Essays

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

1533–1592

Essays

Essais

Translated from the French with AI (Claude) and edited



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Essays · Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592)

Translated from the French with AI (Claude) and edited. Reading edition, Forage, October 2026. forage.com/montaigne/essays

French text: the posthumous edition of 1595 (Paris: Abel L'Angelier), edited by Marie de Gournay, in its original spelling, as reprinted from the Bibliothèque nationale copy in *Essais de Montaigne (self-édition)*, ed. G.-E. Michaud, 4 vols. (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907–1909), via the proofread transcription at Project Gutenberg (www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/48529) (eBooks 48529, 49168 and 58801; public domain). Michaud's modern-French version, summaries and notes are omitted. The 1595 text does not mark the layers of Montaigne's revisions. The 1595 edition printed essay I.14 as I.40; it is restored here to its usual place and number. English: translated from the French with AI (Claude), then edited for accuracy and consistency. Not reviewed by a human specialist. Free to reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0. The small numbers set in the text are book, essay and paragraph; Montaigne's text runs on with few breaks, and the paragraphs follow the 1595 indentations and the section breaks marked in the 1907 reprint. Where the original uses a term now considered offensive, a neutral term is shown in brackets instead.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1571, at thirty-eight, Michel de Montaigne retired from the law courts of Bordeaux to the tower library of his family's château, meaning to spend his remaining years in quiet among his books. Instead he started writing down whatever passed through his mind, and called the pieces *essais*: trials, attempts, tests of his own judgment. Two books appeared in 1580, a third in 1588, and he went on adding to all three, in the margins of his own copy, until his death in 1592.

The essays range over anything: friendship, cannibals, thumbs, coaches, sleep, cruelty, the education of children, the smell of things, the Roman Empire, kidney stones. They wander, contradict themselves and break off into anecdotes and quotations, and always come back to the one subject Montaigne claims to know: "I am myself the matter of my book." Out of that self-scrutiny comes a steady doubt about human certainty, summed up in the motto he took, with the emblem of a pair of balanced scales, "What do I know?", and a humane suspicion of anyone who calls other people's customs barbarous.

This edition gives the text of 1595, published three years after Montaigne's death by his "adopted daughter" Marie de Gournay from his final revisions, in its original spelling. The essays are numbered in the standard way, by book and chapter; the many quotations from Latin, Greek and Italian poets and historians are translated in the English column.

To the Reader

Au lecteur
Montaigne tells the reader the book has only a private, domestic aim: it is a plain portrait of himself.

Au lecteur This is a book written in good faith, reader. It warns you from the outset that in it I have set myself no goal but a domestic and private one. I have given no thought in it either to your service or to my own glory; my powers are not equal to such a design. I have dedicated it to the private convenience of my relatives and friends, so that when they have lost me (as they soon must) they may find in it again some features of my character and temperament, and by this means keep the knowledge they have had of me more complete and more alive. Had my purpose been to seek the world's favor, I would have adorned myself better and would present myself in a studied bearing. I want to be seen here in my simple, natural, ordinary fashion, without straining or artifice; for it is myself that I portray. My faults will be read here to the life, and my natural form, as far as respect for the public has allowed me. Had I been among those nations that are said to live still in the sweet freedom of nature's first laws, I assure you I would very gladly have portrayed myself here entire, and wholly naked. Thus, reader, I am myself the matter of my book; it is not reasonable that you should spend your leisure on so frivolous and vain a subject. So farewell. From Montaigne, this first day of March, fifteen hundred and eighty.

I.1 By Diverse Means We Arrive at the Same End

Par diuers moyens on arrive à pareille fin
Victors are sometimes softened by submission, sometimes by defiance; Montaigne finds man a marvelously vain, varied, and wavering subject.

1.1.1 The most common way of softening the hearts of those we have offended, when they hold vengeance in their hands and have us at their mercy, is to move them to commiseration and pity by submission. Yet defiance, steadfastness and resolution, means quite the opposite, have sometimes served to the same effect.

1.1.2 Edward, Prince of Wales, the one who governed our Guyenne for so long—a man whose character and fortune have many notable elements of greatness—having been very gravely offended by the people of Limoges, and taking their town by force, could not be stopped by the cries of the people, or of the women and children abandoned to the slaughter, who cried to him for mercy and threw themselves at his feet. That lasted until, pressing on ever farther into the town, he caught sight of three French gentlemen who, with incredible daring, were holding out alone against the onslaught of his victorious army. Consideration and respect for such remarkable valor first blunted the edge of his anger; and, beginning with these three, he showed mercy to all the other inhabitants of the town.[1]

1 Edward the Black Prince (1330–1376), eldest son of Edward III; he sacked Limoges in 1370.

1.1.3 Scanderbeg, prince of Epirus, was pursuing one of his soldiers to kill him; and the soldier, having tried every kind of humility and supplication to appease him, resolved as a last resort to await him sword in hand. This resolution stopped his master's fury dead, and Scanderbeg, having seen him take so honorable a course, received him back into favor. This example may admit of another interpretation from those who have not read of the prodigious strength and valor of that prince.[2]

1.1.4 The Emperor Conrad III, having besieged Welf, Duke of Bavaria, would not stoop to milder terms, however base and cowardly the amends offered him, than merely to allow the gentlewomen besieged with the Duke to come out with their honor safe, on foot, with whatever they could carry on their persons. They, with magnanimous hearts, hit upon the idea of carrying on their shoulders their husbands, their children, and the Duke himself. The Emperor took such pleasure in seeing the nobility of their courage that he wept for joy, and quenched all the bitterness of the mortal and capital enmity he had borne against this Duke; and from then on he treated him and his people humanely.[3]

1.1.5 Either of these two means would easily carry me away, for I have a wonderful weakness toward mercy and gentleness. So much so that, in my opinion, I would be likely to surrender more naturally to compassion than to esteem. Yet to the Stoics pity is a vicious passion: they want us to help the afflicted, but not to bend and suffer along with them. Now these examples seem to me the more to the point because we see these souls, assailed and tested by these two means, withstand one without wavering and bow beneath the other. It may be said that to let one's heart break into commiseration is the effect of easygoingness, good nature and softness; whence it comes that the weaker natures, such as those of women, children and the common people, are more subject to it. But to have disdained tears and

2 George Kastrioti, called Scanderbeg (1405–1468), Albanian leader who resisted the Ottoman Turks.

3 The siege of Weinsberg, in Swabia, in 1140.

weeping, and to yield solely to reverence for the sacred image of virtue—that, it may be said, is the effect of a strong and unbending soul, one that holds in affection and honor a manly and stubborn vigor.

1.1.6 Yet in less noble souls, amazement and admiration can give rise to a similar effect. Witness the people of Thebes. They had put their captains on trial on a capital charge for continuing in their command beyond the time prescribed and appointed for it. They barely acquitted Pelopidas, who bowed under the weight of such accusations and used only petitions and supplications to defend himself. Epaminondas, on the contrary, came forward to recount in grand style the things he had done and to throw them in the people's face in a proud and arrogant manner; and they did not have the heart even to take the ballots in hand, but broke up, the assembly greatly praising the loftiness of this man's spirit.[4]

1.1.7 Dionysius the Elder, having taken the city of Rhegium after extreme delays and difficulties, and in it the captain Phyton, a very good man, who had defended it so stubbornly, wanted to make a tragic example of vengeance out of him. First he told him how, the day before, he had had his son drowned, and all his kinsmen. To which Phyton replied only that they were happier than he by one day. Then he had him stripped and seized by executioners and dragged through the city, whipping him most ignominiously and cruelly, and heaping cruel and insulting words on him besides. But Phyton kept his courage constant throughout, never losing himself.[5] And with a steady face he went on, on the contrary, recalling in a loud voice the honorable and glorious cause of his death—that he had refused to deliver his country into the hands of a tyrant—and threatening Dionysius with swift punishment from the gods. Dionysius read in the eyes of the rank and file of his army that, instead of being roused by the defiance of this defeated enemy, in con-

4 Pelopidas and Epaminondas, Theban generals of the 4th century BC; the story is from Plutarch.

5 Dionysius I, tyrant of Syracuse, took Rhegium (Reggio, in Calabria) in 387 BC.

tempt of their leader and his triumph, they were softening in their amazement at such rare valor, and were on the verge of mutiny, even of snatching Phyton from the hands of his guards. So he put an end to this martyrdom and had him secretly drowned in the sea.

1.1.8 Truly, man is a marvelously vain, diverse and wavering subject; it is hard to found any constant and uniform judgment on him. Here is Pompey, who pardoned the whole city of the Mamertines, against which he was greatly incensed, in consideration of the virtue and magnanimity of the citizen Zeno, who took the public fault upon himself alone and asked no other favor than to bear the punishment for it alone. And Sulla's host, having shown similar virtue in the city of Perusia, gained nothing by it, either for himself or for the others.[6]

1.1.9 And directly contrary to my first examples, Alexander, the boldest of men and so gracious to the vanquished, storming the city of Gaza after many great difficulties, came upon Betis, who commanded there and whose valor he had experienced in marvelous proofs during that siege. Betis was then alone, deserted by his men, his armor hacked to pieces, covered all over with blood and wounds, still fighting in the midst of a number of Macedonians who were hammering at him from every side. And Alexander, stung by so costly a victory—for among other losses he had received two fresh wounds on his own person—said to him: "You shall not die as you wished, Betis. Make up your mind that you must suffer every kind of torment that can be devised against a captive."[7] The other, with a countenance not only assured but haughty and disdainful, stood without a word in the face of these threats. Then Alexander, seeing his stubborn silence: "Has he bent a knee? Has any suppliant cry escaped him? Truly I will conquer this silence; and if I cannot wring a word from it, I will at least wring a groan." And turning his anger into rage, he ordered his heels to be pierced, and had him dragged alive in this way behind a cart, torn and dismembered.

6 The Mamertines held Messina in Sicily; Perusia is modern Perugia.
7 Alexander took Gaza in 332 BC; the story is from Quintus Curtius.

Could it be that strength of courage was so natural and commonplace to him that, not admiring it, he respected it the less? Or that he considered it so peculiarly his own that he could not bear to see it at such a height in another without the spite of an envious passion? Or that the natural impetuosity of his anger could brook no opposition? Indeed, if it could ever have been bridled, it is likely that it would have been at the capture and destruction of the city of Thebes, at the sight of so many valiant men, lost and with no further means of common defense, being cruelly put to the sword. For a good six thousand of them were killed, of whom not one was seen fleeing or begging for mercy; on the contrary, they sought, some here, some there, through the streets, to confront the victorious enemy, provoking them to grant them an honorable death.[8] Not one was seen who did not try, with his last breath, to avenge himself still, and with the weapons of despair to console his own death with the death of some enemy. Yet the affliction of their valor found no pity, and the length of a day was not enough to sate his vengeance. This carnage lasted to the last drop of blood that could be shed, and stopped only at the unarmed—old men, women and children—so that thirty thousand slaves might be taken from among them.

8 Alexander destroyed Thebes in 335 BC.

I.2 Of Sadness

De la tristesse
Montaigne distrusts sadness, a passion he rarely feels, and shows how great grief strikes people dumb.

1.2.1 I am among those most free from this passion, and I neither love nor esteem it, although the world has undertaken, as if by agreement, to honor it with special favor. They dress up wisdom, virtue and conscience in it: a foolish and ugly ornament. The Italians have more fittingly given its name to malignity. For it is a quality always harmful, always mad; and since it is always cowardly and base, the Stoics forbid their sages to feel it.[1]

1.2.2 But the story goes that Psammenitus, king of Egypt, having been defeated and captured by Cambyses, king of Persia, saw his daughter pass before him as a prisoner, dressed as a servant and sent to draw water. While all his friends wept and lamented around him, he stayed still without a word, his eyes fixed on the ground; and seeing soon after that his son was being led to his death, he kept the same countenance. But when he caught sight of one of his household servants being led among the captives, he began to beat his head and show extreme grief.[2]

1.2.3 This might be paired with what we saw recently of one of our princes. At Trent, where he was, he heard news of the death of his elder brother—a brother on whom rested the support and honor of his whole house—and soon after of a younger brother, his second hope. He bore these two blows with exemplary con-

1 The essay is "Of Sadness." Italian tristo means both "sad" and "wicked."
2 Psammenitus (Psamtik III) was defeated by Cambyses in 525 BC; the story is from Herodotus.

stancy; but when, a few days later, one of his servants happened to die, he let himself be carried away by this last incident and, abandoning his resolution, gave himself up to grief and lamentation, so much so that some concluded from it that he had been touched to the quick only by this last shock. But in truth it was that, being otherwise full and brimming with sorrow, the least extra burden broke down the barriers of his endurance.[3] The same judgment, I say, might be made of our story, were it not that it adds that when Cambyses asked Psammenitus why, having been unmoved by the misfortune of his son and daughter, he bore that of his friend so impatiently, he answered: "Because only this last sorrow can be expressed by tears; the first two far surpass any means of expression."

1.2.4 Perhaps the invention of that ancient painter would fit here. He had to portray, at the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the grief of the bystanders according to the degree of concern each felt in the death of that beautiful innocent girl; and having exhausted the utmost resources of his art, when he came to the maiden's father he painted him with his face covered, as if no countenance could convey that degree of grief. That is why the poets imagine that wretched mother Niobe—having lost first seven sons and then, in succession, as many daughters, overburdened with losses—to have been finally transformed into a rock, *turned to stone by her sorrows*, to express that dull, mute and deaf stupor which numbs us when events overwhelm us beyond what we can bear.[4] Indeed, the force of a grief, if it is to be extreme, must stun the whole soul and hinder its freedom of action. So it happens to us, at the sudden alarm of some very bad news, that we feel ourselves seized, numbed, and as it were paralyzed in all our movements; so that the soul, afterward giving way to tears and laments, seems to free itself, disentangle itself, and find

3 Probably Charles, Cardinal of Lorraine, who at the Council of Trent in 1563 learned of the deaths of his brothers François, Duke of Guise, and François, Grand Prior of France.

4 The painter is Timanthes (4th century BC); the Latin phrase is from Ovid, Metamorphoses VI.

more room and ease. *And at last, and barely, grief opened a way for the voice.*[5]

1.2.5 In the war that King Ferdinand waged against the widow of King John of Hungary, around Buda, a man-at-arms was particularly noticed by everyone for having borne himself exceedingly well in a certain skirmish; unknown, he was highly praised, and mourned when he fell there. But by none so much as by Raïsciac, a German lord, who was taken with such rare valor. When the body was brought back, this lord, out of common curiosity, went up to see who it was; and when the dead man's armor was removed, he recognized his son.[6]

> This increased the bystanders' compassion. He alone, without saying anything, without blinking, stood upright gazing fixedly at his son's body, until the vehemence of his sorrow, having overwhelmed his vital spirits, brought him down stone-dead on the ground. *He who can say how he burns is in a small fire*, say the lovers who wish to represent an unbearable passion. a thing that, wretched as I am,
>
> Snatches all my senses from me. For the moment
> I have seen you, Lesbia, nothing is left
> That I can say, beside myself.[7]

5 Virgil, Aeneid XI.

6 Ferdinand I of Habsburg fought Isabella, widow of John Zápolya, for Hungary around 1540–1541.

7 Petrarch, Canzoniere, sonnet 170; then Catullus, poem 51, after Sappho.

/ But my tongue grows numb, a subtle flame
Flows down through my limbs, my ears ring
With their own sound, and both my eyes are covered
In night. *Nor indeed is it in the live and most burning heat of the fit that we are able to pour out our laments and our persuasions: the soul is then weighed down with deep thoughts, and the body cast down and languishing with love. And from this sometimes arises the sudden failure that takes lovers by surprise so out of season, and that chill which seizes them through the force of an extreme ardor, in the very lap of enjoyment. All passions that allow themselves to be savored and digested are only moderate.* Light cares speak; great ones are struck dumb.[8]

1.2.6 The shock of an unexpected pleasure stuns us in the same way. *When she saw me coming and, beside herself, saw Trojan*
Arms around me, terrified by such great portents,
She froze as she looked, the warmth left her bones,
She falls, and at last, after a long while, she barely speaks.
Besides the Roman woman who died from the shock of joy at seeing her son returned from the rout at Cannae; Sophocles and Dionysius the Tyrant, who died of joy; and Talva, who died in Corsica while reading the news of the honors the Roman Senate had decreed him—we hold that in our own century Pope Leo X, having been told of the capture of Milan, which he had greatly desired, fell into such an excess of joy that he was seized with fever and died of it.[9]

And as a more notable testimony to human weakness, the ancients noted that Diodorus the Dialectician died on the spot, seized with an extreme passion of shame because, in his school and in public, he could not disentangle himself from an argu-

8 Seneca, Phaedra (Hippolytus).
9 Virgil, Aeneid III (Andromache seeing Aeneas). Leo X died in December 1521, soon after Milan was taken from the French.

ment that had been put to him. I am little exposed to these violent passions. My capacity for feeling is naturally tough; and I harden and thicken it every day by reasoning.[10]

10 Diodorus Cronus, Greek philosopher of the Megarian school, 4th century BC.

I.3 Our Feelings Reach Out Beyond Us

Nos affections s'emportent au delà de nous
We always live beyond ourselves in hopes and fears;
Montaigne examines wishes about burial, reputation, and acting after death.

1.3.1 Those who accuse men of always gaping after future things, and teach us to seize hold of present goods and settle ourselves in them, since we have no grip on what is to come—indeed rather less than we have on what is past—touch on the most common of human errors. That is, if they dare to call an error something to which nature herself guides us for the service of the continuation of her work, imprinting in us, as she does many others, this false notion, being more jealous of our action than of our knowledge. We are never at home; we are always beyond. Fear, desire, hope fling us toward the future, and rob us of the feeling and consideration of what is, to occupy us with what will be, even when we shall no longer be. *Wretched is the mind anxious about the future.*[1]

1.3.2 This great precept is often cited in Plato: "Do your own business, and know yourself." Each of these two parts generally embraces our whole duty, and likewise embraces its companion. Whoever had to do his own business would see that his first lesson is to know what he is and what is proper to him. And whoever knows himself no longer takes another's business for his own; he loves and cultivates himself before anything else; he refuses superfluous occupations and useless thoughts and pro-

1 Seneca, Letters 98.

positions. Just as folly will not be content even when granted what it desires, so wisdom is content with what is present and is never displeased with itself. Epicurus exempts his sage from foresight and care about the future.

1.3.3 Among the laws concerning the dead, this one seems to me as sound as any: the one that requires the actions of princes to be examined after their death. They are companions, if not masters, of the laws; what justice could not do to their persons, it is right that it should do to their reputation and to the property of their successors—things we often prefer to life. It is a practice that brings singular benefits to the nations where it is observed, and one to be desired by all good princes, who have reason to complain that the memory of the wicked is treated like their own. We owe subjection and obedience equally to all kings, for that concerns their office; but esteem, no more than affection, we owe only to their virtue. Let us grant to the political order that we suffer them patiently when they are unworthy, conceal their vices, and support with our commendation their actions that are neither good nor bad, while their authority needs our backing. But once our dealings with them are over, it is not reasonable to refuse justice and our own liberty the expression of our true feelings; and in particular to refuse good subjects the glory of having reverently and faithfully served a master whose imperfections were so well known to them—thus depriving posterity of so useful an example. And those who, out of regard for some private obligation, wrongfully espouse the memory of a blameworthy prince do private justice at the expense of public justice. Livy speaks truly when he says that the language of men raised under kingship is always full of vain boasting and false testimony, each man indiscriminately exalting his king to the farthest limit of worth and sovereign greatness. One may disapprove of the magnanimity of those two soldiers who answered Nero to his face. The one, asked by him why he wished him ill: "I loved you when you deserved it; but since you have become a parricide, an arsonist, a mountebank, a charioteer, I hate you as you deserve." The other, asked why he

wanted to kill him: "Because I can find no other remedy for your continual crimes."[2] But as for the public and universal testimonies that have been given since his death, and will be forever, to him and to all wicked men like him, concerning his tyrannical and vile conduct—who in his right mind can disapprove of them?

1.3.4 It displeases me that in so holy a government as that of Sparta so false a ceremony should have been mixed in at the death of kings. All the allies and neighbors, and all the Helots, men and women pell-mell, gashed their foreheads in token of mourning, and said in their cries and lamentations that this king, whatever he had been, was the best king of all they had ever had—attributing to rank the praise that belonged to merit, and giving what belongs to the highest merit to the last and lowest rank.[3]

1.3.5 Aristotle, who stirs up everything, inquires, concerning Solon's saying that no one can be called happy before his death, whether even the man who has lived and died as he would wish can be called happy if his reputation fares badly and his posterity is wretched. While we are in motion, we carry ourselves by anticipation wherever we please; but once out of being, we have no communication with what is. And it would be better to tell Solon that no man is ever happy, then, since he is happy only when he no longer exists. *Hardly anyone*
Pulls himself up by the roots and casts himself out of life:
Without knowing it, he makes something of himself survive,
Nor does he withdraw and free himself enough from the body he has
Cast away.[4]

1.3.6 Bertrand du Guesclin died at the siege of the castle of Rancon, near Le Puy in Auvergne; the besieged, who sur-

2 Conspirators in the plot against Nero of AD 65, as reported by Tacitus.
3 The Helots were the subject population of Sparta, bound to work the land.
4 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics I; the verses are from Lucretius, On the Nature of Things III.

rendered afterward, were obliged to carry the keys of the place to the dead man's body. Bartolomeo d'Alviano, general of the Venetian army, died in the service of their wars in the region of Brescia, and his body was to be carried back to Venice through the territory of Verona, enemy land. Most of the army were of the opinion that they should ask the Veronese for a safe-conduct for the passage; but Theodore Trivulzio opposed this, and chose rather to force a passage, at the risk of battle: "For it is not fitting," he said, "that one who in his lifetime was never afraid of his enemies should, being dead, show any sign of fearing them."[5] Indeed, in a related matter, by Greek law, whoever asked the enemy for a body to bury renounced the victory, and was no longer allowed to raise a trophy for it; for the one who was asked, it was a title to victory. Thus Nicias lost the advantage he had clearly won over the Corinthians; and conversely, Agesilaus secured the one he had very doubtfully gained over the Boeotians.

1.3.7 These traits might seem strange were it not accepted from all time not only to extend our concern for ourselves beyond this life, but also to believe that very often the favors of heaven accompany us to the tomb and continue to our remains. Of this there are so many ancient examples, leaving aside our own, that I need not dwell on it. Edward I, king of England, had found by trial, in the long wars between him and Robert, king of Scotland, how much his presence gave the advantage to his affairs, for he always carried off the victory in what he undertook in person. When dying, he bound his son by solemn oath that, once he was dead, he should have his body boiled to separate the flesh from the bones, and have the flesh buried; and as for the bones, that he should keep them, to carry them with him and with his army whenever he happened to be at war with the Scots: as if destiny had fatally attached victory to his limbs.[6] Jan Žižka, who threw Bohemia into turmoil in defense of Wycliffe's

5 Bertrand du Guesclin (c. 1320–1380), Constable of France; Bartolomeo d'Alviano died in 1515.

6 Edward I of England (died 1307) and Robert the Bruce.

errors, wished to be flayed after his death and his skin made into a drum to be carried to war against his enemies, believing that this would help continue the advantages he had had in the wars he had led against them. Certain Indians likewise carried into battle against the Spaniards the bones of one of their captains, in consideration of the good fortune he had had in his lifetime. And other peoples in this same world drag to war the bodies of the valiant men who have died in their battles, to serve them as good luck and encouragement.[7] The first examples reserve for the tomb only the reputation acquired by past actions; but these want to mix in the power to act as well.

1.3.8 The deed of Captain Bayard is of a more reasonable sort. Feeling himself mortally wounded by an arquebus shot in the body, and advised to withdraw from the fray, he replied that he would not begin, at his end, to turn his back on the enemy. And having fought as long as he had strength, feeling himself fainting and slipping from his horse, he ordered his steward to lay him at the foot of a tree, but in such a way that he would die with his face turned toward the enemy; and so he did.[8]

1.3.9 I must add this other example, as remarkable in this respect as any of the preceding. The Emperor Maximilian, great-grandfather of King Philip who now reigns, was a prince endowed with a great many fine qualities, and among others a singular beauty of body. But among these traits he had one quite contrary to that of those princes who, to dispatch the most important business, make their close-stool their throne: he never had a valet de chambre so intimate that he would allow him to see him in his privy. He would steal away to pass water, as scrupulous as a maiden about uncovering, to a doctor or to anyone whatever, the parts we are accustomed to keep hidden.[9] I, who have so bold a mouth, am nonetheless by temperament touched with this sense of shame. Unless under strong pressure

7 Jan Žižka (died 1424), general of the Hussites, followers of the English reformer John Wycliffe's teaching.

8 Pierre Terrail, seigneur de Bayard, the "knight without fear and beyond reproach," killed in Italy in 1524.

9 Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519); Philip II of Spain.

from necessity or pleasure, I hardly ever expose to anyone's eyes the members and actions that our custom orders to be covered. I suffer more constraint in this than I think becoming in a man, and above all in a man of my profession. But he carried it to such superstition that he ordered, in express words in his will, that drawers be fastened on him when he was dead. He should have added by codicil that the man who pulled them on him should have his eyes blindfolded. The order Cyrus gives his children, that neither they nor anyone else should see or touch his body after the soul has left it, I attribute to some piety of his; for both his historian and he himself, among their great qualities, sowed throughout the course of their lives a singular care and reverence for religion.[10]

1.3.10 I was displeased by a story a great man told me about a kinsman of mine by marriage, a man rather well known in both peace and war. It is that, dying very old at his court, tormented by extreme pains from the stone, he spent all his last hours with intense concern arranging the honor and ceremony of his burial, and called upon all the nobility who visited him to give him their word that they would attend his funeral procession. Of this very prince, who saw him in his last moments, he made an urgent request that his household be ordered to attend, using several examples and reasons to prove that it was a thing befitting a man of his rank. And he seemed to die content, having obtained this promise and arranged to his liking the distribution and order of his parade. I have hardly ever seen so persevering a vanity.

1.3.11 This other, opposite fussiness, of which I also do not lack examples in my own family, seems to me close kin to this one: to go on worrying and fretting at this last moment over regulating one's funeral to some particular and unusual parsimony—one servant and one lantern. I see this temperament praised, and the instruction of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, who forbade his heirs to employ for him the ceremonies customary in such matters. Is it still temperance and frugality to avoid an expense and

10 Cyrus the Great, as portrayed by Xenophon in the Cyropaedia.

a pleasure whose use and knowledge are imperceptible to us? That is an easy reform, and one of small cost. If there were need to give orders about it, I would be of the opinion that in this, as in all the actions of life, each man should measure the rule by the degree of his fortune. And the philosopher Lycon wisely instructs his friends to put his body wherever they think best, and as for the funeral, to make it neither extravagant nor shabby. I would leave it purely to custom to order this ceremony, and I shall defer to the discretion of the first people into whose charge I fall. *This whole matter is to be despised in our own case, not neglected in that of our people.* And it is saintly said by a saint: *The care of a funeral, the manner of burial, the pomp of obsequies, are more a consolation to the living than a help to the dead.* So Socrates, when Crito asked him at the hour of his end how he wished to be buried, answered: "As you wish."[11] If I had to concern myself any further with it, I would find it more stylish to imitate those who undertake, while alive and breathing, to enjoy the order and honor of their tomb, and who take pleasure in seeing their dead countenance in marble. Happy those who know how to delight and gratify their senses through insensibility, and to live by their death!

1.3.12 I come close to conceiving an irreconcilable hatred against all popular rule—though it seems to me the most natural and equitable—when I remember that inhuman injustice of the Athenian people: putting to death without mercy, and without even being willing to hear their defense, those brave captains who had just won the naval battle against the Spartans near the Arginusae islands, the most hotly contested and the strongest battle the Greeks ever fought at sea with their own forces—because after the victory they had followed up the opportunities that the law of war offered them rather than stopping to gather and bury their dead. And what makes this execution more odious is the conduct of Diomedon.[12] He was one of the condemned, a man of notable virtue, both military and political. He

11 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations I; then Saint Augustine, City of God I.
12 The battle of Arginusae, off Lesbos, in 406 BC.

stepped forward to speak after hearing the sentence of their condemnation, finding only then time for a quiet hearing. Instead of using it for the good of his cause, and to expose the evident iniquity of so cruel a decision, he showed concern only for the preservation of his judges: he prayed the gods to turn this judgment to their good; and, lest by failing to pay the vows that he and his companions had made in gratitude for so illustrious a fortune they should bring the wrath of the gods upon themselves, he informed them what those vows were. And without saying anything more, and without haggling, he went straight off courageously to his execution.

1.3.13 A few years later Fortune paid them back in the same coin. For Chabrias, captain-general of their navy, having gained the upper hand in the battle against Pollis, admiral of Sparta, at the island of Naxos, lost the clear and solid fruit of his victory, which was of great importance to their affairs, so as not to incur the misfortune of that example. So as not to lose a few dead bodies of his friends floating in the sea, he let a world of living enemies sail off in safety, who afterward made them pay dearly for this ill-timed superstition. Do you ask where you will lie after death?[13] / Where the unborn lie. *This other one restores the feeling of rest to a soulless body:* May he have no tomb to receive him, no haven for his body, / Where, human life laid down, the body may rest from its ills. Just as nature shows us that many dead things still have hidden relations with life. Wine changes in the cellars according to certain changes in the seasons of its vine. And the flesh of game changes its condition and its taste in the salting tubs according to the laws of living flesh, so they say.[14]

13 The battle of Naxos, 376 BC. The verse is from Seneca, Trojan Women.
14 Ennius, quoted by Cicero in the Tusculan Disputations I.

I.4 How the Soul Discharges Its Passions on False Objects When the True Are Wanting

Comme l'ame descharge ses passions sur des obiects faux, quand les vrais luy defaillent
When the soul lacks a real target for its passions, it invents one —even lashing out at objects or itself.

1.4.1 A gentleman of our country, marvelously subject to gout, being urged by his doctors to give up salted meats altogether, used to reply humorously that in the attacks and torments of the disease he wanted to have something to blame; and that by shouting and cursing now the sausage, now the ox tongue and the ham, he felt that much relieved.

1.4.2 But in earnest: just as an arm raised to strike hurts us if the blow does not land and goes into the wind; and just as, to make a view pleasant, it must not be lost and scattered in the emptiness of the air, but must have a mark to hold it at a reasonable distance—*As the wind loses its strength, scattered in empty space, / Unless dense forests stand in its way*—so it seems that the soul, shaken and stirred, loses itself in itself if it is not given something to grip; and it must always be supplied with an object to aim at and act upon.[1]

1.4.3 Plutarch says, of those who grow fond of monkeys and little dogs, that the loving part in us, for lack of a legitimate object, rather than remain idle, forges a false and frivolous one for itself in this way. And we see that the soul, in its passions,

1 Lucan, Pharsalia III.

would rather deceive itself, setting up a false and fanciful object, even against its own belief, than not act against something. Thus beasts are carried by their rage to attack the stone or the steel that has wounded them, and to take revenge on themselves with their teeth for the pain they feel.

> *Just so the Pannonian she-bear, fiercer after the blow*
> *Of the javelin the Libyan has hurled with its slender thong,*
> *Whirls round upon her wound and, raging, attacks*
> *The dart she has taken, and circles after the spear that flees with her.*

1.4.4 What causes do we not invent for the misfortunes that befall us? What do we not lay hold of, rightly or wrongly, so as to have something to fence with? It is not those blond tresses that you are tearing, nor the whiteness of that breast that you beat so cruelly in your distress, that killed that beloved brother with an unlucky bullet: take it out on something else. Livy, speaking of the Roman army in Spain after the loss of its two great captains, who were brothers: *All at once they began to weep and beat their heads.* It is a common practice. And the philosopher Bion was amusing about that king who tore out his hair in grief: "Does this man think baldness relieves grief?"[2] Who has not seen people chew and swallow the cards, or gorge themselves on a mouthful of dice, so as to have something to take revenge on for the loss of their money? Xerxes whipped the sea and wrote a letter of challenge to Mount Athos; Cyrus kept a whole army busy for several days taking revenge on the river Gyndes for the fright he had had crossing it; and Caligula ruined a very beautiful house because of the pleasure his mother had had there.

1.4.5 In my youth people used to say that a king of one of our neighboring countries, having received a beating from God, swore to take revenge: he ordered that for ten years no one should pray to Him, or speak of Him, or, as far as his authority extended, believe in Him. By this they meant to depict not so

2 The brothers Publius and Gnaeus Scipio, killed in Spain in 211 BC; Bion of Borysthenes, Greek philosopher of the 3rd century BC.

much the stupidity as the vainglory natural to the nation the story was about. These are vices that always go together; but such actions, in truth, have even a little more of presumption than of stupidity. Augustus Caesar, having been battered by a storm at sea, took to defying the god Neptune, and in the procession of the Circensian games had his image removed from its place among the other gods, to take revenge on him. In which he is even less excusable than the preceding, and less than he was later when, having lost a battle under Quintilius Varus in Germany, he went about in anger and despair beating his head against the wall and crying out, "Varus, give me back my soldiers!" For those who direct their attacks at God himself, or at fortune, as if she had ears open to our assault, surpass all folly, since impiety is joined to it.[3] Like the Thracians, who, when it thunders or lightens, start shooting at the sky with a Titanic vengeance, to bring God to reason with arrows. Now, as that ancient poet in Plutarch says, *We must not grow angry at events: / They care nothing for all our rages.* But we shall never heap enough abuse on the unruliness of our own mind.[4]

3 Varus lost three legions in the Teutoburg Forest in AD 9.

4 The Thracians' custom is from Herodotus; the lines, quoted in Plutarch's essay On the Control of Anger, are given by Montaigne in French verse.

I.5 Whether the Governor of a Besieged Place Should Go Out to Parley

Si le chef d'vne place assiegee, doit sortir pour parlementer
Ancient Romans scorned trickery in war; modern soldiers prize surprise, so a besieged commander should not go out to negotiate.

1.5.1 Lucius Marcius, the Roman legate in the war against Perseus, king of Macedonia, needed time to get his army ready. To gain it, he put out hints of a settlement. Lulled by these, the king granted a truce for a few days, and so gave his enemy the opportunity and leisure to arm, which brought about the king's final ruin. And yet the old men of the Senate, mindful of their fathers' ways, condemned this practice as contrary to their ancient style. That style, they said, was to fight with valor, not with cunning: not by surprises and night encounters, not by feigned flights and unexpected counterattacks. They never undertook a war until they had declared it, and often only after appointing the hour and place of battle.[1] Out of this scruple they sent back to Pyrrhus his treacherous physician, and to the Faliscans their disloyal schoolmaster. These were the truly Roman ways, not those of Greek subtlety and Punic cunning, where conquering by force is thought less glorious than conquering by fraud. Deceit may serve for the moment. But the only one who considers himself beaten is the one who knows he was beaten neither by trickery nor by chance, but by valor, troop against

1 From Livy's account of the Third Macedonian War (172 BC); Livy names the envoy Quintus Marcius Philippus.

troop, in an open and just war. It is clear enough from the way these good people talk that they had not yet taken up that fine maxim: *who asks, of an enemy, whether it was guile or valor?*[2]

1.5.2 The Achaeans, says Polybius, detested every kind of deceit in their wars, and counted no victory a victory except where the enemy's courage had been broken. *A good and wise man will know that the only true victory is one won with honor intact and dignity unimpaired,* says another. *Whether our mistress Fortune wills that you reign or I, and whatever chance may bring, / let us put it to the test of valor.*[3]

1.5.3 In the kingdom of Ternate, among those nations we so roundly call barbarians, custom requires that they never undertake a war without first declaring it. They add a full statement of the means they have to wage it: what kind, how many men, what munitions, what weapons, offensive and defensive. But once that is done, they also allow themselves to use in their war, without reproach, whatever helps them win.[4]

1.5.4 The old Florentines were so far from wanting to gain an advantage over their enemies by surprise that they warned them a month before taking their army into the field, by the continual ringing of the bell they called *Martinella*.

1.5.5 As for us, who are less superstitious, we hold that the honor of war belongs to whoever has the profit of it, and we say, after Lysander, that where the lion's skin will not do, you must sew on a patch of the fox's. So the most common occasions for surprise are drawn from this very practice. There is no hour, we say, when a commander should keep a sharper watch than during parleys and peace talks. And for this reason it is a rule on the lips of every military man of our time that the governor of a besieged place must never go out himself to parley.[5]

2 Virgil, Aeneid. Pyrrhus's physician offered to poison his master, and the Faliscan schoolmaster tried to deliver his pupils to the Romans.

3 Florus, Epitome of Roman History; the verses are Ennius, quoted by Cicero in On Duties.

4 Ternate is an island in the Moluccas, in present-day Indonesia.

5 Lysander was the Spartan commander who defeated Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian War (404 BC).

1.5.6 In our fathers' time this was held against the Seigneurs de Montmord and de l'Assigni, who were defending Mouzon against the Count of Nassau. But by the same reckoning, a man would be excusable who went out in such a way that safety and advantage remained on his side. So did Count Guido Rangoni in the town of Reggio (if we are to believe du Bellay, for Guicciardini says it was he himself), when the Seigneur de l'Escut approached it to parley. He left his stronghold by so little that when a disturbance broke out during the parley, Monsieur de l'Escut and the troop that had come up with him found themselves the weaker, so much so that Alessandro Trivulzio was killed there. More than that, l'Escut himself was forced, as the safest course, to follow the Count and throw himself on his word, into the town and out of reach of the blows.[6]

1.5.7 Eumenes, in the town of Nora, was pressed by Antigonus, who was besieging him, to come out and talk with him. Antigonus argued that it was only right for Eumenes to come to him, since he was the greater and the stronger. Eumenes first gave this noble reply: "I will never consider any man greater than I, as long as I have my sword in my power." Then he would not consent until Antigonus had given him his own nephew Ptolemy as a hostage, as he demanded.[7]

1.5.8 And yet there are some who have done very well by going out on the attacker's word. Witness Henri de Vaux, a knight of Champagne. He was besieged by the English in the castle of Commercy, and Barthélemy de Bonnes, who commanded the siege, had sapped most of the castle from outside, so that only the fire was needed to bring the ruins down on the besieged. He then summoned Henri to come out and parley for his own good. Henri did so, with three companions; and when his obvious ruin had been shown to him before his eyes, he felt singularly obliged to the enemy. He and his troop surrendered at the

6 Montaigne draws on the memoirs of Martin du Bellay and the History of Italy of Francesco Guicciardini, who was then governor of Reggio; the Seigneur de l'Escut is Thomas de Foix-Lescun, marshal of France.

7 Eumenes and Antigonus were generals who fought over Alexander's empire after his death; the story is in Plutarch's Life of Eumenes.

enemy's discretion. Then the fire was set to the mine, the wooden props gave way, and the castle was brought down from top to bottom.[8]

1.5.9 I readily trust another man's word. But I would find it hard to do so if I gave people reason to think I had done it out of despair and lack of courage, rather than out of frankness and confidence in his good faith.

8 The episode comes from Froissart's Chronicles.

I.6 The Hour of Parley Is Dangerous

L'heure des parlemens dangereuse
Towns taken by surprise during truce talks show that no agreement is safe until sealed, and victorious armies are hard to restrain.

1.6.1 Nevertheless, I saw recently in my neighborhood, at Mussidan, that those who were driven out by force by our army, and others of their party, cried treachery: during the negotiations for a settlement, and while the treaty was still under way, they had been taken by surprise and cut to pieces. Such a complaint might perhaps have seemed reasonable in another age. But, as I have just said, our ways are entirely removed from these rules. No one should expect trust of another until the last seal of obligation has been set on the agreement; and even then there is plenty to worry about.[1]

1.6.2 And it has always been a risky course to trust the license of a victorious army with keeping the faith one has given to a town that has just surrendered on mild and favorable terms, and to let the soldiers in freely while their blood is still hot. Lucius Aemilius Regillus, a Roman praetor, had wasted his time trying to take the city of Phocaea by force, because its inhabitants were remarkably skilled at defending themselves. So he made a pact with them: he would receive them as friends of the Roman people and enter the city as an allied town, and he relieved

1 Mussidan, in Périgord near Montaigne's estate, was besieged and taken by the royal army in 1569, during the Wars of Religion.

them of all fear of hostile action.[2] But he brought his army in with him to make a grander show, and then, whatever effort he made, it was not in his power to keep his men in check. He saw a good part of the city plundered before his eyes, the claims of greed and vengeance overriding those of his authority and of military discipline.

1.6.3 Cleomenes used to say that whatever harm one might do to the enemy in war was above justice and not subject to it, in the eyes of the gods as well as of men. Having made a seven-day truce with the Argives, on the third night he went and fell on them while they were all asleep and defeated them, claiming that nothing had been said about nights in his truce. But the gods avenged this treacherous subtlety.[3]

1.6.4 During a parley, while the townspeople were dawdling over their guarantees, the city of Casilinum was seized by surprise. And this, mind you, in the age of the most just captains and of the most perfect Roman military discipline. For it is not laid down that, at the right time and place, we may not take advantage of our enemies' stupidity, as we do of their cowardice. And certainly war naturally has many reasonable privileges to the prejudice of reason. Here the rule fails: *that no one should seek to profit from another's ignorance*.[4] But I am astonished at how far Xenophon extends these privileges, both in the speeches and in the various exploits of his perfect commander. He is an author of marvelous weight in such matters, being both a great captain and a philosopher among the first disciples of Socrates; and yet I do not agree with the full extent of his dispensation in every respect.[5]

1.6.5 Monsieur d'Aubigny was besieging Capua and had subjected it to a furious bombardment. Signor Fabrizio Colonna, cap-

2 Phocaea was a Greek city on the coast of Asia Minor; the episode (190 BC) is in Livy.

3 Cleomenes I, king of Sparta (c. 520–490 BC).

4 Casilinum, in Campania, was taken by the Romans in 214 BC; the Latin is from Cicero, On Duties.

5 The "perfect commander" is Cyrus the Great as portrayed in Xenophon's Cyropaedia.

tain of the town, began to parley from a bastion, and as his men kept a slacker guard, ours seized the place and put everything to the sword. And in more recent memory, at Ivoy, Signor Julian Romero made the novice's blunder of going out to parley with the Constable, and on his return found his position taken.[6] But so that we do not get off without being paid back: the Marquis of Pescara was besieging Genoa, where Duke Ottaviano Fregoso held command under our protection. The agreement between them had been pushed so far that it was considered done, but just as it was about to be concluded, the Spaniards slipped inside and treated it as an outright victory. And later, at Ligny-en-Barrois, where the Count of Brienne was in command, the Emperor besieged the town in person; Bertheville, the Count's lieutenant, went out to parley, and during the parley the town was seized. *Victory was ever a thing to praise, / whether won by fortune or by wit*, they say. But the philosopher Chrysippus would not have been of that opinion; and neither am I.[7]

> For he said that those who run a race must indeed use all their strength for speed, but that they are by no means allowed to lay hands on their opponent to stop him, or to stick out a leg to trip him. And more nobly still, the great Alexander answered Polyperchon, who was urging him to use the advantage the darkness of night gave him to attack Darius: "No," he said, "it is not for me to seek stolen victories. *I would rather regret my fortune than be ashamed of my victory*." *And he did not deign to strike down Orodes as he fled,*
>
> *nor deal him a blind wound with a thrown spear;*
> *he ran to meet him face to face, and man against man*
> *he closed with him, the better not by stealth but by valiant arms.*[8]

6 Capua was taken by the French in 1501; Ivoy, in the Ardennes, in 1552 by the Constable Anne de Montmorency.

7 The Italian is from Ariosto, Orlando Furioso; Chrysippus was a leading Stoic philosopher of the 3rd century BC.

8 Alexander's words are from Quintus Curtius, History of Alexander; the verses are from Virgil's Aeneid.

I.7 That Intention Is Judge of Our Actions

Que l'intention iuge nos actions
Since only our will is in our power, duty rests on intention—so wrongs repaired only by deathbed wills earn little credit.

1.7.1 Death, they say, releases us from all our obligations. I know some who have taken this in different ways. Henry VII, king of England, made an agreement with Don Philip, son of the Emperor Maximilian—or, to give him a more honorable comparison, father of the Emperor Charles V. Philip was to hand over to him the Duke of Suffolk of the White Rose, his enemy, who had fled and taken refuge in the Low Countries, in return for Henry's promise to make no attempt on the Duke's life. Yet when Henry came to die, he ordered his son in his will to have the Duke put to death immediately after his own decease.[1] Recently, in that tragedy the Duke of Alba staged for us in Brussels with the Counts of Horn and Egmont, there were a great many remarkable things. Among others, Count Egmont, on whose word and assurance Count Horn had come to give himself up to the Duke of Alba, earnestly begged to be put to death first, so that his death might free him from the obligation he owed Count Horn. It seems that death did not discharge the first man of the word he had given, and that the second was quit of his even without dying. We cannot be bound beyond our strength and our means.[2] For this reason—since the outcomes and the carrying

1 Edmund de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, a Yorkist claimant, was executed by Henry VIII in 1513.
2 Lamoral, Count of Egmont, and Philippe de Montmorency, Count of Horn, leaders of the Netherlands nobility, were beheaded in Brussels in 1568.

out of things are not in our power at all, and nothing is truly in our power but the will—all the rules of man's duty are necessarily founded and established on the will. So Count Egmont, holding his soul and will bound to his promise, although the power to carry it out was not in his hands, would undoubtedly have been absolved of his duty even if he had outlived Count Horn. But the king of England, breaking his word in his intention, cannot be excused for having put off carrying out his treachery until after his death. No more can Herodotus's mason, who faithfully kept the secret of the treasures of the king of Egypt, his master, all his life, and revealed it to his children as he was dying.[3]

1.7.2 I have seen many people in my time who, convicted by their conscience of keeping what belongs to others, arranged to make amends by their will, after their death. They achieve nothing worthwhile—neither by setting a deadline on a matter so urgent, nor by trying to redress a wrong at so little cost to their feelings and their interest. They owe something more truly their own. The more heavily and inconveniently they pay, the more just and meritorious their reparation. Penitence asks to be a burden. Those do still worse who save for their last will the declaration of some spiteful intention toward a relative, having hidden it during their lifetime. They show they care little for their own honor, since they provoke the injured party against their memory; and less for their conscience, since not even out of respect for death itself could they make their ill will die, but instead extended its life beyond their own. Unjust judges, who put off judging until they no longer know the case. I shall take care, if I can, that my death says nothing my life has not said first, and said openly.

3 The story of the mason who built King Rhampsinitus's treasury is in Herodotus, Histories, Book II.

I.8 Of Idleness

De l'oysiueté
Retiring to rest his mind, Montaigne finds it bolting off into chimeras, so he writes them down to shame it.

1.8.1 We see that fallow lands, if they are rich and fertile, teem with a hundred thousand kinds of wild and useless weeds, and that to keep them doing their job we must subdue them and put them to certain seeds for our use. And we see that women, all by themselves, produce shapeless masses and lumps of flesh, but that to make a good and natural offspring they must be set to work with another seed. So it is with minds. If we do not occupy them with some definite subject that will bridle and restrain them, they throw themselves in disorder, this way and that, into the vague field of imaginings.

> *As when the trembling light of water in bronze basins,*
> *thrown back by the sun or the image of the radiant moon,*
> *flits far and wide over every place, and now rises into the air*
> *and strikes the paneled ceiling of the lofty roof.* And there is no folly or raving that they do not produce in this agitation:
> *like a sick man's dreams, they shape*
> *vain images.* The mind that has no fixed goal loses itself; for, as they say, to be everywhere is to be nowhere. *He who lives everywhere, Maximus, lives nowhere.*[1]

1.8.2 Lately, when I retired to my home, determined as far as I could to concern myself with nothing but spending in rest and seclusion the little life I have left, it seemed to me I could do my

1 Virgil, Aeneid; then Horace, Art of Poetry, and Martial, Epigrams.

mind no greater favor than to leave it in complete idleness, to entertain itself and to settle and rest in itself. I hoped it could do this more easily from now on, having grown weightier and riper with time. But I find—*idleness always makes the mind unsteady*—that, on the contrary, like a runaway horse, it gives itself a hundred times more free rein than it ever took for others. It gives birth to so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one on top of another, without order or purpose, that in order to contemplate their absurdity and strangeness at my leisure, I have begun to put them on record, hoping in time to make my mind ashamed of itself.[2]

2 Montaigne retired to his château in 1571, at the age of 38. The Latin is from Lucan, Pharsalia.

I.9 Of Liars

Des menteurs
Montaigne laments his poor memory, then argues that lying is an accursed vice to be fought from childhood.

1.9.1 There is no man it suits worse to talk about memory. For I recognize hardly a trace of it in myself, and I do not think there is another in the world so marvelously deficient. All my other faculties are mean and ordinary, but in this one I think I am singular and very rare, and worthy of earning a name and a reputation. Besides the natural inconvenience I suffer from it—and indeed, given how necessary memory is, Plato is right to call it a great and powerful goddess—in my part of the country, when they want to say a man has no sense, they say he has no memory. And when I complain of the failings of mine, they reprove me and refuse to believe me, as if I were accusing myself of being witless. They see no difference between memory and understanding. That makes a bad bargain worse for me. But they do me wrong, for experience shows rather the opposite: excellent memories are often joined to feeble judgments. They wrong me in this too—I who can do nothing so well as be a friend—that the same words that accuse my infirmity describe ingratitude. They blame my affection for what is the fault of my memory, and turn a natural defect into a defect of conscience. “He has forgotten,” they say, “this request or that promise. He does not remember his friends. He did not remember to say, or do, or keep quiet about such and such, for my sake.” Certainly I can easily forget; but to neglect a charge my friend has given me—that I do not do. Let them be content with

my wretchedness, without making it into a kind of malice, and a malice so contrary to my temperament.

1.9.2 I console myself somewhat. First, because it is an evil from which I have chiefly drawn the means of correcting a worse one that would easily have grown in me, namely ambition; for this defect is unbearable in anyone who gets entangled in the world's affairs. Also, as many similar examples of nature's workings show, she has readily strengthened other faculties in me as this one has weakened. If other people's ideas and opinions were present to me by the benefit of memory, I might easily let my mind and judgment lie down and languish in others' tracks, without exercising their own powers. Also, my talk is shorter for it; for the storehouse of memory is usually better stocked with material than that of invention. If my memory had served me well, I would have deafened all my friends with chatter, since subjects rouse this faculty I have, such as it is, of handling and using them, warming up and drawing out my reasoning. It is a pity: I see it tested in some of my close friends. As their memory supplies them with the whole thing, complete and present, they start their story so far back and load it with so many pointless details that if the tale is good, they smother its goodness; and if it is not, you are left cursing either the good luck of their memory or the bad luck of their judgment. And it is a hard thing to close a speech and cut it short once you are under way. There is nothing in which a horse's strength shows more than in making a clean, neat stop. Even among those who speak to the point, I see some who want to break off their run and cannot. While they are looking for the place to end their stride, they go rambling and trailing on like men fainting from weakness. Old men above all are dangerous: they keep the memory of things past and have lost the memory of their repetitions. I have seen very amusing stories become extremely tiresome in the mouth of a certain lord, everyone present having been regaled with them a hundred times.

1.9.3 Second, I remember less of the offenses I have received, as that ancient said. I would need a prompter, like Darius: to keep

from forgetting the offense he had received from the Athenians, he had a page come and chant in his ear three times, every time he sat down to table, "Sire, remember the Athenians." And the places and books I see again always smile at me with fresh novelty.[1]

LIARS NEED GOOD MEMORIES

Lying is a cursed vice; liars who forget their own inventions are caught out.

1.9.4 It is not without reason that people say that anyone who does not feel his memory firm enough should not meddle with being a liar. I know well that the grammarians distinguish between telling a falsehood and lying. They say that telling a falsehood is saying something false that one has taken to be true, whereas the definition of the word "lie" in Latin, from which our French word comes, amounts to going against one's conscience; and that consequently it concerns only those who say the contrary of what they know. It is of these that I am speaking. Now such people either invent the whole thing outright, or they disguise and alter something that is true at bottom. When they disguise and alter, if you bring them back often to the same story, it is hard for them not to trip themselves up. For the thing as it really is, having lodged first in the memory and imprinted itself there by way of knowledge and understanding, will hardly fail to present itself to the imagination and dislodge the falsehood, which cannot have so firm or settled a foothold there. And the circumstances of what they first learned, slipping into the mind at every turn, will make them forget the false or spurious pieces they have patched on. In what they invent outright, since there is no contrary impression to clash with their falsehood, they seem to have that much less to fear of slipping up. Yet even this, being an empty body with nothing to grip, readily escapes the memory unless it is very sure. I have often seen proof of this,

1 Cicero said of Caesar that he forgot nothing but injuries; the story of Darius is in Herodotus.

and amusingly, at the expense of those who make a profession of shaping their words only according to what serves the business they are negotiating and what pleases the great men they are speaking to. For since these circumstances, to which they are willing to enslave their faith and their conscience, are subject to many changes, their words must vary along with them. Hence it happens that of the same thing they say now gray, now yellow; to one man one thing, to another something else. And if by chance these men pool their contradictory information like booty, what becomes of this fine art? Besides, they so often trip themselves up out of sheer carelessness: for what memory could be enough to remember so many different shapes they have forged on one and the same subject? I have seen many in my time envy the reputation of this fine kind of prudence, without seeing that if the reputation is there, the effect cannot be.

1.9.5 Truly, lying is an accursed vice. We are men, and hold together with one another, only by our word. If we recognized its horror and its gravity, we would hunt it down with fire more justly than other crimes. I find that people commonly busy themselves punishing children for innocent mistakes, very inappropriately, and torment them for thoughtless actions that leave no mark and have no consequences. Lying alone, and a little below it obstinacy, seem to me the faults whose birth and growth we ought to fight at every turn. They grow along with the children; and once the tongue has been set on this false track, it is amazing how impossible it is to pull it back. Hence we see men who are otherwise decent being subject and enslaved to it. I have a good lad of a tailor whom I have never heard tell a single truth, not even when it would serve him usefully. If falsehood, like truth, had only one face, we would be in better shape, for we would take as certain the opposite of what the liar said. But the reverse of truth has a hundred thousand shapes and a limitless field. The Pythagoreans make good certain and finite, evil infinite and uncertain. A thousand paths miss the target; one leads to it. Certainly I cannot be sure that I could bring myself to ward off an obvious and extreme danger by a brazen

and solemn lie. An ancient Father says that we are better off in the company of a dog we know than in that of a man whose language we do not know. *So that to a stranger a foreigner is not a man.* And how much less sociable is false speech than silence?[2]

1.9.6 King Francis I boasted of having driven to his wits' end, by this means, Francesco Taverna, ambassador of Francesco Sforza, duke of Milan, a man very famous for his skill at speech-making. Taverna had been sent to excuse his master to His Majesty for an act of great consequence, which was as follows.[3] The King, in order always to keep some lines of intelligence in Italy, from which he had lately been driven out, and especially in the duchy of Milan, had decided to keep a gentleman there near the Duke on his behalf: an ambassador in fact, but in appearance a private man, who would pretend to be there on his own business. For the Duke, who depended much more on the Emperor—especially at the time, when he was negotiating a marriage with the Emperor's niece, daughter of the King of Denmark, who is now dowager of Lorraine—could not let it be discovered that he had any dealings or talks with us without great harm to his interests. A Milanese gentleman, an equerry in the King's stables, named Merveille, was found suitable for this commission.[4] Merveille was sent with secret letters of credence and an ambassador's instructions, along with other letters recommending him to the Duke in support of his private affairs, as a mask and a show. He stayed so long near the Duke that the Emperor got some inkling of it, which, we think, gave rise to what followed. It was this: on the pretext of some murder, there is the Duke having his head cut off in the dead of night, after a trial lasting two days. Messer Francesco had come prepared with a long, fabricated account of this story—for the King had appealed for satisfaction to all the princes of Christendom, and

2 The Father is Saint Augustine, City of God; the Latin is from Pliny the Elder, Natural History.

3 Francesco II Sforza was the last Sforza duke of Milan; the affair took place in 1533.

4 The niece was Christina of Denmark, who married Sforza in 1534 and later the Duke of Lorraine.

to the Duke himself. He was given a hearing at the morning council. As the foundation of his case, he laid out several plausible versions of the facts, arranged to this end: that his master had never taken our man for anything but a private gentleman and his own subject, who had come to Milan on business and had never lived there under any other guise. He even denied having known that Merveille was in the service of the King's household, or known to the King—let alone taking him for an ambassador. The King in his turn pressed him with various objections and questions, attacked him from every side, and finally drove him into a corner on the point of the execution carried out by night, and as it were by stealth. To which the poor embarrassed man answered, trying to be polite, that out of respect for His Majesty the Duke would have been very sorry to have such an execution carried out by day. Anyone can imagine how he was taken up on this, having contradicted himself so clumsily before such a nose as King Francis's.

1.9.7 Pope Julius II had sent an ambassador to the King of England to rouse him against King Francis. The ambassador was heard on his commission, and the King of England, in his reply, dwelt on the difficulties he found in making the preparations needed to fight so powerful a king, and gave some reasons. The ambassador replied, inappropriately, that he too had considered them on his part, and had indeed told them to the Pope. From this remark, so far removed from his mission, which was to push the King into war at once, the King of England drew the first evidence of what he later found to be a fact: that this ambassador, in his private intentions, leaned toward France. When the King informed the ambassador's master, the man's goods were confiscated, and he very nearly lost his life over it.

I.10 Of Prompt or Slow Speech

Du parler prompt ou tardif
Some speakers shine when improvising and others need preparation; Montaigne finds his own mind works best unpremeditated.

1.10.1 Never *were all gifts given to all*. So too we see that in the gift of eloquence some have facility and promptness, and, as they say, such an easy delivery that they are ready at every turn, while others, slower, never say anything that is not worked out and premeditated.[1]

1.10.2 Just as ladies are given rules for choosing games and bodily exercises so as to show off what is most beautiful in them, so, if I had to give similar advice about these two different advantages in eloquence—which in our age preachers and lawyers seem to make their chief profession—the slow speaker would make the better preacher, it seems to me, and the other the better lawyer. For the preacher's office gives him as much leisure as he likes to prepare, and then his course runs on in one thread and sequence, without interruption. The lawyer's situation, by contrast, presses him at every hour to enter the lists, and the unexpected replies of the opposing party throw him off his stride, so that he must take a new line on the spot.

1.10.3 And yet at the meeting of Pope Clement and King Francis at Marseille, quite the opposite happened. Monsieur Poyet, a man trained all his life at the bar and of great reputation, was charged with making the address to the Pope. He had thought it

1 A line of verse by Étienne de La Boétie (1530–1563), Montaigne's closest friend.

out long in advance, and had even, so they say, brought it from Paris all ready. On the very day it was to be delivered, the Pope, fearing that something might be said that could offend the ambassadors of the other princes around him, sent the King the subject that seemed to him best suited to the time and place—but, as luck would have it, quite different from the one Monsieur Poyet had worked on. So his speech was useless, and he had to make another one quickly.[2] But he felt unable to do it, and Cardinal du Bellay had to take on the task. The lawyer's part is harder than the preacher's; and yet, in my opinion, we find more passable lawyers than preachers, at least in France. It seems that working promptly and suddenly is more the nature of wit, and working slowly and deliberately more the nature of judgment. But the man who stays utterly mute if he has no time to prepare, and the man to whom time to prepare gives no advantage in speaking better, are equally odd.[3]

1.10.4 It is told of Cassius Severus that he spoke better without having thought about it; that he owed more to chance than to his own diligence; that it helped him to be interrupted while speaking; and that his opponents were afraid to provoke him, for fear that anger would redouble his eloquence. I know by experience this cast of nature, which cannot bear vehement and laborious premeditation: if it does not move along cheerfully and freely, it gets nowhere worthwhile. We say of certain works that they smell of oil and the lamp, because of a certain harshness and roughness that labor imprints on those in which it has a large part.[4] But besides that, the anxiety to do well, and the straining of a soul too taut and too intent on its undertaking, breaks it and hampers it. So it is with water that, pressing on itself through its own violence and abundance, cannot find a way out through an open bottleneck. In this cast of nature I am speaking of, there is

2 Pope Clement VII met Francis I at Marseille in 1533; Guillaume Poyet later became chancellor of France.

3 Jean du Bellay, cardinal and diplomat, brother of the memoirist Martin du Bellay.

4 Cassius Severus was a Roman orator of the Augustan age, described by Seneca the Elder.

also this: it asks not to be shaken and goaded by strong passions, like Cassius's anger, for that movement would be too harsh. It wants not to be jolted but coaxed; it wants to be warmed and roused by occasions from outside, present and fortuitous. If it goes on its own, it merely drags and languishes. Agitation is its life and its grace.

1.10.5 I do not have myself well in my own possession and control: chance has more rights over me than I do. The occasion, the company, the very rhythm of my voice draw more out of my mind than I find there when I sound it and use it on my own. So my spoken words are worth more than my writings, if there can be any choosing where nothing has any value. This too happens to me: I do not find myself where I look for myself, and I find myself more by chance encounter than by the searching of my judgment. I will have tossed off some subtle point while writing. I mean, of course, blunt for someone else, sharp for me. Let us drop all these polite disclaimers: everyone says this according to his own powers. I have lost it so completely that I do not know what I meant to say, and sometimes a stranger has discovered it before I did. If I took the razor to every passage where this happens to me, I would erase myself entirely. Some other time, chance will show it to me in a light brighter than noonday, and make me astonished at my hesitation.

I.11 Of Prognostications

Des prognostications
Oracles and omens have lost credit; Montaigne mocks divination and the anxious curiosity that seeks to know the future.

1.11.1 As for oracles, it is certain that a good while before the coming of Jesus Christ they had begun to lose their credit; for we see Cicero taking pains to find the cause of their decline. These are his words: *Why are oracles no longer delivered at Delphi in this way, not only in our own age but for a long time now, so that nothing could be more despised?* But as for the other kinds of prognostication—drawn from the anatomy of animals at sacrifices (to which Plato partly attributes the natural structure of their internal organs), from the stamping of chickens, from the flight of birds (*We think certain birds were born for the purpose of augury*), from thunderbolts, from the eddying of rivers (*The haruspices see many things, the augurs foresee many; many are revealed by oracles, many by prophecies, many by dreams, many by portents*), and others on which antiquity based most of its undertakings, public and private—our religion has abolished them.[1]

1 The first quotation is from Cicero, On Divination; the other two are also Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods.

1.11.2 And although there remain among us some means of divination by the stars, by spirits, by the shapes of the body, by dreams, and in other ways—a notable example of the frenzied curiosity of our nature, which busies itself anticipating future things as if it did not have enough to do digesting present ones: *Why, ruler of Olympus, did it please you*

to add this care to anxious mortals,
that they should learn of coming disasters through dire omens?
Let whatever you are preparing come suddenly; let men's minds be blind
to future fate; let the fearful be allowed to hope—[2]

1.11.3 *It is not even useful to know what is going to happen; for it is wretched to be tormented to no purpose*—still, such divination carries far less authority now. That is why the example of Francesco, Marquis of Saluzzo, has struck me as remarkable. He was King Francis's lieutenant in his army beyond the Alps, infinitely favored by our court, and indebted to the King for the very marquisate, which had been confiscated from his brother;[3] and though no occasion for doing so presented itself, and his own affection was against it, he let himself be so badly frightened—as has been established—by the fine prognostications then being spread on all sides in favor of the Emperor Charles V and to our disadvantage (especially in Italy, where these mad prophecies had found so much room that in Rome large sums of money were wagered on this belief in our ruin), that after often lamenting to his intimates the evils he saw inevitably in store for the crown of France and for the friends he had there, he revolted and changed sides. To his great loss, however, whatever constellation there may have been.

2 Lucan, Pharsalia.
3 The Latin is from Cicero, On Divination. Francesco, Marquis of Saluzzo, went over to Charles V in 1536.

But he behaved in this like a man torn by conflicting passions. He had both towns and forces in his hand, the enemy army under Antonio de Leyva was a few steps away, and we had no suspicion of what he was doing, so it was in his power to do worse than he did. For through his treachery we lost neither a man nor a town, except Fossano, and that only after contesting it for a long time. *The outcome of the future a prudent god*
buries in murky night,
and laughs if a mortal beyond
what is right takes fright.
He will live master of himself
and happy, who can say each day,
"I have lived"; tomorrow let the Father fill the sky
with black cloud
or with clear sun.
A mind glad in the present will refuse to care
for what lies beyond.[4]

1.11.4 And those who take this saying the other way round are wrong to do so. *These things are so reciprocal that if there is divination, there are gods; and if there are gods, there is divination.* Much more wisely Pacuvius: *As for those who understand the language of birds*
and learn more from another creature's liver than from their own,
I think they should be heard rather than heeded.[5]

1.11.5 This much-celebrated Tuscan art of divination was born like this. A ploughman, driving his ploughshare deep into the earth, saw Tages, a demigod, spring up out of it, with a child's face but an old man's wisdom. Everyone came running, and his words and his knowledge, which contained the principles and methods of this art, were gathered up and preserved for many

4 Horace, Odes; Antonio de Leyva commanded Charles V's army in Italy.
5 The first Latin sentence is the Stoic argument as reported by Cicero, On Divination, which also quotes the Roman tragic poet Pacuvius.

centuries. A birth in keeping with its later progress. I would much rather regulate my affairs by a throw of the dice than by these dreams. And indeed, in all commonwealths a good share of authority has always been left to lot. Plato, in the government he shapes as he pleases, assigns to it the decision of several important matters, and wants, among other things, marriages among the good to be arranged by lot.[6] And he gives such weight to this chance selection that he orders the children born of these marriages to be brought up in the country, and those born of the bad to be put out of it. Yet if one of these exiles should happen, as he grows, to show some good promise of himself, he may be called back; and likewise one of those kept at home may be banished if he shows little promise in his youth.

1.11.6 I see some people who study and annotate their almanacs, and cite their authority to us about whatever happens. Saying so much, they are bound to say both truth and falsehood. *For who is there who, throwing his javelin all day long, does not sometimes hit the mark?* I think none the better of them for seeing them hit it now and then. There would be more certainty if there were a rule and a truth in always lying. Besides, nobody keeps a record of their misses, since they are common and countless; and their predictions are prized for being rare, incredible and prodigious.[7] That was how Diagoras, nicknamed the Atheist, answered when he was in Samothrace and a man showed him in the temple a great many votive offerings and pictures of people who had escaped shipwreck, and said to him: "Well now, you who think the gods do not care about human affairs, what do you say to all these men saved by their grace?" "It happens like this," he answered: "those who were drowned, and they are far more numerous, are not painted."[8]

1.11.7 Cicero says that, of all the philosophers who acknowledged the gods, Xenophanes of Colophon alone tried to uproot

6 The Tuscans are the ancient Etruscans, famed for divination; the story of Tages is told in Cicero, On Divination. Plato's marriage lottery is in the Republic, Book V.
7 Cicero, On Divination.
8 Diagoras of Melos, Greek poet of the 5th century BC; the anecdote is in Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods.

every kind of divination. It is all the less surprising, then, if we have sometimes seen some of our princely souls dwell on these vanities, to their cost. I would very much like to have seen with my own eyes those two marvels: the book of Joachim, the Calabrian abbot, which foretold all the future popes, their names and their forms; and that of the Emperor Leo, which foretold the emperors and patriarchs of Greece.[9] This I have seen with my own eyes: that in times of public turmoil, men stunned by their fortune throw themselves back, as on any superstition, on searching the heavens for the ancient causes and portents of their misfortune. And in my time they have been so strangely lucky at it that they have persuaded me of this: since it is a pastime for sharp and idle minds, those who are trained in this subtle art of folding and unfolding such writings would be able to find in any text whatever they look for. But what gives them most scope is the obscure, ambiguous and fanciful language of prophetic jargon, to which its authors give no clear meaning, so that posterity can apply to it whatever meaning it likes.

1.11.8 The daemon of Socrates was perhaps a certain impulse of the will that came to him without the counsel of his reasoning. In a soul as well refined as his, and prepared by continual exercise of wisdom and virtue, it is likely that these inclinations, though rash and unconsidered, were always important and worth following. Everyone feels within himself some semblance of such stirrings of a sudden, vehement and chance opinion. It is for me to give them some authority, I who give so little to our prudence.[10] And I have had some that were equally weak in reason and violent in persuasion—or in dissuasion, which was more usual with Socrates—and I let myself be carried away by them so profitably and so happily that they might be judged to hold something of divine inspiration.

9 Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202), Calabrian abbot and prophetic writer; Leo VI the Wise, Byzantine emperor (886–912), to whom a set of oracles was attributed.
10 The daemon was the inner divine sign that Socrates said warned him against certain actions.

I.12 Of Constancy

De la constance
Constancy means bearing misfortunes that cannot be avoided, not refusing to dodge dangers—even by flinching from a cannon shot.

1.12.1 The law of resolution and constancy does not require that we should not shield ourselves, as far as is in our power, from the evils and misfortunes that threaten us, nor, consequently, that we should not fear their taking us by surprise. On the contrary, all honorable means of guarding against evils are not only permitted but praiseworthy. And the game of constancy is played chiefly in bearing steadfastly the misfortunes for which there is no remedy. So there is no suppleness of body, no movement of the weapons in our hands, that we think wrong if it serves to protect us from the blow aimed at us.

1.12.2 Several very warlike nations used flight as their principal advantage in their feats of arms, and showed their backs to the enemy more dangerously than their faces. The Turks keep something of this. And Socrates, in Plato, mocks Laches, who had defined courage as standing firm in one's rank against the enemy. "What," he said, "would it then be cowardice to beat them by giving ground?" And he cites Homer to him, who praises in Aeneas the skill of fleeing.[1] And because Laches, on second thought, grants this practice to the Scythians, and finally to all horsemen in general, he cites to him further the example of the Spartan foot soldiers (a nation trained above all others to

1 Plato, Laches.

fight standing firm), who at the battle of Plataea, unable to break the Persian phalanx, hit on the idea of scattering and falling back, so that the Persians, believing they were fleeing, would break up and dissolve that mass in pursuing them. By this they won the victory.[2]

1.12.3 As for the Scythians, it is said of them that when Darius went to subjugate them, he sent their king many reproaches for always retreating before him and dodging battle. To which Indathyrsus—for that was his name—replied that it was not out of fear of him or of any man alive, but that this was the way his nation marched, having neither cultivated land, nor town, nor house to defend, nor any to fear the enemy might profit by. But if Darius was so hungry to get a bite of them, let him come close and see the place of their ancient tombs, and there he would find people to talk to as much as he liked.[3]

1.12.4 Yet with cannon fire, once we are set up as their target, as the circumstances of war often require, it is unbecoming to flinch at the threat of the shot, since we consider it unavoidable because of its violence and speed; and there is many a man who, for having raised his hand or ducked his head, has at the very least given his companions something to laugh at. And yet, during the expedition that the Emperor Charles V made against us in Provence, the Marquis del Vasto went to reconnoiter the town of Arles, and came out from the cover of a windmill under which he had approached. He was spotted by the Lord of Bonneval and the Seneschal of Agenais, who were walking on the theater in the arena; they pointed him out to the Lord of Villiers, commissary of the artillery, who aimed a culverin so accurately that, had the said Marquis not leapt aside when he saw the fuse lit, it was held that he would have taken the shot in his body.[4] And likewise, some years before, Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino, father of the Queen who is the King's mother, was

2 Plataea, in Boeotia, where the Greeks defeated the Persians in 479 BC.

3 Darius I of Persia invaded Scythia around 513 BC; the exchange is in Herodotus, Book IV.

4 Charles V invaded Provence in 1536; Alfonso d'Avalos, Marquis del Vasto, was one of his generals.

besieging Mondolfo, a stronghold in Italy in the lands called the Vicariate, when he saw the fuse put to a gun pointed at him; it served him well to duck, for otherwise the shot, which only grazed the top of his head, would doubtless have hit him in the stomach. To tell the truth, I do not believe these movements were made with any reasoning: for what judgment can you make about a high or low aim in something so sudden?[5] and it is much easier to believe that fortune favored their fright, and that another time it would be as likely a way to throw oneself into the shot as to avoid it. I cannot help starting if the crack of a harquebus shot suddenly strikes my ears in a place where I would not expect it; and I have seen this happen to others who are worth more than I am.

1.12.5 Nor do the Stoics mean that the soul of their sage can resist the first visions and fancies that come upon it. Rather, as to a natural subjection, they grant that he yields to a great clap of thunder, say, or a building collapsing, to the point of turning pale and shrinking; and so with the other passions, provided that his opinion remains safe and whole, that the seat of his reasoning suffers no harm or alteration whatsoever, and that he gives no consent to his fright and suffering. With one who is not a sage, it goes the same way in the first part, but quite otherwise in the second. For the impression of the passions does not remain on his surface, but penetrates to the very seat of his reason, infecting and corrupting it. He judges according to them and conforms to them. See the state of the Stoic sage very eloquently and plainly expressed: *The mind remains unmoved; the tears roll down in vain.* The Peripatetic sage does not exempt himself from disturbances, but he moderates them.[6]

5 Lorenzo II de' Medici (1492–1519), father of Catherine de' Medici, mother of Henry III; the siege of Mondolfo was in 1517.

6 Virgil, Aeneid IV, of Aeneas resisting Dido's pleas. The Peripatetics are the followers of Aristotle.

I.13 The Ceremony of the Meeting of Kings

Ceremonie de l'entreueuë des rois
Starting from the etiquette of royal meetings, Montaigne describes his own impatience with ceremony and the servitude of manners.

1.13.1 There is no subject so trivial that it does not deserve a place in this rhapsody. By our common rules, it would be a notable discourtesy, both toward an equal and still more toward a great man, to fail to be at home when he had told you he would come. Indeed, Queen Margaret of Navarre added on this point that it was uncivil for a gentleman to leave his house, as is most often done, to go and meet a visitor who is coming to see him, however great he may be; that it is more respectful and civil to wait for him in order to receive him, if only for fear of missing him on the road; and that it is enough to escort him when he leaves.[1] For my part, I often forget both of these empty duties, just as I cut out as much ceremony in my house as I can. Someone takes offense: what can I do about it? Better that I offend him once than myself every day: it would be a perpetual subjection. What is the point of fleeing the servitude of courts if we drag it all the way into our own den? It is also a common rule in all gatherings that it falls to the lesser to be first at the appointed place, since it is more fitting for the most eminent to be waited for.

1.13.2 However, at the meeting arranged between Pope Clement and King Francis at Marseille, the King, having ordered the

necessary preparations, withdrew from the city and gave the Pope two or three days' leisure for his entry and rest before he came to see him. And likewise, at the entry of the Pope and the Emperor into Bologna, the Emperor allowed the Pope to be there first, and arrived after him.[2] It is, they say, an ordinary ceremony at meetings of such princes that the greatest should be at the appointed place before the others, even before the one in whose territory the meeting is held; and they take it this way: the purpose is for this appearance to show that it is the greatest whom the lesser go to find and seek out, not he them.

1.13.3 Not only each country, but each city and each profession has its own particular civility. I was trained in it carefully enough in my childhood, and have lived in good enough company, not to be ignorant of the laws of our French civility; I could teach a school in them. I like to follow them, but not so timidly that my life is constrained by them. They have some tiresome forms, and provided one forgets them out of discretion and not by mistake, one is no less gracious for it. I have often seen men uncivil through too much civility, and importunate with courtesy.

1.13.4 For the rest, the art of dealing with people is a very useful knowledge. Like grace and beauty, it smooths the first approaches of society and familiarity; and consequently it opens the door for us to learn from the examples of others, and to put to use and display our own example, if it has anything instructive and communicable.

1 Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549), sister of Francis I and author of the Heptameron.

2 Clement VII met Francis I at Marseille in 1533, and Charles V at Bologna in 1529–1530.

I.14 That the Taste of Good and Evil Depends in Large Part on Our Opinion of Them

Que le goust des biens et des maux despend en bonne partie de l'opinion que nous en auons
If evils reach us only through our opinions, we can change their taste; Montaigne tests this on death, pain, and poverty.

1.14.1 Men, says an old Greek maxim, are tormented by the opinions they have of things, not by the things themselves. A great point would be gained for the relief of our wretched human condition by anyone who could establish this proposition as true everywhere. For if evils enter us only through our judgment, it seems that it is in our power to despise them or turn them to good. If things surrender to our mercy, why shall we not master them, or adapt them to our advantage?[1] If what we call evil and torment is neither evil nor torment in itself, but only our fancy gives it that quality, it is in our power to change it. And having the choice, if nothing compels us, we are strangely foolish to strain ourselves for the side that is most painful to us, and to give sickness, poverty and contempt a bitter and bad taste if we can give them a good one—if, fortune merely supplying the matter, it is up to us to give it the form. Now, that what we call evil is not so in itself, or at least that, whatever it is, it depends on us to give it another flavor and another face—for it all comes to the same—let us see whether this can be maintained.

1.14.2 If the original being of these things we fear had the power to lodge itself in us on its own authority, it would lodge alike and the same in all; for men are all of one species, and, apart from more or less, are furnished with the same tools and instruments for conceiving and judging. But the diversity of opinions we have about these things shows clearly that they enter us only on terms we agree to. One man perhaps lodges them in himself in their true being, but a thousand others give them a new and contrary being within themselves. We take death, poverty and pain as our principal adversaries. Now this death, which some call the most horrible of horrible things—who does not know that others call it the only harbor from the torments of this life? the sovereign good of nature? the sole support of our liberty? and the common and ready remedy for all ills? And as some await it trembling and terrified, others bear it more easily than life. One man complains of how easy it is: *O Death, would that you refused to take the cowards from life, / and that valor alone could bestow you!*[2]

1.14.3 But let us leave aside these lofty spirits: Theodorus answered Lysimachus, who was threatening to kill him, "You will have done a great feat if you match the strength of a Spanish fly." Most philosophers are found either to have forestalled their death deliberately, or to have hastened and assisted it. How many common people we see led to death—and not a simple death, but one mixed with shame and sometimes with grievous torments—who bring to it such assurance, some from obstinacy, some from natural simplicity, that one can see no change in their ordinary state: settling their household affairs, commending themselves to their friends, singing, preaching and talking to the crowd, sometimes even mixing in jokes, and drinking to their acquaintances, just as Socrates did![3]

1.14.4 One man being taken to the gallows said they should not go by a certain street, because there was a danger that a mer-

1 The maxim is from Epictetus, Manual 5.
2 Lucan, Pharsalia IV.

chant might have him seized by the collar for an old debt. Another told the executioner not to touch his throat for fear of making him jump with laughter, he was so ticklish. Another answered his confessor, who promised him that he would sup that day with our Lord: "You go there yourself; as for me, I am fasting." Another, having asked for a drink, and the executioner having drunk first, said he would not drink after him for fear of catching the pox. Everyone has heard the tale of the man from Picardy who, when he was on the ladder, was presented with a girl and told that, as our justice sometimes allows, his life would be spared if he would marry her. He looked at her a little, noticed that she limped, and said: "Tie the rope, tie the rope—she hobbles." And similarly it is said that in Denmark a man condemned to be beheaded, when he was on the scaffold and offered a similar condition, refused it because the girl they offered him had sagging cheeks and too pointed a nose. A servant in Toulouse accused of heresy gave as the whole ground of his belief that of his master, a young student imprisoned with him, and preferred to die rather than let himself be persuaded that his master could be wrong. We read of the people of the town of Arras, when King Louis XI took it, that a good number were found among the common people who let themselves be hanged rather than say "Long live the King." And among those base souls the buffoons, there have been some who would not give up their jesting even in death itself. The one whom the hangman was pushing off the ladder cried, "Row on, galley!"—which was his usual refrain.[4] And the other, who had been laid on a straw mattress along the hearth, on the point of giving up his life: when the doctor asked him where the pain held him, he answered, "Between the bench and the fire." And when the priest, to give him extreme unction, was searching for his feet, which the illness had drawn up and contracted, he said, "You'll

3 Theodorus of Cyrene, called the Atheist; Lysimachus, Macedonian general who became king of Thrace. The Spanish fly is a blister beetle whose poison can kill.
4 Louis XI took Arras in 1477. "Vogue la galère" was a proverbial cry meaning "come what may."

find them at the end of my legs." To the man who was urging him to commend himself to God, he asked, "Who is going there?" And when the other answered, "You yourself, soon, if it pleases Him," he replied, "If only I were there by tomorrow evening!" "Just commend yourself to Him," the other went on, "you will soon be there." "Then it is better," he added, "that I take Him my commendations myself."

1.14.5 In the kingdom of Narsingue, even today, the wives of their priests are buried alive with the bodies of their husbands. All other women are burned at their husbands' funerals, not only steadfastly but gaily. At the death of the king, his wives and concubines, his favorites and all his officers and servants, who make up a whole population, present themselves so cheerfully at the fire where his body is burned that they show they take it as a great honor to accompany their master there.[5] During our recent wars in the Milanese, with so many captures and recaptures, the people, unable to bear such varied changes of fortune, became so resolved on death that I heard my father say he saw a count kept of a good twenty-five heads of household who had done away with themselves in one week. An incident close to that of the Xanthians, who, besieged by Brutus, threw themselves headlong to their deaths, men, women and children together, with so furious an appetite for dying that nothing is done to escape death which these did not do to escape life; so that Brutus could barely save a very small number of them.[6]

1.14.6 Any opinion is strong enough to get itself embraced at the cost of life. The first article of that courageous oath which Greece swore and kept in the Median war was that each man would sooner exchange life for death than their own laws for Persian ones. How many people do we see, in the war between the Turks and the Greeks, accept a very harsh death rather than

5 Narsingue was the European name for the kingdom of Vijayanagara in southern India.

6 Montaigne's father, Pierre Eyquem, fought in the Italian wars of Francis I. Brutus besieged Xanthus in Lycia in 42 BC.

be uncircumcised in order to be baptized? An example of which no kind of religion is incapable.[7]

1.14.7 When the kings of Castile had banished the Jews from their land, King John of Portugal sold them, at eight crowns a head, refuge in his own for a certain time, on condition that when it was up they would have to leave; and he promised to supply ships to carry them over to Africa.[8] The day came after which, it had been declared, those who had not obeyed would remain slaves. Ships were supplied to them sparingly, and those who embarked were harshly and basely treated by the crews, who, besides many other indignities, kept them idling at sea, now forward, now back, until they had used up their provisions and were forced to buy food from them at such a price and for so long that they were not put ashore until they were stripped to their shirts. When news of this inhumanity was brought to those still on land, most of them resolved on servitude; some made a show of changing their religion. Emmanuel, John's successor, on coming to the crown, first set them free, and later, changing his mind, ordered them to leave his lands, assigning three ports for their passage. He hoped, says Bishop Osorius, a Latin historian of our times who is not to be despised, that since the favor of the freedom he had restored to them had failed to convert them to Christianity, the difficulty of exposing themselves to the plundering of the sailors, and of abandoning a country where they were settled with great wealth to go and cast themselves into an unknown and foreign region, would bring them round to it.[9] But seeing himself disappointed in his hope, and all of them determined to make the crossing, he cut out two of the ports he had promised them, so that the length and hardship of the journey might bring some of them round, or so that he might have the means to gather them all in one place, the more conveniently to carry out what he had planned. This was that he ordered all chil-

7 The Median war is the Greeks' war against the Persians (490–479 BC).

8 The Jews were expelled from Castile and Aragon in 1492; John II was king of Portugal (1481–1495).

9 Manuel I, king of Portugal (1495–1521); Jerónimo Osório (1506–1580), bishop of Silves, wrote a Latin history of his reign.

dren under fourteen to be torn from the hands of their fathers and mothers, to be carried out of their sight and company to a place where they would be instructed in our religion. He says that this measure produced a horrible spectacle, the natural affection between parents and children, and their zeal for their ancient faith besides, fighting against this violent decree. Fathers and mothers were commonly seen doing away with themselves, and, as a still harsher example, throwing their young children down wells out of love and compassion, to escape the law. For the rest, when the term he had fixed for them expired, lacking the means to leave, they returned to servitude. Some became Christians; and even today, a hundred years later, few Portuguese feel sure of their faith or of their descendants'—although custom and length of time are far stronger counselors for such changes than any other constraint. In the town of Castelnaudary, fifty Albigensian heretics suffered at one time, with determined courage, to be burned alive in one fire rather than disavow their opinions. *How often,* says Cicero, *have not only our leaders but whole armies rushed to certain death?*[10]

1.14.8 I have seen one of my intimate friends hunt death down with all his might, out of a genuine longing, rooted in his heart by various forms of reasoning that I could not talk him out of; and at the first death that offered itself crowned with a luster of honor, throw himself into it beyond all likelihood, in a harsh and burning end. We have several examples in our time of people, even children, who for fear of some slight discomfort have put themselves to death. And on this point, what shall we not fear, says one of the ancients, if we fear what cowardice itself has chosen as its refuge?

1.14.9 If I were to string out here a long list of those of every sex and condition and of every sect, in happier ages, who have either awaited death steadfastly or sought it voluntarily—and sought it not only to escape the evils of this life, but some simply to escape the satiety of living, and others in the hope of a better

10 The Albigensians were the Cathars of southern France, persecuted in the 13th century.

condition elsewhere—I would never be done. And their number is so infinite that in truth I would have an easier time counting those who have feared it. This one only. Pyrrho the philosopher, finding himself one day in a boat during a great storm, pointed out to those he saw most frightened around him a pig that was aboard, not in the least bothered by the storm, and encouraged them by its example.[11] Shall we dare say, then, that this advantage of reason, which we make so much of, and on account of which we consider ourselves masters and emperors of the rest of creation, was put into us for our torment? What is the use of knowing things if we become more cowardly for it? if we lose the repose and tranquility we would have without it? and if it makes our condition worse than that of Pyrrho's pig? Shall we use the intelligence that was given us for our greatest good to our ruin, fighting the design of nature and the universal order of things, which requires that each use its tools and means for its own benefit?

THE OBJECTION FROM PAIN

Pain seems the hardest case, yet even pain takes up only as much room as we give it.

1.14.10 "Fine," someone will tell me, "let your rule serve for death; but what will you say of poverty? And what will you say of pain, which Aristippus, Hieronymus and most of the wise considered the ultimate evil—and those who denied it in words confessed it in deeds?" When Posidonius was extremely tormented by an acute and painful illness, Pompey went to see him and apologized for having chosen so inconvenient a time to hear him discourse on philosophy. "God forbid," Posidonius said to him, "that pain should get such a hold on me as to prevent me from discussing it"; and he launched into that very subject, the contempt of pain. But meanwhile pain was playing its part and

11 Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360–270 BC), founder of the skeptical school later called Pyrrhonism.

pressing him relentlessly.[12] At which he cried out: "Do what you will, pain, I still will not say that you are an evil." This story that they make so much of—what does it contribute to the contempt of pain? He is only arguing about the word. And meanwhile, if these stabs do not move him, why does he break off his discourse for them? Why does he think he is doing much by not calling it an evil? Here not everything consists in imagination. On other things we hold opinions; here it is certain knowledge that plays its part; our very senses are the judges of it: *For unless they are true, all reason too is false.* Shall we make our skin believe that the lashes of a strap tickle it? And our palate that aloes is Graves wine?[13] Pyrrho's pig is on our side here. He is unafraid of death, to be sure; but if you beat him, he squeals and writhes. Shall we override the general law of nature, seen in everything that lives under heaven, which is to tremble under pain? Trees themselves seem to groan when they are injured.

1.14.11 Death is felt only through reasoning, since it is the motion of an instant. *Either it has been or it is still to come; there is nothing of the present in it. / And death holds less pain than the waiting for death.* A thousand beasts, a thousand men are dead before they are threatened. So too what we say we chiefly fear in death is pain, its usual forerunner. Yet, if we are to believe a holy father, *What makes death evil is only what follows death.* And I would say, still more plausibly, that neither what goes before nor what comes after belongs to death. We make false excuses for ourselves.[14] And I find by experience that it is rather our impatience at the thought of death that makes us impatient of pain, and that we feel pain doubly grievous because it threatens us with death. But since reason accuses our cowardice of fearing something so sudden, so inevitable, so imperceptible, we seize on this other, more excusable pretext. All ills that carry no danger beyond the ill itself we call without danger. Toothache or

12 Aristippus of Cyrene and Hieronymus of Rhodes were Greek philosophers; Posidonius was a Stoic whom Pompey visited at Rhodes.
13 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things IV. Graves is the wine country near Bordeaux.
14 The holy father is Saint Augustine, City of God I.11.

gout, however grievous, since it does not kill—who counts it as an illness?

1.14.12 Well then, let us suppose that in death we chiefly regard pain. Likewise poverty has nothing to fear but this: that it throws us into pain's arms through the thirst, hunger, cold, heat and sleepless nights it makes us suffer. So let us deal only with pain. I grant them that it is the worst accident of our being, and willingly. For I am the man in the world who most bears it ill will and most avoids it, since, thank God, I have not so far had much dealing with it. But it is in our power, if not to annihilate it, at least to lessen it by patience; and even if the body is shaken by it, to keep the soul and reason nevertheless in good temper. And if it were not so, who would have brought into esteem virtue, valor, strength, magnanimity and resolution? Where would they play their part if there were no more pain to defy? *Virtue is eager for danger.* If we need not sleep on the hard ground, endure the noonday heat in full armor, feed on horse and donkey, see ourselves cut to pieces and a bullet pulled from between our bones, submit to being sewn up, cauterized and probed, how shall we gain the advantage we want to have over the common people? What the sages say is a long way from fleeing evil and pain: that of actions equally good, the more desirable to perform is the one that involves more pain.[15] *For it is not in gaiety, or wantonness, or laughter, or jest, the companion of frivolity, that men are happy; often, even in sadness, they are happy through firmness and constancy.* And for this reason it was impossible to persuade our fathers that conquests made by sheer force, at the hazard of war, were not more advantageous than those made in complete safety by intrigues and schemes. *Honor is the more gladdening the more it costs.*[16]

1.14.13 Moreover, this should console us: that by nature, if pain is violent, it is short; if it is long, it is light: *if severe, short; if long, light.* You will not feel it very long if you feel it too much: it will put an end to itself or to you; the one and the other come to the

15 Seneca, On Providence.

16 Cicero, On Ends II; the last line is from Lucan, Pharsalia IX.

same. If you do not carry it, it will carry you off. *Remember that the greatest pains are ended by death, that small ones have many intervals of rest, and that we are masters of moderate ones; so that if they are bearable we may bear them, and if not, we may leave life, since it does not please us, as we leave a theater.*[17]

1.14.14 What makes us endure pain so impatiently is that we are not accustomed to taking our chief contentment in the soul, and do not rely enough on it, though it is the sole and sovereign mistress of our condition. The body has, apart from more or less, only one gait and one bent. The soul can vary into every sort of form, and brings into line with itself and its state, whatever that may be, the sensations of the body and all other accidents. Therefore we must study it and inquire into it, and awaken in it its all-powerful springs. There is no reason, no prescription, no force that can prevail against its inclination and its choice. Of the many thousands of turns it has at its disposal, let us give it one suited to our repose and preservation, and there we are, not only sheltered from all injury, but even gratified and flattered, if it so pleases, by injuries and ills. It turns everything to profit without distinction. Error and dreams serve it usefully, as legitimate material for putting us in safety and contentment. It is easy to see that what sharpens pain and pleasure in us is the keen edge of our mind. The beasts, which keep it buckled down, leave their bodies their sensations free and natural, and consequently much the same in each species, as they show by the similar use of their movements. If we did not disturb the jurisdiction that belongs to our limbs in this matter, it is likely that we would be better off, and that nature has given them a just and moderate disposition toward pleasure and toward pain. And it cannot fail to be just, being equal and common. But since we have freed ourselves from its rules to abandon ourselves to the vagrant liberty of our fancies, let us at least help ourselves by bending them in the most agreeable direction. Plato fears our being too harshly committed to pain and pleasure, because it binds and attaches the soul too much to the body; I fear it rather

17 Cicero, On Ends I and II.

for the opposite reason, because it detaches and unnails the soul from it.[18] Just as the enemy grows fiercer at our flight, so pain grows proud at seeing us tremble under it. It will come to much better terms with anyone who stands up to it: we must set ourselves against it and brace ourselves. By backing away and retreating, we call down on ourselves and draw on the ruin that threatens us. As the body is steadier under a charge when it is stiffened, so is the soul.

1.14.15 But let us come to examples, which are properly the game of weak-backed people like me. There we shall find that pain is like gems, which take on a brighter or duller color according to the foil they are set on, and that it takes up only as much room in us as we make for it. *They suffered as much as they gave themselves up to suffering.* We feel a stroke of the surgeon's razor more than ten sword blows in the heat of battle. The pains of childbirth, judged great by doctors and by God himself, and which we go through with so many ceremonies—there are whole nations that make nothing of them.[19] I leave aside the Spartan women; but among the Swiss in our infantry, what change do you find? Only that, trotting after their husbands, you see them today carrying on their necks the child they had in their bellies yesterday. And those counterfeit Egyptians, gathered up from among our own people, go themselves to wash their newborn babies and take their bath in the nearest river. Besides so many girls who every day conceal their children's birth as they concealed their conception, that fine and noble wife of Sabinus, a Roman patrician, for the sake of others bore alone, without help, without a sound or a groan, the birth of twins.[20] A mere Spartan boy, having stolen a fox (for they feared the shame of being clumsy at theft even more than we fear the penalty for our wickedness) and having hidden it under his cloak, endured having his belly gnawed by it rather than give himself away. And

18 Plato, Phaedo 83d, where every pleasure and pain nails the soul to the body.
19 Saint Augustine, City of God I.10.
20 The wandering "Egyptians" were the Romani, then thought to come from Egypt. The wife of Julius Sabinus, Eponina, hid with her husband after his revolt against Vespasian (Plutarch).

another, offering incense at a sacrifice, let himself be burned to the bone by a coal that had fallen into his sleeve, so as not to disturb the rite. And a great number have been seen who, purely as a test of virtue, according to their upbringing, endured at the age of seven being whipped to death without changing their expression. And Cicero saw them fight in bands, with fists, feet and teeth, until they fainted rather than admit they were beaten. *Custom would never conquer nature, for she is always unconquered; but we have infected our minds with shade, delights, idleness, languor and sloth; we have softened them with false opinions and bad habits.*[21]

1.14.16 Everyone knows the story of Scaevola, who slipped into the enemy camp to kill its leader and missed his stroke. To retrieve his purpose by a stranger device and to deliver his country, he confessed to Porsenna, the king he had meant to kill, not only his plan, but added that there were in his camp a great many Romans like himself, accomplices in his enterprise. And to show what kind of man he was, he had a brazier brought, and watched and endured his arm being grilled and roasted, until the enemy himself, horrified, ordered the brazier taken away. And what of the man who did not deign to interrupt the reading of his book while he was being cut open?[22] And the one who persisted in mocking and laughing in defiance of the ills they were doing him, so that the provoked cruelty of the torturers who held him, and all their inventions of torments heaped one upon another, conceded him the victory? But he was a philosopher. What then? One of Caesar's gladiators endured, laughing all the while, having his wounds probed and cut open. *What ordinary gladiator has ever groaned? Which has ever changed countenance? Which has disgraced himself not only standing but even in falling? Which, when he had fallen and was ordered to receive the blade, drew back his neck?*[23]

21 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations V.
22 Gaius Mucius Scaevola, legendary Roman hero who tried to kill Lars Porsenna, king of Clusium, during his siege of Rome around 508 BC.
23 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations II.

1.14.17 Let us bring the women in too. Who in Paris has not heard of the woman who had herself flayed solely to gain the fresher complexion of a new skin? There are some who have had sound, living teeth pulled out to make their voices softer and fuller, or to set the rest in better order. How many examples of contempt for pain do we have of this kind? What can they not do? What do they fear, if there is the least improvement to be hoped for in their beauty? *Women who take pains to pluck out their white hairs by the root, / and to peel off their skin and bring back a fresh face.* I have seen some of them swallow sand and ashes, and deliberately set about ruining their stomachs to acquire a pale complexion. To get a body slim in the Spanish fashion, what torture do they not endure, braced and strapped, with great notches cut into their sides down to the living flesh? Yes, sometimes even to the point of dying of it.[24]

1.14.18 It is common among many nations of our time to wound themselves deliberately to make their word believed. Our King tells of some remarkable examples of this that he saw in Poland, some of them even done in his honor. But besides the fact that I know some people in France have imitated it, when I came from those famous Estates of Blois I had seen, shortly before, a girl in Picardy who, to show the ardor of her promises and her constancy as well, gave herself four or five good stabs in the arm with the bodkin she wore in her hair. They made her skin crackle and bled her in good earnest.[25] The Turks make great gashes in themselves for their ladies; and so that the mark will stay, they immediately put fire to the wound and hold it there an incredibly long time, to stop the blood and form the scar. People who have seen it have written it down and sworn it to me. But for ten aspers you will find among them, any day, someone who will give himself a very deep slash in the arm or the thighs. I am very glad that the witnesses are closer at hand where we have most need of them, for Christendom supplies us with plenty.

24 Tibullus, Elegies (a poem from the collection attributed to him).
25 Henry III had been king of Poland in 1573–1574; Montaigne attended the Estates-General at Blois in 1588.

And after the example of our holy guide, there have been many who out of devotion chose to bear the cross.[26] We learn from a most trustworthy witness that King Saint Louis wore a hair shirt until, in his old age, his confessor released him from it; and that every Friday he had his shoulders beaten by his priest with five small iron chains, which were carried for that purpose among his nightclothes.[27]

1.14.19 William, our last Duke of Guyenne, father of that Eleanor who passed the duchy on to the houses of France and England, wore a breastplate continually for the last ten or twelve years of his life, under a monk's habit, as a penance. Fulk, Count of Anjou, went all the way to Jerusalem to have himself whipped there by two of his servants, with a rope around his neck, before the tomb of our Lord. But do we not still see nowadays, on Good Friday, in various places, a great number of men and women beating themselves until they tear their flesh and lay it open to the bone? That I have often seen, and it was no illusion.[28] And it was said—for they go masked—that there were some who for money undertook in this way to make good other people's religion, with a contempt for pain all the greater in that the spurs of devotion are more powerful than those of avarice.

1.14.20 Quintus Maximus buried his son, a former consul; Marcus Cato his, who was praetor-elect; and Lucius Paulus his two within a few days—all with a composed face and showing no sign of mourning. In my day I said jokingly of someone that he had cheated divine justice. For when the violent death of three grown sons had been sent to him in a single day, as a harsh stroke of the rod, as we must suppose, he very nearly took it as a singular favor and kindness from heaven. I do not follow these monstrous temperaments; but I have lost two or three children at nurse, if not without regret, at least without great distress. And yet there is hardly any misfortune that touches men more

26 The asper was a small Turkish silver coin.
27 Louis IX of France (1214–1270); the witness is his biographer Jean de Joinville.
28 William X, Duke of Aquitaine (d. 1137), father of Eleanor of Aquitaine; Fulk III Nerra, Count of Anjou (d. 1040).

to the quick.[29] I see plenty of other common occasions of affliction that I would hardly feel if they came to me. And some of those to which the world gives so atrocious a face I have scorned when they did come to me—so much so that I would not dare boast of it in public without blushing. *From which it is understood that distress lies not in nature but in opinion.*[30]

1.14.21 Opinion is a powerful party, bold and without measure. Who ever sought security and rest as hungrily as Alexander and Caesar sought restlessness and difficulties? Teres, the father of Sitalces, used to say that when he was not making war, he felt there was no difference between himself and his groom. When Cato, as consul, to make sure of certain towns in Spain, had merely forbidden their inhabitants to bear arms, a great number of them killed themselves: *A fierce people, who thought there was no life without arms.*[31] How many do we know who have fled the sweetness of a quiet life in their homes, among people they know, to pursue the horror of uninhabitable deserts; who have thrown themselves into abasement, lowliness and the contempt of the world, and have delighted in it to the point of affectation? Cardinal Borromeo, who died recently in Milan, in the midst of the debauchery to which his noble birth, his great wealth, the air of Italy and his youth all invited him, kept to a way of life so austere that the same robe that served him in summer served him in winter. He had only straw for his bed; and the hours left over from the duties of his office he spent in continual study, planted on his knees, with a little water and bread beside his book—which was the whole provision for his meals and all the time he spent on them.[32]

1.14.22 I know some who have knowingly drawn both profit and advancement from cuckoldry, whose very name frightens so many people.

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29 Quintus Fabius Maximus, Cato the Elder and Lucius Aemilius Paulus, examples taken from Cicero.

30 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations.

31 Teres was a king of the Thracian Odrysians in the 5th century BC; the quotation is from Livy.

32 Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, died in 1584.

1.14.23 If sight is not the most necessary of our senses, it is at least the most pleasant; and the most pleasant and useful of our members seem to be those that serve to beget us. Yet a good many people have conceived a mortal hatred for them for the sole reason that they were too lovable, and have rejected them because of their value. The man who put out his own eyes held the same opinion of eyes.[33]

1.14.24 The commonest and soundest part of mankind holds an abundance of children to be a great happiness; I and a few others hold the lack of them to be an equal happiness. And when Thales is asked why he does not marry, he answers that he does not like to leave any offspring of himself.

1.14.25 That our opinion gives things their value is seen from the great many things which, in appraising them, we do not even look at, but look at ourselves instead. We consider neither their qualities nor their usefulness, but only what it cost us to get them, as if that were some part of their substance; and we call value in them not what they bring but what we bring to them. On which I note that we are great managers of our outlay. It serves according to what it weighs, by the very fact that it weighs. Our opinion never lets it run on a voyage for nothing. The purchase gives the diamond its title, difficulty gives it to virtue, pain to devotion, and bitterness to medicine. One man, to attain poverty, threw his crowns into the very sea that so many others ransack on every side to fish up riches. Epicurus says that being rich is not a relief but a change of business. Indeed, it is not want but rather abundance that produces avarice. I want to tell my own experience on this subject.[34]

33 An allusion to the philosopher Democritus, who was said to have blinded himself.

34 Crates the Cynic, according to Diogenes Laertius.

THREE WAYS OF LIVING WITH MONEY

Montaigne lived first on credit, then by hoarding, and now spends as his income comes in.

1.14.26 I have lived in three kinds of condition since leaving childhood. The first period, which lasted nearly twenty years, I spent with no means but chance ones, depending on other people's arrangements and help, without fixed status or settled allowance. My spending was all the more cheerful and carefree because it rested entirely on the rashness of Fortune. I was never better off. It never happened to me to find my friends' purses closed, since I had laid on myself, above every other necessity, the necessity of not missing the date I had set for repaying. They extended it for me a thousand times, seeing the effort I made to satisfy them; so that I paid them back with a thrifty and somewhat crafty loyalty. I naturally feel a certain pleasure in paying, as if I were unloading an irksome weight from my shoulders, and that image of servitude. Also there is a certain satisfaction that tickles me in doing a just action and satisfying someone else. I except payments where one has to get down to bargaining and counting: for if I find no one to whom I can hand over the task, I put them off as long as I can, shamefully and unfairly, for fear of that wrangling, with which both my temperament and my way of speaking are utterly incompatible. There is nothing I hate so much as haggling: it is sheer dealing in cheating and impudence. After an hour of debate and chaffering, both parties abandon their word and their oaths for five sous' improvement. And I borrowed at a disadvantage too. For having no heart to ask face to face, I left the chance of it to paper, which makes hardly any effort and lends a great hand to refusing. I left the management of my needs to the stars, more cheerfully and freely than I have since left it to my own foresight and sense. Most good managers think it horrible to live in such uncertainty; and they do not consider, first, that most of the world lives that way. How many decent men have thrown all

their sure possessions to the winds, and do so every day, to chase the breeze of the favor of kings and of Fortune? Caesar went a million in gold into debt beyond what he was worth, to become Caesar. And how many merchants begin their trade by selling their farm, which they send off to the Indies! *Across so many raging seas!* In so great a drought of devotion, we have thousands upon thousands of religious communities that get along comfortably, expecting every day from the liberality of heaven what they need for their dinner.[35]

1.14.27 Secondly, they do not consider that this certainty on which they rely is hardly less uncertain and hazardous than hazard itself. I see poverty as close to me beyond an income of two thousand crowns as if it were right next to me. For besides the fact that fate has the means to open a hundred breaches for poverty through our riches—there often being no middle ground between the highest and the lowest fortune: *Fortune is glass: just when it shines, it breaks*—and to send all our defenses and ramparts tumbling head over heels, I find that for various reasons want is seen lodged as commonly with those who have property as with those who have none; and that it is perhaps somewhat less troublesome when it is alone than when it meets with riches for company. Riches come more from good order than from income: *Every man is the maker of his own fortune.* And a rich man who is hard up, needy and harried by business seems to me more wretched than one who is simply poor.[36] *Needy in the midst of riches, which is the most grievous kind of poverty.* The greatest and richest princes are usually driven by poverty and want to extreme necessity. For is there any more extreme than to become tyrants because of it, and unjust usurpers of their subjects' property?[37]

1.14.28 My second form was having money. Having taken to it, I soon laid up reserves that were considerable for my station, not thinking that one has anything except what one possesses bey-

35 Catullus.
36 Publilius Syrus; the second quotation is attributed to Sallust.
37 Seneca, Letters.

ond one's ordinary expenses, nor that one can rely on wealth that is still only hoped-for income, however certain it may look. For what, I said, if I were caught by this accident or that? And in pursuit of these vain and vicious imaginings, I went about playing the clever man, providing against every mishap with this superfluous reserve. And I even knew how to answer anyone who argued that the number of mishaps was too infinite: if it was not against all, it was against some, and many. This did not go on without painful anxiety. I made a secret of it; and I, who dare say so much about myself, never spoke of my money except with lies, like others who make themselves out poor when they are rich and rich when they are poor, and excuse their conscience from ever testifying honestly about what they have. A ridiculous and shameful prudence. Was I going on a journey? I never seemed to myself sufficiently provided; and the more I had loaded myself with money, the more I had loaded myself with fear: now about the safety of the roads, now about the trustworthiness of those in charge of my baggage, which, like some others I know, I never felt sure enough of unless I had it before my eyes. Did I leave my strongbox at home? How many suspicions and thorny thoughts—and, what is worse, ones I could tell no one! My mind was always turned that way. All things considered, there is more trouble in keeping money than in getting it. If I did not do quite all I say, at least it cost me something to keep myself from doing it. Of comfort I drew little or none from it. Having more means of spending, I found spending weighed on me no less. For, as Bion said, the hairy man is as angry as the bald one at having his hair pulled out. And once you have grown used to it and have set your fancy on a certain heap, it is no longer at your service: you would not dare make a dent in it. It is a building that, as it seems to you, will all come crashing down if you touch it; necessity has to take you by the throat before you will cut into it. And before then I would pawn my clothes and sell a horse with much less constraint and reluctance than I then felt in making a breach in that favorite purse I kept apart. But the danger was that one can hardly set

fixed limits to this desire (they are hard to find in things we believe good) and fix a stopping point to saving. One goes on fattening this hoard and swelling it from one sum to another, until one meanly deprives oneself of the enjoyment of one's own goods, makes it consist entirely in guarding them, and never uses them at all. By this sort of use, the richest people in the world are the ones charged with guarding the gates and walls of a good town. Every moneyed man is avaricious, to my mind. Plato ranks bodily or human goods thus: health, beauty, strength, wealth. And wealth, he says, is not blind but very clear-sighted when it is lit by prudence. Dionysius the Younger behaved handsomely. He was told that one of his Syracusans had hidden a treasure in the ground; he sent word to him to bring it to him. The man did so, secretly keeping back part of it, and with that he went off to another city, where, having lost this appetite for hoarding, he began to live more liberally. Hearing of this, Dionysius had the rest of his treasure given back to him, saying that since he had learned how to use it, he gladly returned it to him.[38]

1.14.29 I was in this state for some years. Some good daemon or other threw me out of it, very usefully, like the Syracusan, and scattered all that hoard to the winds: the pleasure of a certain very expensive journey trampled that foolish notion underfoot. By which I have fallen back into a third kind of life—I say what I feel about it—certainly much more pleasant and better ordered. It is that I make my spending keep pace with my income; sometimes one gets ahead, sometimes the other, but they never drift far apart. I live from day to day, and am content to have enough for present and ordinary needs; for extraordinary ones, all the provisions in the world could not suffice.[39] And it is folly to expect that Fortune herself will ever arm us sufficiently against herself. It is with our own arms that we must fight her. Chance ones will betray us at the crucial moment. If I save, it is only in

38 Plato, Laws; Dionysius the Younger was tyrant of Syracuse in the 4th century BC.

39 Probably his journey to Italy, Switzerland and Germany in 1580–1581.

hope of spending it on something soon; and not to buy land, which I have no use for, but to buy pleasure. *Not to be covetous is money; not to be fond of buying is an income.* I have hardly any fear that my means will fail me, and no desire for them to grow.[40] *The fruit of riches lies in plenty; and plenty is shown by having enough.* And I am singularly pleased that this correction came to me at an age naturally inclined to avarice, and that I find myself rid of this folly so common among the old, and the most ridiculous of all human follies.

1.14.30 Pheraulas had passed through both fortunes and found that an increase in wealth was no increase in appetite for drinking, eating, sleeping and embracing his wife; and on the other hand he felt the burden of managing it weighing on his shoulders, as it does on mine. So he resolved to make happy a poor young man, his faithful friend, who was hungering after riches. He made him a present of all his own, which were great and excessive, including those he was accumulating every day through the liberality of Cyrus, his good master, and through war—on condition that the young man take on the charge of keeping and feeding him decently, as his guest and friend. They lived thus very happily ever after, both equally content with the change in their condition.[41]

1.14.31 There is a trick I would gladly imitate. And I greatly praise the good fortune of an old prelate whom I see to have handed over his purse, his income and his spending so completely—now to one chosen servant, now to another—that he has let a long stretch of years slip by as ignorant of this side of his household affairs as a stranger. Trust in another's goodness is no slight testimony to one's own goodness; so God readily favors it. And as for him, I see no household run more worthily or more steadily than his. Happy the man who has regulated his needs to so exact a measure that his riches can meet them without his care and trouble, and without their spending or gathering inter-

40 Cicero, Paradoxes of the Stoics.

41 The story is from Xenophon's Education of Cyrus (Cyropaedia).

rupting other occupations that he pursues, more fitting, more tranquil, and more after his own heart.

FORTUNE SUPPLIES ONLY THE MATTER

Ease, want and all things take their value from our opinion; the soul is master of its condition.

1.14.32 Ease and want, then, depend on each man's opinion; and riches, no more than glory or health, have only as much beauty and pleasure as their possessor lends them. Each man is well or ill off according to how he finds himself. Not the man whom others believe content, but the man who believes it of himself, is content; and in this alone belief gives itself essence and truth. Fortune does us neither good nor harm; she only offers us the matter and the seed of it, which our soul, more powerful than she, turns and applies as it pleases—the sole cause and mistress of its own happy or unhappy condition. External additions take their flavor and color from the internal constitution, just as clothes warm us not with their own heat but with ours, which they are fit to brood over and nourish. If someone wrapped a cold body in them, would he not get the same service from them for keeping the cold? That is how snow and ice are preserved. Indeed, just as study is a torment to an idler and abstinence from wine to a drunkard, so frugality is torture to the sensualist and exercise to a soft and idle man; and so it is with the rest. Things are not so painful or difficult in themselves; it is our weakness and faintheartedness that make them so. To judge great and lofty things, one needs a soul of the same kind; otherwise we attribute to them the vice that is ours. A straight oar looks bent in the water. It matters not only that we see the thing, but how we see it.

1.14.33 Come now: of so many arguments that persuade men in various ways to despise death and endure pain, why do we not find some one that works for us? And of so many kinds of notions that have persuaded others of it, why does each man not apply to himself the one that best suits his temperament? If he

cannot digest the strong, purging drug that uproots the ill, let him at least take a soothing one to relieve it. There is a certain spineless and frivolous opinion, as much in pain as in pleasure; when we melt and flow with softness under its sway, we cannot bear a bee's sting without crying out…[42] The whole matter lies in commanding yourself. For the rest, we do not escape philosophy by exaggerating beyond measure the harshness of pain and human weakness. For we force her to fall back on these unanswerable replies: If it is bad to live in necessity, at least there is no necessity to live in necessity. No one is unhappy for long except by his own fault. He who has not the heart to endure either death or life, who will neither resist nor flee—what can be done for him?[43]

42 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations.
43 The maxim on necessity is Epicurus', quoted by Seneca, Letters.

I.15 One Is Punished for Holding a Place Obstinately Without Reason

On est puny pour s'opiniastrer en vne place sans raison
Commanders who stubbornly defend an indefensible place are rightly punished, though judging what is defensible is risky.

1.15.1 Valor has its limits, like the other virtues; and once these are crossed, we find ourselves on the road of vice. So that through her territory one can end up in rashness, obstinacy and folly, if one does not know her boundaries well—and they are truly hard to make out where they meet. From this consideration was born the custom we have in war of punishing, even with death, those who obstinately defend a place that by the rules of war cannot be held. Otherwise, in the hope of impunity, there would be no henhouse that would not hold up an army.

1.15.2 The Constable de Montmorency, at the siege of Pavia, had been ordered to cross the Ticino and take up quarters in the suburb of Saint-Antoine. Being held up by a tower at the end of the bridge, which held out obstinately until it had to be battered, he had everyone inside hanged. And again later, accompanying the Dauphin on the expedition beyond the mountains, having taken the castle of Villane by storm, and everyone inside having been cut to pieces by the fury of the soldiers except the captain and the ensign, he had those two hanged and strangled for this same reason. So too did Captain Martin du Bellay, then governor of Turin, in that same region, with the captain of Saint-[1] Bony, the

1 Anne de Montmorency, later Constable of France; the siege of Pavia was in 1524–1525, the Dauphin's campaign in Piedmont in 1537.

rest of whose men had been massacred when the place was taken.

1.15.3 But since the judgment of a place's strength or weakness is made by estimating and weighing the forces attacking it (for a man may rightly hold out against two culverins who would be raving mad to wait for thirty cannon), and since the greatness of the conquering prince, his reputation and the respect owed him are also taken into account, there is a danger that the scales may be pressed down a little on that side. And by these same terms it comes about that some have so high an opinion of themselves and their means that, since it seems unreasonable to them that anything should be worthy of standing up to them, they put to the knife everyone wherever they meet resistance, for as long as their fortune lasts. This can be seen in the forms of summons and challenge used by the princes of the East and their successors who still reign—proud, haughty and full of barbarous imperiousness. And in the region where the Portuguese broke into the Indies, they found states with this universal and inviolable law: that any enemy defeated by the King in person, or by his lieutenant, is beyond the reach of ransom or mercy.

1.15.4 So above all, one must beware, if one can, of falling into the hands of a judge who is an enemy, victorious and armed.

I.16 Of the Punishment of Cowardice

De la punition de la couardise
Faults of weakness differ from faults of malice, so cowardice is better punished with shame than with death.

1.16.1 I once heard a prince, and a very great general, maintain that a soldier could not be condemned to death for cowardice; this was at table, when he was told about the trial of the Seigneur de Vervins, who was condemned to death for having surrendered Boulogne. In truth it is right to make a great difference between the faults that come from our weakness and those that come from our malice. For in the latter we have deliberately set ourselves against the rules of reason that nature has imprinted in us; and in the former it seems we can call that same nature to vouch for us, for having left us in such imperfection and frailty.[1] So that many people have thought we could be blamed only for what we do against our conscience. On this rule is founded in part the opinion of those who condemn capital punishment for heretics and unbelievers, and the opinion that an advocate or a judge cannot be held liable for having failed in his office through ignorance.

1.16.2 But as for cowardice, it is certain that the commonest way is to punish it with shame and disgrace. It is held that this rule was first put into practice by the lawgiver Charondas, and that before him the laws of Greece punished with death those who had fled from a battle; whereas he ordained only that they should sit for three days in the public square dressed in women's

1 Jacques de Coucy, Seigneur de Vervins, surrendered Boulogne to the English in 1544 and was executed in 1549.

clothes, hoping still to make use of them once this shame had brought back their courage. *To bring the blood to a man's cheeks rather than to shed it.* It seems also that in ancient times the Roman laws punished with death those who had fled.[2] For Ammianus Marcellinus says that the Emperor Julian condemned ten of his soldiers, who had turned their backs in a charge against the Parthians, to be cashiered and then put to death, following, he says, the ancient laws. Yet elsewhere, for a like fault, he condemns others merely to be kept among the prisoners under the baggage standard. The harsh punishment the Roman people inflicted on the soldiers who escaped from Cannae, and, in that same war, on those who had followed Gnaeus Fulvius in his defeat, did not go as far as death. Yet it is to be feared that shame may drive men to despair and make them not merely cold friends but enemies.[3]

1.16.3 In our fathers' time the Seigneur de Franget, formerly lieutenant of the company of the Marshal de Châtillon, was made governor of Fuenterrabía by the Marshal de Chabannes in place of Monsieur du Lude. Having surrendered it to the Spaniards, he was condemned to be stripped of his nobility, and both he and his descendants were declared commoners, liable to the taille and incapable of bearing arms; this harsh sentence was carried out at Lyon. Later, all the gentlemen who were in Guise when the Count of Nassau entered it suffered the same punishment, and others again since then.[4] Yet if there were an ignorance or a cowardice so gross and obvious that it surpassed all ordinary ones, it would be right to take it as sufficient proof of wickedness and malice, and to punish it as such.

2 Charondas was a lawgiver of the Greek cities of Sicily; the quotation is from Tertullian.

3 Julian the Apostate, on his Persian campaign of AD 363; Cannae was Hannibal's great victory over Rome in 216 BC.

4 Fuenterrabía, on the Spanish border, was surrendered in 1523; Guise was taken by Henry of Nassau in 1536. The taille was a tax paid by commoners.

I.17 A Trait of Certain Ambassadors

Vn traict de quelques ambassadeurs
Montaigne asks people about their own trades, and questions why ambassadors once held back unwelcome words from their king.

1.17.1 In my travels I follow this practice, so as always to learn something from dealing with others (which is one of the finest schools there can be): I always bring the people I talk with back to the things they know best. *Let the sailor be content to talk of winds,*
the ploughman of his bulls; and let the soldier
count his wounds, the shepherd his flocks. For the opposite most often happens: each man would rather discourse on someone else's trade than his own, thinking it so much new reputation gained—witness the reproach Archidamus made to Periander, that he was giving up the glory of a good physician to acquire that of a bad poet.[1]

See how expansively Caesar spreads himself to make us understand his inventions for building bridges and engines, and how tight-lipped he becomes by comparison when he speaks of the duties of his profession, his valor and the conduct of his army. His exploits prove him an excellent general well enough; he wants to be known as an excellent engineer, a quality somewhat foreign to him. The elder Dionysius was a very great war

1 An Italian rendering of Propertius, Elegies II.1; Archidamus was a king of Sparta, the anecdote from Plutarch.

leader, as befitted his fortune; but he labored to make poetry his chief claim to esteem—and he knew hardly anything about it. A man of the legal profession, taken the other day to see a study furnished with all sorts of books on his own profession and every other, found nothing there to occupy him; but he stopped to criticize, roughly and magisterially, a barricade set up on the spiral staircase of the study, which a hundred captains and soldiers look over every day without remark or offense. *The lazy ox longs for a saddle; the nag longs to plough.* Going this way, you will never do anything worthwhile. So we must always work to send the architect, the painter, the cobbler, and the rest, each back to his own game.[2]

1.17.2 And on this subject, when reading histories, which is everyone's business, I am in the habit of considering who their writers are. If they are people who profess nothing but letters, I learn chiefly their style and language from them. If physicians, I believe them more readily in what they tell us of the temperature of the air, the health and constitution of princes, wounds and diseases. If jurists, we should take from them disputes about rights, laws, the establishment of governments, and the like. If theologians, the affairs of the Church, ecclesiastical censures, dispensations and marriages. If courtiers, manners and ceremonies. If soldiers, what belongs to their charge, and chiefly their accounts of the exploits in which they took part in person. If ambassadors, intrigues, secret understandings and negotiations, and how to conduct them.

1.17.3 For this reason, what I would have passed over in another writer without pausing, I have weighed and noted in the history of the Seigneur de Langey, who was very well versed in such matters. It is this. He recounts those fine harangues of the Emperor Charles V delivered in the consistory at Rome, in the presence of the Bishop of Mâcon and the Seigneur du Velly, our ambassadors, in which he had mixed several insulting words against us; among others, that if his captains and soldiers were no more loyal or competent in the art of war than the King's, he

2 Horace, Epistles.

would at once tie a rope around his neck and go and beg him for mercy.[3] And it seems he believed something of this, for two or three times later in his life he happened to repeat these same words. Also, he challenged the King to fight him in his shirt, with sword and dagger, in a boat. The said Seigneur de Langey, continuing his history, adds that when these ambassadors sent the King a dispatch about these things, they concealed the greater part from him, and even hid the two points just mentioned. Now I have found it very strange that it should be in an ambassador's power to pick and choose among the reports he owes his master—especially reports of such consequence, coming from such a person, and spoken before so great an assembly. It would have seemed to me the servant's duty to represent things faithfully and in their entirety, as they happened, so that the freedom to order, judge and choose might remain with the master. For to alter or hide the truth from him, for fear he might take it otherwise than he should and that it might drive him to some bad course, and meanwhile to leave him ignorant of his own affairs—that would have seemed to me to belong to the one who gives the law, not to the one who receives it; to the guardian and the schoolmaster, not to one who must consider himself inferior in prudence and good counsel as well as in authority. However that may be, I would not want to be served that way in my own small affairs.

1.17.4 We so readily slip out from under command on some pretext or other, and encroach on mastery; each man aspires so naturally to liberty and authority, that to a superior no usefulness coming from those who serve him should be as dear as their simple and natural obedience. The office of commanding is corrupted when it is obeyed out of discretion and not out of subjection. And Publius Crassus—the man the Romans esteemed five times fortunate—when he was consul in Asia, ordered a Greek engineer to bring him the larger of two ship's masts he had seen at Athens, for some battering engine he wanted to make from it.

3 Guillaume du Bellay, Seigneur de Langey, whose Memoirs Montaigne is citing; Charles V made this speech in Rome in April 1536.

The engineer, on the strength of his expertise, took it upon himself to choose otherwise and brought the smaller one, which by the reasoning of his art was the more suitable. Crassus, having patiently heard his reasons, had him soundly flogged, valuing the interest of discipline above the interest of the work.[4]

1.17.5 On the other hand, however, one might also consider that such strict obedience applies only to precise and definite commands. Ambassadors have a freer charge, which in many respects depends entirely on their own judgment. They do not simply carry out the master's will; they also shape and direct it by their counsel. I have seen in my time persons in command reproached for having obeyed the words of the King's letters rather than the circumstances of the affairs at hand. Men of understanding still blame today the practice of the kings of Persia of cutting their agents' and lieutenants' portions so small that in the least matters they had to have recourse to their orders. This delay, over so vast an extent of dominion, often did their affairs notable harm. And Crassus, writing to a man of the trade and telling him the use for which he intended this mast—did he not seem to be entering into consultation with him about his decision, and inviting him to put in his own judgment?

4 Publius Licinius Crassus Mucianus, consul in 131 BC; the story is told by Aulus Gellius.

I.18 Of Fear

De la peur

Fear, the strangest of passions, breeds delusions, stampedes armies, and can even produce reckless courage; Montaigne fears fear most.

1.18.1 *I stood aghast; my hair stood on end, and my voice stuck in my throat.* I am not a good naturalist (as they call it), and I hardly know by what springs fear works in us; but at any rate it is a strange passion, and the physicians say there is none that more quickly carries our judgment out of its proper seat. Indeed, I have seen many people driven out of their minds by fear; and even in the most level-headed, it is certain that while the fit lasts it produces terrible delusions.[1]

1.18.2 I leave aside the common people, to whom it shows now their great-grandfathers risen from the tomb wrapped in their shrouds, now werewolves, goblins and chimeras. But even among soldiers, where it ought to find less room, how many times has it turned a flock of sheep into a squadron of armored men? Reeds and canes into men-at-arms and lancers? Our friends into our enemies? The white cross into the red?[2] When Monsieur de Bourbon took Rome, a standard-bearer who was on guard at the Borgo San Pietro was seized with such terror at the first alarm that he threw himself out of the city, flag in hand, through a gap in a ruin, straight toward the enemy, thinking he was heading into the city. Only at last, seeing Monsieur de Bour-

1 Virgil, Aeneid.

2 The white cross was the badge of French troops, the red cross that of the Emperor's.

bon's troops forming up to meet him, and thinking it was a sally from the city, did he come to his senses; and turning about, he went back in through the same hole by which he had gone out, having advanced more than three hundred paces into the open field.[3] Things did not turn out nearly so happily for Captain Julle's standard-bearer when Saint-Pol was taken from us by the Count of Bures and Monsieur du Reu. He was so beside himself with fright that he threw himself, flag and all, out of the town through a gunport, and was cut to pieces by the attackers. And at the same siege, memorable was the fear that so gripped, seized and froze the heart of a gentleman that he fell stone dead on the ground at the breach, without a single wound. A like frenzy sometimes drives a whole multitude. In one of Germanicus' encounters with the Germans, two large bodies of troops in their terror took two opposite routes: one fled toward the place the other was leaving.[4]

1.18.3 Sometimes fear puts wings on our heels, as it did for the first two. Sometimes it nails our feet to the ground and shackles them. So we read of the Emperor Theophilus: in a battle he lost against the Agarenes, he was so stunned and so paralyzed that he could not bring himself to flee. *So much does fear dread even help.* At last Manuel, one of the chief commanders of his army, tugged at him and shook him as if to wake him from a deep sleep, and said: "If you do not follow me, I will kill you. It is better for you to lose your life than to be taken prisoner and lose the Empire."[5]

1.18.4 Fear shows its utmost strength when, for its own purposes, it throws us back on the valor it has stolen from our duty and our honor. In the first pitched battle the Romans lost to Hannibal, under the consul Sempronius, a body of a good ten thousand foot soldiers was seized with panic. Seeing no other

3 Charles, Duke of Bourbon, led the imperial army that sacked Rome in 1527.
4 Saint-Pol, in Artois, was taken by imperial troops in 1537; the Germanicus episode comes from Tacitus.
5 Theophilus was Byzantine emperor (AD 829–842); "Agarenes" (sons of Hagar) was a Byzantine name for the Arabs. The Latin is from Quintus Curtius, History of Alexander.

way out for its cowardice, it hurled itself straight through the thick of the enemy and broke through with marvelous effort, with a great slaughter of Carthaginians. It bought a shameful flight at the same price it would have paid for a glorious victory.[6]

1.18.5 The thing I am most afraid of is fear. And indeed it surpasses all other afflictions in sharpness. What feeling could be keener and more justified than that of Pompey's friends, who were on his ship and watched that horrible massacre? And yet fear of the Egyptian sails, which were beginning to close in on them, so smothered it that, as has been noted, they did nothing but urge the sailors to hurry and row for their lives. Only when they reached Tyre, free from fear, were they at leisure to turn their thoughts to the loss they had just suffered and give free rein to the lamentations and tears that this other, stronger passion had held in check.[7] *Then fear drives all wisdom out of my breast.* Men who have been soundly thrashed in some fight, still all wounded and bloody, can easily be brought back to the charge the next day. But those who have conceived a good fear of the enemy—you could not make them so much as look him in the face. Those who are in pressing fear of losing their property, of being exiled, of being subjugated, live in continual anguish and lose their appetite for food and drink, and their rest. Whereas the poor, the banished and the serfs often live as cheerfully as anyone else.[8] And so many people who, unable to bear the stings of fear, have hanged themselves, drowned themselves or thrown themselves from a height, have taught us well that it is even more oppressive and unbearable than death.

1.18.6 The Greeks recognize another kind of fear, which lies outside any error of our reasoning: it comes, they say, without apparent cause and from a heavenly impulse. Whole peoples are often seen struck by it, and whole armies. Such was the fear that

6 The battle of the Trebia, 218 BC.
7 Pompey was murdered on landing in Egypt in 48 BC, in sight of his wife and friends on board his ship.
8 A line of Ennius, quoted by Cicero in the Tusculan Disputations.

brought marvelous desolation upon Carthage. Nothing was heard there but cries and terrified voices. The inhabitants were seen rushing out of their houses as at an alarm, attacking, wounding and killing one another as if they were enemies come to occupy their city. All was disorder and frenzy, until they had appeased the wrath of the gods with prayers and sacrifices. They call these Panic terrors.[9]

9 Named after the god Pan, who was believed to send sudden, groundless terror.

I.19 That We Should Not Judge of Our Happiness Until After Our Death

Qu'il ne faut iuger de nostre heur, qu'après la mort
Following Solon, no one should be called happy before death,
for only the last act shows what a soul is truly worth.

1.19.1 *Truly, a man must always await*
his last day, and no one ought to be called happy
before his death and his final funeral rites.[1]

1.19.2 Children know the story of King Croesus on this subject. Taken prisoner by Cyrus and condemned to death, he cried out at the moment of execution: "O Solon, Solon!" When this was reported to Cyrus and he asked what it meant, Croesus explained that he was now proving, at his own expense, the warning Solon had once given him: that men, however fair a face Fortune shows them, cannot call themselves happy until they have been seen to pass the last day of their lives, because of the uncertainty and changeability of human affairs, which with a very slight movement shift from one state to another quite different.[2] And so Agesilaus, when someone called the King of Persia happy for having come so young to so mighty a throne, said: "Yes, but Priam at that age was not unhappy." We see kings of Macedonia, successors of the great Alexander, turned into carpenters and clerks in Rome; tyrants of Sicily into schoolmasters at Corinth; the conqueror of half the world and commander of

1 Ovid, Metamorphoses.
2 Croesus, king of Lydia, was defeated by Cyrus of Persia; Solon was the Athenian lawgiver. The story is in Herodotus.

so many armies into a wretched suppliant of the beggarly officers of a king of Egypt. That is what five or six more months of life cost the great Pompey.[3] And in our fathers' time, Ludovico Sforza, tenth Duke of Milan, under whom all Italy had so long been shaken, was seen to die a prisoner at Loches—but only after living there ten years, which was the worst of his bargain. Has not the most beautiful queen, widow of the greatest king in Christendom, just died at the hands of an executioner? Unworthy and barbarous cruelty! And a thousand such examples. For it seems that, just as storms and tempests take offense at the pride and loftiness of our buildings, there are also spirits up above who are envious of greatness here below.[4]

> *So true is it that some hidden power crushes human affairs and seems to trample on the splendid rods and cruel axes and make sport of them.* And it seems that Fortune sometimes lies in wait for precisely the last day of our lives, to show her power to overturn in a moment what she had built over long years; and she makes us cry out with Laberius: *Clearly, on this one day I have lived one day longer than I should have.*[5]

1.19.3 So Solon's good advice may reasonably be taken in this way. But he is a philosopher, and for philosophers the favors and disgraces of Fortune rank as neither good fortune nor bad, and greatness and power are accidents of almost indifferent quality. So I find it likely that he looked further, and meant that this same happiness of our life, which depends on the tranquility and contentment of a well-born spirit and on the resolution and assurance of a well-ordered soul, should never be attributed to a man until he has been seen to play the last act of his play—and doubtless the hardest.

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3 Agesilaus was a king of Sparta. The son of Perseus of Macedon ended as a craftsman and clerk at Rome, and Dionysius the Younger of Syracuse kept a school at Corinth.

4 Ludovico Sforza was captured by Louis XII in 1500 and died at Loches in 1508. Mary Queen of Scots, widow of Francis II of France, was beheaded in 1587.

5 The verses are from Lucretius, On the Nature of Things. Decimus Laberius, a Roman writer of mimes, said this when Caesar forced him to perform on stage.

1.19.4 In everything else there may be some mask. Either those fine reasonings of philosophy are only a pose with us, or our misfortunes, not testing us to the quick, give us leisure to keep our faces always composed. But in this last scene, between death and ourselves, there is no more pretending. We must speak plain French; we must show what is good and clean at the bottom of the pot. *For only then are true words drawn from the depths of the heart; / the mask is torn away, the reality remains.* That is why all the other actions of our life must be tried and tested against this final stroke. It is the master day, the day that judges all the others. It is the day, says one of the ancients, that must judge all my past years. I leave it to death to test the fruit of my studies. We shall see then whether my reasonings come from my mouth or from my heart.[6]

1.19.5 I have seen many men give their whole lives a good or a bad reputation by their death. Scipio, Pompey's father-in-law, by dying well repaired the poor opinion people had had of him until then. Epaminondas, asked which of three men he esteemed most, Chabrias, Iphicrates or himself, said: "You must see us die before you can decide." Indeed, we would rob that man of a great deal if we weighed him without the honor and greatness of his end. God has willed it as he pleased; but in my time three of the most execrable and infamous people I have known, steeped in every abomination of life, have had well-ordered deaths, composed to perfection in every circumstance.[7] There are gallant and fortunate deaths. I have seen death cut the thread of one man's marvelous rise, in the very flower of his growth, with so splendid an end that in my opinion his ambitious and courageous designs had nothing so lofty about them as their interruption. Without going there, he arrived where he was aiming, more grandly and gloriously than his desire and hope had reached. By his fall he outstripped the power and the name he was aspiring to in his course. In judging another man's life, I

6 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius.

7 Metellus Scipio killed himself after his defeat at Thapsus in 46 BC; Chabrias and Iphicrates were Athenian generals.

always look at how its end went; and one of my main concerns for my own is that its end go well—that is to say, quietly and without fuss.

I.20 That to Philosophize Is to Learn to Die

Que philosopher, c'est apprendre à mourir
Philosophy teaches us not to fear death; Montaigne urges keeping death always in mind so it loses its power to terrify.

1.20.1 Cicero says that to philosophize is nothing else than to prepare oneself for death. This is because study and contemplation draw our soul somewhat outside us and keep it busy apart from the body, which is a kind of apprenticeship and likeness of death. Or else it is because all the wisdom and reasoning in the world come down in the end to this point: to teach us not to be afraid to die. Indeed, either reason is mocking us, or it must aim solely at our contentment, and all its labor must tend, in sum, to make us live well and at our ease, as Holy Scripture says.[1] All the opinions in the world agree on this—that pleasure is our goal—though they take different means to it; otherwise they would be thrown out at once. For who would listen to a man who set up our pain and discomfort as his end? The disagreements of the philosophical sects on this point are merely verbal. *Let us skip over these most ingenious trifles.* There is more stubbornness and bickering than befits so holy a calling. But whatever role a man takes on, he always plays his own along with it.[2]

1.20.2 Whatever they say, even in virtue the ultimate goal we aim at is pleasure. I like to din this word into their ears, since they find it so distasteful. And if it means some supreme delight

1 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations; the scriptural allusion is to Ecclesiastes 3:12.
2 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius.

and surpassing contentment, it is owed more to the help of virtue than to any other help. This pleasure, for being more lusty, sinewy, robust and manly, is only the more seriously pleasurable. We ought to have given virtue the name of pleasure, a kindlier, sweeter and more natural name, not that of vigor, from which we have named it. That other, baser pleasure, if it deserved this fine name, should have had it in competition, not by privilege. I find it less free of drawbacks and obstacles than virtue is.[3] Besides the fact that its savor is more fleeting, fluid and perishable, it has its vigils, its fasts and its labors, its sweat and its blood; and in particular, moreover, its sharp passions of so many kinds, and at its side a satiety so heavy that it amounts to a penance. We are very wrong to think that its drawbacks serve it as a spur and a seasoning to its sweetness, as in nature one contrary is quickened by its contrary—and then to say, when we come to virtue, that similar consequences and difficulties overwhelm it and make it austere and inaccessible.

1.20.3 On the contrary: far more fittingly than with pleasure, they ennoble, sharpen and heighten the divine and perfect pleasure that virtue procures for us. A man is certainly unworthy of its acquaintance if he weighs its cost against its fruit; he knows neither its graces nor its use. Those who keep telling us that the quest for it is rugged and laborious, and the enjoyment of it pleasant—what are they telling us, except that it is always unpleasant? For what human means ever reached the enjoyment of it? The most perfect men have been content to aspire to it and to approach it, without possessing it. But they are wrong, seeing that of all the pleasures we know, the very pursuit is pleasant. An undertaking takes on the quality of the thing it aims at, for it is a good part of the effect and of one substance with it. The happiness and bliss that shine in virtue fill all its approaches and avenues, right up to the first entrance and the outermost barrier.

1.20.4 Now one of the chief benefits of virtue is contempt for death. It is the means that furnishes our life with a gentle tran-

3 The Latin virtus derives from vir, “man”, and was linked with vis, “force”.

quility and gives us a pure and pleasant taste of it; without it, all other pleasure is snuffed out. That is why all the rules meet and agree on this article. And although they also all lead us with one accord to despise pain, poverty and the other accidents to which human life is subject, they do not do so with equal care. This is partly because those accidents are not so inevitable—most men spend their lives without tasting poverty, and some even without feeling pain or sickness, like Xenophilus the musician, who lived a hundred and six years in perfect health—and partly because, at worst, death can put an end to them whenever we please and cut short all our other troubles. But death itself is inevitable.[4]

> *We are all driven to the same place; the lot of each*
> *is tossed in the urn, and sooner or later*
> *it will come out and put us aboard*
> *the boat bound for eternal ruin.* And consequently, if death frightens us, it is a continual source of torment, and one that cannot be relieved in any way. There is no place from which it may not come at us. We can keep turning our heads this way and that, as in hostile country: *it hangs over us always, like the rock over Tantalus.* Our parlements often send criminals back to be executed at the place where the crime was committed. On the way, take them past fine houses, give them as good a time as you please—*no Sicilian feasts*
> *will produce a sweet savor for them,*
> *nor will the song of birds and the lyre*
> *bring back their sleep.* Do you think they can enjoy it?[5]

Do you not think that the final purpose of their journey, constantly before their eyes, has spoiled and dulled their taste for all these comforts? *He asks about the road, counts the days, meas-*

4 Xenophilus was a Pythagorean musician of the 4th century BC, cited by Pliny and Valerius Maximus.

5 The verses are from Horace, Odes; the prose line is from Cicero, On Ends. The parlements were the sovereign law courts of France.

ures his life by the length / of the way, tormented by the doom to come.[6]

1.20.5 The goal of our course is death; it is the necessary object of our aim. If it frightens us, how is it possible to take one step forward without a fever? The remedy of ordinary people is not to think about it. But from what brutish stupidity can so gross a blindness come to them? They must be made to bridle the donkey by the tail, *like one who has taken it into his head to walk backward.* No wonder they are so often caught in the trap. You frighten our people merely by naming death, and most of them cross themselves as at the name of the devil. And because it is mentioned in wills, don't expect them to put their hand to one until the doctor has pronounced the final sentence.[7] And God knows, between pain and fright, with what sound judgment they knead it together for you.

1.20.6 Because this syllable struck their ears too harshly and the word seemed ill-omened to them, the Romans had learned to soften it or stretch it out into circumlocutions. Instead of saying "he is dead," they say "he has ceased to live," "he has lived." As long as it is life, even life past, they take comfort. From this we have borrowed our "the late Master John." Perhaps, as the saying goes, a delay is as good as cash. I was born between eleven o'clock and noon on the last day of February, 1533, by our present reckoning, which begins the year in January. It is just two weeks since I passed thirty-nine; I need at least as many years again.[8] Meanwhile, to trouble oneself with the thought of something so far off would be folly. But what of it? Young and old leave life in the same condition. No one leaves it otherwise than as if he were just entering it. Besides, there is no man so decrepit that, as long as he sees Methuselah ahead of him, he does not think he still has twenty years in his body. Furthermore, poor fool that you are, who has fixed the limits of your

6 Claudian, Against Rufinus.
7 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.
8 French feu, "late", was thought to come from Latin fuit, "he was". The year was made to begin on 1 January in France by a royal edict of 1564.

life? You rely on the tales of doctors. Look rather at the facts and at experience. By the common course of things, you have long been living by extraordinary favor. You have passed the customary limits of life. To see that this is so, count among your acquaintances how many have died before your age: more than have reached it. Even among those who have ennobled their lives by renown, make a list, and I will wager to find more who died before thirty-five than after. It is full of reason and piety to take our example from the humanity of Jesus Christ himself. Now he ended his life at thirty-three. The greatest man who was simply a man, Alexander, also died at that age.

1.20.7 How many ways death has of taking us by surprise! *Man can never take care enough / from hour to hour of what he should avoid.* I leave aside fevers and pleurisies. Who would ever have thought that a Duke of Brittany would be crushed to death in a crowd, as that one was at the entry into Lyon of Pope Clement, my neighbor? Have you not seen one of our kings killed at play? And did not one of his ancestors die from a collision with a pig?[9] Aeschylus, warned that a falling house would kill him, may keep on his guard all he likes: there he is, knocked dead by a tortoise shell that slipped from the claws of an eagle in the air. Another died of a grape seed; an emperor, from the scratch of a comb while doing his hair; Aemilius Lepidus, from stubbing his foot on his own threshold; and Aufidius, from bumping into the door of the council chamber as he went in. And between women's thighs: Cornelius Gallus, praetor; Tigellinus, captain of the watch at Rome; Ludovico, son of Guido Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua. And, an even worse example, Speusippus, the Platonist philosopher, and one of our popes.[10] Poor Baebius, a judge, while granting a litigant a week's adjournment, is seized himself, his own term of life having expired. And Caius Julius, a doctor, while anointing a patient's eyes—there is death closing his

9 John II of Brittany was killed in 1305 during the entry into Lyon of Clement V, a former archbishop of Bordeaux. Henry II died of a jousting wound in 1559; Philip, son of Louis VI, was thrown when a pig ran under his horse in 1131.

10 The grape-seed death is the poet Anacreon's, as told by Pliny. Tigellinus was Nero's prefect of the guard; Speusippus succeeded Plato as head of the Academy.

own. And if I may bring in my own family: a brother of mine, Captain Saint-Martin, twenty-three years old, who had already given good proof of his valor, was struck while playing tennis by a ball that hit him a little above the right ear, without any sign of bruise or wound. He did not sit down or rest; but five or six hours later he died of an apoplexy caused by that blow.[11]

1.20.8 With such frequent and ordinary examples passing before our eyes, how can we possibly rid ourselves of the thought of death, or help feeling at every moment that it has us by the collar? "What does it matter," you will tell me, "how it happens, as long as we don't worry about it?" I am of that opinion. Whatever way one could find to shelter from the blows, even under a calf's hide, I am not the man to shrink from it. For it is enough for me to get through life at my ease; and the best game I can give myself, I take, however inglorious and unexemplary you may think it.

I would rather be thought a fool and a sluggard,
so long as my failings please me, or at least deceive me,
than be wise and gnash my teeth.

1.20.9 But it is folly to think of getting there that way. They come, they go, they trot, they dance—of death, no news. All that is very fine. But then, when it does come, to them or to their wives, children or friends, catching them unawares and unprotected, what torments, what cries, what rage and what despair overwhelm them! Did you ever see anything so crushed, so changed, so confused? We must make provision for it earlier. And this brutish indifference, even if it could lodge in the head of a man of understanding—which I find entirely impossible—sells us its wares too dear.

11 Arnaud de Montaigne, the author's younger brother. The game is jeu de paume, an early form of tennis.

> If it were an enemy that could be avoided, I would advise borrowing the weapons of cowardice. But since it cannot be; since it catches you just the same whether you run away like a coward or stand like an honorable man—
> *Indeed, it pursues the man who flees,*
> *and does not spare the hamstrings or the timid backs*
> *of unwarlike youth*—and since no temper of breastplate can protect you—*Though he hide himself cautiously in iron and bronze,*
> *death will still drag his head out of its shelter*—let us learn to meet it steadfastly and to fight it. And to begin by depriving it of its greatest advantage over us, let us take a road quite contrary to the common one.[12]

GETTING USED TO DEATH

Strip death of its strangeness by keeping it always in mind, even at feasts.

Let us take away its strangeness, get to know it, get used to it. Let us have nothing so often in our minds as death. At every moment let us picture it in our imagination, in all its guises. At the stumble of a horse, at the fall of a tile, at the slightest pinprick, let us promptly chew on this: "Well, what if it were death itself?" And thereupon let us steel ourselves and make an effort. Amid feasting and gaiety, let us always keep this refrain, the remembrance of our condition, and not let ourselves be so carried away by pleasure that it does not now and then come back to mind in how many ways this gaiety of ours is exposed to death, and with how many holds death threatens it. So did the Egyptians, who in the middle of their banquets and amid their best cheer had the dried skeleton of a man brought in, as a warning to the guests. *Believe that every day that has dawned for*

12 The second quotation is from Propertius, Elegies; the first is Horace, Odes.

you is your last; / the hour you do not hope for will come as a welcome gift.[13]

1.20.10 It is uncertain where death awaits us; let us await it everywhere. Premeditation of death is premeditation of freedom. He who has learned how to die has unlearned how to be a slave. There is nothing evil in life for the man who has fully understood that losing life is not an evil. Knowing how to die frees us from all subjection and constraint. Paulus Aemilius replied to the man sent by that wretched King of Macedonia, his prisoner, to beg him not to lead him in his triumph: "Let him make that request of himself."[14]

1.20.11 In truth, in all things, unless nature lends a little help, it is hard for art and effort to get very far. I am by nature not melancholy, but given to daydreaming. There is nothing I have always occupied myself with more than imaginings of death, even in the most licentious season of my life, *when my blooming youth was enjoying its pleasant spring.* Among the ladies and the games, someone would think me busy digesting some jealousy or the uncertainty of some hope, while I was actually thinking about some fellow or other who had been seized a few days before by a high fever and had died on the way home from a party just like this one, his head full of idleness, love and good times, like mine—and the same thing could happen to me.[15] *Soon it will have been, and we shall never be able to call it back.* That thought furrowed my brow no more than any other.

1.20.12 It is impossible not to feel the stings of such imaginings at first. But by handling them and going over them, in the long run we no doubt tame them. Otherwise, for my part, I would be in continual fright and frenzy; for never did a man so distrust his life, never did a man set less store by its duration. Neither my health, which so far has been very vigorous and seldom interrupted, lengthens my hope of it, nor do illnesses shorten it.

13 Herodotus, Histories II, describes this custom. The verses are from Horace, Epistles.
14 Perseus, last king of Macedonia, was defeated by Aemilius Paulus at Pydna in 168 BC.
15 Catullus.

Every minute I feel I am slipping away. And I keep singing to myself: "Whatever can be done another day can be done today." In truth, chances and dangers bring us little or no nearer to our end. And if we think how many millions of other accidents remain hanging over our heads, besides the one that seems to threaten us most, we shall find that, in vigor or in fever, at sea or at home, in battle or at rest, death is equally near us. *No man is more fragile than another; no man more certain of tomorrow.*

1.20.13 To finish what I have to do before I die, any amount of time seems short to me, even if the task is only an hour's work. The other day someone leafing through my notebooks found a memorandum about something I wanted done after my death. I told him, and it was true, that though I was only a league from my house, and healthy and in good spirits, I had hurried to write it down there because I was not sure of getting as far as home. As a man who is constantly brooding over my thoughts and laying them up within me, I am at all times about as ready as I can be; and the arrival of death will tell me nothing new. We must always have our boots on and be ready to leave, as far as it lies in us, and above all take care that by then we have no business with anyone but ourselves. *Why in our brief life do we boldly aim / at so many things?* For we shall have quite enough to do then without any further load. One man complains, more than of death itself, that it breaks off the course of a fine victory; another, that he must move out before marrying off his daughter or seeing to the education of his children. One mourns his wife's company, another his son's, as the chief comforts of his existence.

> I am at present in such a state, thank God, that I can move out whenever it pleases him, without regretting anything whatsoever. I am untying myself everywhere; my farewells to everyone are nearly taken, except to myself. Never did a man prepare to leave the world more purely and fully, or detach himself from it more completely, than I expect to do. The deadest deaths are the soundest. *Wretch, O wretch that I am* (they say), *one hateful day*
> *has robbed me of all the many rewards of life*; and the builder: *The works remain* (he says) *broken off, and the huge threat*
> *of the walls.* We must not plan anything of such long breath, or at least not with so passionate a wish to see it finished.[16]

1.20.14 We are born to act: *When I die, may it be in the midst of my work.* I want us to act and to prolong the duties of life as long as we can; and I want death to find me planting my cabbages, but caring little about it, and still less about my unfinished garden. I saw one man die who, at the very end, kept complaining that his destiny was cutting the thread of the history he had in hand, at the fifteenth or sixteenth of our kings. *But they do not add this: that no longer / will any longing for these things remain with you.*[17]

16 The first verses are Lucretius; the second are from Virgil, Aeneid IV, of the walls of Carthage left unfinished.
17 Ovid, Amores; the closing verses are Lucretius.

1.20.15 We must rid ourselves of these common and harmful notions. Just as our cemeteries have been placed next to churches and in the busiest parts of town, in order, as Lycurgus said, to accustom the common people, women and children not to be alarmed at the sight of a dead man, and so that this continual spectacle of bones, tombs and funeral processions may remind us of our condition: *Moreover, it was once the custom to enliven banquets with slaughter,*
and to mix with the feast the grim spectacle
of men fighting with the sword, who often fell among the very cups, spattering the tables with abundant blood.[18]

1.20.16 And as the Egyptians, after their banquets, had a large image of death shown to the guests by a man who cried out to them, "Drink and be merry, for when you are dead you will be like this," so I have made it my custom to have death not only in my imagination but constantly in my mouth. There is nothing I inquire about so willingly as men's deaths: what words, what face, what bearing they had; nor any passage in the histories that I note so attentively. It shows in the way I stuff my pages with examples, and that I have a particular fondness for this subject. If I were a maker of books, I would compile a register, with commentary, of various deaths. Whoever taught men to die would teach them to live. Dicaearchus wrote a book with a similar title, but with another and less useful aim.[19]

1.20.17 People will tell me that the reality so far exceeds the thought of it that no fencing skill is so fine that it is not lost when it comes to that point. Let them talk. Premeditation undoubtedly gives a great advantage. And then, is it nothing to get at least that far without agitation and without fever? There is more: nature herself lends us a hand and gives us courage. If it is a short and violent death, we have no time to fear it. If it is

18 Lycurgus was the legendary lawgiver of Sparta. The verses are from Silius Italicus, Punica.
19 Dicaearchus of Messana, a pupil of Aristotle, wrote On the Destruction of Men, cited by Cicero.

otherwise, I notice that as I sink further into illness I naturally come to feel a certain disdain for life. I find that I have much more trouble digesting this resolution to die when I am healthy than when I am feverish. Since I no longer cling so strongly to the comforts of life, as I begin to lose the use and pleasure of them, I look on death with far less frightened eyes. This makes me hope that the farther I move from the one and the nearer I come to the other, the more easily I shall come to terms over exchanging them.

1.20.18 I have tested on several other occasions what Caesar says, that things often look bigger to us from far off than close at hand; in the same way I have found that when healthy I dreaded illnesses much more than when I actually felt them. The cheerfulness I am in, my pleasure and my strength, make the other state seem so out of proportion to this one that in imagination I magnify those discomforts by half, and conceive them as heavier than I find them when I have them on my shoulders. I hope it will be the same for me with death.[20]

1.20.19 Let us see how, in the ordinary changes and declines we undergo, nature hides from us the sight of our loss and deterioration. What does an old man have left of the vigor of his youth and his past life? *Alas, how small a portion of life remains to the old!* When a soldier of Caesar's guard, worn out and broken, came up to him in the street to ask leave to kill himself, Caesar looked at his decrepit appearance and answered with a joke: "So you think you are alive?"[21]

1.20.20 If we fell into it all at once, I do not think we could bear such a change. But nature leads us by the hand down a gentle and almost imperceptible slope, little by little, step by step; she rolls us into this wretched state and makes us used to it. So we feel no jolt when youth dies in us—which in essence and in truth is a harder death than the complete death of a languishing life, or the death of old age. For the leap is not so heavy from ill-

20 Caesar, Gallic War VII.

21 Maximianus, Elegies, attributed in Montaigne's day to Cornelius Gallus.

being to non-being as it is from a sweet and flourishing being to a painful and grievous one.

> A bent and stooping body has less strength to carry a load; so does our soul. We must straighten it and raise it up against the onslaught of this adversary. For just as it cannot be at rest while it fears death, so, if it can make itself secure against it, it can boast—something almost beyond the human condition—that it is impossible for anxiety, torment or fear, or even the slightest displeasure, to lodge in it. *Not the face of a threatening tyrant*
> *shakes his firm mind, nor the South Wind,*
> *stormy lord of the restless Adriatic,*
> *nor the mighty hand of thundering Jove.* It becomes mistress of its passions and cravings; mistress of want, shame and poverty, and of all the other injuries of Fortune.
>
> Let whoever can gain this advantage. Here is the true and sovereign freedom, which enables us to thumb our noses at force and injustice and to laugh at prisons and chains. *"In handcuffs and*
> *in shackles I will keep you, under a cruel jailer."*
> *"God himself will set me free the moment I wish." I think*
> *he means: "I will die." Death is the final line of things.* Our religion has had no surer human foundation than contempt for life. Not only does rational argument call us to it—for why should we fear to lose a thing which, once lost, cannot be regretted?—[22]

but also, since we are threatened by so many kinds of death, is there not more harm in fearing them all than in suffering one? What does it matter when it comes, since it is inevitable? To the man who told Socrates, "The Thirty Tyrants have condemned you to death," he replied, "And nature has condemned them." What foolishness to torment ourselves at the very moment of

22 Horace, Epistles, adapting the exchange between Pentheus and Dionysus in Euripides' Bacchae.

passing into freedom from all torment! As our birth brought us the birth of all things, so our death will bring the death of all things. Therefore it is as foolish to weep because a hundred years from now we shall not be alive as to weep because we were not alive a hundred years ago.[23] Death is the origin of another life. So we wept, so it cost us to enter this one; so we stripped off our former veil as we entered it. Nothing can be grievous that happens only once. Is it reasonable to fear for so long a thing that lasts so short a time? Living a long time and living a short time are made all one by death. For long and short do not apply to things that no longer exist. Aristotle says that there are little creatures on the river Hypanis that live only one day. The one that dies at eight in the morning dies in its youth; the one that dies at five in the evening dies in its decrepitude.[24] Which of us would not laugh to see this moment of duration weighed in terms of happiness or unhappiness? The more and the less in our own, if we compare it with eternity, or even with the duration of mountains, rivers, stars, trees and even some animals, is no less ridiculous.

NATURE'S SPEECH ON DEATH

Nature tells us that death is part of the order of the world and nothing to fear.

1.20.21 But nature compels us to it. Go out of this world, she says, as you entered it. The same passage you made from death to life, without feeling and without fear, make it again from life to death. Your death is one of the parts of the order of the universe; it is a part of the life of the world. *Mortals live by borrowing from one another, / and like runners they hand on the torch of life.* Shall I change this fine fabric of things for your sake? It is the condition of your creation; death is a part of you; you are running away from yourselves. This being of yours that you enjoy is shared

23 The Thirty Tyrants were the oligarchy that ruled Athens in 404–403 BC.
24 Aristotle, History of Animals; the Hypanis is probably the modern Southern Bug, which flows into the Black Sea.

equally between death and life. The first day of your birth sets you on the road to dying as well as to living. *The first hour that gave us life took it away. / As we are born we die, and the end hangs on the beginning.* All the time you live, you steal from life; it is at life's expense. The constant work of your life is to build death. You are in death while you are in life; for you are after death when you are no longer in life. Or, if you prefer it this way, you are dead after life; but during life you are dying; and death touches the dying much more roughly than the dead, and more keenly and essentially.[25]

1.20.22 If you have made good use of life, you have had your fill of it; go away satisfied. *Why not leave like a guest who has had his fill of life?* If you have not known how to use it, if it was useless to you, what does it matter to you that you have lost it? What do you still want it for? *Why seek to add more, / Only to lose it badly again and have it all perish without profit?* Life in itself is neither good nor evil: it is the place of good and evil, depending on the room you make for them. And if you have lived one day, you have seen everything: one day is equal to all days. There is no other light, and no other night.

25 The first line is from Seneca, Hercules Furens; the second from Manilius, Astronomica.

This sun, this moon, these stars, this order of things, are the very same that your forefathers enjoyed and that will sustain your great-great-grandchildren. *Your fathers saw no other, nor will your grandsons*
Behold any other. And at worst, the distribution and variety of all the acts of my comedy is completed in a single year. If you have paid attention to the round of my four seasons, they take in the childhood, youth, manhood and old age of the world. It has played its game; it knows no other trick than to begin again; it will always be the very same thing. *We turn in the same place and stay there forever,*
And the year rolls back upon itself along its own tracks. I have no intention of devising other, new pastimes for you.[26]

For there is nothing more I can contrive or invent
To please you: all things are always the same. Make room for others, as others have made room for you. Equality is the first part of equity. Who can complain of being included where all are included? Besides, live as long as you like, you will not shave anything off the time you have to be dead. It is no use: you will remain just as long in that state you fear as if you had died in your nurse's arms. *Though you may outlive as many generations as you please,*
That eternal death will still be waiting for you all the same.

1.20.23 And besides, I will put you in such a state that you will feel no discontent. *Do you not know that in real death there will be no other you*
Still alive to mourn you dead,
Standing over you as you lie? Nor will you long for the life you lament so much. *For then no one misses himself or his life,*
And no longing for ourselves troubles us at all.

26 The second quotation joins a line of Lucretius to one from Virgil's Georgics.

1.20.24 Death is less to be feared than nothing, if there were anything less than nothing. *We must think death much less to us than nothing,*

If there can be anything less than what we see to be nothing. It does not concern you either dead or alive: alive, because you are; dead, because you no longer are. Moreover, no one dies before his hour. The time you leave behind was no more yours than the time that passed before your birth, and it concerns you no more. *Look back and see how the ages of eternal time gone by before us*

Were nothing to us.

1.20.25 Wherever your life ends, it is all there. The usefulness of living lies not in its length but in its use. Many a man has lived long who has lived little. Give it your attention while you are in it. Whether you have lived enough depends on your will, not on the number of your years. Did you think you would never arrive where you were constantly heading? Yet there is no road that does not come to an end. And if company can comfort you, is not the world going the same way you are? *All things, when your life is done, will follow you.*

1.20.26 Does not everything move with your movement? Is there anything that does not grow old along with you? A thousand men, a thousand animals and a thousand other creatures die at the very moment you die. *For no night has followed day, nor dawn followed night,*

Without hearing, mingled with the sickly wailing of newborn infants,

The laments that attend death and gloomy funerals.

1.20.27 Why do you recoil from it, if you cannot draw back? You have seen plenty of people who were the better for dying, escaping great miseries by it. But have you ever seen anyone who was the worse for it? It is very simple-minded to condemn a thing you have never experienced, either yourself or through someone else. Why do you complain of me and of destiny? Do we wrong you? Is it for you to govern us, or for us to govern you?

Though your age may not be complete, your life is. A small man is a whole man just as much as a tall one. Neither men nor their lives are measured by the yard.

1.20.28 Chiron refused immortality when he was told its conditions by the very god of time and duration, Saturn, his father. Just imagine how much less bearable to man, and how much more painful, an everlasting life would be than the life I have given him. If you did not have death, you would curse me endlessly for having deprived you of it.[27]

1.20.29 I have deliberately mixed a little bitterness into it, to keep you, when you see how convenient it is to use, from embracing it too greedily and rashly. To settle you in the moderation I ask of you—neither to flee life nor to run away from death—I have tempered both of them between sweetness and sourness.

1.20.30 I taught Thales, the first of your sages, that living and dying were all one; and so, when someone asked him why, then, he did not die, he answered very wisely: "Because it is all one." Water, earth, air and fire, and the other parts of this building of mine, are no more instruments of your life than instruments of your death. Why do you fear your last day? It contributes no more to your death than each of the others. The last step does not cause the weariness; it reveals it. Every day travels toward death; the last one arrives. Such are the good counsels of our mother Nature.[28]

TAKING OFF DEATH'S MASK

The trappings around a deathbed frighten us more than death itself.

1.20.31 Now I have often wondered why it is that in war the face of death, whether we see it in ourselves or in others, seems to us incomparably less terrifying than in our homes—otherwise an army would be made up of doctors and weepers; and why, death

27 Chiron, the wise centaur, son of Saturn (the Greek Cronus), gave up his immortality after receiving an incurable wound.

28 Thales of Miletus (6th century BC), counted first among the Seven Sages of Greece.

being always the same, there is nevertheless far more composure among village folk and people of low condition than among others. I truly believe it is those terrifying looks and trappings with which we surround it that frighten us more than death itself: an entirely new way of living; the cries of mothers, wives and children; visits from people dazed and numb with shock; the presence of a crowd of pale, tearful servants; a room without daylight; lighted candles; our bedside besieged by doctors and preachers; in short, nothing but horror and dread all around us. There we are, already shrouded and buried. Children are afraid even of their friends when they see them masked; so are we. We must strip the mask from things as well as from people. Once it is off, we shall find underneath only that same death which a valet or a mere chambermaid went through not long ago without fear. Happy the death that leaves no leisure for preparing such a pageant!

I.21 Of the Power of the Imagination

De la force de l'imagination
Montaigne explores how imagination produces illness, cures, impotence, and supposed miracles, in himself and others.

1.21.1 *A strong imagination produces the event*, say the learned. I am one of those who feel the very great force of the imagination. Everyone is jolted by it, but some are knocked flat. Its impression pierces me; and my art is to escape it, for lack of strength to resist it. I would like to live in the company of none but healthy and cheerful people. The sight of other people's anguish causes me real physical anguish, and my senses have often usurped the sensations of someone else. A man who coughs constantly irritates my lungs and my throat. I visit more reluctantly the sick to whom duty binds me than those I am less attached to and care less about. I catch the illness I study and lodge it in myself. I do not find it strange that imagination brings on fevers and even death in those who give it free rein and encourage it. Simon Thomas was a great physician in his day. I remember that one day, when he met me in Toulouse at the house of a rich old man with a lung disease, and was discussing with him the means of curing him, he told him that one of them was to give me reason to enjoy his company: by fixing his eyes on the freshness of my face and his thoughts on the cheerfulness and vigor overflowing from my youth, and filling all his senses with the flourishing state I was then in, his condition might improve. But he forgot to say that mine might get worse as well.[1] Vibius Gallus strained

1 Simon Thomas, a physician of Lectoure in Gascony.

his mind so hard to understand the essence and the impulses of madness that he carried his judgment off its seat, so that he could never put it back again; he could boast of having gone mad through wisdom. There are some who, out of fright, forestall the executioner's hand; and one man, whose blindfold was being removed so that his pardon could be read to him, was found stone dead on the scaffold, struck down by his imagination alone. We sweat, we tremble, we turn pale and we blush at the jolts of our imaginings; and lying back in our feather beds we feel our bodies shaken by their agitation, sometimes to the point of dying of it. And hot-blooded youth gets so heated in its harness, fast asleep, that it satisfies its amorous desires in dreams.[2] *So that often, as though the whole business were accomplished, they pour out / Great floods in a stream and stain their clothes.*[3]

1.21.2 And although it is nothing new to see someone sprout horns in the night who did not have them when he went to bed, still the case of Cippus, king of Italy, is memorable: having watched a bullfight with great excitement during the day, and having had horns on his head in his dreams all night, he produced them on his forehead by the power of imagination. Passion gave the son of Croesus the voice that nature had denied him. And Antiochus caught a fever from the beauty of Stratonice, too vividly imprinted on his soul. Pliny says he saw Lucius Cossitius changed from a woman into a man on his wedding day.[4] Pontanus and others tell of similar metamorphoses that occurred in Italy in past centuries; and through his own and his mother's vehement desire, *Iphis paid as a boy the vows he had made as a girl.*[5]

1.21.3 Passing through Vitry-le-François, I was able to see a man whom the Bishop of Soissons had named Germain at his con-

2 Vibius Gallus, a rhetorician of Augustus' time; the story is told by Seneca the Elder.

3 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.

4 Croesus' mute son cried out when a soldier was about to kill his father (Herodotus); Antiochus fell ill for love of his stepmother Stratonice.

firmation. All the inhabitants there had known him, and seen him as a girl named Marie, until the age of twenty-two. He was by then heavily bearded, and old, and not married. He said that as he was straining in a jump, his male organs came out. And there is still a song current among the girls there in which they warn one another not to take long strides, for fear of becoming boys, like Marie Germain.[6] It is not so very surprising that this sort of accident happens often. For if imagination has power in such matters, it is so continually and so vigorously fixed on this subject that, rather than having to fall back so often into the same thought and the same sharpness of desire, it finds it simpler to incorporate this male part into girls once and for all.

1.21.4 Some attribute to the power of imagination the scars of King Dagobert and of Saint Francis. It is said that bodies are sometimes lifted from their place by it. And Celsus tells of a priest who would carry his soul off into such an ecstasy that his body remained for a long time without breath or sensation. Saint Augustine names another who had only to hear cries of lament and grief to faint at once, and to go so completely out of himself that it was no use storming at him and yelling, pinching him and burning him, until he came back to life. Then he would say he had heard voices, but as if from far away; and he would notice his burns and bruises.[7] And that this was not a stubbornness put on in defiance of his feelings was shown by the fact that meanwhile he had neither pulse nor breath. It is likely that visions, enchantments and such extraordinary effects owe most of their credit to the power of imagination, acting chiefly on the souls of the common people, which are softer. Their belief has been so firmly seized that they think they see what they do not see.

5 Giovanni Pontano, a 15th-century Neapolitan humanist. The line is from Ovid's Metamorphoses, where the girl Iphis, raised as a boy, is changed into one.

6 Vitry-le-François, a town in Champagne; Montaigne passed through it in 1580 on his way to Italy.

7 The "scars" are the stigmata of Saint Francis of Assisi; Dagobert was a 7th-century Frankish king.

SPELLS OF IMPOTENCE

Fear and imagination cause the failures blamed on knotting spells; a playful counter-charm cures one.

1.21.5 I am still inclined to suspect that those comical spells of tying, which hamper our world so much that people talk of nothing else, are usually the effects of apprehension and fear. For I know from experience that a certain man, for whom I can answer as for myself, and on whom no suspicion of weakness could fall, and just as little of enchantment, had heard one of his companions tell of an extraordinary failure that had come over him at the very moment he could least afford it. Finding himself in a similar situation, the horror of this story suddenly struck his imagination so hard that he met with the same fate.[8] And from then on he was liable to relapse, that wretched memory of his mishap bullying and tyrannizing him. He found some remedy for this fancy in another fancy. By admitting and announcing this weakness of his in advance, he relieved the strain on his soul, because by presenting the trouble as something expected, he lessened his obligation and it weighed on him less. When he had the opportunity, at a time of his own choosing—his mind clear and relaxed, his body in proper order—to let it first be tried, taken hold of and caught unawares, with the other person's knowledge, he was completely cured. With a woman toward whom one has once been capable, one is never again incapable, except through genuine weakness. This misfortune is only to be feared in undertakings where our soul is strained beyond measure with desire and respect, and particularly where the opportunity comes unexpectedly and urgently. There is no way to recover from that disturbance. I know one man who found it helpful to bring to the task a body already half sated elsewhere, to dull the heat of that frenzy, and who with age finds himself less impotent for being less potent; and another who

8 An allusion to the popular belief in "knotting the cord" (nouer l'aiguillette), a spell supposed to make a bridegroom impotent.

was also helped when a friend assured him that he was supplied with a counter-battery of sure enchantments to protect him. I had better tell how that came about.

1.21.6 A count of very good family, with whom I was on very intimate terms, was marrying a beautiful lady who had been courted by a man present at the festivities. This caused his friends great anxiety, and especially an old lady, a relative of his, who was presiding over the wedding and holding it at her house, and who feared these sorceries; she told me so. I asked her to leave it to me. I happened to have in my coffers a certain small flat piece of gold engraved with some celestial figures, good against sunstroke and for taking away headaches when placed exactly on the suture of the skull; and to keep it there, it was sewn to a ribbon meant to be tied under the chin. A fancy akin to the one we are talking about. Jacques Peletier, when he was living at my house, had made me this singular present. I thought of putting it to some use, and told the count that he might run the same risk as others, since there were men present who would like to play such a trick on him; but that he should go boldly to bed: I would do him a friend's turn, and would not withhold, if he needed it, a miracle that was in my power, provided he promised me on his honor to keep it most faithfully secret. Only, when they came during the night to bring him the late-night collation, if things had gone badly for him, he was to give me such-and-such a sign.[9] His mind and ears had been so battered that he found himself tied up by the agitation of his imagination, and he gave me his sign at the appointed time. Then I whispered to him to get up, on the pretext of chasing us out, and playfully take the dressing gown I had on (we were very close in size) and put it on until he had carried out my prescription, which was this: when we had gone out, he was to withdraw to pass water, say such-and-such words three times, and make such-and-such movements. Each of those three times he was to tie around himself the ribbon I was putting into his hand, and

9 Jacques Peletier du Mans, poet and mathematician. It was customary to bring newlyweds a late-night collation (réveillon) on the wedding night.

very carefully place the medal attached to it over his loins, with the figure in such-and-such a position. That done, and having tied the ribbon tight the last time so that it could neither come undone nor slip from its place, he was to go back to his appointed task with complete confidence, and not forget to throw my gown over his bed so that it covered them both. These monkey tricks are the main part of the effect, since our minds cannot rid themselves of the idea that such strange means must come from some abstruse science. Their very inanity gives them weight and reverence. In short, it was certain that my figures proved more Venusian than solar, more for action than for prohibition. It was a sudden and curious whim that led me to such a deed, so far removed from my nature. I am an enemy of subtle and feigned actions, and I hate trickery in my own hands, not only when it is for amusement but even when it is profitable. If the action is not wicked, the way to it is.

1.21.7 Amasis, king of Egypt, married Laodice, a very beautiful Greek girl; and he, who showed himself a lusty fellow everywhere else, found himself falling short when it came to enjoying her, and threatened to kill her, thinking it was some sorcery. As is usual in things that consist in fancy, she referred him to devotion; and having made his vows and promises to Venus, he found himself divinely restored from the very first night after his offerings and sacrifices. Now women are wrong to receive us with those coy, quarrelsome, evasive airs that put out our fire while kindling it. The daughter-in-law of Pythagoras used to say that a woman who goes to bed with a man should put off her modesty along with her petticoat, and put it back on with her petticoat. The soul of the assailant, troubled by many different alarms, is easily lost. And when imagination has once made a man suffer this shame—and it does so only in first encounters, since these are more ardent and eager, and also because in this first acquaintance one gives of oneself one is far more afraid of failing—having begun badly, he falls into a fever of vexation over the accident, which stays with him on later occasions.

1.21.8 Married couples, who have all the time in the world, should neither press nor attempt their undertaking if they are not ready. It is better to fail, however unseemly, to christen the marriage bed while it is full of agitation and fever, and to wait for some other, more private and less anxious opportunity, than to fall into perpetual misery from having been stunned and driven to despair by the first refusal. Before taking possession, the patient should try and offer himself lightly, in sallies and at various times, without getting stubborn and insisting on convincing himself once and for all. Those who know their members to be naturally docile need only take care to outwit their own fancy.

IN DEFENSE OF AN UNRULY MEMBER

Every part of the body, and the will most of all, disobeys us as often as this one.

1.21.9 People are right to note the unruly freedom of this member, thrusting itself forward so inopportunely when we have no use for it, and failing so inopportunely when we have most use for it, contesting authority so imperiously with our will, and refusing with such pride and obstinacy our solicitations both mental and manual. Yet if, when its rebellion is being scolded and used as proof for its condemnation, it had paid me to plead its cause, I might perhaps cast suspicion on our other members, its fellows, of having trumped up this quarrel against it out of sheer envy of the importance and sweetness of its function, and of having conspired to arm the world against it, maliciously charging it alone with their common fault. For I leave you to consider whether there is a single part of our body that does not often refuse to work at our will, and that does not often act against our will. Each of them has passions of its own that rouse it and put it to sleep without our leave. How often do the involuntary movements of our face bear witness to thoughts we were keeping secret, and betray us to those around us? The same cause that animates this member also animates, without our

knowledge, the heart, the lungs and the pulse, the sight of a pleasing object imperceptibly spreading through us the flame of a feverish emotion. Is it only these muscles and veins that rise and lie down without the consent not only of our will but even of our thought? We do not command our hair to stand on end, or our skin to quiver with desire or fear. Our hand often goes where we do not send it. Our tongue goes numb and our voice freezes when they please. Even when we have nothing to put in the pan and would gladly forbid it, the appetite for eating and drinking does not fail to stir the parts subject to it, just like that other appetite; and it likewise deserts us, at the wrong moment, whenever it likes.

1.21.10 The organs that serve to empty the bowels have their own dilations and contractions, beyond and against our wishes, just like those meant to empty the kidneys. And when, to vindicate the power of our will, Saint Augustine claims to have seen a man who could command his backside to produce as many farts as he wanted, and Vives caps this with another example from his own time, of farts arranged to follow the tone of words spoken to them, that does not imply any more perfect obedience in this member. For is there any member ordinarily more indiscreet and unruly?[10] Besides, I know of one so turbulent and unruly that for forty years it has kept its master farting with a constant and unremitting wind and compulsion, and is thus leading him to his death. And I wish to God I knew only from history books how often our belly, by refusing a single fart, brings us to the very gates of an agonizing death; and that the emperor who gave us the freedom to fart anywhere had given us the power to do so![11]

1.21.11 But our will, on behalf of whose rights we bring this reproach—how much more plausibly can we brand it with rebellion and sedition for its unruliness and disobedience! Does it

10 Juan Luis Vives, Spanish humanist, wrote a commentary on Augustine's City of God.

11 The emperor Claudius was said to have planned an edict allowing people to break wind at table (Suetonius).

always will what we would like it to will? Does it not often will what we forbid it to will, and to our evident harm? Does it let itself be led any better by the conclusions of our reason?

1.21.12 Finally, I would say on behalf of the gentleman my client: may it please the court to consider that in this matter, although his case is inseparably and indistinguishably joined with that of an associate, it is he alone who is accused, and with arguments and charges that cannot apply to his said associate. For the latter's action is indeed sometimes to invite inopportunely, but never to refuse; and to invite, moreover, silently and quietly. Hence the animosity and manifest illegality of the accusers is plain to see. Be that as it may, I protest that lawyers and judges may wrangle and pass sentence as they please: nature will meanwhile go her own way. And she would only have done right had she endowed this member with some special privilege, as the author of the only immortal work of mortals. A divine work, according to Socrates; and Love is a desire for immortality, and himself an immortal daemon.[12]

1.21.13 One man, perhaps, through this effect of imagination, leaves his scrofula behind here, while his companion carries his back to Spain. That is why, in such matters, it is customary to require a soul that is prepared. Why do doctors work on their patient's credulity beforehand with so many false promises of a cure, if not so that the effect of imagination may make up for the imposture of their potion? They know that one of the masters of their profession has left it in writing that there have been men on whom the mere sight of medicine did the work.[13] And this whole fancy has just come to hand from a story told me by an apothecary in my late father's household, a simple man and a Swiss, a nation little given to vanity and lying. He had long known a merchant in Toulouse, sickly and subject to the stone, who often needed enemas and had his doctors prescribe them in various forms according to the course of his illness. When they

12 Plato, Symposium.

13 The kings of France were believed to cure scrofula by touch, and Spaniards came to France to be touched.

were brought, none of the usual formalities was left out; he would often feel them to see if they were too hot; there he lay, turned over, with all the preliminaries done—except that no injection was given. The apothecary having withdrawn after this ceremony, and the patient settled as if he had really taken the enema, he felt the same effect from it as those who actually take them. And if the doctor did not find its effect sufficient, he would give him two or three more of the same kind. My witness swears that when the sick man's wife, to save expense (for he paid for them as if he had received them), sometimes tried having just warm water put in, the effect gave away the trick; and since those proved useless, they had to go back to the first method.

1.21.14 A woman who thought she had swallowed a pin with her bread was crying out and tormenting herself as if she had an unbearable pain in her throat, where she thought she felt it stuck. But because there was no swelling or change on the outside, a clever man judged that it was only fancy and imagination, caused by some piece of bread that had scratched her on the way down. He made her vomit, and slipped a bent pin into what she brought up. The woman, believing she had got rid of it, felt suddenly relieved of her pain. I know of a gentleman who, having entertained a good company at his house, boasted three or four days later, as a joke (for there was nothing to it), that he had made them eat a cat baked in a pie. A young lady of the party was seized with such horror at this that she fell into a severe stomach disorder and fever, and it proved impossible to save her.

1.21.15 Even animals are seen to be subject, as we are, to the power of imagination: witness dogs that let themselves die of grief at the loss of their masters. We also see them yap and twitch in their dreams, and horses whinny and thrash about.

1.21.16 But all this may be put down to the close seam between mind and body, which share their fortunes with each other. It is another matter for the imagination sometimes to act not only on its own body but on someone else's. And just as a body passes its

illness on to its neighbor, as is seen with the plague, the pox and sore eyes, which are caught from one person to another—*Eyes that look on sore eyes grow sore themselves; / And many ills pass from body to body by contagion*—so the imagination, when violently stirred, shoots out darts that can strike an outside object. Antiquity held that certain women in Scythia, when roused and angry with someone, could kill him with a look alone.[14] Tortoises and ostriches hatch their eggs by sight alone, a sign that there is some ejaculatory power in their eyes. And as for sorcerers, they are said to have harmful and baneful eyes. *Some eye or other is bewitching my tender lambs.* Magicians are poor guarantors, as far as I am concerned. Be that as it may, we see by experience that women transmit marks of their fancies to the bodies of the children they carry in their wombs: witness the woman who gave birth to the dark-skinned child. And there was presented to Charles, king of Bohemia and emperor, a girl from near Pisa, all hairy and bristly, whose mother said she had been conceived that way because of an image of Saint John the Baptist hanging by her bed.[15]

1.21.17 The same is true of animals: witness Jacob's sheep, and the partridges and hares that the snow turns white in the mountains. Recently at my house a cat was seen watching a bird at the top of a tree; and after they had fixed their eyes firmly on each other for some time, the bird let itself drop as if dead between the cat's paws, either intoxicated by its own imagination or drawn by some power of attraction in the cat.[16]

TRUE STORIES AND POSSIBLE ONES

Montaigne borrows tales on others' word, since even possible examples show what humans can do.

1.21.18 Those who love falconry have heard the story of the falconer who, fixing his gaze stubbornly on a kite in the air,

14 Ovid, Remedies of Love.
15 Virgil, Eclogues. Charles IV (1316–1378), king of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor.

wagered that by the sole force of his gaze he would bring it down; and he did, so they say. For the stories I borrow, I leave them on the conscience of those I take them from. The reasonings are mine, and they stand by the proof of reason, not of experience; anyone can add his own examples to them; and whoever has none, let him not stop believing that there are plenty, given the number and variety of things that happen. If my comparisons are not apt, let someone else make them for me. Besides, in the study I am engaged in, of our ways and impulses, fabulous testimonies, provided they are possible, serve as well as true ones. Whether it happened or not, in Rome or in Paris, to John or to Peter, it is always a turn of human capability, of which this account usefully informs me. I see it and profit from it as much in shadow as in substance. And of the various versions that stories often have, I make a point of using the rarest and most memorable. There are authors whose aim is to relate what happened. Mine, if I could achieve it, would be to speak about what can happen. The schools are rightly allowed to invent illustrations when they have none. I do not do so, however, and in that respect I surpass all historical fidelity in superstitious scrupulousness. In the examples I bring in here from what I have read, heard, done or said, I have forbidden myself to dare to alter even the slightest and most useless circumstances. My conscience does not falsify one iota; my ignorance—I don't know.

1.21.19 On this subject, I sometimes find myself wondering whether it is quite fitting for a theologian, a philosopher and such people of exquisite and exact conscience and prudence to write history. How can they stake their good faith on popular belief? How can they answer for the thoughts of people they do not know, and pass off their conjectures as ready cash? Of actions involving many parties that take place in their presence, they would refuse to bear witness if put under oath by a judge; and they know no man so intimately that they would undertake

16 In Genesis 30, Jacob makes his flocks bear striped and spotted young by setting peeled rods before them as they breed.

to answer fully for his intentions. I consider it less hazardous to write of things past than of things present, inasmuch as the writer has only to account for a borrowed truth.

1.21.20 Some people urge me to write the history of my own times, believing that I see things with an eye less wounded by passion than another man's, and from closer up, because of the access fortune has given me to the leaders of various parties. But they do not mention that I would not take the trouble even for the glory of Sallust, sworn enemy that I am of obligation, assiduity and constancy; and that nothing is so contrary to my style as an extended narrative. I cut myself short so often, for lack of breath. I have neither composition nor exposition worth anything. I am more ignorant than a child of the phrases and words used for the commonest things. That is why I have undertaken to say what I know how to say, fitting the matter to my strength.[17] If I took a subject that led me, my measure might fall short of its own. And my freedom being so free, I might have published judgments that, even in my own opinion and according to reason, were unlawful and punishable.

1.21.21 Plutarch would readily tell us, of what he has done, that if his examples are true in every respect and every detail, that is the work of others; that if they are useful to posterity, and presented with a luster that lights our way to virtue, that is his own work. In an old tale, unlike a medicinal drug, there is no danger whether it is this way or that.

17 Sallust (86–35 BC), the Roman historian.

I.22 One Man's Profit Is Another Man's Loss

Le profit de l'vn est dommage de l'autre
Every profit comes at someone's loss—and nature too lives by one thing's birth being another's corruption.

1.22.1 Demades the Athenian condemned a man of his city whose trade was selling the things needed for funerals, on the ground that he asked too much profit for them, and that this profit could not come to him without the death of many people. This judgment seems ill-founded, since no profit is made except at someone else's expense, and by that reckoning every kind of gain would have to be condemned.[1]

1.22.2 The merchant does good business only through the extravagance of the young; the farmer through the high price of grain; the architect through the ruin of houses; officers of justice through men's lawsuits and quarrels; even the honor and practice of ministers of religion derive from our death and our vices. No doctor takes pleasure in the health even of his friends, says the ancient Greek comic poet, nor any soldier in the peace of his city; and so on with the rest. And what is worse, let each of us sound himself within, and he will find that our inmost wishes are for the most part born and nourished at the expense of others.[2] As I considered this, it occurred to me that nature in this respect does not depart from her general order; for the natural philosophers hold that the birth, nourishment and growth of

1 Demades, an Athenian orator of the 4th century BC.
2 The Greek comic poet Philemon, in a fragment preserved by Stobaeus.

each thing is the alteration and corruption of another. *For whatever is changed and passes beyond its bounds, / That is at once the death of what it was before.*[3]

3 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.

I.23 Of Custom, and Not Easily Changing an Accepted Law

De la coustume, et de ne changer aisément vne loy receüe
Custom rules us like a tyrant, shaping even conscience; yet Montaigne counsels against lightly changing established laws.

1.23.1 He seems to me to have grasped very well the power of custom who first made up this story: that a village woman, having learned to pet a calf and carry it in her arms from the hour of its birth, and continuing always to do so, gained this by habit, that even when it was a great ox she could still carry it. For custom is in truth a violent and treacherous schoolmistress. Little by little, by stealth, she establishes the foothold of her authority in us; but having by this gentle and humble beginning settled and planted it with the help of time, she soon reveals to us a furious and tyrannical face, against which we no longer have the freedom even to raise our eyes. We see her force the rules of nature at every turn. *Custom is the most effective teacher of all things.* I take as witness Plato's cave in his Republic; and the doctors, who so often abandon the reasonings of their art in favor of her authority; and that king who by her means trained his stomach to feed on poison; and the girl Albert tells of, who accustomed herself to live on spiders. And in that world of the new Indies, great peoples were found, in very different climates, who lived on spiders, laid in stores of them and fattened them; and also on grasshoppers, ants, lizards and bats; and a toad was sold for six crowns in a time of food shortage. They cook them and serve

them with various sauces.[1] Others were found to whom our meats and our foods were deadly and poisonous. *Great is the power of custom. Hunters spend the night in the snow; they let themselves be scorched in the mountains. Boxers, bruised by the cestus, do not even groan.*[2]

1.23.2 These foreign examples are not strange if we consider what we commonly experience: how much habit dulls our senses. We need not go looking for what is said of the people who live near the cataracts of the Nile, or for what the philosophers think about the music of the heavens: that the bodies of those spheres, being solid and polished, and touching and rubbing against one another as they roll, cannot fail to produce a wonderful harmony, to whose cadences and modulations the turns and changes of the stars' round dances are measured; but that the hearing of all creatures here below, lulled to sleep, like that of the Egyptians, by the unbroken continuity of this sound, cannot perceive it, however loud it may be. Blacksmiths, millers and armorers could not stand the noise that strikes them if it pierced them as it does us. My perfumed collar serves my nose; but after I have worn it three days in a row, it serves only the noses of those around me. What is stranger is that, despite long intervals and interruptions, habit can join together and establish the effect of its impression on our senses, as people who live near belfries find. At home I lodge in a tower where at dawn and at dusk a very big bell rings the Ave Maria every day. This din shakes my very tower; and though in the first days it seemed unbearable to me, in a short time it so tamed me that I hear it without annoyance, and often without being woken by it.

1.23.3 Plato once scolded a child who was playing at nuts. The child answered, "You scold me over a small thing." "Habit," Plato replied, "is no small thing." I find that our greatest vices take their bent from our tenderest childhood, and that our upbringing is chiefly in the hands of nurses. Mothers find it amusing to

1 Pliny the Elder, Natural History. The king is Mithridates of Pontus; Albert is Albertus Magnus, the 13th-century scholar.
2 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations.

watch a child wring a chicken's neck, or enjoy himself hurting a dog or a cat. And many a father is foolish enough to take it as a good omen of a martial spirit when he sees his son insolently beating a peasant or a lackey who does not defend himself, and as a sign of cleverness when he sees him get the better of a playmate by some spiteful disloyalty and deceit. Yet these are the true seeds and roots of cruelty, tyranny and treachery. They sprout there, then shoot up vigorously and thrive mightily in the hands of custom. And it is a very dangerous way to bring up children to excuse these vile inclinations on the grounds of the child's tender age and the triviality of the matter. In the first place, it is nature speaking, and her voice is all the purer and more unaffected for being still thin and new. In the second place, the ugliness of cheating does not depend on the difference between crowns and pins; it depends on itself. I think it far more right to reason like this: "Why should he not cheat for crowns, since he cheats for pins?" rather than, as people do: "It is only for pins; he would never do it for crowns." Children must be carefully taught to hate vices for what they are in themselves, and must be taught their natural deformity, so that they shun them not only in their actions but above all in their hearts, and the very thought of them is odious to them, whatever mask the vices wear.

1.23.4 I know very well that, because I was trained in childhood always to walk my own broad, open road, and had a strong distaste for mixing any trickery or slyness into my childish games (and indeed it should be noted that children's games are not games, and must be judged in children as their most serious actions), there is no pastime so trivial that I do not bring to it, from within, from a natural inclination and without any effort, an extreme aversion to cheating. I play cards for pennies and keep score as if for double doubloons, when winning or losing against my wife and daughter makes no difference to me, just as I do when the stakes are real.[3] In everything and everywhere,

3 His wife was Françoise de La Chassaigne; Léonor was his only daughter to survive infancy.

my own eyes are enough to keep me to my duty; there are none that watch me so closely, and none that I respect more.

1.23.5 I have just seen at my house a little man, a native of Nantes, born without arms, who has trained his feet so well to do the service his hands owed him that his feet have, in truth, half forgotten their natural function. What is more, he calls them his hands. He cuts his food, he loads a pistol and fires it, he threads his needle, he sews, he writes, he doffs his hat, he combs his hair, he plays cards and dice and handles them with as much dexterity as anyone could; the money I gave him he carried away in his foot, as we do in our hand. When I was a child I saw another who, for want of hands, wielded a two-handed sword and a halberd in the crook of his neck, threw them into the air and caught them again, hurled a dagger, and cracked a whip as well as any carter in France.

1.23.6 But custom's effects are discovered far better in the strange impressions it makes on our souls, where it meets less resistance. What can it not do with our judgments and our beliefs? Is there any opinion so bizarre—I leave aside the gross imposture of religions, with which so many great nations and so many able persons have been seen intoxicated; for since that matter lies outside our human reasoning, it is more excusable for anyone to lose his way in it who is not extraordinarily enlightened by divine favor—but among other opinions, are there any so strange that custom has not planted them and established them by law in whatever regions it saw fit? And this ancient exclamation is very just: *Is it not shameful for a natural philosopher, that is, an observer and hunter of nature, to seek testimony of the truth from minds steeped in custom?*[4]

A CATALOG OF STRANGE CUSTOMS

Every notion, however wild, is somewhere a public custom: a long list of peoples' practices.

1.23.7 I believe that no notion so mad can enter the human imagination that it does not find an example in some public practice, and consequently that our reason does not prop up and give a foundation to. There are peoples among whom you turn your back on the person you greet, and never look at the one you wish to honor. There are some among whom, when the king spits, the most favored of the ladies of his court holds out her hand; and in another nation the most eminent persons around him stoop to the ground to gather up his filth in a cloth. Let me steal room here for a story.

1.23.8 A French gentleman always blew his nose with his hand, a thing very much against our usage, and he defended his practice on this point; he was famous for his witty sallies. He asked me what privilege this dirty excrement had, that we should go and prepare a fine, delicate linen to receive it, and then, what is more, wrap it up and carry it carefully about on our persons. That ought to turn the stomach more, he said, than seeing it dropped anywhere at all, as we do with all our other filth. I found that he was not speaking altogether without reason; custom had taken from me any perception of this strangeness, which we nevertheless find so hideous when it is reported of another country. Miracles exist according to our ignorance of nature, not according to the being of nature. Habituation puts the eye of our judgment to sleep. Barbarians are no more a marvel to us than we are to them, nor with more cause—as everyone would admit if, after strolling among these far-off examples, each knew how to come back and settle on his own and compare them soundly. Human reason is a dye infused in roughly equal measure into all our opinions and customs, whatever their

4 Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods.

form: infinite in matter, infinite in diversity. I return to my subject.

1.23.9 There are peoples among whom no one but his wife and children speaks to the king except through a speaking tube. In one and the same nation the virgins show their private parts uncovered, and the married women cover and hide them carefully. To this another custom found elsewhere bears some relation: there chastity is prized only for the purposes of marriage, for girls may give themselves as they please and, when pregnant, may have themselves aborted with suitable drugs in full view of everyone. And elsewhere, if it is a merchant who marries, all the merchants invited to the wedding sleep with the bride before he does; and the more of them there are, the more honor she has and the greater her reputation for stamina and capacity. If an official marries, it is the same; the same if it is a noble; and so with the rest—unless it is a laborer or someone of the common people, for then it falls to the lord to do it. And yet they do not fail to enjoin strict fidelity during the marriage. There are some where one sees public brothels of males, and even marriages between them; where the women go to war alongside their husbands and hold rank not only in combat but also in command. Where rings are worn not only in the nose, the lips, the cheeks and the toes, but very heavy rods of gold through the nipples and buttocks. Where, while eating, they wipe their fingers on their thighs, on the purse of their genitals and on the soles of their feet. Where children are not the heirs, but brothers and nephews; and elsewhere nephews only, except in the succession of the prince. Where, to regulate the community of goods that is observed there, certain sovereign magistrates have universal charge of cultivating the land and distributing the produce according to each person's need. Where they mourn the death of children and celebrate that of old men. Where they sleep ten or twelve to a bed together with their wives. Where women who lose their husbands by violent death may remarry, and the others may not. Where they think so poorly of the condition of women that they kill the girls born

there and buy women from their neighbors as needed. Where husbands can repudiate their wives without giving any reason, and wives cannot repudiate their husbands for any reason whatever. Where husbands have the right to sell their wives if they are barren. Where they cook the body of the dead man and then pound it until it turns into a kind of pulp, which they mix into their wine and drink. Where the most desirable burial is to be eaten by dogs; elsewhere, by birds. Where they believe that happy souls live in complete freedom in pleasant fields furnished with every comfort, and that it is they who make the echo we hear. Where they fight in the water and shoot accurately with their bows while swimming. Where, as a sign of submission, one must raise one's shoulders and lower one's head, and take off one's shoes on entering the king's dwelling. Where the eunuchs who guard the women vowed to religion are also without nose and lips, so that they cannot be loved; and the priests put out their own eyes in order to commune with demons and receive oracles. Where each man makes a god of whatever he pleases—the hunter of a lion or a fox, the fisherman of a certain fish—and idols of every human action or passion; the sun, the moon and the earth are the chief gods; the way to swear an oath is to touch the earth while looking at the sun; and there they eat meat and fish raw. Where the great oath is to swear by the name of some dead man who was held in good repute in the country, touching his tomb with one's hand. Where the New Year's gift the king sends every year to the princes who are his vassals is fire; when it is brought, all the old fire is put out, and the neighboring peoples are bound to come and draw from this new fire, each for himself, on pain of high treason. Where, when the king retires from his office to give himself wholly to devotion, which often happens, his first successor is obliged to do the same, and the right to the kingdom passes to the third successor. Where they vary the form of government as affairs seem to require: they depose the king when it seems good, put elders in his place to take the helm of state, and sometimes also leave it in the hands of the common people. Where

men and women are circumcised, and likewise baptized. Where a soldier who, in one battle or several, has managed to present seven enemy heads to his king is made a noble. Where they live under that rare and unsociable belief in the mortality of souls. Where women give birth without complaint and without fear. Where the women wear copper greaves on both legs, and if a louse bites them they are bound by a duty of magnanimity to bite it back; and they dare not marry until they have offered their virginity to their king, if he wants it. Where people greet one another by touching a finger to the ground and then raising it toward the sky. Where men carry loads on their heads and women on their shoulders; the women urinate standing, the men squatting. Where they send some of their blood as a token of friendship, and burn incense, as to the gods, to the men they wish to honor. Where kinship is a bar to marriage not only up to the fourth degree but at any more distant degree. Where children are nursed for four years, and often twelve; and in that same place it is thought fatal to give the child the breast at any time on its first day. Where fathers are in charge of punishing the boys, and mothers, separately, the girls; and the punishment is to smoke them while they hang by the feet. Where they circumcise the women. Where they eat every kind of plant with no other discrimination than to refuse those that seem to them to smell bad. Where everything is open, and the houses, however fine and rich, have no doors, no windows, no chests that lock; and thieves are punished twice as severely as elsewhere. Where they kill lice with their teeth, like apes, and find it horrible to see them crushed under the fingernails. Where in all their lives they cut neither hair nor nails; elsewhere, where they cut only the nails of the right hand, letting those of the left grow long out of refinement. Where they let all the hair on the right side grow as long as it will, and keep the hair on the other side close-shaven. And in neighboring provinces, one grows the hair in front and the other the hair behind, and each shaves the opposite part. Where fathers lend their children, and husbands their wives, to guests to enjoy, for payment. Where one may honor-

ably have children by one's mother, and fathers may lie with their daughters and with their sons. Where at gatherings for feasts they lend their children to one another without regard to kinship. Here they live on human flesh; there it is an act of piety to kill one's father at a certain age; elsewhere fathers decide, while the children are still in their mothers' wombs, which they want reared and kept and which they want abandoned and killed; elsewhere old husbands lend their wives to young men to make use of; and elsewhere women are held in common without sin—indeed, in one such country they wear, as a mark of honor, as many fine fringed tassels on the hems of their robes as they have known men. Has custom not even made a commonwealth of women on their own? Has it not put weapons in their hands, made them raise armies and fight battles? And what all philosophy cannot plant in the heads of the wisest, does custom not teach by its decree alone to the crudest common people? For we know of whole nations where death was not only scorned but celebrated; where children of seven endured being whipped to death without changing expression; where wealth was held in such contempt that the poorest citizen in the city would not have deigned to reach down to pick up a purse full of crowns.[5] And we know of regions very rich in every kind of food where, nevertheless, the most ordinary and the most savory dishes were bread, cress and water. Did custom not also work this miracle on Chios: that seven hundred years passed there without any record of a woman or girl failing in her honor?

1.23.10 In short, to my mind, there is nothing custom does not do, or cannot do; and Pindar, so I am told, rightly calls it the queen and empress of the world. The man who was found beating his father replied that it was the custom of his house: his father had beaten his grandfather that way, and his grandfather his great-grandfather; and pointing to his son, he said, "This one will beat me when he reaches my age." And the father whom his son was dragging and knocking about in the middle of the street

5 He is thinking of the legendary Amazons and of the Spartan boys flogged at the altar of Artemis.

ordered him to stop at a certain doorway, for he himself had dragged his father only that far: that was the limit of the hereditary abuse that the children of their family were in the habit of inflicting on their fathers.[6] Out of custom, says Aristotle, as often as out of illness, women pull out their hair, bite their nails, and eat coal and earth; and males couple with males more from custom than from nature.

CONSCIENCE BORN OF CUSTOM

What we call the laws of conscience come from custom, which keeps us from reasoning about it.

1.23.11 The laws of conscience, which we say are born of nature, are born of custom. Each man, holding in inward veneration the opinions and ways approved and accepted around him, cannot break away from them without remorse, nor apply himself to them without self-approval. When the Cretans of old wished to curse someone, they prayed the gods to entangle him in some bad habit. But the principal effect of custom's power is to seize us and grip us so tightly that it is scarcely in our power to free ourselves from its grasp and return to ourselves, to reflect and reason about its decrees. Indeed, because we suck them in with our first milk, and because the face of the world presents itself in that state to our first sight, it seems that we are born on condition of following that course. And the common notions that we find in credit around us, infused into our soul with our fathers' seed, seem to be the universal and natural ones. Hence it comes about that whatever is off the hinges of custom is believed to be off the hinges of reason—God knows how unreasonably, most of the time.

1.23.12 If, as we who study ourselves have learned to do, everyone who hears a sound maxim looked at once to see how it applies to him personally, each would find that this one is not so much a witty saying as a sharp lash of the whip at the habitual

6 Pindar's line "law is king of all," quoted by Herodotus and Plato, was commonly read as referring to custom.

stupidity of his own judgment. But people take the counsels and precepts of truth as addressed to the public, never to themselves; and instead of laying them up in their conduct, each lays them up in his memory, very foolishly and very uselessly. Let us return to the empire of custom.

1.23.13 Peoples brought up in freedom and self-government consider every other form of government monstrous and against nature. Those accustomed to monarchy do the same. And whatever opportunity for change fortune offers them, even when they have rid themselves, with great difficulty, of a troublesome master, they rush to set up a new one with equal difficulty, because they cannot bring themselves to hate mastery. It is through the agency of custom that each man is content with the place where nature has planted him: the Highlanders of Scotland have no use for Touraine, nor the Scythians for Thessaly.

> Darius asked some Greeks how much they would take to adopt the custom of the Indians and eat their dead fathers (for that was their practice, since they thought they could give them no more favorable burial than within themselves). They answered that they would not do it for anything in the world. But when he also tried to persuade the Indians to give up their way and adopt that of Greece, which was to burn the bodies of their fathers, he horrified them even more. Everyone does likewise, since usage robs us of the true face of things. *Nothing is so great, nothing so marvelous*
> *At first, that all men do not, little by little,*
> *Come to marvel at it less.*[7]

1.23.14 Once, when I had to justify one of our observances, accepted with firm authority far and wide around us, and did not want merely to establish it, as is usually done, by the force of laws and examples, but kept tracing it back to its origin, I found its foundation so weak that I nearly lost my taste for it—I,

7 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things. The story of Darius comes from Herodotus.

who was supposed to confirm it in others. This is the remedy by which Plato undertakes to drive out the unnatural and perverse loves of his time, and which he considers sovereign and principal: namely, that public opinion should condemn them, and that the poets, and everyone, should tell bad stories about them.[8] A remedy by means of which the most beautiful daughters no longer attract their fathers' love, nor the most handsome brothers their sisters' love, since the very fables of Thyestes, Oedipus and Macareus, along with the pleasure of their song, have instilled this useful belief into the tender brains of children. Indeed, chastity is a fine virtue, and its usefulness is well enough known; but to treat it and justify it according to nature is as hard as it is easy to justify it according to usage, laws and precepts. First and universal reasons are difficult to search out.[9] And our masters skim over them, or, not even daring to touch them, throw themselves straight into the sanctuary of custom, where they puff themselves up and triumph cheaply. Those who will not let themselves be drawn away from that original source go even further astray and commit themselves to uncouth opinions—witness Chrysippus, who scattered through so many places in his writings how little account he made of incestuous unions, of whatever kind.

LAWS NOBODY CAN READ

Laws sold and kept in a foreign tongue, and two codes of justice and honor, show custom's absurdity.

1.23.15 Whoever wishes to rid himself of this violent prejudice of custom will find many things accepted with unquestioning resolve that have no support but the gray beard and wrinkles of the usage that goes with them. But once this mask is torn off and things are referred to truth and reason, he will feel his judgment as if turned upside down, and yet set back on a much surer foot-

8 Plato, Laws, Book VIII.

9 Legendary figures guilty of incest: Thyestes with his daughter, Oedipus with his mother, Macareus with his sister Canace.

ing. For example, I shall then ask him what can be stranger than to see a people obliged to follow laws it never understood; bound in all its domestic affairs—marriages, gifts, wills, sales and purchases—by rules it cannot know, since they are neither written nor published in its own language, and whose interpretation and application it must of necessity buy. Not according to the ingenious opinion of Isocrates, who advises his king to make the trade and dealings of his subjects free, unhampered and profitable, and their disputes and quarrels costly, burdened with heavy taxes; but according to a monstrous opinion: to make reason itself an article of trade and give laws the currency of merchandise. I am grateful to fortune that, as our historians say, it was a Gascon gentleman from my own region who first opposed Charlemagne when he wanted to give us Latin and imperial laws.[10]

1.23.16 What is more shocking than to see a nation where, by lawful custom, the office of judge is sold and judgments are paid for in ready cash; where justice is lawfully refused to anyone who has not the means to pay for it; and where this merchandise has such credit that there forms within the state a fourth estate, of people who handle lawsuits, to join the three ancient ones of the Church, the Nobility and the People;[11] an estate which, having charge of the laws and sovereign authority over property and lives, forms a body separate from that of the nobility; with the result that there are two sets of laws, those of honor and those of justice, in many things quite contrary? The former condemn a man who puts up with being called a liar as severely as the latter condemn one who takes revenge for it: by the code of arms, a man who swallows an insult is stripped of honor and nobility, and by civil duty, a man who avenges it incurs capital punishment. He who goes to the law for satisfaction for an offense to his honor dishonors himself; and he who does not is

10 Isocrates (436–338 BC), Athenian orator, in his address To Nicocles, king of Salamis in Cyprus.

11 The sale of judicial offices was established practice in sixteenth-century France; Montaigne himself had sat as a magistrate in the Bordeaux Parlement.

punished and chastised by the law. And of these two so different parts, which nevertheless answer to a single head, the one has charge of peace, the other of war; the one has gain for its share, the other honor; the one knowledge, the other virtue; the one words, the other action; the one justice, the other valor; the one reason, the other force; the one the long robe, the other the short.[12]

1.23.17 As for indifferent things such as clothes, if anyone wants to bring them back to their true purpose, which is the service and comfort of the body, on which their original grace and seemliness depend, then for the most fantastic I think one could imagine, I will offer him, among others, our square caps; that long tail of pleated velvet hanging from our women's heads, with its motley trappings; and that vain and useless model of a member we cannot even decently name, which we nevertheless show off and parade in public.[13]

1.23.18 These considerations do not, however, turn a man of understanding away from following the common style. On the contrary, it seems to me that all eccentric and peculiar ways spring from folly or ambitious affectation rather than from true reason; and that the wise man should inwardly withdraw his soul from the crowd and keep it free and able to judge things freely, but outwardly he should follow the accepted fashions and forms entirely. Public society has no business with our thoughts; but the rest—our actions, our labor, our fortunes and our life—we must lend and surrender to its service and to common opinion, as the good and great Socrates refused to save his life by disobeying the magistrate, even a very unjust and very iniquitous magistrate. For it is the rule of rules and the universal law of laws that each should observe those of the place where he is: *It is good to obey the laws of one's country.*[14]

12 The long robe was worn by magistrates and lawyers; the short robe stands for the nobility of the sword.

13 The codpiece.

14 Socrates' refusal to escape his death sentence is told in Plato's Crito; the Greek line comes from the ancient collections of verse maxims attributed to Menander.

AGAINST CHANGING ACCEPTED LAWS

Changing a received law usually does more harm than good; the novelty of our time proves it.

1.23.19 Here is one of another vintage. It is very doubtful whether there can be such evident profit in changing an accepted law, whatever it may be, as there is harm in disturbing it; for a government is like a building made of various parts joined together so closely that it is impossible to shake one without the whole structure feeling it. The lawgiver of the Thurians decreed that anyone who wanted either to abolish one of the old laws or to establish a new one should come before the people with a rope around his neck, so that if the novelty was not approved by everyone, he could be strangled on the spot. And the lawgiver of Sparta spent his life extracting from his citizens a firm promise not to break any of his ordinances.[15] The ephor who so roughly cut the two strings that Phrynis had added to music does not trouble himself whether music is the better for them or its harmonies the fuller: it is enough for him, to condemn them, that they are a change from the old way. That is what the rusty sword of the court of justice at Marseille signified.[16]

1.23.20 I am sick of novelty, whatever face it wears, and with reason, for I have seen its very harmful effects. The one that has been oppressing us for so many years has not achieved everything; but one may plausibly say that it has, incidentally, produced and engendered everything—even the evils and ruins that have since been wrought without it and against it. It has only itself to blame: *Alas, I suffer wounds made by my own arrows!* Those who set a state in motion are usually the first to be swallowed up in its ruin. The fruits of disorder seldom go to the man who stirred it up; he beats and muddies the water for other fish-

15 Charondas was the lawgiver of Thurii in southern Italy; Lycurgus, the lawgiver of Sparta.

16 Phrynis was a fifth-century BC lyre player; Marseille was said to have used the same rusty sword for executions since its founding, as a sign of unchanging law.

ermen.[17] Since the bond and fabric of this monarchy, this great building, has been loosened and dissolved by it, especially in its old age, it lies as open as anyone could wish to similar injuries. Royal majesty comes down from the summit to the middle with more difficulty than it plunges from the middle to the bottom. But if the inventors do more harm, the imitators are more wicked, for rushing into examples whose horror and harm they have themselves felt and punished. And if there is any degree of honor even in wrongdoing, the imitators owe the others the glory of invention and the courage of the first attempt. All kinds of new disorder happily draw from this first and fertile source the models and patterns for disturbing our state. In our very laws, made to remedy this first evil, one reads the apprenticeship and the excuse for every kind of wicked enterprise. And what Thucydides says of the civil wars of his time happens to us: that to favor public vices, people baptized them with new and gentler words to excuse them, debasing and softening their true names. And yet it is all to reform our consciences and our beliefs: *the pretext is honorable.*[18]

1.23.21 But the best pretext for novelty is very dangerous. *So true is it that no change from ancient ways deserves approval.* Indeed, it seems to me, to speak frankly, that there is great self-love and presumption in valuing one's opinions so highly that, to establish them, one must overturn public peace and bring in so many inevitable evils and so horrible a corruption of morals as civil wars and changes of state bring with them, in a matter of such weight—and bring them into one's own country. Is it not poor management to promote so many certain and known vices in order to combat disputed and debatable errors? Is there any worse kind of vice than those that offend one's own conscience and natural knowledge?[19] The Senate dared to offer this evasion by way of payment in its dispute with the people over the min-

17 Ovid, Heroides. The novelty is the Protestant Reformation and the Wars of Religion that followed.
18 Terence, The Girl from Andros.
19 Livy, History of Rome.

istry of their religion: *That this concerned the gods more than themselves; the gods would see to it that their rites were not profaned.* This agrees with the oracle's answer to the people of Delphi in the Median War, when they feared the Persian invasion. They asked the god what they should do with the sacred treasures of his temple—hide them or carry them away. He answered that they should move nothing and look after themselves: he was quite able to provide for what belonged to him.[20]

1.23.22 The Christian religion has all the marks of supreme justice and usefulness, but none more evident than its strict injunction to obey the magistrate and uphold governments. What a marvelous example of this divine wisdom has left us! To establish the salvation of the human race and carry through its glorious victory over death and sin, it chose to act only at the mercy of our political order, and submitted the progress and conduct of so lofty and so saving an effect to the blindness and injustice of our customs and practices—letting the innocent blood of so many of its chosen favorites flow, and suffering many long years to be lost in ripening this priceless fruit. There is a great difference between the case of a man who follows the forms and laws of his country and that of one who undertakes to dictate to them and change them. The first pleads as his excuse simplicity, obedience and example; whatever he does cannot be malice; at worst it is misfortune. *For who is there who is not moved by antiquity attested and sealed by the most illustrious monuments?* Besides, as Isocrates says, deficiency has more in common with moderation than excess has. The other is in a much harder position. For whoever takes it upon himself to choose and change usurps the authority to judge, and must be sure that he sees the fault in what he drives out and the good in what he brings in.[21]

1.23.23 This very commonplace consideration has kept me firmly in my seat, and held even my youth, which was more reckless, in check: not to load my shoulders with so heavy a bur-

20 Livy, History of Rome; the Median War is the Persian invasion of Greece in 480 BC.

21 Cicero, On Divination.

den as making myself answerable for a science of such importance, and not to dare in this one what, in sound judgment, I could not dare in the easiest of those I had been taught, where rashness of judgment does no harm. For it seems to me very unjust to want to subject public and unchanging institutions and observances to the instability of a private fancy (private reason has only a private jurisdiction), and to attempt against divine laws what no government would tolerate against civil ones. Although human reason has much more to do with civil laws, they are still the supreme judges of their judges; and the greatest ability serves to explain and extend their accepted use, not to divert it or make innovations. If divine providence has sometimes passed over the rules to which it has necessarily bound us, it is not in order to release us from them. These are strokes of its divine hand, which we must not imitate but admire; extraordinary examples, marks of an express and particular sanction, of the same kind as the miracles it offers us as testimony to its omnipotence, beyond our orders and our powers; which it is folly and impiety to try to reproduce, and which we must not follow but contemplate with astonishment. They are acts proper to its role, not to ours. Cotta declares very aptly: *When it is a question of religion, I follow Tiberius Coruncanius, Publius Scipio and Publius Scaevola, chief pontiffs, not Zeno, Cleanthes or Chrysippus.*[22]

1.23.24 God knows, in our present quarrel, where there are a hundred articles to remove and restore—great and deep articles—how many can boast of having precisely grasped the reasons and foundations of either side. It is a number, if it is a number at all, that would hardly be able to trouble us. But all this other crowd—where is it going? Under what banner does it break ranks? Their medicine has fared like other weak and badly administered remedies: the humors it meant to purge from us it has heated, inflamed and soured by the conflict, and it has stayed in our body all the same. It was too weak to purge us, and

22 Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods, where Cotta defends traditional Roman religion against the Stoic philosophers.

meanwhile it has weakened us, so that we cannot void it either, and get nothing from its action but long, intestine pains.

WHEN NECESSITY OVERRIDES THE LAW

In extreme crises it may be wiser to bend the laws than to let violence trample them.

1.23.25 Still, fortune, always keeping its authority above our reasonings, sometimes confronts us with a necessity so urgent that the laws must make some room for it. And when one is resisting the growth of an innovation that is forcing its way in by violence, to keep oneself bridled and bound by rules in everything and everywhere against those who have free rein—to whom anything is permissible that can advance their design, and who have no law or order but to follow their own advantage—is a dangerous obligation and an unequal contest. *Trust gives the treacherous the opportunity to do harm.* For the ordinary discipline of a state in good health does not provide for these extraordinary accidents: it presupposes a body that holds together in its principal members and functions, and a common consent to observe and obey it. The lawful pace is cold, heavy and constrained, and it is not made to hold its own against a licentious and unbridled one.[23]

1.23.26 We know that those two great men, Octavius and Cato, are still reproached—in the civil wars, the one of Sulla, the other of Caesar—for having let their country suffer every extremity rather than help it at the expense of its laws and change anything. For in truth, in these final necessities, where there is nothing left to hold on to, it would perhaps be wiser to bow one's head and yield a little to the blow than, by striving beyond what is possible to concede nothing, to give violence occasion to trample everything underfoot; and it would be better to make the laws will what they can do, since they cannot do what they

23 Seneca, Oedipus.

will.[24] So did the man who ordered the laws to sleep for twenty-four hours, and the one who moved a day of the calendar just that once, and that other who made the month of June into a second May. Even the Spartans, such scrupulous observers of their country's ordinances, being pressed on one side by their law, which forbade electing the same man admiral twice, and on the other by their affairs, which absolutely required that Lysander take that office again, did indeed make one Aracus admiral—but Lysander superintendent of the navy.[25] And with the same subtlety, when one of their ambassadors was sent to the Athenians to obtain the change of some ordinance, and Pericles objected that it was forbidden to take down the tablet on which a law had once been set up, the ambassador advised him simply to turn it around, since that was not forbidden. This is what Plutarch praises in Philopoemen: that, being born to command, he knew how to command not only according to the laws but the laws themselves, when public necessity required it.[26]

24 Gnaeus Octavius, consul in 87 BC, opponent of Marius and Cinna; Cato the Younger, opponent of Caesar.
25 Agesilaus let the Spartan laws "sleep" for a day after the defeat at Leuctra; Alexander the Great altered the calendar before a battle. Both stories are in Plutarch.
26 Philopoemen (c. 253–183 BC), general of the Achaean League.

I.24 Different Outcomes of the Same Plan

Diuers euenemens de mesme Conseil
From the Duke of Guise's mercy to a would-be assassin, Montaigne weighs how the same counsel yields different results by fortune.

1.24.1 Jacques Amyot, Grand Almoner of France, once told me this story to the honor of one of our princes (and ours he was, on very good grounds, even though his family came from abroad). During our first troubles, at the siege of Rouen, this prince was warned by the Queen Mother of a plot against his life. Her letters told him in detail who was to carry it out: a gentleman from Anjou or Maine, who at that time regularly frequented the prince's household for that very purpose. He told no one of this warning. But the next day, while walking on Mont Sainte-Catherine, from which our guns were firing on Rouen (for this was when we were besieging it), with the said Lord Grand Almoner and another bishop at his side, he caught sight of this gentleman, who had been pointed out to him, and had him called over.[1] When the man came before him, the prince saw him already turning pale and trembling at the alarms of his conscience, and spoke to him thus: "Monsieur de So-and-so, you can well guess what I want with you, and your face shows it. You have nothing to hide from me. I am so fully informed of your business that you would only make your position worse by trying to cover it up. You know very well such and such a thing"

1 Jacques Amyot (1513–1593) was the translator of Plutarch. The prince is François, Duke of Guise, of the House of Lorraine; Rouen was besieged in 1562, in the first War of Religion, and the Queen Mother was Catherine de' Medici.

(these were the ins and outs of the most secret parts of the plot), "so do not fail, on your life, to confess to me the whole truth of this scheme." When this poor man found himself caught and convicted (for the whole thing had been revealed to the Queen by one of the accomplices), there was nothing left for him but to clasp his hands and beg the prince's pardon and mercy. He tried to throw himself at the prince's feet, but the prince prevented him and went on: "Come here. Have I ever done you any harm? Have I offended anyone of your family out of private hatred? I have not known you three weeks. What reason could have moved you to undertake my death?" The gentleman answered in a trembling voice that he had no private reason of his own. He had acted for the general cause of his party, and certain people had persuaded him that it would be a deed full of piety to root out, by whatever means, so powerful an enemy of their religion. "Well," the prince went on, "I want to show you how much gentler the religion I hold is than the one you profess. Yours has counseled you to kill me without hearing me, though you had received no offense from me. Mine commands me to pardon you, convicted as you are of having tried to kill me without reason. Go away, get out, and let me not see you here again. And if you are wise, from now on take advisers in your undertakings who are better men than those."

AUGUSTUS AND CINNA

Augustus pardons the conspirator Cinna on Livia's advice and is never plotted against again.

1.24.2 The Emperor Augustus, while he was in Gaul, received definite warning of a conspiracy that Lucius Cinna was hatching against him. He resolved to take revenge, and for that purpose summoned a council of his friends for the next day. But he spent the night in between in great anxiety, considering that he would have to put to death a young man of good family, a nephew of the great Pompey. And in his lamenting he turned over many different arguments. "What then," he said, "shall it be said that I

am to remain in fear and alarm, and let my murderer stroll about meanwhile at his ease? Shall he go scot-free, after striking at this head of mine, which I have brought safe through so many civil wars, so many battles on sea and land?[2] And after I have established universal peace in the world, shall he be acquitted, having planned not merely to murder me but to sacrifice me?" For the conspirators had planned to kill him while he was performing a sacrifice. After that he kept quiet for some time, then began again in a louder voice and turned on himself: "Why do you live, if it matters to so many people that you should die? Will there be no end to your acts of vengeance and your cruelties? Is your life worth so much damage being done to preserve it?" His wife Livia, sensing his anguish, spoke to him: "And will a woman's advice be heard in this?" she said. "Do what doctors do: when the usual remedies are of no use, they try the opposite ones. Up to now you have gained nothing by severity. Lepidus has followed Salvidienus, Murena Lepidus, Caepio Murena, Egnatius Caepio. Begin to test how gentleness and clemency will turn out for you. Cinna is convicted: pardon him. He will no longer be able to harm you, and he will add to your glory." Augustus was very glad to have found an advocate who shared his temperament. He thanked his wife, called off the friends he had summoned to the council, and ordered Cinna to be brought to him alone. He sent everyone out of his room, had a seat given to Cinna, and spoke to him in this way: "First of all, Cinna, I ask you for a quiet hearing. Do not interrupt me; I will give you time and leisure to answer. You know, Cinna, that when I took you in the camp of my enemies, when you had not merely become my enemy but were born one, I saved you. I put all your property back into your hands, and in the end I have made you so well off and so comfortable that the victors envy the lot of the vanquished. You asked me for the office of priest, and I granted it to you, after refusing it to others whose fathers had always fought on my side. After I had put you so deeply in my debt, you have undertaken to kill me." At this Cinna cried out that he was far

2 Montaigne follows Seneca, On Clemency I.9.

from any such wicked thought. “You are not keeping your promise, Cinna,” Augustus went on. “You assured me that I would not be interrupted. Yes, you have undertaken to kill me, in such a place, on such a day, in such company, and in such a manner.” And seeing him stunned by this news and silent, no longer to keep his bargain of holding his tongue but under the pressure of his conscience, he added: “Why are you doing it? Is it to be emperor? Truly the commonwealth is in a very bad way if I am the only one who stands between you and the Empire. You cannot even defend your own house, and you recently lost a lawsuit through the influence of a mere freedman. What? Have you no means or power for anything except attacking Caesar? I will step aside, if I am the only one standing in the way of your hopes. Do you think that Paulus, that Fabius, that the Cossi and the Servilii will put up with you? Or so great a crowd of nobles, noble not only in name but who honor their nobility by their virtue?” After much more talk, for he spoke to him for more than two full hours, he said: “Now go. I give you your life, Cinna, as a traitor and a parricide, as I once gave it to you as an enemy. Let friendship begin between us from this day. Let us see which of us two acts in better faith: I in giving you your life, or you in receiving it.” And with that he parted from him. Some time later he gave him the consulship, complaining that Cinna had not dared to ask him for it. From then on Cinna was a close friend to him, and made him the sole heir to his property. Now after this incident, which befell Augustus in the fortieth year of his age, there was never again any conspiracy or attempt against him, and he received a just reward for his clemency. But it did not turn out the same for our prince. His gentleness could not save him from falling afterward into the snares of a similar treachery. So vain and frivolous a thing is human prudence. Through all our plans, our counsels and our precautions, Fortune always keeps possession of the outcome.[3]

3 The Duke of Guise was assassinated by the Huguenot Poltrot de Méré at the siege of Orléans in 1563.

FORTUNE IN ART, WAR AND COUNSEL

Chance has a large share in medicine, poetry, painting and war, whatever our wisdom plans.

1.24.3 We call doctors lucky when they achieve some good result. It is as if theirs were the only art that could not stand on its own, with foundations too frail to rest on its own strength, and as if it were the only one that needs Fortune to lend a hand in its operations. I believe all the worst or all the best of it that anyone likes, for we have, thank God, no dealings with each other. I am the opposite of other people. I always despise medicine, but when I am ill, instead of coming to terms with it, I begin to hate and fear it as well. And to those who urge me to take medicine, I answer that they should at least wait until I have recovered my strength and health, so that I will be better able to withstand the force and the risk of their potion. I leave it to nature, and assume that she has provided herself with teeth and claws to defend herself from the assaults that come upon her, and to maintain this structure whose dissolution she shuns. When she is locked in close combat with the disease, I am afraid that people, instead of going to her aid, may aid her adversary, and load her with fresh troubles.

1.24.4 Now I say that Fortune has a large share not only in medicine but in many arts that are more certain. Take the flights of poetry that carry their author away and transport him out of himself. Why should we not attribute them to his good luck? He himself confesses that they surpass his ability and his powers, acknowledges that they come from somewhere other than himself, and admits that they are not at all in his control. In the same way, orators do not claim to control those extraordinary impulses and stirrings that drive them beyond what they intended. It is the same in painting. Strokes sometimes escape from the painter's hand that surpass his conception and his knowledge, fill him with wonder, and stun him. But Fortune shows still more plainly the share she has in all these works by the

graces and beauties found in them not only without the craftsman's intention but even without his knowledge. A capable reader often discovers in other people's writings perfections other than those the author put there or perceived, and lends them richer meanings and aspects.

1.24.5 As for military enterprises, everyone sees how large a share Fortune has in them. Even in our counsels and deliberations there must certainly be some chance and luck mixed in, for all that our wisdom can do is not much. The keener and quicker it is, the more weakness it finds in itself, and the more it distrusts itself. I am of Sulla's opinion. When I look closely at the most glorious exploits of war, I see, or so it seems to me, that those who conduct them use deliberation and counsel only for form's sake. They leave the better part of the enterprise to Fortune, and, trusting in her help, they go at every turn beyond the limits of all reasoning. Chance elations and strange frenzies come upon them in the midst of their deliberations. Most often these drive them to take the course that seems least well-founded, and swell their courage beyond reason.[4] Hence many great captains of antiquity, to give credit to these rash decisions, told their men that they had been prompted to them by some inspiration, some sign or omen.

1.24.6 We are uncertain and perplexed, because we cannot see and choose what is most advantageous, given the difficulties raised by the various accidents and circumstances of each thing. That is why, in my opinion, the surest course, even if no other consideration drew us to it, is to fall back on the side where there is more honor and justice. And since we are in doubt about the shortest road, we should always keep to the straight one. In the two examples I have just put forward, there is no doubt that it was finer and more generous for the man who had received the offense to pardon it than to do otherwise. If things went badly for the first of them, we must not blame his good intention. No one knows whether, had he taken the opposite

4 Sulla attributed his successes to Fortune rather than to his own planning (Plutarch, Life of Sulla).

course, he would have escaped the end to which his destiny called him. And in any case he would have lost the glory of such humanity.

TRUST AGAINST CONSPIRACIES

Suspicion torments princes; open trust, as shown by Alexander and Caesar, wins over enemies.

1.24.7 We see in the histories many people in this fear, and most of them chose to forestall the conspiracies made against them by vengeance and punishments. But I see very few whom this remedy has served: witness so many Roman emperors. Anyone who finds himself in this danger should not put much hope either in his strength or in his vigilance. For how hard is it to protect oneself from an enemy hidden behind the face of the most obliging friend we have? And to know the inner wishes and thoughts of those who attend us? He may employ foreign nations as his guard and always be surrounded by a hedge of armed men, but in vain: whoever holds his own life in contempt will always make himself master of another's. And then this continual suspicion, which makes the prince doubt everyone, must be an extraordinary torment to him. So Dion, when he was warned that Callippus was looking for ways to have him killed, never had the heart to look into it. He said he would rather die than live in the misery of having to guard himself not only against his enemies but also against his friends.[5] Alexander showed this much more vividly in action, and more boldly. He was warned by a letter from Parmenio that Philip, his dearest physician, had been bribed with Darius's money to poison him. At the same moment that he handed the letter to Philip to read, he drank down the potion Philip had brought him. Was this not to declare that if his friends wanted to kill him, he consented to their being able to do it? This prince is the supreme model of daring deeds. But I do not know whether there is any act in his life that shows

5 Dion, ruler of Syracuse, was murdered at the instigation of his associate Callippus in 354 BC.

more firmness than this one, or a beauty so illustrious in so many aspects.

1.24.8 Those who preach such watchful distrust to princes, under color of preaching their safety, are preaching their ruin and their shame. Nothing noble is done without risk. I know one prince, of a very martial and enterprising temperament by nature, whose good fortune is spoiled every day by advice of this kind: that he should keep close among his own people, listen to no reconciliation with his old enemies, keep to himself, and never trust himself to stronger hands, whatever promise is made to him and whatever advantage he sees in it. I know another who has unexpectedly advanced his fortune by taking the very opposite advice.

1.24.9 The boldness whose glory they seek so eagerly shows itself, when need be, as magnificently in a doublet as in armor, in a study as in a camp, with the arm hanging down as with the arm raised. Prudence so delicate and circumspect is the mortal enemy of lofty deeds. To win over Syphax, Scipio was able to leave his army and abandon Spain, still unsettled under his new conquest, and cross to Africa in two plain ships. There he entrusted himself, on enemy soil, to the power of a barbarian king and to a good faith he did not know, without obligation, without hostage, on the sole security of the greatness of his own courage, of his good fortune, and of the promise of his high hopes.[6] *Trust shown usually binds the other's trust in return.* For an ambitious and famous life, one must on the contrary give little credit to suspicions and keep them on a short rein. Fear and distrust draw offense and invite it. The most distrustful of our kings set his affairs in order chiefly by voluntarily abandoning and entrusting his life and his liberty into the hands of his enemies. He showed that he had complete trust in them, so that they would come to trust him.[7]

6 Syphax was a king of Numidia; Scipio's visit to him took place in 206 BC.

> When his legions mutinied and took up arms against him, Caesar set against them nothing but the authority of his face and the pride of his words. He trusted so much in himself and his fortune that he was not afraid to give himself up and entrust himself to a seditious and rebellious army: *He stood, upheld on a mound of turf, his face unafraid, and earned the right to be feared by fearing nothing.*[8]

1.24.10 But it is quite true that this strong assurance can be shown whole and natural only by those who are not frightened by the thought of death and of the worst that can happen after all. To display it still trembling, doubtful and uncertain, in the service of an important reconciliation, is to do nothing worthwhile. It is an excellent way to win the heart and will of another to go and submit to him and trust him, provided it is done freely, without the constraint of any necessity, and on condition that one brings to it a pure and clear trust, with a brow at least free of all misgiving. In my childhood I saw a gentleman who was in command of a great city hard pressed by the uprising of a furious populace.[9] To put out this first spark of trouble, he decided to leave a very safe place where he was and go out to this mutinous mob. It went badly for him, and he was miserably killed there. But it does not seem to me that his mistake lay so much in having gone out, as people commonly hold against his memory, as in having taken a path of submission and softness. He tried to lull that rage to sleep by following rather than guiding, and by pleading rather than admonishing. I think that a gracious severity, with a soldierly command full of assurance and confidence, befitting his rank and the dignity of his office, would have served him better, or at least with more honor and propriety. Nothing is less to be hoped for from this monster, once it is so

7 The Latin is from Livy, XXII.22. The king is Louis XI, who put himself in the power of Charles the Bold at Péronne in 1468.
8 Lucan, Pharsalia V.
9 Tristan de Moneins, the king's lieutenant, was killed at Bordeaux in the salt-tax revolt of 1548.

stirred up, than humanity and gentleness; it will far more readily receive reverence and fear. I would also reproach him for this. He had taken a resolution, brave rather than rash to my mind, to throw himself, weak and in his doublet, into that stormy sea of maddened men; he ought to have seen it through to the end and not abandoned the role. Instead, once he had seen the danger up close, his nerve failed him. He then changed the submissive and flattering bearing he had adopted into a frightened one, loading his voice and his eyes with dismay and remorse. By trying to scuttle off like a rabbit and slip away, he inflamed them and drew them upon himself.

1.24.11 A general review of various troops under arms was being planned. (That is the place for secret acts of vengeance, and there is none where they can be carried out in greater safety.) There were public and notorious signs that things did not bode well for certain persons whose principal and necessary duty it was to inspect the troops. Various counsels were put forward, as happens in a difficult matter with much weight and many consequences.[10] Mine was that above all we should avoid giving any sign of this suspicion, and should be there and mingle among the ranks with heads high and faces open. Instead of cutting anything out, which was what the other opinions chiefly aimed at, the captains should on the contrary be asked to tell the soldiers to make their salvos fine and lively in honor of the onlookers, and not to spare their powder. This served as a mark of favor toward those suspect troops, and from then on bred a mutual and useful confidence.

1.24.12 The way Julius Caesar took in this matter is, I find, the finest that can be taken. First he tried by clemency to make himself loved even by his enemies. When conspiracies were revealed to him, he was content simply to declare that he had been warned of them. That done, he took a very noble resolve: to await, without fear or anxiety, whatever might come of it, abandoning himself and committing himself to the keeping of

10 This probably took place at Bordeaux in 1585, when Montaigne was mayor.

the gods and of Fortune. For that was certainly the state he was in when he was killed.

1.24.13 A stranger had announced everywhere that, if Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse, would give him a good sum of money, he could teach him a way to detect and discover with complete certainty the plots his subjects might devise against him. Dionysius heard of it and had him summoned, to learn about an art so necessary to his preservation. The stranger told him that there was no other art than this: he should have a talent paid out to him and boast of having learned a remarkable secret from him. Dionysius found this a good device and had six hundred crowns counted out to him. It was not likely that he would have given so large a sum to an unknown man except as reward for some very useful teaching, and this reputation served to keep his enemies in fear. So princes wisely make public the warnings they receive of plots laid against their lives, to make people believe that they are well informed and that nothing can be undertaken without their getting wind of it. The Duke of Athens committed many follies in establishing his new tyranny over Florence, but this was the most notable. He received the first warning of the conspiracies that people was hatching against him from Matteo di Morozzo, one of the accomplices; and he had him put to death, to suppress the warning and to keep anyone from feeling that there was discontent with his rule in the city.[11]

1.24.14 I remember once reading the story of a certain Roman, a man of rank, who, fleeing the tyranny of the Triumvirate, had escaped a thousand times from the hands of his pursuers by the cleverness of his devices. One day a troop of horsemen charged with capturing him passed right by a thicket where he was crouching, and just missed discovering him. But at that point he considered the pain and difficulties he had already endured for so long to escape the continual, close searches being made for him everywhere, the little pleasure he could hope for from such a life, and how much better it would be to take the step once and

11 Walter of Brienne, titular Duke of Athens, ruled Florence in 1342–1343 until he was driven out.

for all than to remain forever in such terror. So he called them back himself and betrayed his hiding place to them, giving himself up willingly to their cruelty, to relieve both them and himself of further trouble. To call for the enemy's hands is a rather bold course; yet I believe it would still be better to take it than to remain in the continual fever of a danger for which there is no remedy. But since the precautions one can take are full of anxiety and uncertainty, it is better to prepare oneself with fine assurance for whatever may come of it, and to draw some consolation from the fact that one is not sure it will happen.

I.25 Of Pedantry

Du Pedantisme

Learned pedants stuff their memories but leave their judgment empty; true learning should make us wiser and better.

1.25.1 In my childhood I was often vexed to see the pedant always cast as the clown in Italian comedies, and the title "magister" hardly more honorable among us. For since I had been put in the charge of such men, what less could I do than be jealous of their reputation? I did try to excuse them by the natural incompatibility between ordinary people and persons rare and excellent in judgment and learning, since the two go entirely opposite ways. But here my Latin failed me: the finest gentlemen were the very ones who held them most in contempt. Witness our good du Bellay: *But above all I hate pedantic learning.* And this custom is ancient, for Plutarch says that "Greek" and "scholar" were words of reproach and contempt among the Romans. Since then, with age, I have found that people had very good reason, and that *the most great clerks are not the most great wise men.*[1] But how it can happen that a soul rich in the knowledge of so many things does not become livelier and more awake for it, and that a coarse and common mind can lodge within itself, without being improved, the reasonings and judgments of the most excellent minds the world has produced, I am still in doubt. "To take in so many other people's brains, so strong and so great," a young lady, the first of our princesses, once said to me of someone, "his own must be crushed, cramped and shrunk to

1 Joachim du Bellay, Regrets, sonnet 68. The Latin is a deliberately ungrammatical proverb of the schools.

make room for the others." I would readily say that just as plants are stifled by too much moisture and lamps by too much oil, so is the action of the mind by too much study and matter. Occupied and encumbered with a great diversity of things, it would lose the means of disentangling itself, and this load would keep it bent and stooping. But it is otherwise, for our soul expands the more it is filled. And in the examples of olden times we see quite the reverse: men capable in the handling of public affairs, great captains and great counselors in affairs of state, were at the same time very learned.

1.25.2 As for the philosophers who withdrew from all public occupation, it is true that they too were sometimes scorned by the comic license of their time, their opinions and ways making them ridiculous. Would you make them judges of the rights of a lawsuit, or of a man's actions? They are just the men for it! They are still inquiring whether there is life, whether there is motion, whether man is anything other than an ox; what acting and suffering are; what sort of beasts law and justice are. Do they speak of the magistrate, or to him? It is with an irreverent and uncivil freedom. Do they hear a prince or a king praised? To them he is a shepherd, idle as a shepherd, busy squeezing and shearing his flock, only far more roughly. Do you think a man greater for owning two thousand acres of land? They laugh at it, used as they are to embracing the whole world as their possession. Do you boast of your nobility because you can count seven rich ancestors? They think little of you, for not grasping the universal picture of nature, and how many forebears each of us has had: rich, poor, kings, servants, Greeks, barbarians. And were you the fiftieth descendant of Hercules, they would think you vain for making much of this gift of Fortune. So the common people disdained them, as ignorant of the first and most ordinary things, and as presumptuous and insolent.

1.25.3 But this Platonic portrait is far removed from the one that fits our men. Those philosophers were envied as being above the common way, as despising public actions, as having set up a private and inimitable life, ruled by certain lofty and unusual

principles. These men of ours are disdained as being beneath the common way, as incapable of public office, as dragging out a low and vile life and low and vile habits in the wake of the common people. *I hate men who are idle in deed and philosophical in speech.*[2]

1.25.4 As for those philosophers, I say, great as they were in learning, they were still greater in every kind of action. They say of that geometer of Syracuse that, when he was diverted from his contemplation to put some of it into practice in the defense of his country, he at once set going terrifying engines and effects surpassing all human belief. Yet he himself disdained all this handiwork of his, thinking that he had thereby debased the dignity of his art, of which these works were only the apprenticeship and the plaything.[3] So too with them: whenever they were put to the test of action, they were seen to fly on so lofty a wing that it was plain their hearts and souls had been wonderfully enlarged and enriched by the understanding of things. But some, seeing the seat of political government seized by incapable men, drew back from it. The man who asked Crates how long one must go on philosophizing received this answer: "Until it is no longer donkey drivers who lead our armies." Heraclitus resigned the kingship to his brother. And to the Ephesians, who reproached him for spending his time playing with the children in front of the temple, he said: "Is it not better to do this than to govern affairs in your company?" Others, with their imagination lodged above Fortune and the world, found the seats of justice, and even the thrones of kings, low and vile. And Empedocles refused the kingship that the people of Agrigentum offered him. When Thales once criticized the concern with household management and getting rich, he was reproached with doing it like the fox, because he could not manage it himself. He took a fancy, as a pastime, to show the contrary by experiment. Lowering his

2 The portrait is from Plato's Theaetetus. The Latin line is from Pacuvius, quoted by Aulus Gellius.

3 Archimedes, who devised engines against the Roman siege of Syracuse in 213–212 BC.

knowledge for once to the service of profit and gain, he set up a business that in one year brought in such riches that the most experienced in that trade could hardly have made as much in their whole lives. Aristotle reports that some people called both Thales and Anaxagoras, and others like them, wise but not prudent, for not caring enough about the more useful things. Besides the fact that I do not quite digest this distinction between words, it is no excuse for the men I am speaking of. Seeing the low and needy fortune they are content with, we would rather have reason to declare both: that they are neither wise nor prudent.

LEARNING WITHOUT JUDGMENT

Schools fill the memory and leave understanding empty; pedants make their pupils worse.

1.25.5 I give up this first reason, and I think it better to say that this evil comes from their bad way of going about the sciences. Given the way we are taught, it is no wonder if neither pupils nor masters become any more able, though they do become more learned. Indeed, all the care and expense of our fathers aims only at furnishing our heads with knowledge; of judgment and virtue, very little news. Cry out to our people about one passerby, "Oh, what a learned man!" and about another, "Oh, what a good man!" They will not fail to turn their eyes and their respect toward the first. There ought to be a third crier: "Oh, what blockheads!"

1.25.6 We readily ask, "Does he know Greek or Latin? Does he write in verse or in prose?" But whether he has become better or wiser, which was the main thing, is what gets left behind. We ought to have asked who is better learned, not who is more learned.

1.25.7 We work only to fill the memory, and leave the understanding and the conscience empty. Birds sometimes go in search of grain and carry it in their beaks without tasting it, to feed it to their young. In just the same way our pedants go pilfer-

ing knowledge from books and lodge it only on the tips of their lips, merely to spit it out again and scatter it to the wind. It is remarkable how neatly this folly fits my own case. Is not what I am doing in most of this book the very same thing? I go about cadging from books, here and there, the sayings that please me. I do not do it to keep them, for I have no storehouse, but to carry them over into this book, where, to tell the truth, they are no more mine than they were in their first place. We are learned, I believe, only in present knowledge, not in past knowledge, any more than in future. But what is worse, their pupils and their little ones do not feed or nourish themselves on it either. Instead it passes from hand to hand for this sole purpose: to make a show of it, to entertain others with it, and to tell tales with it, like a worthless coin of no other use or employment than counting and casting accounts. They have learned to speak with others, not with themselves.[4] What matters is not speaking but steering. *Nature, to show that there is nothing uncouth in what she guides, often brings forth, in nations less cultivated by art, productions of the mind that rival the most artful ones. Apropos of my subject, how delicate is the Gascon proverb drawn from a reed pipe:* Bouha prou bouha, mas à remuda lous dits qu'em: "Blow away, blow all you like, but when it comes to moving the fingers, there we are stuck." We know how to say, "Cicero says this," "These are Plato's morals," "These are the very words of Aristotle." But what do we ourselves say? What do we do? What do we judge? A parrot could say as much.[5]

1.25.8 This way of doing things reminds me of that rich Roman who had taken care, at very great expense, to procure men capable in every kind of learning. He kept them continually around him, so that whenever an occasion arose among his friends to speak of one thing or another, they might fill in for him and be all ready to supply him, one with a speech, another with a line of Homer, each in his own field. And he thought this knowledge was his because it was in the heads of his people. So too do those

4 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations V.
5 The Latin is from Seneca, Letters 108.

whose ability resides in their sumptuous libraries.[6] I know one man who, when I ask him what he knows, asks me for a book so that he can show me. He would not dare tell me that he has a mangy backside without going at once to look up in his lexicon what "mangy" is and what "backside" is.

1.25.9 We take the opinions and knowledge of others into our keeping, and that is all. We must make them our own. We are just like the man who, needing fire, went to fetch some from his neighbor's, found a fine big one there, and stayed there warming himself, without remembering to bring any back home. What good does it do us to have our bellies full of food if it is not digested, if it is not transformed into us, if it does not make us bigger and stronger? Do we think that Lucullus, whom letters shaped into so great a captain without experience, took them in our way? We lean so heavily on others' arms that we destroy our own strength.[7] Do I want to arm myself against the fear of death? I do it at Seneca's expense. Do I want to draw consolation for myself or for another? I borrow it from Cicero. I would have drawn it from myself if I had been trained to. I do not like this borrowed, begged ability. Even if we could be learned with another's learning, at least we can be wise only with our own wisdom. *I hate the wise man who is not wise for himself.* Hence Ennius: *Vain is the wisdom of the wise man who cannot profit himself. If he is greedy, if / vain, and more worthless than any Euganean lamb. For wisdom is not only to be acquired but to be enjoyed.*[8]

1.25.10 Dionysius mocked the grammarians who take care to inquire into the ills of Ulysses and know nothing of their own; the musicians who tune their flutes and do not tune their morals; the orators who study how to speak of justice, not how to do it. If our soul does not move better for it, if our judgment is not made sounder by it, I would just as soon my pupil had spent the time playing tennis; at least his body would be the nimbler for

6 Calvisius Sabinus, described by Seneca in Letters 27.

7 Lucius Licinius Lucullus (1st century BC) learned the art of war from books on his way to the East, according to Cicero.

8 The Greek line is from Euripides, quoted by Cicero, who also quotes Ennius in On Duties III. Then come Juvenal, Satires VIII, and Cicero, On Ends I.

it. Look at him coming back from school after fifteen or sixteen years spent there: nothing is so unfit to be put to work. All the difference you can see in him is that his Latin and his Greek have made him more foolish and presumptuous than when he left home.[9] He ought to have brought his soul back full; he brings it back only bloated. He has merely puffed it up instead of enlarging it.

1.25.11 These masters, as Plato says of the Sophists, their first cousins, are of all men the ones who promise to be most useful to men. Yet they alone of all men not only fail to improve what is entrusted to them, as a carpenter or a mason does, but make it worse, and get paid for having made it worse. Protagoras proposed this rule to his pupils: either they paid him his price, or they swore in the temple how much they valued the profit they had received from his teaching, and paid him for his trouble accordingly. If that rule were followed, my pedagogues would find themselves left high and dry, if they relied on the oath of my experience. My Périgord common folk very amusingly call these smatterers *Lettre ferits*, as you might say "letter-struck": men whom letters have hit with a hammer, as the saying goes. Truly, most of the time they seem to have sunk below even common sense. For the peasant and the shoemaker, you see them going about their business simply and naturally, speaking of what they know. These men, wanting to raise themselves up and swagger with this knowledge that floats on the surface of their brains, keep getting themselves tangled up and bogged down. Fine words escape them, but let someone else put them to use. They know Galen well, but not the patient at all. They have already filled your head with laws, and yet they have not grasped the crux of the case. They know the theory of everything; go and find someone to put it into practice.[10]

1.25.12 I once saw a friend of mine at my house, by way of pastime, deal with one of these men by putting on a gibberish jar-

9 Diogenes Laertius tells this of Diogenes the Cynic.

10 Galen (2nd century AD) was the Greek physician whose works were still the authority in Montaigne's day.

gon: talk with no thread to it, a fabric of patched-together pieces, except that it was often larded with terms proper to their disputes. In this way he kept the fool amused and arguing for a whole day, the man always thinking he was answering the objections put to him. And yet he was a man of letters and of reputation, and he wore a fine gown. *You of patrician blood, whose lot is to live with no eyes in the back of your head, / turn round and face the mockery behind you.* Whoever looks very closely at this kind of people, and it is a widespread kind, will find, as I do, that most often they understand neither themselves nor anyone else, and that their memories are full enough but their judgment entirely hollow—unless their nature has of itself fashioned it otherwise. So it was with Adrianus Turnebus, as I saw. He professed nothing but letters, and in that field he was, in my opinion, the greatest man there has been in a thousand years; yet he had nothing of the pedant about him except the way he wore his gown and a certain outward manner that was perhaps not polished in the courtier's fashion. These are things of no account.[11] And I hate people who find a gown worn askew harder to tolerate than a soul askew, and who judge what sort of man someone is by his bow, his bearing and his boots. For within, his was the most polished soul in the world. I often deliberately drew him into talk far removed from his own field, and he saw into it so clearly, with so quick an apprehension and so sound a judgment, that it seemed he had never followed any other trade than war and affairs of state. These are fine, strong natures, *whose hearts the Titan fashioned with kindly art / and of a better clay*, which hold their own through a bad education. Now it is not enough that our education should not spoil us; it must change us for the better.[12]

1.25.13 Some of our Parlements, when they have to admit officers, examine them only on their learning; others also add a

11 Persius, Satires I. Adrien Turnèbe (1512–1565) was a French classical scholar and royal professor in Paris.

12 Juvenal, Satires XIV; the Titan is Prometheus, said to have shaped humans from clay.

test of their sense by giving them some case to judge. The latter seem to me to have a much better method. And although both these parts are necessary, and both must be present, still in truth learning is less to be prized than judgment. Judgment can do without learning, but not learning without judgment. For as the Greek verse says, *Learning is nothing, unless there is a mind to go with it.* What use is learning if understanding is not there?[13] Would to God that, for the good of our justice, those bodies were as well furnished with understanding and conscience as they still are with learning! *We learn not for life but for school.* Now learning must not be attached to the soul; it must be incorporated into it. The soul must not be sprinkled with it; it must be dyed in it. And if learning does not change the soul and improve its imperfect state, it is certainly much better to leave it alone. It is a dangerous sword, which hampers and wounds its master if it is in a weak hand that does not know how to use it: *so that it would have been better never to have learned.*[14]

1.25.14 Perhaps this is the reason why both we and theology do not require much learning of women. And it is why Francis, Duke of Brittany, son of John V, when they spoke to him of his marriage to Isabella, a daughter of Scotland, and added that she had been brought up simply and without any instruction in letters, replied that he loved her the better for it, and that a woman was learned enough when she could tell the difference between her husband's shirt and his doublet.[15]

1.25.15 So it is not such a great wonder, whatever people cry, that our ancestors did not set much store by letters, and that even today they are found only by chance in the chief councils of our kings. And if the aim of growing rich by them, which is the only one held out to us today through jurisprudence, medicine, pedantry, and theology too, did not keep them in credit, you would doubtless see them as wretched as they ever were.

13 The Greek line is preserved in Stobaeus's anthology.

14 The first quotation is from Seneca, Letters 106; the second from Cicero, Tusculan Disputations II.

15 Francis I, Duke of Brittany (1414–1450), married Isabella Stuart, daughter of James I of Scotland, in 1442.

And what a loss would that be, if they teach us neither to think well nor to act well? *Since the learned have appeared, the good have vanished.* All other knowledge is harmful to the man who lacks the knowledge of goodness.[16]

1.25.16 But might not the reason I was looking for a moment ago also come from this? Since our study in France has hardly any aim but profit, fewer of those whom nature has born for nobler offices than lucrative ones devote themselves to letters, or else they do so only briefly (withdrawn, before they have acquired a taste for them, into a profession that has nothing in common with books). And so there ordinarily remain, to commit themselves wholly to study, only people of low fortune, who are hunting in it for a means of living. And since the souls of such people are of the basest alloy, both by nature and by their home upbringing and example, they yield a false fruit of learning. For learning is not meant to give light to a soul that has none, nor to make a blind man see. Its business is not to furnish the soul with sight but to train its sight, to regulate its gait, provided it has, of its own, feet and legs that are straight and capable. Learning is a good drug; but no drug is strong enough to keep itself free of alteration and corruption, according to the defect of the vessel that holds it. A man may have clear sight who does not have straight sight; and so he sees the good and does not follow it, and sees knowledge and does not use it. Plato's chief ordinance in his Republic is to give his citizens their duties according to their nature. Nature can do everything and does everything. The lame are ill fitted for bodily exercises, and lame souls for exercises of the mind. Spurious and common souls are unworthy of philosophy. When we see a man badly shod, we say it is no wonder if he is a hosier. In the same way, experience often seems to offer us a doctor worse doctored than others, a theologian less reformed, and, as a rule, a learned man less competent. Aristo of Chios was right, long ago, to say that philosophers harmed their listeners, since most souls are not fitted to profit from such instruction, which, if it does not turn to good, turns to ill: *that*

16 Seneca, Letters 95.

profligates came out of the school of Aristippus, and harsh men out of Zeno's.[17]

TEACHING VIRTUE, PERSIAN AND SPARTAN

The Persians and Spartans taught their children virtue and action rather than letters.

1.25.17 In that fine education which Xenophon lends the Persians, we find that they taught their children virtue as other nations teach letters. Plato says that the eldest son, in their royal succession, was brought up as follows. After his birth he was given not to women but to eunuchs of the highest authority about the kings, on account of their virtue. These took charge of making his body handsome and healthy, and after the age of seven they trained him to ride and to hunt. When he reached his fourteenth year, they placed him in the hands of four men: the wisest, the most just, the most temperate and the most valiant in the nation.[18] The first taught him religion; the second, to be always truthful; the third, to master his desires; the fourth, to fear nothing.

1.25.18 It is a thing well worth considering that in that excellent government of Lycurgus—truly monstrous in its perfection—so careful of the rearing of children as its principal charge, and in the very home of the Muses, there is so little mention of learning. It is as if, since those noble youths disdained every yoke but that of virtue, they had to be given, instead of our masters of learning, only masters of valor, prudence and justice. Plato followed this example in his Laws. Their method of teaching was to put questions to the children about how to judge men and their actions; and if they condemned or praised this person or that deed, they had to give reasons for what they said. By this means they sharpened their understanding and learned what was

17 Aristo of Chios was a Stoic philosopher of the 3rd century BC; the quotation is from Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods III. Aristippus founded the pleasure-seeking Cyrenaic school, Zeno the Stoic school.

18 Xenophon's Cyropaedia is an idealized account of the education of Cyrus the Great; the passage on the royal heir is from Plato's Alcibiades I.

right, both at once. Astyages, in Xenophon, asks Cyrus to give an account of his last lesson. "It was this," he says. "In our school a big boy who had a small tunic gave it to one of his companions who was smaller, and took from him his tunic, which was bigger. Our tutor made me judge of this dispute, and I judged that things should be left as they were, since each seemed better suited that way. Whereupon he showed me that I had done wrong; for I had stopped at considering what was fitting, whereas I should first have attended to justice, which required that no one be forced in what belonged to him."[19] And he says he was whipped for it, just as we are in our villages for having forgotten the first aorist of τυπτω. My schoolmaster would have to make me a fine speech *in the demonstrative genre* before he persuaded me that his school is as good as that one.[20]

1.25.19 They wanted to take a shortcut. And since it is the case that the sciences, even when taken straight, can only teach us prudence, integrity and resolution, they chose to put their children from the outset into the thick of action, and to instruct them not by hearsay but by trying out action, forming and molding them in a lively way, not only with precepts and words but chiefly with examples and deeds. The aim was that this should be not a knowledge in their soul but its very constitution and habit; not an acquisition but a natural possession. On this subject, Agesilaus was asked what he thought children should learn. "What they should do when they are men," he answered. It is no wonder if such an education produced such admirable results.

1.25.20 People went, they say, to the other cities of Greece to look for rhetoricians, painters and musicians, but to Lacedaemon for lawgivers, magistrates and generals. At Athens they learned to speak well, and here to act well. There they learned to disentangle themselves from a sophistical argument and to beat down the imposture of words cunningly interwoven; here, to disen-

19 Astyages, king of the Medes, was Cyrus's grandfather (Xenophon, Cyropaedia I).
20 τυπτω ("I strike") was the model verb in Greek grammars. The demonstrative genre is the oratory of praise and blame.

tangle themselves from the lures of pleasure and to beat down with great courage the threats of fortune and of death. Those busied themselves with words, these with things. There it was a continual exercise of the tongue; here, a continual exercise of the soul.[21] So it is not strange that when Antipater demanded fifty children of them as hostages, they answered, quite the reverse of what we would do, that they would rather give twice as many grown men—so highly did they value the loss of their country's education. When Agesilaus invites Xenophon to send his children to be brought up in Sparta, it is not for them to learn rhetoric or dialectic there, but to learn, as he says, the finest knowledge there is: namely, the knowledge of how to obey and how to command.[22]

1.25.21 It is very amusing to see Socrates, in his way, mocking Hippias, who tells him how he has earned a good sum of money by teaching, especially in certain little towns in Sicily, and that at Sparta he did not earn a penny. The Spartans, he says, are simple, unlettered people who know neither how to measure nor how to count, who set no store by grammar or by rhythm, and amuse themselves only with knowing the succession of kings, the founding and decline of states, and such a jumble of tales. And at the end of all this Socrates, making him admit point by point the excellence of their form of public government and the happiness and virtue of their private life, leaves him to guess the conclusion: the uselessness of his own arts.[23]

1.25.22 Examples teach us, both in this martial state and in all those like it, that the study of the sciences softens and enfeebles hearts more than it strengthens and toughens them. The strongest state that appears in the world at present is that of the Turks, peoples trained alike to esteem arms and to despise letters. I find Rome more valiant before it became learned. The most warlike nations of our day are the crudest and most ignor-

21 Lacedaemon is Sparta.

22 Antipater was the Macedonian general who became regent after the death of Alexander the Great.

23 The dialogue is Plato's Hippias Major; Hippias of Elis was a sophist famous for his fees.

ant. The Scythians, the Parthians, Tamburlaine, serve us as proof of this.[24] When the Goths ravaged Greece, what saved all the libraries from being put to the fire was one of them who spread the opinion that these goods should be left intact for the enemy, as being apt to divert them from military exercise and keep them amused with sedentary and idle occupations. When our king, Charles VIII, almost without drawing his sword from its scabbard, found himself master of the kingdom of Naples and a good part of Tuscany, the lords of his retinue attributed this unhoped-for ease of conquest to the fact that the princes and nobility of Italy amused themselves more with becoming clever and learned than vigorous and warlike.[25]

24 Tamburlaine is Timur (1336–1405), the Central Asian conqueror.
25 The Goths raided Athens in AD 267. Charles VIII invaded Italy in 1494–1495.

I.26 Of the Education of Children

De l'Institution des enfans, à Madame Diane de Foix, Contesse de Gurson
Writing to a noblewoman, Montaigne outlines an education that trains judgment and character rather than memory or rote learning.

1.26.1 I never saw a father, however hunchbacked or scabby his son might be, who would refuse to acknowledge him. Not that he fails to perceive the boy's defect, unless he is utterly drunk with that affection; but the fact remains that the boy is his. So I too see better than anyone that these are only the musings of a man who in his childhood tasted only the outer crust of the sciences, and has kept only a general, shapeless picture of them: a little of everything and nothing at all, in the French manner. For in short, I know that there is such a thing as medicine, and jurisprudence, and that mathematics has four parts, and roughly what they aim at.[1] And perhaps I also know what the sciences in general claim to do in the service of our life. But as for plunging in deeper, gnawing my nails over the study of Aristotle, monarch of modern learning, or stubbornly pursuing some science —I have never done it. Nor is there any art of which I could sketch even the first outlines. There is no child in the middle forms who could not call himself more learned than I, who do not even know enough to examine him on his first lesson. And if I am forced to, I am obliged, rather ineptly, to draw from it some

1 The four parts are the medieval quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy.

matter of general discussion, on which I examine his natural judgment: a lesson as unknown to them as theirs is to me.

1.26.2 I have struck up an acquaintance with no solid book except Plutarch and Seneca, from whom I draw like the Danaids, endlessly filling and pouring out. Something of it sticks to this paper; to me, next to nothing. History is my quarry in the matter of books, or poetry, which I love with a particular inclination. For, as Cleanthes said, just as the voice forced through the narrow channel of a trumpet comes out sharper and stronger, so it seems to me that a thought pressed into the measured feet of poetry springs forth much more abruptly and strikes me with a livelier jolt.[2]

1.26.3 As for the natural faculties that are in me, of which this is the trial, I feel them bending under the load. My conceptions and my judgment move only by groping, staggering, stumbling and tripping; and when I have gone as far as I can, I am still not at all satisfied. I can see more country beyond, but with a dim and clouded sight that I cannot clear. I undertake to speak indiscriminately of whatever comes into my fancy, using only my own natural means. And if I happen, as I often do, to come across by chance in the good authors those very topics I have undertaken to treat—as I have just now done in Plutarch, with his discussion of the power of the imagination—then, seeing myself so weak and puny, so heavy and sluggish compared with those men, I feel pity or disdain for myself. Still, I please myself with this: that my opinions have the honor of often coinciding with theirs, and that I at least follow behind at a distance, saying "Quite so." Also, I have this, which not everyone has: I recognize the extreme difference between them and me. And nonetheless I let my inventions run on, weak and lowly as they are, just as I produced them, without plastering over and patching up the defects this comparison has revealed to me.

1.26.4 You need a very strong back to undertake to march abreast of those men. The indiscreet writers of our century, who

go sowing whole passages of the ancient authors among their worthless works to do themselves honor, do the opposite. For this infinite difference in brilliance makes what is their own look so pale, so tarnished and so ugly that they lose much more than they gain. There were two contrary notions on this. The philosopher Chrysippus mixed into his books not just passages but whole works of other authors, in one of them the Medea of Euripides; and Apollodorus said that if you cut out everything borrowed, his paper would be left blank.[3] Epicurus, on the contrary, in the three hundred volumes he left, had not put a single quotation.

1.26.5 The other day I happened to come upon such a passage. I had been dragging along languidly after French words so bloodless, so fleshless, so empty of matter and sense, that they really were nothing but French words. At the end of a long and tedious road I came upon a piece that was lofty, rich and raised to the clouds. If I had found the slope gentle and the climb a little gradual, it would have been excusable; but it was a precipice so sheer and so abrupt that from the first six words I knew I was flying off into another world. From there I saw the bog I had come from, so low and so deep that I never afterward had the heart to go down into it again. If I stuffed one of my discourses with these rich spoils, it would show up the stupidity of the others all too clearly. To reprove my own faults in others seems to me no more inconsistent than to reprove, as I often do, the faults of others in myself. They must be denounced everywhere, and every sanctuary taken from them. Yet I know how boldly I myself try at every turn to match my thefts, to keep pace with them side by side, not without a rash hope that I may deceive the eyes of the judges who would tell them apart. But this is as much thanks to my skill in applying them as to my invention and my strength. And then, I do not wrestle with those old

2 The Danaids, daughters of Danaus, were condemned in the underworld to fill a leaking jar forever. Cleanthes was a Stoic philosopher; the saying is reported by Seneca, Letters 108.

3 The anecdote comes from Diogenes Laertius.

champions wholesale and body to body. It is by bouts, with slight and light touches. I do not charge into them; I only feel them out. And I don't so much advance as haggle about advancing. If I could hold my own against them, I would be a man of some worth; for I take them on only where they are stiffest. As for doing what I have found some people do—covering themselves in other men's armor until not even their fingertips show, and carrying out their design (as is easy for the learned in a common subject) under ancient inventions patched together here and there—for those who want to hide these borrowings and make them their own, it is first of all injustice and cowardice. Having nothing of their own worth showing, they seek to present themselves by a merit wholly foreign to them. And then it is great foolishness: contenting themselves with winning by trickery the ignorant approval of the common crowd, they discredit themselves with men of understanding, who turn up their noses at this borrowed incrustation—and theirs is the only praise that has any weight. For my part, there is nothing I would less wish to do. I speak of others only in order to speak all the more of myself. This does not concern centos that are published as centos; and I have seen some very ingenious ones in my time, among others one under the name of Capilupus, not to mention the ancients. These are minds that show themselves both elsewhere and in this, as Lipsius does in that learned and laborious web, his Politics.[4]

1.26.6 Be that as it may, I mean to say, and whatever these absurdities may be, I have not resolved to hide them, any more than I would a portrait of myself, bald and graying, in which the painter had put not a perfect face but mine. For these too are my own temperament and opinions. I give them as what I believe, not as what is to be believed. My only aim here is to reveal myself, who may be different tomorrow if some new learning

4 A cento is a work stitched together from lines of other authors. Lelio Capilupi (1497–1560) wrote centos from Virgil; Justus Lipsius's Politics (1589) is woven largely of quotations.

changes me. I have no authority to be believed, nor do I wish for it, feeling myself too ill instructed to instruct others.

TO THE COUNTESS OF GURSON

Montaigne offers his one notion on educating her expected son.

1.26.7 Someone, then, having seen the preceding chapter, told me at my house the other day that I should have expanded a little on the subject of the education of children. Now, Madame, if I had any competence in this subject, I could put it to no better use than to make a present of it to that little man who threatens soon to make a fine exit from your premises (you are too generous to begin otherwise than with a male).[5] For having had so large a part in arranging your marriage, I have some right and interest in the greatness and prosperity of all that comes of it; besides which, the long-standing claim you have on my service obliges me well enough to wish honor, good and advantage to all that concerns you. But in truth I understand nothing about it except this: that the greatest difficulty and importance in human knowledge seems to lie in the area that deals with the rearing and education of children. Just as in agriculture the tasks that come before planting are sure and easy, and so is the planting itself, but once what has been planted comes to life, there is a great variety of methods, and great difficulty, in raising it; so too with men: there is little skill in planting them, but once they are born, we take on a manifold care, full of bustle and fear, in training and rearing them. The signs of their inclinations are so faint at that early age, and so obscure, and the promises so uncertain and deceptive, that it is hard to base any solid judgment on them. Look at Cimon, look at Themistocles and a thousand others: how unlike their early selves they turned out![6] The young of bears and dogs show their natural inclination; but

5 The essay is addressed to Diane de Foix, Countess of Gurson, then expecting her first child.

6 Cimon and Themistocles, Athenian statesmen of the 5th century BC, were both notorious for their dissolute youth.

men, throwing themselves straight into habits, opinions and laws, easily change or disguise themselves. Yet it is hard to force natural propensities. Hence it happens that, for want of having chosen their road well, people often toil in vain and spend many years training children for things in which they cannot get a footing. Nevertheless, in this difficulty, my opinion is that we should always steer them toward the best and most profitable things, and pay little attention to those trivial divinations and prognostications we draw from the movements of their childhood. Plato, in his Republic, seems to me to give them too much authority.

1.26.8 Madame, learning is a great ornament and a tool of marvelous service, notably to persons raised to such a degree of fortune as yours. In truth it does not find its true use in base and low hands. It is much prouder to lend its means to conducting a war, governing a people, or cultivating the friendship of a prince or a foreign nation, than to constructing a dialectical argument, pleading an appeal, or prescribing a mass of pills. So, Madame, since I believe you will not forget this part in the education of your children—you who have tasted its sweetness and who come of a lettered race (for we still have the writings of those ancient Counts of Foix from whom the Count your husband and you are descended; and your uncle François, Monsieur de Candale, brings forth others every day, which will spread the knowledge of this quality of your family for many centuries)—I want to tell you one notion of mine on this subject, which runs contrary to common practice. That is all I can contribute to your service in this matter.[7]

1.26.9 The duties of the tutor you will give him, on whose choice the whole effect of his education depends, have many other important parts; but I do not touch on them, since I could contribute nothing of value there. And on the one point on which I take it upon myself to advise him, he will believe me as far as he finds it plausible.

7 François de Foix-Candale (1512–1594), bishop of Aire, translated Euclid and Hermes Trismegistus; her husband was Louis de Foix, Count of Gurson.

A WELL-MADE HEAD

The tutor should make the pupil judge for himself, weigh every opinion, and make what he learns his own.

Consider a child of good family who seeks letters not for gain (for so abject an aim is unworthy of the grace and favor of the Muses, and besides, it looks to others and depends on them), nor so much for outward advantages as for his own, to enrich and adorn himself inwardly with them, wanting to turn out an able man rather than a learned one. For such a child I would also want care to be taken to choose a guide with a well-made rather than a well-filled head; that both be required of him, but more character and understanding than learning; and that he conduct himself in his charge in a new way.

1.26.10 People never stop bawling into our ears, as though pouring into a funnel, and our task is only to repeat what we have been told. I would want the tutor to correct this practice. From the very start, according to the capacity of the mind in his hands, he should begin to put it through its paces, letting it taste things, choose them and discern them by itself: sometimes opening the way for it, sometimes letting it open the way for itself. I do not want him to think up everything and do all the talking; I want him to listen to his pupil speak in his turn. Socrates, and later Arcesilaus, first had their pupils speak, and then they spoke to them.[8] *The authority of those who teach is often an obstacle to those who want to learn.* It is good that he should make the boy trot ahead of him, to judge his pace and judge how far he must come down to adapt himself to the boy's strength. For want of this proportion we spoil everything. And to know how to find it and keep within it with good measure is one of the hardest tasks I know. It is the work of a lofty and very strong

8 Arcesilaus (3rd century BC) headed Plato's Academy and turned it toward skepticism.

soul to know how to come down to a child's gait and guide it. I walk more firmly and surely uphill than down.[9]

1.26.11 Those who, as our custom has it, undertake to school many minds of such different capacities and forms with the same lesson and the same measure of guidance—no wonder if, in a whole crowd of children, they scarcely find two or three who bear any proper fruit from their teaching. Let the tutor ask his pupil for an account not only of the words of his lesson but of its sense and substance. And let him judge the profit the boy has made not by the testimony of his memory but by that of his life. Let him have the boy put what he has just learned into a hundred shapes and adapt it to as many different subjects, to see whether he has really grasped it and made it his own, taking guidance for the boy's progress from Plato's methods of teaching. It is a sign of rawness and indigestion to throw up food just as it was swallowed. The stomach has not done its work if it has not changed the condition and form of what was given it to cook. Our soul moves only on credit, bound and constrained to the appetite of other men's notions, enslaved and captive under the authority of their teaching. We have been held so long in leading strings that we no longer have a free gait. Our vigor and liberty are extinguished. *They never become their own guardians.* At Pisa I knew well a decent man, but such an Aristotelian that the most general of his dogmas is this: that the touchstone and rule of all solid ideas and of all truth is conformity to the teaching of Aristotle; that outside of it there is nothing but chimeras and emptiness; that Aristotle saw everything and said everything. This proposition of his, for having been interpreted a little too broadly and unfairly, once landed him, and long kept him, in serious trouble with the Inquisition in Rome.[10]

1.26.12 Let him make the boy pass everything through a sieve, and lodge nothing in his head on mere authority and trust. Let Aristotle's principles not be principles to him, any more than

9 Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods I.

10 Seneca, Letters 33. The Aristotelian was probably Girolamo Borro, a professor at Pisa.

those of the Stoics or Epicureans. Let this diversity of judgments be set before him: he will choose if he can; if not, he will remain in doubt. *For doubting pleases me no less than knowing.* For if he embraces the opinions of Xenophon and Plato by his own reasoning, they will no longer be theirs; they will be his. Whoever follows another follows nothing. He finds nothing—indeed, he seeks nothing. *We are not under a king; let each man claim his own freedom.* Let him at least know that he knows. He must absorb their temperament, not learn their precepts.[11] And let him boldly forget, if he likes, where he got them, but let him know how to make them his own. Truth and reason are common to everyone, and belong no more to the one who said them first than to the one who says them after. It is no more according to Plato than according to me, since he and I understand it and see it alike. The bees plunder the flowers here and there, but afterward they make of them honey, which is all their own; it is no longer thyme or marjoram. So he will transform and blend the pieces borrowed from others to make a work all his own: namely, his judgment. His education, his labor and his study aim only at forming it. Let him conceal everything that has helped him, and show only what he has made of it. Plunderers and borrowers put their buildings and their purchases on display, not what they take from others. You do not see the fees a member of the Parlement receives; you see the alliances he has gained and the honors for his children. No one makes public his receipts; everyone makes public his acquisitions.[12]

1.26.13 The gain from our study is to have become better and wiser by it. It is the understanding, said Epicharmus, that sees and hears; it is the understanding that profits by everything, disposes everything, acts, dominates and reigns; all other things are blind, deaf and soulless. Truly, we make it servile and cowardly by not leaving it the freedom to do anything by itself. Who ever asked his pupil what he thinks of rhetoric and grammar, or of this or that saying of Cicero? They are stuck into our memory

11 Dante, Inferno XI; the Latin is Seneca, Letters 33.
12 Judges in the Parlements were paid fees (épices) by the litigants.

fully fledged, like oracles in which the letters and syllables are the substance of the thing.[13] To know by heart is not to know; it is to retain what we have given our memory to keep. What we know rightly we can make use of without looking at the model, without turning our eyes to our book. A sorry competence, a purely bookish competence! I expect it to serve as ornament, not as foundation, following the opinion of Plato, who says that steadfastness, faith and sincerity are the true philosophy, and that the other sciences, which aim elsewhere, are mere cosmetics. I would like to see Paluel or Pompey, those fine dancers of my day, teach us capers just by our watching them, without our stirring from our seats—the way these people want to train our understanding without setting it in motion. Or to see us taught to handle a horse, a pike, a lute or our voice without practicing—the way these people want to teach us to judge well and speak well without exercising us in speaking or judging. Now for this apprenticeship, everything that comes before our eyes is book enough: a page's prank, a valet's blunder, a remark at table—these are so much new material.[14]

THE WORLD AS SCHOOLBOOK

Travel, company and histories train the judgment; the great world is the pupil's mirror.

1.26.14 For this purpose, mixing with men is marvelously suited, and so is visiting foreign countries—not merely to bring back, in the fashion of our French nobility, how many paces *Santa Rotonda* measures, or how rich *Signora Livia*'s drawers are, or, like others, how much longer or wider Nero's face is on some old ruin there than on some similar medal,[15] but chiefly to bring back the temperament and ways of those nations, and to rub and polish our brains against those of others. I would have him

13 Epicharmus was a Sicilian comic poet of the 5th century BC.
14 Paluel and Pompey (Pompeo Diobono) were celebrated dancing masters at the French court.
15 Santa Rotonda is the Pantheon in Rome.

taken traveling from his tender childhood; and first, to kill two birds with one stone, among the neighboring nations whose language is farthest from ours, to which the tongue cannot bend unless you train it early.

1.26.15 Besides, everyone holds that it is not right to bring up a child in his parents' lap. That natural love makes them too tender and too lax, even the wisest of them. They are capable neither of punishing his faults nor of seeing him brought up roughly, as he should be, and among risks. They could not bear to see him come back sweaty and dusty from his exercise, drinking hot, drinking cold, nor see him on a restive horse, or foil in hand against a tough fencer, or with his first arquebus. For there is no help for it: whoever wants to make a good man of him must certainly not spare him in his youth, and must often go against the rules of medicine: *Let him live under the open sky / and amid dangers.* It is not enough to toughen his soul; we must also toughen his muscles. The soul is too hard pressed if it is not seconded, and has too much to do in meeting two duties alone. I know how much mine labors in company with a body so tender and so sensitive, which leans so heavily on it.[16] And in my reading I often notice that my masters, in their writings, cite as magnanimity and strength of courage examples that have more to do with thickness of skin and hardness of bones.

1.26.16 I have seen men, women and children so made that a beating is less to them than a flick of the finger is to me, and who move neither tongue nor eyebrow at the blows they are given. When athletes imitate the philosophers in endurance, it is strength of sinew rather than of heart. Now, being used to bearing toil is being used to bearing pain: *toil grows a callus against pain*. The boy must be broken in to the hardship and harshness of exercise, to train him for the hardship and harshness of dislocation, colic and cautery—and of prison too, and of torture. For these last may also catch him, since, as times go, they threaten the good as well as the wicked. We are living through it.[17] Who-

16 Horace, Odes III.2.
17 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations II.

ever fights the laws threatens good men with the whip and the rope. And then, the tutor's authority, which ought to be sovereign over the boy, is interrupted and hampered by the presence of the parents. Besides, the respect the household pays him and his awareness of the wealth and greatness of his house are, in my opinion, no slight drawbacks at that age.

1.26.17 In this school of human dealings I have often noticed a fault: instead of getting to know others, we work only at making ourselves known, and we take more trouble to sell off our own goods than to acquire new ones. Silence and modesty are very useful qualities in conversation. This child will be trained to be sparing and thrifty with his ability once he has acquired it, and not to take offense at the foolish remarks and tall tales told in his presence; for it is a rude nuisance to attack everything that is not to our taste. Let him be content to correct himself, and not seem to reproach others for everything he declines to do himself, nor set himself against public customs. *One may be wise without ostentation and without arousing envy.* Let him shun those schoolmasterly and uncivil poses toward the world, and that childish ambition of wanting to seem cleverer by being different. Let him not, as if fault-finding and novelties were wares hard to come by, try to win from them a name for some special merit. Just as only great poets are entitled to use the licenses of their art, so only great and illustrious souls may be allowed to grant themselves privileges above custom.[18] *If Socrates and Aristippus did anything contrary to custom and usage, let him not think the same is permitted to him; for they earned this license by great and divine qualities.* He will be taught not to enter into discussion and dispute except where he sees a champion worthy of wrestling with him; and even there not to use every move that might serve him, but only those that can serve him best. Let him be made fastidious in choosing and sorting his arguments, and fond of relevance, and therefore of brevity. Above all, let him be taught to surrender and lay down his arms to truth as soon as he perceives it, whether it springs up in his opponent's hands or

18 Seneca, Letters 103.

within himself through some second thought.[19] For he will not be set up in a professor's chair to recite a prescribed part; he is committed to no cause except because he approves of it. Nor will he belong to the trade in which the freedom to change one's mind and admit one's mistakes is sold for ready cash. *Nor is he forced by any necessity to defend everything that has been prescribed and commanded.*[20]

1.26.18 If his tutor is of my temperament, he will shape his will to be a very loyal servant of his prince, very devoted and very brave; but he will cool in him any desire to attach himself to the prince otherwise than by public duty. Besides several other drawbacks of such private obligations, which wound our freedom, the judgment of a man who is hired and bought is either less whole and less free, or else tainted with both imprudence and ingratitude. A pure courtier can have neither the right nor the will to speak or think anything but favorably of a master who, among so many thousands of other subjects, has chosen him to nourish and raise up with his own hand. This favor and advantage corrupt his frankness, not without some reason, and dazzle it. That is why we commonly see the language of such people differ from all other language in a state, and deserve little trust in such matters.

1.26.19 Let his conscience and his virtue shine in his speech, and have only reason as their guide. Let him be made to understand that to confess a fault he discovers in his own argument, even if no one but himself has noticed it, is an effect of judgment and sincerity, which are the chief qualities he is seeking. That obstinacy and contentiousness are common qualities, most visible in the basest souls. That to think again and correct oneself, to abandon a bad position in the very heat of one's ardor—these are rare, strong and philosophical qualities.

1.26.20 He will be advised, when in company, to keep his eyes everywhere; for I find that the chief seats are commonly taken by the least capable men, and that greatness of fortune is sel-

19 Cicero, On Duties I.41.
20 Cicero, Academica II.3.

dom found combined with ability. I have seen, while people at one end of a table talked about the beauty of a tapestry or the taste of the malmsey, many fine sayings lost at the other end. He will sound out the depth of each person: a cowherd, a mason, a passer-by. He must put everything to use, and borrow from each according to his wares, for everything is useful in a household; even other people's stupidity and weakness will be instruction to him. By observing the graces and manners of each person, he will breed in himself a desire for the good ones and a contempt for the bad.

1.26.21 Let a decent curiosity be put into his head to inquire into all things. Whatever is remarkable around him, he will see: a building, a fountain, a man, the site of an ancient battle, the places where Caesar or Charlemagne passed. *What land is stiff with frost, what land crumbles in the heat, / What wind bears sails well to Italy.* He will inquire into the customs, the resources and the alliances of this prince and that. These are things very pleasant to learn and very useful to know.[21]

1.26.22 In this frequenting of men I mean to include—and principally—those who live only in the memory of books. By means of histories he will frequent those great souls of the best ages. It is a vain study if you like; but, if you like, it is also a study of inestimable fruit, and, as Plato says, the only study the Lacedaemonians had kept for themselves. What profit will he not draw in this field from reading the Lives of our Plutarch?[22] But let my guide remember what his charge is aiming at, and let him not imprint on his pupil so much the date of the destruction of Carthage as the characters of Hannibal and Scipio; nor so much where Marcellus died as why it was unworthy of his duty that he died there. Let him teach him not so much the histories as how to judge them. In my opinion, of all subjects this is the one to which our minds apply themselves in the most varying measure. I have read in Livy a hundred things that another man has

21 Propertius, Elegies IV.3.

22 Plato, Hippias Major. Montaigne read Plutarch in Jacques Amyot's French translation, hence "our Plutarch."

not read there. Plutarch read a hundred there beyond what I could read, and perhaps beyond what the author had put there.[23] For some it is a purely grammatical study; for others, the anatomy of philosophy, by which the most hidden parts of our nature are penetrated. In Plutarch there are many extended discussions well worth knowing, for in my opinion he is the master craftsman of that kind of work; but there are a thousand that he has merely touched on. He just points with his finger the way we are to go, if we like, and is sometimes content to give a single thrust at the very heart of a subject. We must pull these out of there and put them on the market. Like that saying of his, that the inhabitants of Asia served a single man because they could not pronounce a single syllable, namely "No"—which perhaps gave La Boétie the matter and the occasion for his Voluntary Servitude. The mere fact of seeing him pick out a slight action in a man's life, or a word that seems not to carry such weight, is a discourse in itself. It is a pity that men of understanding are so fond of brevity: no doubt their reputation is the better for it, but we are the worse. Plutarch would rather we praised him for his judgment than for his learning; he would rather leave us wanting more of him than sated.[24] He knew that even in good things one can say too much, and that Alexandridas was right to reproach a man who was making good but overlong speeches to the ephors: "Stranger, you say what you should, otherwise than you should." Those with thin bodies fill them out with padding; those with slender matter puff it out with words.[25]

1.26.23 Human judgment draws a marvelous clarity from frequenting the world. We are all cramped and huddled up within ourselves, and our sight is shortened to the length of our nose. Socrates was asked where he came from; he did not answer "Athens," but "the world." He, whose imagination was fuller and broader, embraced the universe as his city, and cast his know-

23 The Roman general Marcellus was killed in 208 BC in an ambush while rashly scouting in person, though he was consul.

24 La Boétie's Discourse on Voluntary Servitude, an attack on tyranny written in his youth.

25 The ephors were the five chief magistrates of Sparta.

ledge, his fellowship and his affections over the whole human race—not like us, who look only at what lies under our feet. When the vines freeze in my village, my priest argues from it the wrath of God upon the human race, and judges that the Cannibals must already be parched with thirst. Seeing our civil wars, who does not cry out that the whole machine is being turned upside down and that the Day of Judgment has us by the collar—without reflecting that many worse things have been seen, and that ten thousand parts of the world go on having a merry time all the while? As for me, considering how lawless and unpunished these wars are, I marvel to see them so mild and soft. When it hails on a man's head, the whole hemisphere seems to be in tempest and storm. And the Savoyard said that if that fool of a King of France had known how to manage his fortune well, he was the sort of man who might have become his Duke's steward. His imagination could conceive no greater height than his master's. We are all imperceptibly in this error—an error of great consequence and harm. But whoever pictures to himself, as in a painting, that great image of our mother nature in her full majesty; whoever reads in her face so universal and constant a variety; whoever sees himself in it—and not himself only, but a whole kingdom—as a dot made with a very fine point: he alone judges things at their true size.

1.26.24 This great world, which some multiply further, like species under one genus, is the mirror in which we must look at ourselves to know ourselves from the right angle. In short, I want it to be my pupil's book. So many temperaments, sects, judgments, opinions, laws and customs teach us to judge our own soundly, and teach our judgment to recognize its imperfection and its natural weakness—which is no small apprenticeship. So many upheavals of state and changes of public fortune teach us not to make a great wonder of our own. So many names, so many victories and conquests buried in oblivion, make ridiculous the hope of immortalizing our name by capturing ten light horsemen and some henhouse of a fort known only from its fall. The pride and arrogance of so many foreign

pageants, the swollen majesty of so many courts and grandeurs, steady and strengthen our gaze to bear the brilliance of our own without blinking. So many millions of men buried before us encourage us not to fear going to join such good company in the other world. And so with the rest. Our life, said Pythagoras, resembles the great and crowded assembly of the Olympic Games. Some exercise their bodies there to win glory in the games; others bring goods to sell, for profit. There are some—and not the worst—who seek no other fruit there than to watch how and why each thing is done, and to be spectators of other men's lives in order to judge and regulate their own.

1.26.25 With these examples may fittingly be matched all the most profitable discourses of philosophy, by which human actions must be measured as by their rule. He will be told *what it is right to wish for, what use*
Hard coin has, how much it is fitting to bestow
On one's country and dear kin, what God has ordered
You to be, and in what part of human affairs you are placed,
What we are, and for what life we are born: what it is to know and not to know, which should be the aim of study; what valor, temperance and justice are; what difference there is between ambition and greed, servitude and subjection, license and liberty; by what marks one recognizes true and solid contentment; how far one should fear death, pain and disgrace.[26]

And how he may avoid or bear each hardship. What springs move us, and the cause of so many different stirrings in us. For it seems to me that the first discourses with which his understanding should be steeped must be those that regulate his conduct and his sense, that will teach him to know himself, and to know how to die well and to live well.[27]

1.26.26 Among the liberal arts, let us begin with the art that makes us free. They all serve in some way, it is true, to instruct

26 Persius, Satires III.
27 Virgil, Aeneid III.459.

our life and its use, as all other things also serve it in some way. But let us choose the one that serves it directly and expressly. If we knew how to confine what pertains to our life within its just and natural limits, we would find that most of the sciences in use are of no use to us; and that even in those that are, there are stretches and depths quite useless, which we would do better to leave alone, and, following Socrates' teaching, stop the course of our study in them where usefulness ends.

> *Dare to be wise;*
> *Begin! He who postpones the hour of living rightly*
> *Is the rustic waiting for the river to run by; but it*
> *Glides on, and will glide on, rolling, through all time.* It is great foolishness to teach our children *What influence the Fishes have, and the fiery signs of the Lion,*
> *And Capricorn, bathed in the Hesperian sea,* the science of the stars and the movement of the eighth sphere, before their own. *What are the Pleiades to me,*
> *What the stars of Boötes?* Anaximenes, writing to Pythagoras: "What sense can I have in amusing myself with the secrets of the stars, when I have death or slavery always before my eyes?" For at that time the kings of Persia were preparing war against his country. Everyone ought to say the same.[28]

Beset by ambition, greed, rashness and superstition, and having within me other such enemies of life, shall I go dreaming about the motion of the world?

1.26.27 After he has been taught what serves to make him wiser and better, he will be told what logic, physics, geometry and rhetoric are; and whatever science he chooses, his judgment being already formed, he will soon master it. His lessons will be given sometimes by conversation, sometimes by books. Sometimes his tutor will provide him with the very author suited to this purpose of his education; sometimes he will give him its

28 Horace, Epistles I.2; Propertius, Elegies IV.1; and a Greek line attributed to Anacreon. The eighth sphere was the sphere of the fixed stars in the old astronomy.

marrow and substance all ready chewed. And if the tutor is not himself familiar enough with books to find in them all the fine discourses they contain for the purpose of his design, some man of letters can be joined to him to supply, at each need, the ammunition required, for him to distribute and dispense to his charge. And who can doubt that this lesson is easier and more natural than Gaza's? That is all thorny, unpleasant precepts and empty, fleshless words, with nothing to take hold of, nothing to wake up your mind; in this one the mind finds something to bite on and feed on. This fruit is incomparably greater, and yet it will ripen sooner.[29]

PHILOSOPHY'S CHEERFUL FACE

Philosophy is not grim but gay, and its virtue is reached by pleasant, easy paths.

1.26.28 It is a strange thing that matters have come to such a pass in our age that philosophy, even for men of understanding, is an empty and fanciful name, of no use and no value, both in opinion and in fact. I think the cause is all that logic-chopping which has taken over its approaches. It is very wrong to portray it as inaccessible to children, with a frowning, beetle-browed and terrifying face. Who has masked it for me with this false face, pale and hideous? There is nothing more cheerful, more lively, more sprightly, and I would almost say more frolicsome. It preaches nothing but feasting and good times. A sad and downcast look shows that it does not dwell there. Demetrius the grammarian, coming upon a group of philosophers sitting together in the temple at Delphi, said to them: "Either I am mistaken, or, judging by your peaceful and cheerful faces, you are not engaged in any deep discussion." To which one of them, Heracleon of Megara, replied: "It is for those who inquire whether the future of the verb βαλλω has a double λ, or who seek the derivation of the comparatives χειρον and βελτιον and the super-

29 Theodore Gaza (c. 1400–1475), Greek scholar whose Greek grammar was a standard school text.

latives χειριστον and βελτιστον, to furrow their brows while discussing their science. But as for the discussions of philosophy, they usually cheer and delight those who engage in them, not make them frown and grow sad."[30]

> *You can detect the torments of the mind concealed in a sick Body, and you can detect its joys; the face takes on either Look from that source.* The soul that houses philosophy must by its health make even the body healthy. It must make its repose and its ease shine out even on the outside; it must shape the outward bearing to its own mold, and so arm it with a gracious pride, an active and lively demeanor, and a contented and kindly countenance. The surest sign of wisdom is a constant cheerfulness; its state is like that of things above the moon, always serene. It is *Baroco* and *Baralipton* that make their followers so mud-spattered and smoke-begrimed; it is not philosophy; they know it only by hearsay. What?[31]

It makes it its business to calm the storms of the soul, and to teach hunger and fevers to laugh—not by some imaginary epicycles, but by natural and palpable reasons. Its aim is virtue, which is not, as the schools say, planted on the top of a steep, rugged and inaccessible mountain. Those who have approached her hold, on the contrary, that she dwells on a fine plain, fertile and flowering, from which she sees all things well beneath her; yet anyone who knows the way can get there by shady, grassy, sweet-smelling paths, pleasantly, by an easy and smooth slope, like that of the vaults of heaven. Because they have never frequented this supreme virtue—beautiful, triumphant, loving, delightful and courageous alike, the professed and irreconcilable enemy of sourness, displeasure, fear and constraint, with nature for her guide and fortune and pleasure for her companions—they have gone and, in their weakness, invented this fool-

30 βαλλω means "I throw"; χειρον and βελτιον mean "worse" and "better," χειριστον and βελτιστον "worst" and "best."

31 Juvenal, Satires IX. Baroco and Baralipton were mnemonic names for forms of the syllogism in scholastic logic.

ish image, sad, quarrelsome, sullen, threatening, scowling, and set it on a rock apart, among brambles: a phantom to stun people.

1.26.29 My tutor, who knows he must fill his pupil's will with as much love for virtue as reverence, or more, will be able to tell him that the poets follow common temperaments, and make him see plainly that the gods have put sweat on the approaches to the chambers of Venus rather than of Pallas. And when he begins to feel his manhood, he will present him with Bradamante or Angelica as a mistress to enjoy: a natural, active, generous beauty, not mannish but manly, set against a soft, affected, delicate, artificial beauty; the one disguised as a boy, wearing a shining helmet, the other dressed as a girl, in a pearl-studded headdress. He will judge his love itself manly if he chooses quite differently from that soft shepherd of Phrygia.[32]

1.26.30 He will give him this new lesson: that the value and height of true virtue lie in the ease, usefulness and pleasure of its exercise, which is so far from difficult that children can manage it as well as men, the simple as well as the subtle. Measure is its instrument, not force. Socrates, her first favorite, deliberately gives up force, to glide into the naturalness and ease of her progress. She is the nursing mother of human pleasures. By making them just, she makes them safe and pure. By moderating them, she keeps them fresh and keen. By cutting out those she rejects, she sharpens our appetite for those she leaves us; and she leaves us, abundantly, all those that nature wants, and to the point of satiety, if not of weariness—like a mother. Unless perhaps we mean to say that the regimen that stops the drinker before drunkenness, the eater before indigestion, the lecher before he loses his hair, is an enemy of our pleasures. If common fortune fails her, she escapes it, or does without it, and forges another wholly her own, no longer fluctuating and unstable. She knows how to be rich and powerful and learned, and to sleep on musk-scented mattresses. She loves life; she loves beauty, glory and

32 Bradamante and Angelica are heroines of Ariosto's Orlando Furioso. The Phrygian shepherd is Paris, who awarded the prize of beauty to Venus.

health.[33] But her proper and particular office is to know how to use these goods with moderation, and how to lose them with constancy—an office far more noble than harsh, without which every course of life is unnatural, turbulent and deformed; and to that kind of life one may rightly attach those reefs, those thickets and those monsters.

1.26.31 Suppose this pupil turns out to be of such a different disposition that he would rather hear a fairy tale than the account of a fine voyage or a wise discourse when he hears one; that at the sound of the drum that arms the young ardor of his companions, he turns aside to another drum that calls him to the tumblers' show; that by his own wish he does not find it more pleasant and sweet to come back dusty and victorious from a battle than from tennis or a ball with the prize for that exercise. I see no other remedy than to apprentice him to a pastry cook in some good town, were he the son of a duke—following Plato's precept that children should be placed not according to their father's faculties but according to the faculties of their soul. Since it is philosophy that teaches us to live, and since childhood has its lesson there like the other ages, why is it not imparted to children? *The clay is moist and soft: now, now we must hurry, and shape it / Without end on the swift wheel.* We are taught to live when life is over. A hundred schoolboys have caught the pox before getting to their lesson on Aristotle's temperance. Cicero said that even if he lived the lives of two men, he would not take the time to study the lyric poets. And I find these logic-choppers even more sadly useless.[34] Our child is in much more of a hurry: he owes to schooling only the first fifteen or sixteen years of his life; the rest is owed to action. Let us use so short a time for the necessary teachings. These are abuses: get rid of all those thorny subtleties of dialectic, which cannot make our lives any better; take the simple discourses of philosophy, know how to choose them and handle them aptly; they are easier to grasp than a tale of Boccaccio. A child is capable of them as soon as he

33 Loss of hair was a common symptom of syphilis.
34 Persius, Satires III.

leaves his nurse, much more than of learning to read or write. Philosophy has discourses for the birth of men as well as for their decrepitude.

1.26.32 I am of Plutarch's opinion, that Aristotle did not occupy his great pupil so much with the craft of composing syllogisms or with the principles of geometry as with instructing him in good precepts concerning valor, prowess, magnanimity and temperance, and the assurance that fears nothing. And with this provision he sent him off, still a boy, to subdue the empire of the world with only 30,000 foot soldiers, 4,000 horse and forty-two thousand crowns. The other arts and sciences, he says, Alexander honored well enough, and praised their excellence and refinement; but for all the pleasure he took in them, he was not easily caught by a desire to practice them. *Seek here, young and old, / A sure goal for your mind, and provision for wretched gray hairs.* That is what Epicurus said at the beginning of his letter to Menoeceus: "Let neither the youngest shrink from philosophizing nor the oldest grow weary of it." Whoever does otherwise seems to be saying either that it is not yet the season for living happily, or that it is no longer the season. For all that, I do not want this boy imprisoned; I do not want him abandoned to the anger and melancholy temper of a raging schoolmaster; I do not want to corrupt his mind by keeping him on the rack and at hard labor, as others do, fourteen or fifteen hours a day, like a porter.[35] Nor would I think it right, if through some solitary and melancholy disposition he were seen to be given to the study of books with too immoderate an application, that this should be encouraged in him. It makes them unfit for civil conversation and turns them away from better occupations. And how many men have I seen in my time made stupid by a reckless greed for learning? Carneades was so crazed by it that he no longer had time to trim his hair and nails. Nor do I want to spoil his noble manners by the incivility and barbarism of others. French wisdom was proverbial in ancient times as a wisdom that took hold early and had hardly any staying power. In truth we still see that

35 Persius, Satires V.

there is nothing so delightful as little children in France; but as a rule they disappoint the hopes placed in them, and as grown men they show no excellence. I have heard men of understanding maintain that it is these colleges they are sent to, of which there are plenty, that brutalize them so.

1.26.33 For our boy, a study, a garden, the table and the bed, solitude and company, morning and evening, all hours will be the same, all places will be his schoolroom; for philosophy, which, as the shaper of judgment and manners, will be his principal lesson, has the privilege of mixing in everywhere. When Isocrates the orator was asked at a banquet to speak about his art, everyone agrees he was right to answer: "This is not the time for what I know how to do, and what this is the time for, I do not know how to do." For to offer speeches or rhetorical disputations to a company gathered to laugh and make merry would be far too discordant a mixture. And as much could be said of all the other sciences. But as for philosophy, in the part that deals with man and his duties and obligations, it has been the common judgment of all the wise that, because of the pleasantness of its company, it should be refused neither at banquets nor at games. And when Plato invited it to his Symposium, we see how it entertains the gathering in a gentle manner suited to the time and place, though these are among its loftiest and most salutary discourses. *It benefits the poor and the rich alike; / Neglected, it will harm young and old alike.*[36]

1.26.34 In this way, no doubt, he will be idle less than the others. But just as the steps we take strolling in a gallery, even if there are three times as many, do not tire us like those we spend on some set journey, so our lesson, happening as if by chance, bound to no time or place and mingling with all our actions, will slip by without being felt. Even games and exercises will be a good part of his study: running, wrestling, music, dancing, hunting, the handling of horses and arms. I want his outward decorum, his social ease and his bodily bearing to be fashioned along with his soul. It is not a soul, it is not a body that we are

36 Horace, Epistles I.1.

training: it is a man; we must not make two of him. And as Plato says, we must not train one without the other, but drive them equally, like a pair of horses harnessed to the same shaft. And to hear him, does he not seem to give more time and care to bodily exercises, and to think that the mind gets its exercise along with them, and not the other way around?

1.26.35 For the rest, this education must be conducted with a stern gentleness, not as it is now done. Instead of inviting children to letters, they are in truth offered nothing but horror and cruelty. Away with violence and force! There is nothing, in my opinion, that so debases and stupefies a well-born nature. If you want him to fear shame and punishment, do not harden him to them. Harden him to sweat and cold, to wind and sun, and to the dangers he must learn to despise. Rid him of all softness and daintiness in dress and bed, in eating and drinking; accustom him to everything. Let him not be a pretty boy and a ladies' man, but a lusty, vigorous lad. As a child, as a man, as an old man, I have always believed and judged the same. But among other things, the discipline of most of our colleges has always displeased me. They might have erred less harmfully by leaning toward indulgence. They are real jails for captive youth. They make the young debauched by punishing them for it before they are. Go there at lesson time: you hear nothing but cries, from children being tortured and from masters drunk with anger. What a way to awaken a taste for their lessons in those tender and timid souls—to lead them to it with a fearsome scowl and hands armed with whips! An unjust and pernicious method. Not to mention what Quintilian has very rightly observed, that this imperious authority has dangerous consequences, and especially our manner of punishment. How much more fittingly their classrooms would be strewn with flowers and leaves than with bloody stumps of willow rods! I would have joy and gladness painted there, and Flora and the Graces, as the philosopher Speusippus did in his school. Where their profit is, let their pleasure be also. Wholesome foods should be sweetened for the

child, and harmful ones dosed with gall.[37] It is remarkable how careful Plato shows himself in his Laws about the gaiety and pastimes of the youth of his city, and how much he dwells on their races, games, songs, leaps and dances, the direction and patronage of which, he says, antiquity gave to the gods themselves: Apollo, the Muses and Minerva. He goes into a thousand precepts for his gymnasiums. On literary studies he spends very little time, and seems to recommend poetry in particular only for the sake of music.

1.26.36 All oddity and peculiarity in our manners and ways should be avoided as hostile to social life. Who would not be astonished at the constitution of Demophon, Alexander's steward, who sweated in the shade and shivered in the sun? I have seen men flee the smell of apples more than arquebus fire; others take fright at a mouse; others throw up at the sight of cream; others at seeing a feather bed shaken up; just as Germanicus could bear neither the sight nor the crowing of cocks. There may perhaps be some hidden property in this; but in my opinion it could be stamped out if one went about it early. Education has won this much from me—true, not without some effort—that, except for beer, my appetite adapts itself indifferently to everything people eat.

1.26.37 The body is still supple; for that reason it should be bent to all fashions and customs. And provided appetite and will can be kept in check, let a young man boldly be made fit for all nations and all company, even for disorder and excess, if need be. Let his training follow usage. Let him be able to do all things, and love to do only the good. The philosophers themselves do not find it praiseworthy in Callisthenes that he lost the favor of his master, the great Alexander, by refusing to match him drink for drink. He will laugh, he will frolic, he will carouse with his prince.[38] I want him, even in carousing, to outdo his companions in vigor and firmness, and to refrain from doing wrong not

37 Quintilian, Roman teacher of rhetoric (1st century AD).
38 Callisthenes, historian and nephew of Aristotle, who accompanied Alexander on his campaigns.

for lack of strength or knowledge, but for lack of will. *There is a great difference between not wanting to do wrong and not knowing how.* I thought I was paying honor to a lord as far removed from such excesses as anyone in France when I asked him, in good company, how many times in his life he had got drunk out of necessity in the King's business in Germany. He took it in that spirit, and answered that it was three times, and told us about them. I know some who, for lack of this ability, have got into great difficulty when they had to deal with that nation.[39]

> I have often noted with great admiration the marvelous nature of Alcibiades, who could transform himself so easily to such different ways without harm to his health: outdoing now the sumptuousness and pomp of the Persians, now the austerity and frugality of the Lacedaemonians; as reformed in Sparta as voluptuous in Ionia. *Every color, every state and circumstance became Aristippus.* That is how I would like to shape my pupil:
>
> *Him whom patience clothes in a doubled rag,*
> *I shall admire if he carries a changed way of life well,*
> *And plays both parts not without grace.*[40]

1.26.38 These are my lessons: the one who does them has profited from them more than the one who knows them. If you see him, you hear him; if you hear him, you see him. "God forbid," says someone in Plato, "that philosophizing should mean learning many things and dabbling in the arts." *This discipline of living well, the greatest of all the arts, they pursued in their lives rather than in their reading.* Leon, prince of the Phliasians, asked Heraclides Ponticus what science, what art he professed. "I know neither art nor science," he said, "but I am a philosopher." Diogenes was reproached for meddling with philosophy when he was ignorant. "I meddle with it," he said, "all the more fittingly."[41] Hegesias begged him to read him some book. "You are funny," he answered. "You choose real, natural figs, not painted

39 Seneca, Letters 90.
40 Horace, Epistles I.17.
41 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations IV.3.

ones; why do you not also choose natural, real exercises, not written ones?"

1.26.39 He will not so much recite his lesson as do it. He will repeat it in his actions. We shall see whether there is prudence in his undertakings, goodness and justice in his conduct, judgment and grace in his speech, fortitude in his illnesses, modesty in his games, temperance in his pleasures, order in the management of his household, indifference in his taste, whether for meat or fish, wine or water. *One who regards his learning not as a display of knowledge but as a law of life, and who obeys himself and follows his own principles.* The true mirror of our discourse is the course of our lives.[42] Someone asked Zeuxidamus why the Lacedaemonians did not put the rules of valor into writing and give them to their young people to read; he answered that it was because they wanted to accustom them to deeds, not words. Compare with this pupil, after fifteen or sixteen years, one of those college Latinizers who will have spent as long merely learning to talk. The world is nothing but chatter, and I never saw a man who did not say more rather than less than he should; yet half our life goes into it. They keep us four or five years learning to understand words and stitch them into sentences; as many again to shape them into a great body laid out in four or five parts; and another five at least to learn how to mix and weave them together concisely in some subtle fashion. Let us leave that to those who make it their express profession.

1.26.40 Going to Orléans one day, I met, on that plain this side of Cléry, two college teachers on their way to Bordeaux, about fifty paces apart. Farther behind them I saw a troop of riders with a master at its head, who was the late Count de La Rochefoucauld. One of my men asked the first of these teachers who the gentleman was who was coming along behind him. He had not seen the retinue following him, and thought he was being asked about his companion; he answered amusingly: "He is not a gentleman; he is a grammarian, and I am a logician." Now we, who on the contrary are trying here to form not a grammarian or a

42 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations II.4.

logician but a gentleman, let us leave them to misuse their leisure: we have business elsewhere.

MATTER BEFORE WORDS

With clear ideas, words follow of themselves; Montaigne praises plain, vigorous speech.

1.26.41 But let our pupil be well supplied with matter, and the words will follow only too readily; if they will not follow, he will drag them along. I hear some people excuse themselves for not being able to express themselves. They make a show of having their heads full of many fine things, but say that for lack of eloquence they cannot bring them out. That is a sham. Do you know what I think it is? It is shadows that come to them from some shapeless notions, which they cannot sort out and clarify within, and so cannot bring forth without. They do not yet understand themselves. Watch them stammer a little as they are about to give birth, and you will judge that their labor is not in the delivery but in the conception, and that they are still only licking this half-formed matter into shape. For my part, I hold, and Socrates prescribes, that whoever has a vivid and clear idea in his mind will bring it out, whether in the dialect of Bergamo or, if he is mute, by gestures: *Once the matter is foreseen, the words will follow willingly.* And as that other said, just as poetically in his prose, *when things have taken hold of the mind, words come crowding.* And this other: *the things themselves carry off the words.*[43] He does not know the ablative, the subjunctive, the substantive, or grammar; nor does his lackey, or a fishwife of the Petit-Pont. And yet they will talk with you to your heart's content, if you wish, and will perhaps trip up over the rules of their language as little as the best master of arts in France. He does not know rhetoric, nor how to capture the goodwill of the candid reader by way of a preamble, nor does he care to know it. In truth, all this fine painting is easily outshone by the luster of a

43 The quotations are from Horace, Art of Poetry; Seneca the Elder, Controversies; and Cicero, On Ends. The Bergamo dialect was proverbially rustic.

simple, natural truth. These niceties serve only to amuse the common people, who cannot take more solid and firmer meat, as Afer shows very clearly in Tacitus.[44] The ambassadors of Samos had come to Cleomenes, king of Sparta, armed with a fine long oration to stir him to war against the tyrant Polycrates. After he had let them say their piece, he answered: "As for your beginning and exordium, I no longer remember it, nor therefore the middle; and as for your conclusion, I will have none of it." That is a fine answer, it seems to me, and a pair of orators thoroughly put out of countenance. And what about this other?[45] The Athenians had to choose between two architects to direct a great building project. The first, more polished, presented himself with a fine prepared speech on the subject of the work, and was drawing the people's judgment his way. But the other said, in three words: "Lords of Athens, what this man has said, I will do." At the height of Cicero's eloquence, many were struck with admiration, but Cato only laughed at it: "We have," he said, "an amusing consul." Whether it comes before or after, a useful maxim or a fine stroke is always in season. If it does not fit well with what goes before or what comes after, it is good in itself.[46]

44 The Petit-Pont was a Paris bridge near the fish market. Montaigne means Marcus Aper, a speaker in Tacitus' Dialogue on Orators.

45 Polycrates was tyrant of Samos in the 6th century BC.

46 Cato the Younger, mocking Cicero's speech for Murena in 63 BC.

1.26.42 I am not one of those who think that good rhyme makes a good poem. Let him lengthen a short syllable if he likes; no matter. If the inventions are delightful, if wit and judgment have done their work well, I will say: there is a good poet but a bad versifier, *A man of keen wit, but harsh in composing verse.* Let someone, says Horace, strip his work of all its seams and measures—*Take away the fixed beats and meters, put the word that comes first in order*
Last, and set the final words before the first,
You would still find the limbs of the dismembered poet—he will not belie himself for all that; even the pieces will be beautiful.[47]

That is what Menander replied when he was scolded because the day was approaching on which he had promised a comedy, and he had not yet set his hand to it: "It is composed and ready; all that remains is to add the verses." Having the substance and the matter arranged in his mind, he made little account of the rest. Since Ronsard and du Bellay have brought our French poetry into credit, I see no apprentice so petty that he does not puff up his words and arrange his cadences more or less as they do.[48] *More sound than substance.* In the common view, there were never so many poets. But just as it has been easy for them to reproduce their rhymes, so they fall well short of imitating the rich descriptions of the one and the delicate inventions of the other.[49]

1.26.43 Yes, but what will he do if someone presses him with the sophistical subtlety of some syllogism? "Ham makes you drink; drinking quenches thirst; therefore ham quenches thirst." Let him laugh at it. It is subtler to laugh at it than to answer it. Let him borrow from Aristippus this amusing counter-trick: "Why should I untie it, since even tied up it gives me trouble?"

47 Both quotations are from Horace, Satires I.4; the first describes the poet Lucilius.
48 Menander (c. 342–290 BC), Greek comic playwright. Pierre de Ronsard and Joachim du Bellay were the leading poets of the Pléiade.
49 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius 40.

Someone was propounding dialectical tricks against Cleanthes, and Chrysippus said to him: "Play these conjuring games with children, and do not divert the serious thoughts of a grown man to them." If these foolish quibbles, *twisted and prickly sophisms*, are to persuade him of a lie, that is dangerous; but if they remain without effect and move him only to laughter, I do not see why he should be on his guard against them.[50] There are some so foolish that they go a quarter of a league out of their way to chase after a fine word: *or who do not fit words to things, but fetch from outside things that the words may suit.* And the other: *who, charmed by the beauty of some word, are drawn on to write what they had not meant to.* I am much more willing to twist a fine saying to sew it onto myself than to twist my thread out of line to go and fetch it. On the contrary, it is for words to serve and follow; and let Gascon get there if French cannot. I want the things to prevail, and to fill the imagination of the listener in such a way that he has no memory of the words.[51] The speech I love is simple and natural, the same on paper as in the mouth: a speech succulent and sinewy, brief and compact, not so much dainty and well-combed as vehement and abrupt. *Only that speech will have savor which strikes home.* Rather difficult than tedious, far from affectation; irregular, disjointed and bold; each piece making a body of its own; not pedantic, not friarly, not lawyerly, but rather soldierly, as Suetonius calls that of Julius Caesar. And yet I do not quite see why he calls it that.[52]

1.26.44 I have gladly imitated that carelessness seen in our young men in the way they wear their clothes: a cloak worn like a sash, the cape over one shoulder, a stocking loosely pulled up, which displays a pride disdainful of these extraneous trappings and careless of art. But I find it even better employed in the manner of speaking. All affectation, especially given French gaiety and freedom, is unbecoming in a courtier. And in a monarchy every gentleman should be trained to the bearing of a

50 The Latin is from Cicero, Academics.
51 Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory VIII.3, and Seneca, Letters to Lucilius 59.
52 From an epitaph of the Roman poet Lucan.

courtier. So we do well to lean a little toward the natural and the disdainful. I do not like a fabric in which the joins and seams show; just as in a beautiful body one should not be able to count the bones and veins. *The speech that serves truth should be plain and unadorned. Who speaks with care unless he wants to speak affectedly?* Eloquence that draws us to itself does injury to the substance. As in dress it is small-mindedness to want to mark oneself out by some peculiar and unusual fashion, so in language the hunt for new phrases and little-known words comes from a schoolboyish, childish ambition. Would that I could use only the words that are used in the markets of Paris! Aristophanes the grammarian knew nothing about it when he criticized Epicurus for the simplicity of his words, and for the aim of his art of oratory, which was simply clarity of language. The imitation of speech, because it is easy, is promptly taken up by a whole people. The imitation of judgment and invention does not go so fast.[53] Most readers, because they have found a similar robe, very wrongly think they hold a similar body. Strength and sinews cannot be borrowed; finery and cloak can. Most of those who frequent me talk like the Essays; but I do not know whether they think like them. The Athenians, says Plato, have as their share the care for abundance and elegance of speech, the Spartans for brevity, and the Cretans for fertility of ideas rather than of language: these last are the best. Zeno said he had two kinds of disciples: those he called φιλολόγους, eager to learn things, who were his favorites; and the others, λογοφιλους, who cared only for language.[54] This is not to say that speaking well is not a fine and good thing; but it is not so good as people make it out, and I am vexed that our whole life is taken up with it. I would want first to know my own language well, and that of my neighbors, with whom I have the most frequent dealings.

53 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius 40 and 75. Aristophanes of Byzantium was a Greek scholar of the 3rd–2nd century BC.

54 Plato, Laws I. The Greek terms mean roughly "lovers of reason" and "lovers of words."

MONTAIGNE'S OWN EDUCATION

His father had him taught Latin as a mother tongue, then sent him to the Collège de Guyenne.

1.26.45 Greek and Latin are without doubt a fine and great accomplishment, but they are bought too dear. I will describe here a way of getting them more cheaply than usual, which was tried out on me myself; anyone who likes may use it. My late father, having made all the inquiries a man can make among learned and intelligent people about an excellent form of education, was made aware of this drawback then in practice. He was told that the long time we spent learning languages that cost the ancients nothing was the sole reason why we cannot attain the greatness of soul and of knowledge of the ancient Greeks and Romans. I do not believe it is the only reason. Be that as it may, the expedient my father hit upon was this. While I was still at nurse and before my tongue was first loosened, he put me in the charge of a German, who has since died a famous doctor in France, wholly ignorant of our language and very well versed in Latin. This man, whom he had sent for expressly and who was very highly paid, had me constantly in his arms. He also had two others with him, less learned, to attend me and relieve the first; these spoke to me in no language but Latin. As for the rest of his household, it was an inviolable rule that neither he himself, nor my mother, nor valet, nor chambermaid, spoke in my presence anything but as many words of Latin as each had learned in order to jabber with me. It is wonderful what profit everyone drew from it. My father and mother learned enough Latin to understand it, and acquired enough to use it when necessary, as did the other servants who were most attached to my service. In short, we Latinized ourselves so much that it overflowed into the villages all around, where there still remain, having taken root through use, several Latin names for craftsmen and their tools. As for me, I was over six years old before I understood any more French or Perigordian than Arabic. And without art,

without book, without grammar or precept, without the whip and without tears, I had learned Latin quite as pure as my schoolmaster knew it, for I could not have mixed or corrupted it. If, as a test, they wanted to set me a theme in the school fashion, where others are given it in French, it had to be given to me in bad Latin, for me to turn into good.[55] And Nicolas Grouchy, who wrote On the Assemblies of the Romans, Guillaume Guérente, who wrote commentaries on Aristotle, George Buchanan, that great Scottish poet, and Marc-Antoine Muret, whom France and Italy recognize as the best orator of the age—my private tutors—have often told me that in my childhood I had that language so ready and so much at hand that they were afraid to accost me. Buchanan, whom I later saw in the retinue of the late Marshal de Brissac, told me he was busy writing on the education of children and was taking mine as his model; for he then had in his charge that Count de Brissac whom we have since seen so valiant and so brave.[56]

1.26.46 As for Greek, of which I have almost no understanding at all, my father planned to have me taught it by art, but in a new way, as a game and exercise: we tossed our declensions back and forth like a ball, in the manner of those who learn arithmetic and geometry through certain board games. For among other things he had been advised to make me relish knowledge and duty through my own unforced will and desire, and to bring up my soul in all gentleness and freedom, without severity or constraint. I may say he carried this to the point of superstition. Because some hold that it disturbs the tender brains of children to wake them in the morning with a start, and to snatch them suddenly and violently from sleep (in which they are plunged much more deeply than we are), he had me woken by the sound of some instrument, and I was never without a man to do me that service.

1.26.47 This example will suffice to judge the rest, and also to commend both the prudence and the affection of so good a

55 Perigordian is the Occitan dialect of Montaigne's native Périgord.

father, who is not to be blamed if he reaped no fruits answering to such exquisite cultivation. Two things were the cause. First, the field was barren and unsuitable. For though I had firm and sound health, and with it a gentle and tractable nature, I was for all that so heavy, soft and drowsy that no one could drag me out of idleness, not even to make me play. What I saw, I saw well; and beneath this sluggish constitution I nourished bold imaginings and opinions beyond my age. My mind was slow, and went only as far as it was led; my grasp was tardy, my invention feeble, and on top of all that I had an incredible lack of memory. With all this, it is no wonder he could get nothing worthwhile out of me. Secondly, just as those driven by a frantic desire to be cured let themselves follow every sort of advice, the good man, being extremely afraid of failing in a thing he had so much at heart, finally let himself be carried away by common opinion, which always follows those who go ahead, like cranes. He fell in with custom, no longer having around him those who had given him those first ideas on education, which he had brought back from Italy; and he sent me, at about six, to the Collège de Guyenne, then very flourishing and the best in France.[57] And there it is impossible to add anything to the care he took, both in choosing competent private tutors for me and in all the other circumstances of my upbringing, in which he reserved several special practices contrary to the usage of the colleges. But all the same, it was still college. My Latin promptly degenerated, and since then, through disuse, I have lost all use of it. And this unusual education of mine served only to make me skip straight into the top classes on arrival. For at thirteen, when I left the college, I had finished my course (as they call it), and in truth without any fruit that I could now take into account.

1.26.48 My first taste for books came from the pleasure I took in the tales of Ovid's Metamorphoses. For at about the age of seven or eight I would steal away from every other pleasure to read

56 Humanists who taught at the Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux. Marshal Charles de Cossé-Brissac's son Timoléon was killed in 1569.

57 The Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux, founded in 1533.

them, since that language was my mother tongue, and it was the easiest book I knew and, because of its subject matter, the best suited to the weakness of my age. For as to the Lancelots of the Lake, the Amadises, the Huons of Bordeaux, and such rubbishy books that amuse childhood, I did not know even their names, nor do I yet know their contents, so strict was my discipline. This made me more careless in studying my other prescribed lessons.[58] Here it was singularly fortunate for me to have as tutor an intelligent man, who knew how to wink skillfully at this unruliness of mine and at others like it. For in that way I ran straight through Virgil's Aeneid, and then Terence, and then Plautus, and some Italian comedies, lured always by the pleasure of the subject. If he had been foolish enough to break off this course, I think I would have brought nothing away from school but a hatred of books, as almost all our nobility do. He managed it ingeniously, pretending to see nothing. He sharpened my hunger, letting me gorge on these books only on the sly, and keeping me gently at my duty in the other, regular studies. For the chief qualities my father looked for in those to whom he gave charge of me were good nature and an easy temperament. And indeed mine had no other vice than languor and laziness. The danger was not that I would do ill, but that I would do nothing. No one predicted that I would become wicked, only useless; they foresaw idleness in me, not malice. I feel that this is how it has turned out. The complaints that ring in my ears are these: "He is idle; cold in the duties of friendship and kinship; and in public duties too aloof, too disdainful." Even the most abusive do not say, "Why has he taken? Why has he not paid?" but "Why does he not forgo? Why does he not give?" I would take it as a favor if nothing more were wanted of me than such works of supererogation. But they are unjust to exact what I do not owe much more rigorously than they exact of themselves what they do owe. By condemning me to it, they wipe out the graciousness of the act and the gratitude that would be due me for it. Whereas the good I actively do ought to weigh more coming from my hand, consid-

58 Popular romances of chivalry.

ering that I have received none whatever. I can dispose of my fortune the more freely because it is more my own, and of myself because I am more my own. Still, if I were a great illuminator of my own actions, I might perhaps rebuff these reproaches well enough, and teach some people that they are not so much offended that I do not do enough as that I could do a good deal more than I do.

1.26.49 My soul did not fail, nevertheless, to have at the same time firm stirrings of its own, and sure and open judgments about the things it knew; and it digested them alone, without sharing them with anyone. And among other things, I truly believe it would have been wholly incapable of yielding to force and violence. Shall I count this faculty of my childhood: assurance of countenance, and suppleness of voice and gesture in applying myself to the parts I undertook? For before the usual age, *I had barely entered my twelfth year,* I played the leading roles in the Latin tragedies of Buchanan, Guérente and Muret, which were performed with dignity in our Collège de Guyenne.[59] In this, as in all other aspects of his office, Andreas Goveanus, our principal, was beyond compare the greatest principal in France; and I was considered a master craftsman at it. It is an exercise I do not disapprove of for young children of good family; and I have since seen our princes take it up in person, after the example of some of the ancients, honorably and laudably. In Greece it was even permitted for people of rank to make a profession of it: *He disclosed the matter to Aristo, the tragic actor; he was a man of good birth and fortune, and his art did not disgrace these, since nothing of the kind is shameful among the Greeks.*[60]

1.26.50 For I have always accused of absurdity those who condemn these entertainments, and of injustice those who refuse entry into our good towns to actors who deserve it, and begrudge the people these public pleasures. Good governments take care to assemble the citizens and bring them together for

59 Virgil, Eclogues 8.

60 André de Gouvéa, Portuguese humanist, principal of the Collège de Guyenne. The Latin is from Livy, History of Rome XXIV.

sports and games, as they do for the serious duties of devotion. Society and friendship are increased by it; and besides, one could not grant them more orderly pastimes than those that take place in everyone's presence and in the very sight of the magistrate. And I would think it reasonable for the prince now and then to treat the common people to them at his own expense, with an affection and kindness almost paternal; and that in populous towns there should be places designed and fitted out for these spectacles—some diversion from worse and hidden doings.

1.26.51 To return to my subject, there is nothing like whetting the appetite and the affection; otherwise all you produce is asses loaded with books. They are flogged into keeping a satchel full of learning, which, to do any good, must not merely be lodged in us; we must marry it.

I.27 It Is Folly to Measure the True and False by Our Own Capacity

C'est folie de rapporter le vray et le faux à nostre suffisance
It is presumptuous to dismiss as impossible whatever seems unlikely to us, since we do not know the limits of nature.

1.27.1 It is perhaps not without reason that we attribute to simplicity and ignorance the readiness to believe and to be persuaded. For I seem to have learned once that belief was like an impression made on our soul, and that the softer and less resistant the soul was, the easier it was to imprint something on it. *As the pan of a scale must sink under the weights placed in it, so the mind must yield to what is evident.* The emptier the soul and the less counterweight it has, the more easily it sinks under the load of the first persuasion. That is why children, the common people, women and the sick are more apt to be led by the ears.[1] But on the other hand, it is foolish presumption to go about disdaining and condemning as false whatever does not seem likely to us; which is a common vice of those who think they have some ability above the ordinary. I used to do so once. If I heard talk of returning spirits, or of the prediction of future things, of enchantments, of sorceries, or some other tale I could not swallow—*Dreams, magic terrors, marvels, witches, / Ghosts of the night and Thessalian portents*—I felt pity for the poor people deceived by these follies.[2]

1.27.2 And now I find that I was at least as much to be pitied myself. Not that experience has since shown me anything bey-

1 Cicero, Academics II.
2 Horace, Epistles II.2. Thessaly was famed in antiquity for witchcraft.

ond my first beliefs—and that is not for want of curiosity on my part. But reason has taught me that to condemn a thing so decisively as false and impossible is to claim the advantage of having in one's head the bounds and limits of the will of God and of the power of our mother nature; and that there is no more notable folly in the world than to reduce them to the measure of our own capacity and ability. If we call monsters or miracles whatever our reason cannot reach, how many of them continually present themselves to our sight? Let us consider through what clouds, and how gropingly, we are led to the knowledge of most of the things we have in hand. We shall surely find that it is familiarity rather than knowledge that takes away their strangeness—*Now no one, weary and sated with seeing, / Deigns to look up at the shining temples of the sky*—and that if these things were presented to us anew, we would find them as unbelievable as any others, or more so.[3]

> *If now for the first time they appeared to mortals*
> *Without warning, as if suddenly set before their eyes,*
> *Nothing could be called more marvelous than these things,*
> *Nor anything the nations would less have dared believe*
> *beforehand.* The man who had never seen a river thought the first one he came upon was the Ocean; and the things that are greatest within our knowledge we judge to be the utmost that nature makes in that kind. Indeed, a river that is not the largest seems so to one
> Who has never seen a larger; and a tree, and a man,
> Seem huge; and in every kind of thing,
> Whatever is greatest that each has seen, he imagines to be huge.

Minds grow accustomed through the habit of the eyes, and neither marvel at nor inquire into the causes of the things they always see. The novelty of things incites us more than their greatness to seek their causes. We must judge this infinite power of nature with more reverence, and with more acknowledgment

3 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things II.

of our own ignorance and weakness. How many unlikely things there are, attested by people worthy of belief, which, if we cannot be persuaded of them, we must at least leave in suspense! For to condemn them as impossible is to claim, with rash presumption, to know how far possibility extends.[4] If we properly understood the difference between the impossible and the unusual, and between what is contrary to the order of nature's course and what is contrary to the common opinion of men—neither believing rashly nor disbelieving easily—we would observe the rule of "Nothing too much," prescribed by Chilon.[5]

1.27.3 When we find in Froissart that the Count of Foix, in Béarn, learned of the defeat of King John of Castile at Aljubarrota the day after it happened, and read the means he alleges for it, we may laugh at it; and likewise at what our annals say, that Pope Honorius, on the very day King Philip Augustus died at Mantes, had his public funeral held and ordered it held throughout Italy. For the authority of these witnesses perhaps does not rank high enough to keep us in check. But what then?[6] Suppose Plutarch, besides several examples he cites from antiquity, says he knows for certain that in Domitian's time the news of the battle lost by Antonius in Germany, many days' journey away, was published in Rome and spread through the whole world on the very day it was lost; and suppose Caesar holds that it has often happened that rumor has outrun the event: shall we say that these simple people let themselves be fooled along with the common people, for not being as clear-sighted as we are? Is there anything more delicate, more clear and more lively than Pliny's judgment, when he cares to bring it into play? Anything further from vanity?[7] I leave aside the excellence of his learning, which I count for less: in which of these two qualities do we surpass him? And yet there is no schoolboy so petty that he does

4 Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods II.

5 Chilon of Sparta, one of the Seven Sages of Greece.

6 Froissart's Chronicles say a familiar spirit brought the count news of the battle of 1385. Philip Augustus died in 1223.

7 Lucius Antonius Saturninus, whose revolt against Domitian was crushed in AD 89.

not convict him of lying and want to lecture him on the workings of nature.

1.27.4 When we read in Bouchet of the miracles worked by the relics of Saint Hilary, let it pass: his credit is not great enough to deprive us of the license to contradict him. But to condemn all such stories wholesale seems to me a singular impudence.[8] That great Saint Augustine testifies that he saw a blind child recover his sight at the relics of Saint Gervase and Saint Protasius in Milan; a woman in Carthage cured of a cancer by the sign of the cross that a newly baptized woman made over her; Hesperius, a friend of his, drive out the spirits that infested his house with a little earth from the Sepulcher of our Lord, and, when that earth was later carried to the church, a paralytic suddenly cured by it; a woman in a procession who touched Saint Stephen's reliquary with a bouquet, rubbed her eyes with that bouquet, and recovered her sight, long since lost; and several other miracles at which he says he himself was present. Of what shall we accuse him, and the two holy[9] bishops Aurelius and Maximinus whom he calls as his witnesses? Shall it be of ignorance, simplicity, credulity, or of malice and imposture? Is there any man in our century so impudent as to think himself comparable to them, whether in virtue and piety or in learning, judgment and ability? *Though they gave no reason, they would overwhelm me by their authority alone.* It is a dangerous and weighty boldness, besides the absurd rashness it drags along with it, to despise what we do not understand. For after you have established, by your fine understanding, the limits of truth and falsehood, and it turns out that you must necessarily believe things even stranger than what you deny, you have already obliged yourself to abandon those limits.[10]

1.27.5 Now what seems to me to bring just as much disorder into our consciences, in these religious troubles we are in, is the

8 Jean Bouchet, author of the Annals of Aquitaine (1524). Saint Hilary was a 4th-century bishop of Poitiers.
9 Augustine, City of God XXII.8.
10 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations I.

way Catholics pick and choose within their belief. They think they are being very moderate and enlightened when they concede to their adversaries some of the articles in dispute. But besides not seeing what an advantage it is to the man who attacks you when you begin to yield to him and draw back, and how much it encourages him to press his point, they fail to see that the articles they choose as the least weighty are sometimes very important. Either we must submit entirely to the authority of our ecclesiastical government, or release ourselves from it entirely. It is not for us to determine what share of obedience we owe it. Moreover, I can say this from having tried it. I once made use of this freedom of personal choice and selection, disregarding certain points in the observance of our Church that seemed to have a more empty or a stranger look; then, coming to discuss them with learned men, I found that these things have a massive and very solid foundation, and that it is only stupidity and ignorance that make us receive them with less reverence than the rest. Why do we not remember how much contradiction we feel even within our own judgment? How many things served us yesterday as articles of faith that are fables to us today? Glory and curiosity are the two scourges of our soul. The latter leads us to poke our nose into everything; the former forbids us to leave anything unresolved and undecided.

I.28 Of Friendship

De l'Amitié
Montaigne describes his perfect friendship with Étienne de La Boétie, a union of souls unlike any ordinary bond.

1.28.1 As I was considering the way a painter I employ goes about his work, I had a mind to follow his example. He chooses the finest spot, in the middle of each wall, to put a picture worked with all his skill; and the empty space all around it he fills with grotesques, which are fantastic paintings whose only charm lies in their variety and strangeness. And what are these here, in truth, but grotesques and monstrous bodies, patched together from various limbs, with no definite shape, having no order, sequence or proportion other than by chance? *A lovely woman above, ending in a fish below.* I go along with my painter as far as this second point, but I fall short in the other and better part; for my skill does not go so far that I would dare undertake a rich, polished picture, formed according to art. It occurred to me to borrow one from Étienne de La Boétie, which will honor all the rest of this work. It is a discourse to which he gave the name Voluntary Servitude; but those who did not know this have since very aptly rebaptized it Against One. He wrote it by way of an essay in his early youth, in honor of liberty against tyrants.[1] It has long been passing through the hands of people of understanding, not without very great and well-deserved praise; for it is fine, and as full as can be. Yet it is far from being the best he could do. If, at the more mature age when I knew him, he had

1 Horace, Art of Poetry.

taken up a plan like mine of putting his notions in writing, we would see many rare things that would bring us very close to the glory of antiquity; for especially in this matter of natural gifts, I know no one comparable to him. But nothing of his has remained except this discourse—and that by chance, and I believe he never saw it again after it left his hands—and some memoranda on that edict of January made famous by our civil wars, which may yet find their place elsewhere. That is all I have been able to recover of his remains (I, whom he left, on his deathbed, with so loving a recommendation, by his will, heir to his library and his papers), apart from the little book of his works that I have had published. And I am particularly indebted to this piece, inasmuch as it served as the means of our first acquaintance.[2] For it was shown to me long before I had seen him, and gave me my first knowledge of his name, thus starting on its way this friendship which we fostered between us, as long as God willed, so entire and so perfect that you will certainly read of few like it, and among men of our time no trace of it is to be seen in practice. So many chances must meet to build it that it is a great deal if Fortune brings it about once in three centuries.

KINDS OF FRIENDSHIP

Ties of family, love and marriage fall short of the perfect friendship he describes.

1.28.2 There is nothing to which nature seems to have led us more than to society. And Aristotle says that good lawgivers have taken more care for friendship than for justice. Now the ultimate point of its perfection is this one. For in general, all the friendships that pleasure or profit, public or private need, forge and nourish are so much the less beautiful and generous, and so much the less friendships, as they mix into friendship some cause, aim and fruit other than friendship itself. Nor do the four

2 The Edict of January 1562 granted limited toleration to Protestants. Montaigne published La Boétie's works in 1571.

ancient kinds—natural, social, hospitable, erotic—come up to it, either separately or together.[3]

1.28.3 From children to fathers, it is rather respect. Friendship is nourished by communication, which cannot exist between them because of their too great disparity, and would perhaps offend against the duties of nature. For neither can all the secret thoughts of fathers be communicated to their children, lest it beget an unbecoming familiarity; nor could admonitions and corrections, which are one of the first offices of friendship, be exercised by children toward their fathers. There have been nations where by custom children killed their fathers, and others where fathers killed their children, to avoid the hindrance they can sometimes be to each other; and by nature the one depends on the ruin of the other. There have been philosophers who disdained this natural bond. Witness Aristippus: when he was pressed about the affection he owed his children for having come out of him, he began to spit, saying that this too had come out of him, and that we also breed lice and worms. And that other man, whom Plutarch was trying to bring to make peace with his brother: "I do not think any more of him," he said, "for having come out of the same hole." It is truly a beautiful name, and full of affection, the name of brother; and for that reason he and I made it the name of our alliance. But this mingling of property, these divisions of inheritance, and the fact that the wealth of one is the poverty of the other, wonderfully dilute and loosen this brotherly solder. Brothers, having to pursue their advancement along the same path and at the same pace, must inevitably jostle and collide with each other often. Moreover, why should the harmony and affinity that beget these true and perfect friendships be found in them? Father and son may be of entirely different temperaments, and so may brothers. "He is my son, he is my kinsman—but he is a surly man, a wicked one, or a fool." And then, insofar as these are friendships that law and natural obligation command of us, there is so much the less of

3 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics VIII.

our own choice and free will in them; and our free will has no product more properly its own than affection and friendship.

> Not that I have not experienced all that can be found on that side, having had the best father that ever was, and the most indulgent, even into his extreme old age, and coming from a family famous from father to son, and exemplary in this matter of brotherly concord: *and himself*
> *Known for his fatherly love toward his brothers.* As for affection for women, though it is born of our choice, it cannot be compared with friendship, nor put in this category. Its fire, I confess—*for I am not unknown to the goddess*
> *Who mingles a sweet bitterness with the cares of love*—is more active, more burning and fiercer.[4]

But it is a rash and fickle fire, wavering and changeable, a fever's fire, subject to fits and remissions, that holds us only by one corner. In friendship there is a general and universal warmth, temperate besides and even, a constant and settled warmth, all gentleness and smoothness, with nothing sharp or stinging about it.

> What is more, in love there is nothing but a frantic desire for what flees us: *As the hunter pursues the hare*
> *In cold and heat, on mountain and on shore,*
> *And cares no more for it once he sees it caught,*
> *And only hastens after what flees.* As soon as love enters the bounds of friendship, that is to say, the harmony of wills, it fades and languishes. Enjoyment destroys it, since its end is bodily and subject to satiety. Friendship, on the contrary, is enjoyed in proportion as it is desired; it rises, feeds and grows only in enjoyment, since it is spiritual, and the soul is refined by use.[5]

Beneath this perfect friendship, those fickle affections once found a place in me—not to speak of him, who confesses only

4 Horace, Odes II.2, and Catullus 68; the goddess is Venus.
5 Ariosto, Orlando Furioso X.

too much of them in his verses. Thus these two passions came to know each other in me, but never to be compared: the first holding its course in a lofty and proud flight, and disdainfully watching the other make its swoops far beneath it.

1.28.4 As for marriage, it is a bargain in which only the entry is free, since its duration is constrained and forced and depends on something other than our will; and it is a bargain ordinarily made for other ends. Besides that, a thousand foreign tangles come into it that have to be unraveled, enough to break the thread and disturb the course of a lively affection. In friendship, by contrast, there is no business or dealing except with friendship itself. Moreover, to tell the truth, the ordinary ability of women is not up to the conversation and communication that nourish this sacred bond. Nor does their soul seem firm enough to bear the strain of a knot so tight and so lasting. And certainly, but for that, if it were possible to form such a free and voluntary relationship—one in which not only the souls had this complete enjoyment, but the bodies also had a share in the union, so that the whole man was engaged—it is certain that the friendship would be fuller and more complete. But this sex has never yet, by any example, been able to attain it, and the ancient schools exclude it.

1.28.5 And that other, Greek license is rightly abhorred by our morals. Yet it too, because by their custom it required so great a disparity of age and difference of roles between the lovers, did not sufficiently match the perfect union and harmony that we are asking for here either. For what is this love of friendship?[6] Why does no one love an ugly youth, or a handsome old man? For I think even the picture the Academy paints of it will not disown me if I say this on its behalf. That first frenzy, inspired by the son of Venus in the lover's heart for the flower of tender youth, was simply founded on outward beauty, a false image of bodily generation; and to it they permit all the insolent and passionate efforts that an immoderate ardor can produce. It could not be founded on the mind, whose qualities were still hidden

6 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations.

from view, for the mind was only just being born and was not yet old enough to sprout.[7] If this frenzy seized a base heart, the means of its pursuit were riches, presents, favor in advancement to high office, and other such base merchandise, which they condemn. If it fell upon a nobler heart, the means employed were noble too: philosophical instruction, teachings to revere religion, obey the laws and die for the good of one's country, examples of valor, prudence and justice. The lover strove to make himself acceptable by the grace and beauty of his soul, the beauty of his body having long since faded, and hoped by this fellowship of minds to establish a firmer and more lasting bargain. When this pursuit achieved its effect in due season —for what they do not require of the lover, that he should bring leisure and discretion to his enterprise, they strictly require of the beloved, since he had to judge an inner beauty, hard to know and hidden from discovery—then there was born in the beloved the desire for a spiritual conception, by means of a spiritual beauty. On his side this was the main thing, and bodily beauty was accidental and secondary: the very reverse of the lover. For this reason they prefer the beloved, and prove that the gods prefer him too. And they sharply rebuke the poet Aeschylus for having given, in the love of Achilles and Patroclus, the lover's part to Achilles, who was in the first beardless bloom of his youth and the most beautiful of the Greeks.[8] Once this general communion is established, with its master and worthier part exercising its functions and holding sway, they say that very useful fruits came of it, both private and public. It was the strength of the countries that accepted the practice, and the chief defense of equity and liberty: witness the salutary loves of Harmodius and Aristogiton. That is why they call it sacred and divine; by their account nothing is hostile to it but the violence of tyrants and the cowardice of peoples. In short, all that can be granted in favor of the Academy is that this was a love ending in

7 The Academy is Plato's school; Montaigne summarizes the account of love in Plato's Symposium and Phaedrus. The son of Venus is Cupid.

8 Aeschylus' lost play The Myrmidons; the criticism is made in Plato's Symposium.

friendship, which fits not badly with the Stoic definition of love: *Love is an attempt to form a friendship, inspired by the appearance of beauty.*[9]

1.28.6 I return to my own description, which is fairer and more even. *Friendships can be fully judged only when characters and ages have been strengthened and matured.* For the rest, what we ordinarily call friends and friendships are nothing but acquaintanceships and familiarities knotted together by some chance or convenience, by means of which our souls keep each other company. In the friendship I speak of, they mix and blend into each other in so complete a mingling that they efface the seam that joined them and can no longer find it. If I am pressed to say why I loved him, I feel that it cannot be expressed except by answering: Because it was he, because it was I.[10] Beyond all my reasoning, and beyond anything I can say about it in particular, there is some inexplicable and fateful force that brought about this union. We were seeking each other before we had ever seen each other, through reports we heard of each other, which worked more powerfully on our affection than reports reasonably should—by some decree of heaven, I believe. We embraced each other by our names. And at our first meeting, which happened by chance at a great feast and gathering in the city, we found ourselves so taken with each other, so well acquainted, so bound together, that from then on nothing was so close to either of us as each was to the other. He wrote an excellent Latin satire, which has been published, in which he excuses and explains the haste of our mutual understanding, which reached its perfection so quickly. Since it had so little time to last, and had begun so late (for we were both grown men, and he a year or so older), it had no time to lose. Nor did it have to follow the pattern of soft, regular friendships, which need so many precautions of long preliminary acquaintance. This one has no model but

9 Harmodius and Aristogiton killed Hipparchus, brother of the tyrant of Athens, in 514 BC. The Stoic definition is quoted from Cicero, Tusculan Disputations.
10 Cicero, On Friendship.

itself, and can be compared only to itself.[11] It is not one particular consideration, nor two, nor three, nor four, nor a thousand. It is some quintessence of all this mixture which, having seized my whole will, led it to plunge and lose itself in his; which, having seized his whole will, led it to plunge and lose itself in mine, with an equal hunger, an equal eagerness. I say "lose" in all truth, for we kept nothing back that was our own, nothing that was either his or mine.

1.28.7 The Roman consuls, after the condemnation of Tiberius Gracchus, were prosecuting all those who had been in league with him. In their presence Laelius asked Caius Blosius, the chief of Gracchus's friends, how much he would have been willing to do for him. Blosius answered: "Everything." "What, everything?" Laelius went on. "And what if he had ordered you to set fire to our temples?" "He would never have ordered me to," replied Blosius. "But what if he had?" added Laelius. "I would have obeyed," he answered. If he was as perfect a friend of Gracchus as the histories say, he had no need to offend the consuls by this last bold confession, and he should not have abandoned the assurance he had of Gracchus's will.[12] All the same, those who condemn this answer as seditious do not properly understand the mystery of it. They fail to assume what was the fact: that he held Gracchus's will up his sleeve, both by power over it and by knowledge of it. They were more friends than citizens, more friends to each other than friends or enemies of their country, or friends of ambition and upheaval. Having committed themselves perfectly to each other, each perfectly held the reins of the other's inclination. Have this team guided by virtue and the direction of reason (as indeed it is altogether impossible to harness it without that), and Blosius's answer is just what it should have been. If their actions came apart, they were neither friends to each other, by my measure, nor friends to themselves. Besides, this answer sounds no worse than mine would if

11 La Boétie's Latin poem to Montaigne, published in 1571 with his other works.
12 Tiberius Gracchus, tribune of the people, was killed in 133 BC; Gaius Laelius was the friend of Scipio. The story is told in Cicero's On Friendship.

someone asked me in this way, "If your will commanded you to kill your daughter, would you kill her?" and I said yes. For that bears no witness of any consent to doing it, because I have no doubt about my will, and just as little about the will of such a friend. It is not in the power of all the arguments in the world to dislodge me from the certainty I have about the intentions and judgments of mine. Not one of his actions could be presented to me, whatever face it wore, without my immediately finding its mainspring. Our souls pulled together in harness so closely, they regarded each other with so ardent an affection, and with a like affection laid themselves open to each other down to their innermost depths, that not only did I know his soul as well as my own, but I would certainly have trusted myself to him more readily than to myself.

COMMON FRIENDSHIPS

Ordinary friendships need caution; perfect friendship knows no debts and admits only one friend.

1.28.8 Let no one put those other, common friendships in this rank. I know as much about them as anyone, and some of the most perfect of their kind. But I do not advise confusing their rules; one would be deceived. In those other friendships one must walk with the bridle in hand, with prudence and caution: the bond is not so tied that one has no reason at all to distrust it. "Love him," said Chilon, "as if you will one day have to hate him; hate him as if you will have to love him." This precept, so abominable in that sovereign and masterful friendship, is healthy in the practice of ordinary, customary friendships. With regard to them we must use the saying Aristotle so often had on his lips: "O my friends, there is no friend."[13]

1.28.9 In this noble relationship, the services and benefits that nourish other friendships do not even deserve to be taken into account. The reason is this complete fusion of our wills. For just as the friendship I bear myself receives no increase from the

13 The saying is attributed to Aristotle by Diogenes Laertius.

help I give myself in need, whatever the Stoics say, and just as I feel no gratitude to myself for the service I do myself, so the union of such friends, being truly perfect, makes them lose the sense of such duties. It makes them hate and banish from between them these words of division and difference: benefit, obligation, gratitude, request, thanks, and the like. Everything being in effect common between them—wills, thoughts, judgments, goods, wives, children, honor and life—and their union being nothing but one soul in two bodies, according to Aristotle's very apt definition, they can neither lend nor give each other anything. That is why lawmakers, to honor marriage with some imaginary resemblance to this divine bond, forbid gifts between husband and wife. They mean to imply by this that everything should belong to each of them, and that they have nothing to divide and share out between them.

1.28.10 If, in the friendship I speak of, one could give to the other, it would be the one who received the benefit who would put his companion under obligation. For since each of them seeks, above all else, to do the other good, the one who provides the matter and the occasion is the one who is being generous, since he gives his friend the satisfaction of doing for him what he most desires. When the philosopher Diogenes was short of money, he used to say that he asked his friends to give it back, not to give it. And to show how this works in practice, I will relate a singular example from antiquity. Eudamidas of Corinth had two friends, Charixenus of Sicyon and Aretheus of Corinth. When he came to die, he was poor and his two friends were rich, and he made his will as follows: "I bequeath to Aretheus the task of feeding my mother and supporting her in her old age; to Charixenus, that of marrying off my daughter and giving her the largest dowry he can. And in case one of them should die, I put the survivor in his place." Those who first saw this will laughed at it; but his heirs, when they were informed of it, accepted it with singular satisfaction.[14] One of them, Charixenus, died five days later, and the substitution fell to Aretheus. He supported

14 The story comes from Lucian's dialogue Toxaris.

the mother with great care, and of the five talents in his estate he gave two and a half as a dowry to his own only daughter and two and a half for the marriage of Eudamidas's daughter, and he held both weddings on the same day.

1.28.11 This example is quite complete, but for one condition that is lacking: the number of friends. For this perfect friendship I speak of is indivisible. Each gives himself so wholly to his friend that he has nothing left to share out elsewhere; on the contrary, he is sorry not to be double, triple or quadruple, and not to have several souls and several wills to bestow them all on this one object. Common friendships can be divided: one may love in this man his beauty, in that one the ease of his manners, in another his generosity, in one his fatherliness, in another his brotherliness, and so on. But this friendship, which possesses the soul and rules it with complete sovereignty, cannot possibly be double. If two asked to be helped at the same time, which one would you run to? If they required contrary services of you, how would you set them in order? If one entrusted to your silence something it would be useful for the other to know, how would you get out of that? The single, principal friendship unstitches all other obligations. The secret I have sworn not to reveal to another, I can without perjury communicate to the one who is not another: he is myself. It is a great enough miracle to double oneself, and those who talk of tripling themselves do not know how lofty it is. Nothing is extreme that has its equal. Whoever supposes that of two friends I love one as much as the other, and that they love each other and love me as much as I love them, turns into a brotherhood the most single and united of all things, of which even one is the rarest thing to find in the world. The rest of this story fits very well with what I was saying. For Eudamidas grants it to his friends as a grace and favor to use them for his need; he leaves them heirs to this generosity of his, which consists in putting into their hands the means of doing him good. And no doubt the force of friendship shows itself much more richly in what he did than in what Aretheus did. In short, these are effects unimaginable to anyone who has not

tasted them. They make me wonderfully honor the answer of that young soldier to Cyrus. Cyrus asked him for how much he would sell a horse on which he had just won the prize in a race, and whether he would exchange it for a kingdom. "Certainly not, Sire; but I would gladly give it up to gain a friend, if I found a man worthy of such an alliance." He was not wrong to say "if I found."[15] For it is easy to find men fit for a superficial acquaintance. But in this kind, in which we deal from the very bottom of our heart and hold nothing back, all the springs must be perfectly clean and sound.

1.28.12 In alliances that hold only by one end, we need only provide against the imperfections that particularly concern that end. It cannot matter what religion my doctor or my lawyer belongs to; that consideration has nothing in common with the services of friendship, which they do not owe. And in the domestic acquaintance formed with me by those who serve me, I do the same. I inquire little whether a lackey is chaste; I look to see whether he is diligent. And I do not fear a gambling muleteer so much as a feeble one, nor a swearing cook so much as an ignorant one. I do not take it upon myself to say what should be done in the world—plenty of others do that—but only what I do in it. *That is my practice; do as you see fit.*[16]

1.28.13 For the familiarity of the table I choose the amusing, not the prudent; for bed, beauty before goodness; for the fellowship of conversation, ability, even without integrity; and likewise elsewhere. A man who was found riding a stick-horse, playing with his children, begged the man who caught him at it to say nothing until he was a father himself, judging that the feeling that would then arise in his soul would make him a fair judge of such an action. In the same way, I would like to speak to people who had tried out what I am saying. But knowing how far such a friendship is from common practice, and how rare it is, I do not expect to find any good judge of it.[17] For even the discourses that

15 From Xenophon's Cyropaedia.
16 Terence, The Self-Tormentor.
17 The father was Agesilaus, king of Sparta, as told by Plutarch.

antiquity has left us on this subject seem feeble to me beside what I feel. And on this point the facts surpass even the precepts of philosophy. *While I am in my right mind, I would compare nothing to a delightful friend.*[18]

1.28.14 Old Menander called a man happy who had been able to meet even the shadow of a friend. He was certainly right to say so, especially if he had tasted friendship. For in truth, by the grace of God, I have spent my life pleasantly and easily, free of heavy affliction except for the loss of such a friend, full of tranquility of mind, having accepted my natural and original advantages as payment without seeking others. Yet if I compare all the rest of my life—if I compare it all, I say—with the four years I was granted to enjoy the sweet company and fellowship of this man, it is nothing but smoke, nothing but a dark and sorrowful night.[19]

> Since the day I lost him, *a day I shall always hold bitter, always honored (such, gods, was your will!),* I do nothing but drag on, languishing. The very pleasures that come my way, instead of consoling me, redouble my grief at his loss. We went halves in everything; it seems to me that I am robbing him of his share. *Nor have I thought it right to enjoy any pleasure here,*
>
> *so long as he who shared my life is gone.*[20]

18 Horace, Satires.
19 Montaigne knew La Boétie from about 1559 until his death in 1563.
20 Virgil, Aeneid; the second quotation is from Terence, The Self-Tormentor.

1.28.15 I was already so formed and accustomed to being one of two in everything that I now seem to be only half a man. *If an untimely blow has carried off that part of my soul,*
why do I, the other part, linger on,
neither as dear nor surviving
whole? That day brought
ruin to both. There is no action or thought in which I do not miss him, as indeed he would have missed me. For just as he surpassed me by an infinite distance in every other ability and virtue, so did he in the duty of friendship. What shame or limit should there be to grief
for one so dear?
O brother, taken from wretched me!
All our joys have perished with you,
which your sweet love nourished while you lived.[21]

/ You, brother, by your death have shattered my happiness;
with you my whole soul lies buried;
at your death I drove from my mind
these studies and all the delights of the spirit.
Shall I speak to you? Shall I never hear your voice?
Shall I never, brother dearer than life,
see you again? But surely I shall always love you.

WHY THE DISCOURSE IS WITHHELD

Since partisans published it for their own ends, Montaigne will print other works of La Boétie instead.

1.28.16 But let us hear this boy of sixteen speak a little. I have found that this work has since been brought to light, and for an evil purpose, by those who seek to disturb and change the state of our government without caring whether they will improve it, and that they have mixed it with other writings ground from their own flour. So I have given up my plan to place it here. And so that the author's memory may not suffer with those who

21 Horace, Odes (twice); then Catullus, lamenting his brother.

could not know his opinions and actions closely, I inform them that he treated this subject in his boyhood, merely as an exercise, as a common theme worked over in a thousand places in books.[22] I have no doubt that he believed what he wrote, for he was conscientious enough not to lie even in jest. And I know further that if he had had the choice, he would rather have been born in Venice than in Sarlat—and with reason. But he had another maxim sovereignly imprinted on his soul: to obey and submit most scrupulously to the laws under which he was born. There was never a better citizen, nor one more devoted to the peace of his country, nor more hostile to the commotions and innovations of his time. He would much rather have used his ability to extinguish them than to supply them with the means of stirring things up further. His mind was molded on the pattern of other ages than these.[23] Now, in exchange for this serious work, I will substitute another, produced in the same season of his life, more lighthearted and playful.

22 La Boétie's Discourse on Voluntary Servitude, published by Protestant pamphleteers in 1574 and 1576.

23 Sarlat, La Boétie's birthplace in Périgord; Venice was a republic.

I.29 Twenty-Nine Sonnets of Étienne de La Boétie

Vingt et neuf sonnets d'Estienne de la Boetie, à Madame de Grammont Contesse de Guissen
Montaigne dedicates twenty-nine love sonnets by his late friend La Boétie to the Countess of Guiche.

1.29.1 MADAME, I offer you nothing of my own, either because it is already yours or because I find nothing in it worthy of you. But I wanted these verses, wherever they might be seen, to bear your name at their head, for the honor it will be for them to have as their guide the great Corisande d'Andoins.[1] This present seemed fitting for you, since there are few ladies in France who judge poetry better or make more fitting use of it than you; and since there are none who can make it as lively and animated as you do with those beautiful, rich harmonies with which, among a million other beauties, nature has endowed you. Madame, these verses deserve your cherishing them. For you will agree with me that none have ever come out of Gascony with more invention and grace, or that show they came from a richer hand. And do not be jealous because you have only what remains after what I long ago had printed under the name of Monsieur de Foix, your good kinsman. For truly these have something livelier and more ardent about them, since he wrote them in his greenest youth, fired by a fine and noble passion that I will tell you about, Madame, one day in your ear. The others were writ-

1 Diane d'Andoins, Countess of Guiche, called "la belle Corisande," later mistress of Henry of Navarre. This is the dedication of La Boétie's twenty-nine sonnets.

ten later, when he was courting for his marriage, in honor of his wife, and already feeling some sort of marital coldness. And I am one of those who hold that poetry never laughs anywhere as it does on a frolicsome and unruly subject.[2]

THE SONNETS

La Boétie's twenty-nine love sonnets follow, each rendered line by line.

1.29.2 Mercy, Love, mercy! O Lord, I vow to you
The rest of my years, my voice and my writings,
My sobs, my sighs, my tears and my cries:
Nothing, nothing will I own to hold from anyone but you.
Alas, how my fortune makes sport of me!
Not long ago, Love, I laughed at you.
I have erred, I see it; I surrender, I am taken.
I guarded my heart too well; now I disown it.
If by guarding it I delayed your victory,
Do not treat it worse for that: your glory is the greater.

/ And if you did not strike me down at the first blow,
Consider that a good victor, born to be great,
Holds his new prisoner, once he surrenders,
In higher esteem and love if he has fought well.

2 In 1571–72 Montaigne published La Boétie's other French verse with a dedication to Paul de Foix.

1.29.3 It is Love, it is Love, it is he alone, I feel it;
But the most piercing love, the strongest poison
To which a poor heart ever opened the door.
This cruel one has not lodged just one of his piercing arrows,
But bow, arrows and quiver, and himself entire, within my senses.
It is not yet a month since my freedom died,
Since I have carried this deadly venom in my veins,
And already I have lost both heart and reason.
What then? If this love kept growing at that rate,
This love conceived within me in such torment?
Oh, grow, if you can grow, and improve as you grow.

/ You feed on tears: tears I promise you,
And to refresh you, sighs forever.
But let the worst pain at least come at the start.

1.29.4 It is done, my heart; let us give up our freedom.
What use would defense be now,
Except to increase both the pain and the offense?
I am no longer strong, as I once was.
Reason was on my side for a time;
Now, turned rebel, she would have me think
That I must serve, and take as my reward
That no one was ever held by such a knot.
If one must surrender, then is the time,
When one no longer has reason on one's side.
I see that Love, though I do not deserve it,
Without any right, comes and seizes me?
And I see that this great King must still
Have reason serve him, even when he is wrong.

1.29.5 It was the time when, the heats gone by,
Stained Autumn goes treading in the vats
The plump grape that runs beneath the foot,
That my sorrows began.
The peasant threshes his gathered sheaves,
And, rolling his seething casks into the cellars,
And shaking his autumn harvest down from the fruit trees,
Takes revenge then for the labors he has spent.
Could this be an omen given
That my hope has already been reaped?
No, surely not. But I think for certain
That I shall have, if I know how to divine,
If one can foretell anything from the season,
Some great fruit from my long hope.

1.29.6 I have seen her piercing eyes, I have seen her radiant face
(No one ever looks on the gods without harm to himself);
Her victorious eye left me cold and heartless,
Utterly stunned by the blow of its strong light.
As a man caught at night in the fields when lightning
flashes,
Stunned, turns pale if the arrow of the heavens
Whistles past close by him and makes him shut his eyes;
He trembles, and sees, frozen with fear, Jupiter in his
wrath.
Tell me, Madame, truly, tell me if your green eyes
Are not those that Love is said to keep covered?

/ You had them, I believe, the time I saw you;
At least I remember that it seemed to me then
That Love, all at once, when I first saw you,
Loosed his bow upon me and unbound his eyes.

1.29.7 Many a one says of me: “What is he complaining of so much,
Wasting his best years on so frivolous a thing?
Why does he cry out so much, if he still has hope?
And if he hopes for nothing, why is he not content?”
When I was free and healthy, I used to say as much.
But surely that man is not quite in his right mind,
But has his heart spoiled by some proud harshness,
If he complains of my complaint and does not understand my pain.
Love all at once pierces me with a hundred pains,
And then I am told not to cry out.

/ I am not so vain as to magnify my pain
By dint of talking: if someone can free me from it,
I give up sonnets, I give up singing.
Let whoever forbids me to grieve cure me.

1.29.8 Sometimes I venture to sing your praise,
Without daring to set down your great name in my verse;
Sounding the shallowest part of this wide sea,
I tremble lest I lose myself in it, and keep safe near the shore.
I fear that by praising badly I may do you wrong.

/ But the people, amazed to hear you so highly esteemed,
Burning to know you, try to name you,
And, seeking your holy name thus at random,
Dazzled, cannot manage to see a thing so bright;
And the common crowd does not find you,
For, having only one way, it does not see that way:
Namely, if, having made the comparison
Of the perfect women of the world, it can pick out the one most perfect,
Then, if it has a voice, let it boldly cry, “There she is.”

1.29.9 When will that day come when your name, truly told,
passes
Through France in my verse? How many, many times
Does my heart press for it, do my fingers itch for it?
Often in my writings it takes its place of its own accord.
Despite myself I write you, despite myself I erase you.
If Astraea should come, and good faith, and justice,
Then your name would joyfully show itself to the world.
As it is, this age makes it hide you;
It is a great shame on this wicked age.
So, Madame, meanwhile you shall be my Dordogne.[3]

/ Yet let me, let me set down your name;
Take pity on the age: if I bring you into the light of day,
If the age recognizes you, then I promise you,
Then it will be golden, if it ever is to be.

1.29.10 Oh, among your beauties, how beautiful your constancy is!
It is that steadfast heart, that constant spirit,
That people prize so highly among your virtues:
And indeed what is more beautiful than a faithful love?
So take on nothing from your faithless sister,
From your sister the Vézère: she keeps straying,
Always wavering, unsteady in her fickle course.
Do you see how the winds play with her as they please?
And do not regret having, by right of your seniority,
Already chosen constancy as your share.[4]

/ The same race bore the sovereign love
Of the good twins, each of whom shares with the other
Half his portion of heaven and of hell,
And the disgraced love of too-beautiful Helen.[5]

3 Astraea, goddess of justice, left the earth at the end of the Golden Age. The Dordogne, the river of La Boétie's Périgord, stands for the lady's name.
4 The Vézère, a tributary of the Dordogne.
5 Castor and Pollux, who shared their immortality between them, and their sister Helen were children of Leda.

1.29.11 I see well, my Dordogne, that you still go humbly:
You are ashamed to show yourself a Gascon in France.
If the stream of the Sorgue is now held in great account,
Yet it too was once just as low.
Do you see how the little Loir quickens its pace?
How it already counts itself among the greatest?
How it marches proudly with a swifter course
Right alongside the Mincio, and the Mincio does not complain?
A single Olive tree from the Arno, grafted on the bank of the Loire,
Makes it run more splendidly and gives it its glory.
Leave it, leave it to me.[6]

And one day, my Dordogne,
If I guess right, you will be better known:
And the Garonne, and the Rhône, and those other great gods
Will feel some envy of it, and perhaps shame.

1.29.12 You who hear my sighs, do not be harsh with me
If I shed my tears apart, all my own,
If my love, in its changing sorrow, does not follow
The languishing laments of the lovelorn Florentine,
Nor those of Catullus, the playful lover,
Who pierces his lady's heart while tickling it,
Nor the learned love of half-Greek Propertius:
They do not love for me, I do not love for them.
He who can measure his sorrows by another's
Will be able to imitate another's laments:
Each feels his own torment and knows what he endures.
Each spoke of love as he understood it.
I say what my heart, what my pain tells me.[7]

6 The Sorgue was Petrarch's river, the Loir Ronsard's, the Mincio Virgil's; the "Olive" is Du Bellay's Petrarchan collection L'Olive, Du Bellay being from the Loire.
7 The Florentine is Petrarch; with Catullus and Propertius he stands for the great love poets.

/ How little he loves who loves by measure!

1.29.13 What? What is this? O winds, O clouds, O storm!
Just when, as I draw near her,
I see myself cutting across the woods, the mountains, the valleys,
You lie in wait and hurl your rage upon me.
Now my heart burns all the more.
Go, go and frighten the merchant
Who seeks treasures on the sea:
That is not how my courage is struck down.
When I hear the winds, their tempest and their cries,
I laugh in my heart at their malice.
Do they think they will make me give up for this?
Let the sky do its worst, and the air too:
I wish, I wish, and so declare,
If I must die, to die like Leander.[8]

1.29.14 You who do not yet know how to love,
Now that you hear me speak of my Leander,
Now or never you must learn from him,
If you have anything good in your heart.
He dared, waving his water-washed arms,
Armed with love, to defend himself against the water
That took the girl as tribute,
Having spared the brother and the ram.
One evening, overcome by the cruel waves,
This valiant lover, seeing already
That the water, his mistress, was turning him at its pleasure,
Spoke to the waves and cast them these words:
"Spare me now, as I go there,
And keep my death for when I return."[9]

8 Leander swam the Hellespont nightly to visit Hero and drowned in a storm.
9 The Hellespont was named after Helle, who fell from the golden ram into the strait, while her brother Phrixus was carried safely across.

1.29.15 O fickle heart, O unreliable spirit,
Do you think I can bear you any longer?
O hollow kindness, O hidden malice,
Treacherous beauty, venomous sweetness,
Were you then always your sister's sister?
And I, too simple, had to make
The trial of it on myself? And understand too late
Your double speech and your hunter's songs?
Since the day I began to love you,
I could have conquered the waves of the sea.
What can I expect from now on?
How could I be content with you?
Who will teach your heart to be constant,
Since mine cannot teach it?

1.29.16 I am not one to be deceived like this:
Use your tricks on some child
Who has no taste and understands nothing he hears:
I know how to love, I know how to hate as well.
Be content with having until now
Kept my eyes shut; it is time I saw clearly,
And that from now on I be weary and ashamed
Of having spent my time and care so badly.
Would you dare, having treated me so,
Ever to speak to me of constancy?
You take pleasure in my extreme pain;
You forbid me to feel my torment;
And yet you want me to die loving you.
If I do not feel, how do you expect me to love?

1.29.17 Oh, did I say it? Alas, did I dream it?
Or did I truly speak such blasphemy?
Come then, false tongue: her honor must be
Avenged on me, by me, upon me.
My heart, Madame, is lodged with you:
There give it some new torture;
Make it suffer some cruel pain;
Do, do everything to it but send it away.
But you will be (I know it) too kind,
And will not be able to watch my suffering for long.
But such a deed—must it be pardoned?
At the very least I will loudly retract
My sonnets and give myself the lie:
For these two false ones, I give you five hundred true.

1.29.18 If my reason has been able to return to me,
If I can now recover myself,
If I have sense, if I am a man again,
I thank you for it, O most blessed letter.
Who (alas), who could have recognized me
When, enraged, overcome by my griefs,
I went on blaspheming my lady?
From afar, ashamed, I saw you then appear,
O holy paper; then I came back to myself,
And came devoutly toward you.
I would give you an altar for this deed,
Where all might see the strokes of that divine hand.
But no man is worthy to see them,
Nor I either, had she not made me so.

1.29.19 I was about to incur some lasting blame.
Heated by anger, my heart was burning;
My mad voice reeled at the whim of my fury;
I defied the gods, and my lady too.
When she from afar casts a little note into my flame,
I felt at once how it set me right again,
How before it my fury immediately departed,
How, victorious, it gave me back my soul in its place.
You who hear these marvels of me,
What do you say of her? And see, I beg you,
Whether I should adore her as I do.
What miracles do you think she works in me
With her all-powerful eye, or with one ray of her face,

/ Since the marks of her fingers worked so much in me?
1.29.20 I trembled before her and, frozen with fear, awaited
Some just sentence to avenge my crime,
Aware myself of the weight of my offense,
When she said to me: "Go, I grant you mercy.
Let my praise from now on shine out everywhere:
Spend your years on that; and from this day think only
Of enriching our France with my name through your verses;
Cover your fault with verse, and pay me so."
Up then, my pen: to reap the fruit of my pains
We must range over her greatness in an ampler vein.
But watch her eye, lest it abandon us.
Without her eyes our spirits would languish and die.

/ They give us heart, they give us sense. / For her to be paid by me, she must first give to me.

1.29.21 O you accursed sonnets, you who had the audacity
To touch upon my lady: O spiteful and perverse,
Reproach of the Muses and shame of my verse:
If ever I made you, if I must do myself
The wrong of confessing that you are of my stock,
Then for you the streams were not opened
Of golden Apollo and the green-eyed Muses,
But Tisiphone received you at your birth in their place.
If I ever have any share in posterity,
I want both the one and the other of you disinherited of it.[10]

/ And if I do not give you at once to the avenging fire,
It is to disgrace you: live, wretches, live,
Live before the eyes of all, stripped of all honor,
For it is to punish you that I now pardon you.

1.29.22 Have no more, my friends, have no more this wish
That I should cease to love; leave me, obstinate,
To live and die this way, since it is so decreed:
My love is the thread on which my life hangs.
So the fairy told me; so in Aeagria
She made Meleager destined for love,
And lit his log at the hour he was born,
And said: "You and this fire, keep each other company."[11]

/ So she said, and the appointed end
Followed after along the thread of that destiny;
The log (so they say) was consumed in the fire,
And then (great miracle) in one and the same moment
Were seen all at once, of the wretched lover,
The life and the brand going up in smoke.

10 Tisiphone was one of the Furies, the avenging goddesses of Greek myth.
11 In Greek myth the Fates decreed at Meleager's birth that he would live only until a certain log had burned; his mother later threw it into the fire.

1.29.23 When, stunned, I gaze into your conquering eyes,
I see in them, clearly written, all my hope;
I see in them Love himself, smiling at me,
And sweetly showing me the happiness he keeps for me.
But when at times I venture to speak to you,
It is then that my hope dries up and runs out.
And to vouch, ever, for your eye that feeds me
With one word of favor, cruel one, you never will.
If your eyes are for me—now mark what I say—
They are the ones, and no others, to whom I surrendered.
My God, what a quarrel rises within you
If your mouth and your eyes mean to give each other the lie.

/ Better, my sweet torment, better to settle between them, /
And let me take your eyes at their word and keep their promise.

1.29.24 It is your piercing eyes that give me courage:
I see gay freedom leaping in them,
And my little archer, who leads at his side
Lovely high spirits and fickle pleasure.
But afterward the severity of your stern speech
Shows me proud honor in your heart,
And, condemned, I see hard chastity
Gravely seated there, and fierce virtue.
So my changing time passes on these waves:
Now her eye calls me, now her mouth drives me off.
Alas, in this strife, how much I have endured!

/ And then let anyone think he has some assurance in love!
Ceaselessly, night and day, I think of serving her,
And still I cannot be sure even of my suffering.

1.29.25 Now I can truly say my hope is dead.
Now it is all over with my ease and my good.
My ill is plain: now I see clearly
I have wedded the grief I bear.
Everything assails me, nothing comforts me,
Everything forsakes me, and from her I get nothing
But ever some new prop
That makes my pain and my grief the stronger.
What I wait for is one day to win
A few sighs from the people of times to come:
Someone will say over me, out of pity:
"His lady and he were born destined,
Equally obstinate in dying,
The one in harshness, the other in love."

1.29.26 I have lived so long, wretched, in my languor,
That now I have seen—and am still alive—
My hope, snatched away before my eyes, broken
Against the reef of her proud harshness.
What good to me has been the length of so many years?
She is not sated with my pain:
She laughs at it, and has no other wish
Than to keep my suffering in full vigor.
So I shall have, unhappy in loving
Always one heart, always fresh torment.
I feel that I am quite out of breath,
Ready to give up my life under the burden:
What could one do but what I am doing?
Stung by suffering, I persist in my pain.

1.29.27 Since such are my hard destinies,
I shall glut my care with them, if I can.
If I suffer, she wills it too.
I shall fulfill my appointed pains.
Nymphs of the woods, who have been stunned by my sorrows
Into some pity, I believe,
What do you think? Can I last like this
If no truce is granted to my ills?
Now if one of you is inclined to hear me,
Listen, for God's sake, to what I now foresee:
The day is near when my strength, already spent,
Will no longer be able to keep up with my torment.
It is my hope that if I die loving,
Then, I believe, I shall be done with my pains.

1.29.28 When my pain is weary of wearying me,
Love, refreshing my ill with some good,
Soothes my languishing wound in my dead heart,
Feeds my ill and lets it catch its breath;
Then I conceive some vain hope:
But at once this harsh tyrant, if he feels
My hope growing stronger as it grows,
Brings me a hundred torments to stifle it,
All fresh again: then I find myself blaming myself
For having rebelled against my torment.
Long live the ill, O gods, that devours me!
Long live my harsh torment, as it pleases!
O happy, and happy again,
He who without respite is always unhappy!

1.29.29 If I have no other defense against Love,
I shall complain of him; my verses will curse him,
And after me the rocks will repeat
The wrong he does to my hard constancy.
Since I endure this offense from him,
At least my rhymes will proclaim it aloud,
And our descendants, when they read me,
Will avenge me by reviling him.
Having lost all the ease I had,
It will be little to lose my voice.
If the bitterness of my sad care is known,
Even he who dealt me this wound,
However hard a heart he has,
Will feel some pity for it—but no mercy.

1.29.30 Already the blessed day was shining
That nature owed the world in you,
When the great key to the treasures
She had kept for you was handed over to you.
You took the grace meant for you alone;
You plundered so many of the beauties she had
That she, proud as she is, when she sees you,
Is at times stunned at it herself.
At last your hand was content to take no more:
But nature offered you as well,
To enrich you, this earth where we live.
You took none of it, but laughed to yourself,
Well aware that you had taken enough
To be queen here of the hearts of men.

I.30 Of Moderation

De la Moderation
Even virtue can be pursued to excess; Montaigne praises temperate natures and moderation even in pleasure and devotion.

1.30.1 AS if our touch were infected, we corrupt by our handling things that are fine and good in themselves. We can grasp virtue in such a way that it becomes vicious, if we embrace it with too fierce and violent a desire. Those who say that there is never excess in virtue, since it is no longer virtue if there is excess in it, are playing with words. *Let the wise man bear the name of madman, and the just man of unjust, / If he pursues virtue itself beyond what is enough.* This is a subtle reflection of philosophy. One can both love virtue too much and behave excessively in a just action. The divine word fits this view: "Be not wiser than you should be, but be soberly wise."[1] I have seen a certain great man damage the reputation of his religion by showing himself religious beyond every example of men of his kind. I like natures that are temperate and middling. Immoderation even in the direction of good, if it does not offend me, astonishes me, and leaves me at a loss what to call it. Neither the mother of Pausanias, who gave the first information against her son and carried the first stone for his death, nor the dictator Postumius, who put to death his own son, whom the ardor of youth had carried successfully against the enemy a little ahead of his rank, seems to me so much just as strange. And I like neither to advise

1 The verse is from Horace, Epistles; the "divine word" is Saint Paul, Romans 12:3.

nor to follow a virtue so fierce and so costly.[2] The archer who overshoots the target misses just as much as the one who falls short of it. And my eyes are as troubled by climbing suddenly toward a great light as by going down into the dark.

1.30.2 Callicles in Plato says that philosophy carried to the extreme is harmful, and advises us not to plunge into it beyond the bounds of profit. Taken in moderation, he says, it is pleasant and useful; but in the end it makes a man uncouth and vicious, contemptuous of religion and the common laws, an enemy of civil society, an enemy of human pleasures, incapable of any political administration and of helping others or helping himself, fit to be slapped in the face with impunity. He is right: for in its excess it enslaves our natural freedom, and by a troublesome subtlety leads us astray from the fine, level road that nature marks out for us.[3]

1.30.3 The love we bear our wives is entirely lawful; theology nonetheless curbs and restrains it. I seem to have read once in Saint Thomas, in a passage where he condemns marriages between relatives within the forbidden degrees, this reason among others: that there is a danger that the love one bears such a wife may be immoderate. For if marital affection is found there whole and perfect, as it should be, and one loads on top of it the affection owed to kinship as well, there is no doubt that this surplus will carry such a husband beyond the barriers of reason.[4]

1.30.4 The sciences that regulate men's morals, such as theology and philosophy, meddle in everything. There is no action so private and secret that it escapes their knowledge and jurisdiction. Those who find fault with this freedom of theirs are mere novices. It is women who will share their private parts as freely as you please for lovemaking; for doctoring, shame forbids it. So on their behalf I want to teach husbands this, if there are still

2 Pausanias, the Spartan regent, was walled up in a temple for treason, his mother laying the first stone; Aulus Postumius Tubertus, Roman dictator in 431 BC, reportedly executed his son for fighting out of rank.

3 Callicles is a speaker in Plato's dialogue Gorgias.

4 Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), the scholastic theologian.

any who are too intent on it: that even the pleasures they take in intimacy with their wives are condemned if moderation is not observed, and that one can sin through license and excess in this matter as in an unlawful one. Those shameless refinements that the first heat suggests to us in this game are employed with our wives not only indecently but harmfully. Let them learn shamelessness at least from another hand. They are always wide enough awake for our needs. For my part I have used only nature's simple instruction.

1.30.5 Marriage is a religious and devout bond: that is why the pleasure one takes from it should be a restrained, serious pleasure, mixed with some severity; it should be a pleasure that is in some measure prudent and conscientious. And because its principal end is procreation, there are those who question whether, when we have no hope of that fruit—as when women are past the age, or pregnant—it is permitted to seek their embrace. It is homicide, after the fashion of Plato. Certain nations, among others the Muslims, abhor intercourse with pregnant women. Many also abhor it with women who are having their periods.[5] Zenobia received her husband only for a single bout, and that done she let him roam all the while she was carrying the child, giving him leave to begin again only then: a brave and noble example of marriage. It was from some poet, needy and starved of this sport, that Plato borrowed this story: that Jupiter one day made so heated a charge on his wife that, unable to wait until she had reached her bed, he tumbled her onto the floor; and in the violence of his pleasure he forgot the great and weighty resolutions he had just taken with the other gods in his heavenly court, boasting that he had found it as good that time as when he first deflowered her behind their parents' backs.[6]

1.30.6 The kings of Persia invited their wives to keep them company at their feasts; but when the wine began to heat them in

5 In the Laws Plato condemns intercourse not aimed at procreation as a kind of murder of the human race.

6 Zenobia was queen of Palmyra in the 3rd century AD. The story of Jupiter and Juno comes from Homer, Iliad 14, as cited in Plato's Republic, book 3.

earnest, and they had to give pleasure free rein altogether, they sent the wives back to their private quarters, so as not to make them share in their immoderate appetites, and had other women brought in their place, to whom they owed no such duty of respect. Not all pleasures and all favors are fitly bestowed on all people. Epaminondas had had a dissolute young man imprisoned; Pelopidas begged him to set him free as a favor to himself; he refused, and granted it to a girl of his who also begged it of him, saying that it was a favor due to a lady friend, not to a captain. Sophocles, sharing the praetorship with Pericles, happened to see a handsome boy go by. "Oh, what a handsome boy!" he said to Pericles. "That would be fine for anyone but a praetor," Pericles told him, "who must keep not only his hands but his eyes chaste." The emperor Aelius Verus, when his wife complained that he let himself go in love affairs with other women, answered that he did it for reasons of conscience, since marriage was a name of honor and dignity, not of playful and lascivious lust. And our ecclesiastical history has preserved with honor the memory of the woman who repudiated her husband because she would not second and put up with his too insolent and unbridled caresses.[7] In short, there is no pleasure so legitimate that excess and intemperance in it are not open to reproach. But, to speak in earnest, is not man a wretched animal? Scarcely is it in his power, by his natural condition, to taste a single whole and pure pleasure, and still he goes to the trouble of cutting it back by reasoning. He is not wretched enough unless he increases his misery by art and study: *By art we have added to the miseries of Fortune's paths.*[8]

1.30.7 Human wisdom very foolishly plays the clever one when it exerts itself to reduce the number and sweetness of the pleasures that belong to us, just as it acts kindly and ingeniously when it uses its artifices to comb and paint over our ills and

7 Sophocles and Pericles were fellow generals (strategoi) of Athens, which Montaigne renders by the Roman "praetorship." Lucius Aelius Verus was Hadrian's adopted heir, made Caesar but never reigning.
8 Propertius, Elegies.

lighten our feeling of them. If I had been the head of a sect, I would have taken another, more natural path—that is to say, true, comfortable and holy—and perhaps I would have made myself strong enough to keep it within bounds. As it is, our physicians of the soul and of the body, as if by a plot agreed among them, find no road to healing and no remedy for the diseases of body and soul except through torment, pain and suffering. Vigils, fasts, hair shirts, distant and solitary exiles, perpetual imprisonment, the rod and other afflictions have been introduced for that purpose. But on condition that they truly be afflictions, with a sharp, stinging bitterness in them, and that it not turn out as with one Gallio. He had been sent into exile on the island of Lesbos, and word came to Rome that he was having a fine time there, and that what had been imposed on him as a penalty was turning to his comfort. So they changed their minds and recalled him to his wife and his home, and ordered him to stay there, in order to suit their punishment to his feelings.[9] For if fasting were to sharpen a man's health and cheerfulness, if fish were more appetizing to him than meat, it would no longer be a salutary prescription; any more than, in the other kind of medicine, drugs have any effect on someone who takes them with appetite and pleasure. Bitterness and difficulty are circumstances that serve their working. A constitution that took to rhubarb as something familiar would spoil its use: it has to be something that hurts our stomach in order to cure it. And here the common rule fails, that things are cured by their contraries; for here ill cures ill.

1.30.8 This notion is somewhat related to that other very ancient one, of thinking we gratify heaven and nature by our own slaughter and killing, which was universally embraced in all religions. Even in our fathers' time Amurat, at the taking of the Isthmus, sacrificed six hundred young Greeks to his father's soul, so that this blood might serve as a propitiation to expiate the dead man's sins. And in these new lands discovered in our

9 Junius Gallio, a Roman senator exiled under Tiberius, as told by Tacitus, Annals 6.

age, still pure and virgin compared with ours, the practice is in some measure accepted everywhere. All their idols drink their fill of human blood, not without various examples of horrible cruelty. They burn the victims alive, and pull them half-roasted from the fire to tear out their hearts and entrails.[10] Others, even women, are flayed alive, and with their skin, still bloody, they dress and mask others. And there are no fewer examples of constancy and resolve. For these poor people destined for sacrifice —old men, women, children—go about for some days beforehand begging alms themselves for the offering of their sacrifice, and present themselves at the slaughter singing and dancing with the onlookers.

1.30.9 The ambassadors of the King of Mexico, explaining to Hernán Cortés the greatness of their master, told him that he had thirty vassals, each of whom could raise a hundred thousand fighting men, and that he lived in the finest and strongest city under heaven; and then they added that he had fifty thousand men a year to sacrifice to the gods. Indeed, they say that he kept up war with certain great neighboring peoples not only to exercise the youth of the country but chiefly to have prisoners of war with which to supply his sacrifices. Elsewhere, in a certain town, to welcome this same Cortés, they sacrificed fifty men all at once. I will tell this story too. Some of these peoples, having been beaten by him, sent to acknowledge him and seek his friendship. The messengers presented him with three kinds of gifts, in this manner: "Lord, here are five slaves: if you are a fierce god who feeds on flesh and blood, eat them, and we will bring you more; if you are a kindly god, here are incense and feathers; if you are a man, take these birds and fruits."

10 The Ottoman sultan Murad II, who stormed the Hexamilion wall across the Isthmus of Corinth in 1446.

I.31 Of Cannibals

Des Cannibales
Describing Brazilian peoples, Montaigne argues that Europeans, with their tortures and cruelties, are the true barbarians.

1.31.1 WHEN King Pyrrhus crossed into Italy, after he had surveyed the formation of the army the Romans were sending to meet him, "I do not know," he said, "what barbarians these are" (for the Greeks called all foreign nations so), "but the disposition of this army that I see is not in the least barbarous." The Greeks said as much of the army that Flamininus brought into their country; and so did Philip, when he saw from a hillock the order and layout of the Roman camp in his kingdom under Publius Sulpicius Galba. That shows how we must beware of clinging to common opinions, and must judge them by the way of reason, not by popular report.[1]

1.31.2 For a long time I had with me a man who had lived ten or twelve years in that other world which has been discovered in our century, in the place where Villegaignon landed and which he named Antarctic France. This discovery of a boundless country seems a matter of great consequence. I do not know whether I can vouch that some other will not be made in the future, since so many greater men than we were mistaken about this one. I fear that our eyes are bigger than our stomachs, and that we

1 Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, invaded Italy in 280 BC. Titus Quinctius Flamininus and Publius Sulpicius Galba led Roman forces against Philip V of Macedon around 200 BC.

have more curiosity than capacity. We embrace everything, but we clasp nothing but wind.[2]

1.31.3 Plato introduces Solon telling how he had learned from the priests of the city of Saïs in Egypt that long ago, before the Flood, there was a great island called Atlantis, right at the mouth of the Strait of Gibraltar, which held more land than Africa and Asia together. The kings of that country, who not only possessed this island but had extended so far into the mainland that they held the breadth of Africa as far as Egypt and the breadth of Europe as far as Tuscany, undertook to stride over into Asia and subjugate all the nations bordering the Mediterranean as far as the gulf of the Black Sea. To that end they crossed the Spains, Gaul and Italy, as far as Greece, where the Athenians held them off; but some time later the Athenians, and they, and their island were swallowed up by the Flood.[3]

> It is very likely that this extreme devastation by water made strange changes in the inhabited parts of the earth, as it is held that the sea cut off Sicily from Italy—*These lands, they say, once torn apart by force and vast upheaval,*
> *Sprang asunder, when before the two countries*
> *Had been one*—Cyprus from Syria, and the island of Negropont from the mainland of Boeotia; and that elsewhere it joined lands that were divided, filling the channels between them with mud and sand:[4]

And the marsh, long barren and fit for oars, / Feeds the neighboring towns and feels the heavy plow. But there is little likelihood that this island is the new world we have just discovered. For it almost touched Spain, and it would be an incredible effect of a flood to have pushed it back as far as it is now, more than twelve hundred leagues. Besides, the voyages of the moderns have already all but established that it is not an island but mainland,

2 Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon founded a short-lived French colony in the bay of Rio de Janeiro in 1555.
3 The story is told in Plato's Timaeus and Critias; Montaigne's "mer Maiour" is the Black Sea.
4 Virgil, Aeneid. Negropont is the island of Euboea.

continuous with the East Indies on one side and with the lands under the two poles on the other; or if it is separated from them, it is by so small a strait and gap that it does not deserve to be called an island on that account.[5]

1.31.4 It seems that there are movements in these great bodies, as in ours, some natural, others feverish. When I consider the inroads that my river, the Dordogne, has made in my lifetime on the right bank as it flows down, and how in twenty years it has gained so much ground and undermined the foundations of several buildings, I can see that this is an extraordinary disturbance: for if it had always gone at this rate, or were to go on so in future, the face of the world would be turned upside down. But rivers are subject to changes. Sometimes they spread to one side, sometimes to another, sometimes they keep within their banks. I am not speaking of sudden floods, whose causes we can account for. In Médoc, along the sea, my brother the Sieur d'Arsac sees one of his estates buried under the sands that the sea spews out before it; the tops of some buildings still show; his rents and lands have turned into very thin pasture. The inhabitants say that for some time now the sea has been pushing toward them so hard that they have lost four leagues of land. These sands are its advance guard. And we see great dunes of shifting sand marching half a league ahead of it and gaining ground.[6]

1.31.5 The other testimony from antiquity to which people try to relate this discovery is in Aristotle—at least if that little book of unheard-of marvels is his. He tells there that certain Carthaginians set out across the Atlantic Ocean beyond the Strait of Gibraltar and, after sailing a long time, at last discovered a great fertile island, all clothed in forest and watered by great deep rivers, very far from any mainland; and that they, and others after them, drawn by the goodness and fertility of the soil, went there with their wives and children and began to settle.[7] The lords of

5 Horace, Art of Poetry.
6 Thomas de Montaigne, Sieur d'Arsac, the author's younger brother.
7 On Marvellous Things Heard, a collection ascribed to Aristotle but not by him.

Carthage, seeing their country being gradually depopulated, expressly forbade anyone, on pain of death, to go there any more, and drove out these new inhabitants, fearing, it is said, that in course of time they might multiply so much that they would supplant the Carthaginians themselves and ruin their state. This account of Aristotle's agrees no better with our new lands.

A PLAIN WITNESS

A simple man who lived in Brazil is a better witness than clever cosmographers.

1.31.6 This man I had was a simple, rough fellow, which is a condition well suited to bearing true witness. For clever people notice more things, and more carefully, but they gloss them; and to give weight to their interpretation and make it persuasive, they cannot help altering the story a little. They never present things to you pure; they bend and mask them according to the face they saw them wear; and to give credit to their judgment and win you over to it, they are glad to add to the matter on that side, stretching and amplifying it. We need either a very honest man, or one so simple that he has not the wherewithal to build up false inventions and make them plausible, and who is wedded to nothing. Mine was such a man; and besides, he brought me on various occasions several sailors and merchants he had known on that voyage. So I am content with this information, without inquiring what the cosmographers say about it. We would need topographers, to give us detailed accounts of the places where they have been. But because they have this advantage over us, of having seen Palestine, they want to enjoy the privilege of telling us news of all the rest of the world. I would like everyone to write what he knows, and as much as he knows of it—not in this matter only, but in all other subjects. For a man may have some particular knowledge or experience of the nature of a river or a spring who otherwise knows only what everyone knows; yet to get this little scrap into circulation he will undertake to write

the whole science of nature. From this vice spring many great drawbacks.

BARBAROUS AND WILD

Each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice; these peoples live close to nature.

1.31.7 Now, to return to my subject, I find that there is nothing barbarous and wild in this nation, from what I have been told of it, except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice. For indeed we have no other test of truth and reason than the example and pattern of the opinions and customs of the country we live in. There, always, is the perfect religion, the perfect government, the perfect and accomplished practice in all things. They are wild in the same way that we call wild the fruits that nature has produced by herself and in her ordinary course; whereas in truth it is those we have altered by our artifice and diverted from the common order that we ought rather to call wild. In the former, the true, most useful and natural virtues and properties are alive and vigorous; in the latter we have debased them, adapting them to the pleasure of our corrupted taste. And yet in various uncultivated fruits of those countries the flavor and delicacy are found excellent even to our own taste, rivaling ours. It is not reasonable that art should win the point of honor over our great and powerful mother nature.

> We have so overloaded the beauty and richness of her works with our inventions that we have smothered her entirely. Yet wherever her purity shines forth, she puts our vain and frivolous enterprises wonderfully to shame. *And ivy comes better of its own accord,*
> *And the arbutus grows lovelier in lonely caves,*
> *And birds sing more sweetly with no art.* All our efforts cannot even manage to reproduce the nest of the tiniest little bird, its structure, its beauty and its fitness for use—nor even the web of the puny spider. All things, says Plato, are produced either by nature, by fortune, or by art:[8]

the greatest and most beautiful by one or the other of the first two, the lesser and imperfect ones by the last.

1.31.8 These nations, then, seem to me barbarous in this sense: that they have received very little fashioning from the human mind and are still very close to their original naturalness. The laws of nature still govern them, very little debased by ours. But they are in such purity that I am sometimes sorry that knowledge of them did not come earlier, in the days when there were men who could have judged them better than we. I am sorry that Lycurgus and Plato did not have it; for it seems to me that what we see by experience in those nations surpasses not only all the pictures with which poetry has embellished the golden age, and all its inventions in imagining a happy state of mankind, but even the conception and the very desire of philosophy. They could not imagine a naturalness so pure and simple as we see by experience; nor could they believe that our society could be maintained with so little artifice and human solder. This is a nation, I would say to Plato, in which there is no kind of trade; no knowledge of letters; no science of numbers; no title of magistrate or of political superiority; no use of servitude, of wealth or of poverty; no contracts; no inheritances; no divisions of property; no occupations but leisurely ones; no regard for kinship except what is common to all; no clothing; no agricul-

8 Propertius, Elegies.

ture; no metal; no use of wine or wheat. The very words that signify lying, treachery, dissimulation, avarice, envy, slander, pardon—unheard of. How far from this perfection would he find the republic he imagined! *These are the ways nature first ordained.* For the rest, they live in a very pleasant and temperate stretch of country, so that, from what my witnesses have told me, it is rare to see a sick man there; and they have assured me that they never saw one there trembling, blear-eyed, toothless or bent with age. They are settled along the sea, and shut in on the landward side by great high mountains, with a stretch of about a hundred leagues in breadth between the two. They have a great abundance of fish and meat that bear no resemblance to ours, and they eat them with no other artifice than cooking.[9] The first man who brought a horse there, though he had dealt with them on several other voyages, so horrified them, mounted as he was, that they shot him dead with arrows before they could recognize him. Their buildings are very long and can hold two or three hundred souls. They are covered with the bark of great trees, fixed in the ground at one end, and supporting and leaning on one another at the ridge, in the manner of some of our barns, whose roofs hang down to the ground and serve as sides. They have wood so hard that they cut with it and make their swords of it, and grills to cook their food. Their beds are of woven cotton, hung from the roof like those in our ships, each person having his own: for the wives sleep apart from their husbands. They rise with the sun and eat immediately after rising, for the whole day, for they have no other meal than that one. They do not drink at that meal—like certain other peoples of the East, of whom Suidas says that they drank apart from eating—but they drink several times a day, and a great deal. Their drink is made from some root, and is the color of our light red wines. They drink it only lukewarm.[10] This drink keeps only two or three days; it tastes a little sharp, is not at all heady, is good for the

9 Virgil, Georgics.

10 Suidas: the Suda, a 10th-century Byzantine encyclopedia, long taken for the work of an author of that name.

stomach, and is laxative for those not used to it; it is a very pleasant drink for anyone accustomed to it. Instead of bread they use a certain white substance like candied coriander. I have tasted it; the taste is sweet and a little flat. The whole day is spent dancing. The younger men go hunting animals with bows. Some of the women meanwhile busy themselves warming their drink, which is their chief duty.

1.31.9 One of the old men, in the morning before they begin to eat, preaches to the whole barnful together, walking from one end to the other and repeating the same phrase several times until he has completed the round (for these buildings are a good hundred paces long). He recommends only two things to them: valor against their enemies and love for their wives. And they never fail to point out this obligation, by way of refrain: that it is the wives who keep their drink warm and seasoned for them. In several places, and among others in my house, one can see what their beds are like, and their ropes, their swords, and the wooden bracelets with which they cover their wrists in battle, and the great canes, open at one end, by whose sound they keep time in their dance. They are shaved all over, and remove their hair much more cleanly than we do, with no other razor than one of wood or stone. They believe that souls are eternal, and that those that have deserved well of the gods are lodged in the part of the sky where the sun rises, and the accursed ones in the west.

1.31.10 They have some sort of priests and prophets, who very rarely appear before the people, since they live in the mountains. On their arrival there is a great feast and solemn assembly of several villages (each barn, as I have described it, makes a village, and they are about a French league from one another). This prophet speaks to them in public, exhorting them to virtue and to their duty; but all their ethical science contains only these two articles: resoluteness in war and affection for their wives. He foretells to them things to come and the outcome they are to expect from their undertakings; he steers them toward war or away from it. But this is on condition that if he fails to divine

correctly, and if things turn out otherwise than he predicted, he is hacked into a thousand pieces if they catch him, and condemned as a false prophet. For that reason, one who has been wrong once is never seen again. Divination is a gift of God; that is why abusing it ought to be a punishable imposture. Among the Scythians, when the soothsayers had missed the mark, they were laid, shackled hand and foot, on carts full of heather drawn by oxen, and burned in them. Those who handle matters subject to the guidance of human ability are excusable for doing what they can. But those others, who come to us deceiving us with assurances of an extraordinary faculty beyond our knowledge—should they not be punished for failing to make good their promise, and for the rashness of their imposture?

WAR AND THE EATING OF PRISONERS

They fight only for valor and eat captives as revenge; our own cruelties are worse.

1.31.11 They wage wars against the nations beyond their mountains, further inland. They go to these wars quite naked, with no other weapons than bows or wooden swords sharpened at one end, like the tips of our boar-spears. The steadfastness of their battles is a marvel: they never end except in slaughter and bloodshed, for they do not know what routs and panic are. Each man brings back as his trophy the head of the enemy he has killed, and fixes it at the entrance of his dwelling. After treating their prisoners well for a long time, with every comfort they can think of, the man who owns a prisoner calls a great gathering of his acquaintances. He ties a rope to one of the prisoner's arms and holds him by the end of it, a few paces away, for fear of being hurt by him. He gives his dearest friend the other arm to hold in the same way, and the two of them, in the presence of the whole gathering, beat him to death with their swords. That done, they roast him and eat him together, and send portions to those of their friends who are absent. This is not, as people think, to feed themselves on him, as the Scythians did in ancient

times; it is to signify an extreme revenge. And here is the proof. They noticed that the Portuguese, who had joined forces with their enemies, used another kind of death against them when they captured them: they buried them up to the waist, shot the rest of the body full of arrows, and then hanged them. They concluded that these people from the other world, being men who had spread the knowledge of many vices among their neighbors and were far greater masters than they of every kind of wickedness, did not take this kind of revenge without good reason, and that it must be more painful than their own. So they began to abandon their old way and follow this one. I am not sorry that we note the barbarous horror of such an act; what I am sorry about is that, while judging their faults rightly, we are so blind to our own. I think there is more barbarism in eating a man alive than in eating him dead; in tearing apart by tortures and the rack a body still full of feeling, roasting it bit by bit, having it bitten and mangled by dogs and swine (as we have not only read but seen within fresh memory, not among ancient enemies but among neighbors and fellow citizens, and what is worse, on the pretext of piety and religion), than in roasting and eating him after he is dead.[11]

1.31.12 Chrysippus and Zeno, heads of the Stoic school, did indeed think there was no harm in using our carcass for whatever we needed, and in drawing nourishment from it; just as our ancestors, besieged by Caesar in the town of Alesia, resolved to bear the hunger of that siege by means of the bodies of the old men, the women and other persons useless for fighting. *The Vascones, so the story goes, by using such food / Prolonged their lives.* And physicians do not shrink from using it in every sort of way for our health, whether applied internally or externally.[12] But no opinion was ever found so unruly as to excuse treachery, disloyalty, tyranny and cruelty, which are our ordinary faults. So we may well call them barbarous with regard to

11 Montaigne is alluding to atrocities committed in the French Wars of Religion.
12 Alesia, in Gaul, was besieged by Caesar in 52 BC. The verses are from Juvenal, Satires XV, on the Vascones besieged at Calagurris in Spain.

the rules of reason, but not with regard to ourselves, who surpass them in every kind of barbarism.

1.31.13 Their warfare is wholly noble and generous, and has as much excuse and beauty as this human disease can admit of. Among them it has no other basis than the mere jealous rivalry of valor. They are not quarreling over the conquest of new lands, for they still enjoy that natural abundance which supplies them, without toil and without trouble, with all necessary things in such plenty that they have no need to enlarge their borders. They are still at that happy stage of desiring only as much as their natural needs require; everything beyond that is superfluous to them. Those of the same age generally call one another brothers; those younger they call children; and the old men are fathers to all the rest. These leave to their heirs in common this full possession of goods, held undivided, with no other title than the pure and simple one that nature gives to her creatures in bringing them into the world. If their neighbors cross the mountains to attack them and win the victory over them, the victor's gain is glory, and the advantage of having proved the master in valor and virtue. Beyond that they have no use for the goods of the vanquished, and they go back to their own country, where they lack nothing necessary; nor do they lack that great thing, knowing how to enjoy their condition happily and be content with it. These do the same in their turn. They ask no other ransom of their prisoners than the confession and acknowledgment that they are beaten. But in a whole century not one prisoner is to be found who would not rather die than yield a single jot of an invincible greatness of courage, by look or by word. Not one is seen who would not rather be killed and eaten than so much as ask not to be. They treat them with complete freedom, so that life may be all the dearer to them; and they commonly entertain them with threats of their coming death, of the torments they will have to suffer, of the preparations being made for it, of the cutting up of their limbs, and of the feast that will be held at their expense. All this is done for the sole purpose of wringing from their mouths some weak or abject word, or of

making them want to run away, so as to gain the advantage of having frightened them and broken their constancy. For indeed, rightly considered, true victory consists in this alone: *there is no victory / But that which subdues enemies who confess themselves beaten in their hearts as well.* The Hungarians, most warlike fighters, did not in former times press their advantage beyond having brought the enemy to their mercy. Having wrung this confession from him, they let him go unharmed and without ransom, except at most for getting his word not to take up arms against them from then on.[13]

1.31.14 Many of the advantages we gain over our enemies are borrowed advantages, not our own. It is the quality of a porter, not of valor, to have stronger arms and legs; agility is a dead, bodily quality; it is a stroke of fortune to make our enemy stumble, or to dazzle his eyes with the light of the sun; and being good at fencing is a matter of skill and technique, which may fall to a cowardly and worthless person. A man's worth and value lie in his heart and his will; that is where his true honor resides. Valor is firmness, not of legs and arms, but of courage and soul; it lies not in the worth of our horse or of our weapons, but in our own. He who falls with his courage unyielding, *if he has fallen, fights on his knees*. He who does not slacken his assurance in the least for any danger of imminent death; who, as he gives up the ghost, still looks at his enemy with a firm and scornful gaze—he is beaten not by us but by fortune; he is killed, not conquered. The most valiant are sometimes the most unfortunate.[14] So there are also defeats that are as triumphant as victories. Not even those four sister victories, the finest the sun ever beheld with its eyes—Salamis, Plataea, Mycale and Sicily—ever dared set all their combined glory against the glory of the defeat of King Leonidas and his men at the pass of Thermopylae. Who ever rushed with a more glorious and ambitious eagerness to win a battle than Captain Ischolas to lose one? Who has ever secured his own safety more ingeniously and carefully than he

13 Claudian, On the Sixth Consulship of Honorius.
14 Seneca, On Providence 2.

secured his ruin?[15] He had been charged with defending a certain pass in the Peloponnese against the Arcadians. He found himself wholly unable to do so, given the nature of the place and the inequality of the forces, and concluded that whoever faced the enemy there must of necessity stay there for good. On the other hand, he judged it unworthy both of his own valor and magnanimity and of the Spartan name to fail in his charge. Between these two extremes he took a middle course, as follows. The youngest and fittest of his troop he preserved for the protection and service of their country, and sent them back home; and with those whose loss would matter less, he resolved to hold the pass, and by their death to make the enemy pay as dearly as he possibly could for getting through. And so it turned out.[16] For soon he was surrounded on all sides by the Arcadians, and after making a great slaughter of them, he and his men were all put to the sword. Is there any trophy assigned to the victors that is not more due to these vanquished? True victory has for its part the fight, not survival; and the honor of valor lies in fighting, not in beating.

1.31.15 To return to our story: these prisoners are so far from giving in, whatever is done to them, that on the contrary, during the two or three months they are kept, they bear a cheerful countenance. They urge their masters to hurry up and put them to the test; they defy them, insult them, reproach them with their cowardice and with the number of battles they have lost against their own people. I have a song composed by a prisoner which contains this point: let them all come boldly and gather to dine on him, for at the same time they will be eating their own fathers and grandfathers, who have served as food and nourishment for his body. These muscles, he says, this flesh and these veins are yours, poor fools that you are; you do not recognize that the substance of your ancestors' limbs is still in them. Savor

15 Salamis, Plataea and Mycale were Greek victories over the Persians in 480–479 BC, and the Sicilian one was Himera (480 BC) over Carthage; Leonidas fell at Thermopylae in 480 BC.

16 Ischolas, a Spartan commander, held a pass against the Arcadians in 369 BC; the story is told by Diodorus Siculus.

them well: you will find in them the taste of your own flesh. A notion with no whiff of barbarism about it at all. Those who paint them dying, and depict the moment when they are killed, paint the prisoner spitting in the faces of those who are killing him and pulling faces at them. Indeed, to their last breath they never stop braving and defying them by word and look. Truly, here are men who are very wild compared with us: for either they must be so in good earnest, or we must be; there is an amazing distance between their ways and ours.

1.31.16 The men there have several wives, and the higher their reputation for valor, the more they have. It is a remarkable beauty in their marriages that the same jealousy our wives have in keeping us from the friendship and goodwill of other women, theirs have in exactly the same measure in winning it for them. Being more concerned for their husbands' honor than for anything else, they strive and take pains to have as many companions as they can, since that is a testimony to the husband's valor. Our wives will cry miracle; it is no miracle. It is a properly matrimonial virtue, but of the highest order. And in the Bible, Leah, Rachel, Sarah and the wives of Jacob provided their beautiful handmaids to their husbands; Livia seconded the appetites of Augustus, to her own detriment; and Stratonice, the wife of King Deiotarus, not only lent her husband for his use a very beautiful young chambermaid who served her, but carefully brought up the children and backed them in succeeding to their father's dominions. And lest anyone think that all this is done out of a simple and servile obligation to their usage, under the weight of the authority of their ancient custom, without reasoning and without judgment, because their minds are too dull to take any other course, I must cite some instances of their ability.[17] Besides the passage I have just recounted from one of their war songs, I have another song, a love song, which begins in this sense: Adder, stay; stay, adder, so that from the pattern of your coloring my sister may take the design and workmanship of a

17 Deiotarus was king of Galatia in the 1st century BC; the story of Stratonice comes from Plutarch.

rich cord that I may give to my love; and so may your beauty and your grace be preferred forever to all other snakes. This first couplet is the refrain of the song. Now I have enough acquaintance with poetry to judge this much: not only is there nothing barbarous in this conception, but it is altogether Anacreontic.[18] Their language, for the rest, is soft and pleasant-sounding, rather like Greek in its endings.

THREE VISITORS AT ROUEN

Brought to France, three of them marvel at men obeying a child and at unequal wealth.

1.31.17 Three of them were at Rouen at the time when the late King Charles IX was there. They did not know how dearly their peace and happiness will one day pay for the knowledge of the corruptions on this side of the ocean, nor that from this contact will come their ruin, which I suppose is already well advanced. Most wretched they were, to let themselves be lured by the desire for novelty and to leave the sweetness of their own sky to come and see ours! The king talked with them for a long time; they were shown our ways, our pomp, the layout of a fine city. After that someone asked their opinion and wanted to know what they had found most remarkable. They replied with three things, of which I have forgotten the third, and I am very sorry about it; but I still remember two.[19] They said that, in the first place, they found it very strange that so many tall, bearded men, strong and armed, who stood around the king (it is likely they meant the Swiss of his guard), should submit to obey a child, and that one of them was not chosen to command instead. Secondly (they have a way of speaking in their language whereby they call men halves of one another), they had noticed that among us there were men full and gorged with all sorts of good things, while their halves were begging at their doors, emaciated with hunger

18 That is, in the manner of Anacreon, the Greek lyric poet of the 6th century BC.
19 Charles IX visited Rouen in 1562, after its recapture from the Protestants; he died in 1574.

and poverty; and they found it strange that these needy halves could put up with such injustice, and did not take the others by the throat or set fire to their houses.

1.31.18 I talked with one of them for a very long time; but I had an interpreter who followed me so badly, and whose stupidity made it so hard for him to take in my ideas, that I could get nothing worthwhile out of him. When I asked him what benefit he gained from his high rank among his people (for he was a captain, and our sailors called him king), he told me it was to march first in war. How many men followed him? He pointed to a stretch of ground, to signify as many as could fit into such a space; it might have been four or five thousand men. Did all his authority lapse when there was no war? He said that this much remained to him: when he visited the villages that depended on him, they cleared paths for him through the thickets of their woods, so that he could pass through quite comfortably. All this is not too bad. But what of it? They don't wear breeches.

I.32 That We Must Be Sparing in Judging Divine Ordinances

Qu'il faut sobrement se mesler de iuger des ordonnances diuines
Those who read God's will into the outcome of events claim knowledge no one has, and weaken faith by doing so.

1.32.1 THE true field and subject of imposture is things unknown. In the first place, strangeness itself lends them credit; and then, since they are not subject to our ordinary reasoning, they deprive us of the means of fighting them. For this reason, says Plato, it is much easier to satisfy people when speaking of the nature of the gods than of the nature of men, because the ignorance of the hearers lends a fine wide field and complete freedom to the handling of a hidden subject. Hence it comes about that nothing is so firmly believed as what is least known, and no people are so sure of themselves as those who tell us tall tales: alchemists, prognosticators, judicial astrologers, palm-readers, physicians, *all that tribe*.[1] To these I would gladly add, if I dared, a crowd of people who are the regular interpreters and auditors of God's designs, who claim to find the causes of every event and to see in the secrets of the divine will the incomprehensible motives of his works. And though the variety and continual discord of events toss them from corner to corner and from East to West, they still keep chasing their ball, and paint white and black with the same crayon.

1.32.2 In one Indian nation there is this praiseworthy practice: when things go badly for them in some encounter or battle, they

publicly ask pardon of the Sun, who is their god, as for an unjust act, attributing their good or bad fortune to divine reason and submitting their judgment and reasoning to it. It is enough for a Christian to believe that all things come from God, to receive them with acknowledgment of his divine and inscrutable wisdom, and therefore to take them in good part, in whatever guise they are sent to him. But I disapprove of what I see commonly done, seeking to strengthen and support our religion by the success of our enterprises. Our faith has enough other foundations without being vouched for by events. For when the people have grown used to these plausible arguments, so much to their taste, there is a danger that their faith will be shaken when events in their turn prove contrary and unfavorable. So it is in the wars we are now fighting over religion. Those who had the advantage in the encounter at La Roche-l'Abeille made a great fuss about it and used that piece of fortune as a sure sign of approval for their party. When they later come to excuse their misfortunes at Moncontour and Jarnac as fatherly rods and chastisements, unless they have a people wholly at their mercy, they easily enough make them feel that this is getting two grindings out of one sack, and blowing hot and cold with the same mouth.[2] It would be better to instruct them in the true foundations of the truth. It was a fine naval battle that was won these past months against the Turks under the command of Don John of Austria; but at other times it has pleased God to let us see others like it at our expense. In short, it is hard to bring divine things into our scales without their losing some weight.[3] And anyone who wanted to explain why Arius and Leo, his Pope, the principal leaders of this heresy, died at different times such similar and strange deaths (for both, having left the debate with a stomach-ache to go to the privy, suddenly gave up the ghost there), and to magnify this divine vengeance by the circumstance of the place,

1 Plato, Critias 107. *Id genus omne* comes from Horace, Satires I.2.
2 The Protestants won at La Roche-l'Abeille in June 1569 and lost at Jarnac (March) and Moncontour (October) in the same year.
3 The battle of Lepanto, 7 October 1571.

might well add the death of Heliogabalus, who was also killed in a latrine. But what of it? Irenaeus turns out to have met the same fate.[4]

1.32.3 God, wishing to teach us that the good have something other to hope for, and the wicked something other to fear, than the fortunes and misfortunes of this world, handles and dispenses them according to his hidden disposition, and deprives us of the means of foolishly turning them to our profit. Those who try to take advantage of them by human reason are only making fools of themselves. They never land one blow without taking two. Saint Augustine gives a fine proof of this against his adversaries. It is a conflict decided by the weapons of memory more than by those of reason. We must be content with the light that it pleases the sun to share with us through its rays; and whoever raises his eyes to take in more of it from its very body, let him not think it strange if, as the penalty for his presumption, he loses his sight. *Who among men can know the counsel of God? Or who can conceive what the Lord wills?*[5]

4 Arius (d. AD 336) founded the Arian heresy; Heliogabalus, Roman emperor, was murdered in AD 222.

5 Book of Wisdom 9:13.

I.33 Of Fleeing from Pleasures at the Cost of Life

De fuir les voluptez au pris de la vie
Ancients advised death over a life of worldly ties; Montaigne finds a Christian version in Saint Hilary's prayer for his daughter.

1.33.1 I HAD indeed seen most of the ancient opinions agree on this: that it is time to die when there is more ill than good in living, and that to preserve our life to our own torment and discomfort is to offend against the very rules of nature, as these old precepts say: *Either a life without grief, or a happy death.*
Death is good for those to whom life brings disgrace.
It is better not to live than to live in misery.[1]

But to push contempt for death so far as to use it to get away from honors, riches, high positions and the other favors and goods that we call the goods of fortune—as if reason did not have enough to do in persuading us to give them up, without adding this fresh burden—that I had never seen either prescribed or practiced, until this passage of Seneca fell into my hands. He is advising Lucilius, a powerful man of great authority at the emperor's court, to change his life of pleasure and pomp and to withdraw from worldly ambition to some solitary, tranquil and philosophical life; and when Lucilius raised some difficulties, he says: My advice is that you leave that life, or life altogether. I do

1 Greek gnomic verses, preserved in the anthology of Stobaeus.

indeed advise you to take the gentler way, and to untie rather than break what you have badly knotted, provided that, if it cannot be untied any other way, you break it.[2] There is no man so cowardly that he would not rather fall once than stay forever teetering. I would have found this advice in keeping with Stoic harshness; but it is stranger that it is borrowed from Epicurus, who writes quite similar things on this subject to Idomeneus. Still, I think I have noticed something similar among our own people, but with Christian moderation.[3]

1.33.2 Saint Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, that famous enemy of the Arian heresy, was in Syria when he learned that Abra, his only daughter, whom he had left at home with her mother, was being sought in marriage by the most eminent lords of the land, as a girl very well brought up, beautiful, rich, and in the flower of her youth. He wrote to her (as we can still see) that she should withdraw her affection from all these pleasures and advantages that were being offered her; that on his journey he had found her a much greater and worthier match, a husband of far greater power and magnificence, who would give her presents of robes and jewels of inestimable value. His aim was to make her lose the appetite for worldly pleasures and the habit of them, so as to join her wholly to God.[4] But since the shortest and surest way to this seemed to him to be his daughter's death, he never ceased, by vows, prayers and supplications, to petition God to take her from this world and call her to himself; and so it happened, for soon after his return she died, at which he showed a singular joy. This man seems to outdo the others, in that he turns to this means at the very outset, whereas they take it only as a last resort, and in that it concerns his only daughter. But I will not leave out the end of this story, even though it is beside my purpose. Saint Hilary's wife, having learned from him how their daughter's death had come about through his design

2 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius 22.

3 Idomeneus was a friend and disciple of Epicurus; Seneca quotes the letter in the same passage.

4 Hilary of Poitiers (c. AD 315–367), exiled to the East for his opposition to Arianism.

and will, and how much happier she was to have left this world than to be in it, conceived so lively a sense of eternal and heavenly bliss that she begged her husband with the utmost insistence to do the same for her. And when God, at their joint prayers, took her to himself soon afterwards, it was a death embraced with singular contentment on both sides.

I.34 Fortune Is Often Found in the Path of Reason

La fortune se rencontre souuent au train de la raison
Fortune sometimes acts with apparent justice and skill,
punishing poisoners and curing the sick by chance.

1.34.1 THE inconstancy of fortune's shifting motion means that she is bound to show us every kind of face.

1.34.2 Is there any act of justice more express than this? The Duke of Valentinois had resolved to poison Adrian, Cardinal of Corneto, with whom he and his father, Pope Alexander VI, were going to dine at the Vatican. He sent ahead a bottle of poisoned wine and ordered the butler to guard it very carefully. The Pope arrived before his son and asked for a drink; the butler, who thought the wine had been entrusted to him only for its quality, served some of it to the Pope. And the Duke himself, arriving just at the time of the meal and trusting that no one would have touched his bottle, drank some in his turn. So the father died suddenly, and the son, after being tormented by illness for a long time, was kept for another, worse fortune.[1]

1.34.3 Sometimes she seems to play tricks on us on purpose. The Seigneur d'Estrées, then standard-bearer to Monsieur de Vendôme, and the Seigneur de Licques, lieutenant of the Duke of Aerschot's company, were both suitors of the sister of the Sieur de Fouguesselles, though they were of different parties (as happens with neighbors on the frontier). The Sieur de Licques

1 Cesare Borgia, Duke of Valentinois, was the son of Pope Alexander VI, who died in August 1503.

won her; but on the very day of the wedding, and what is worse, before the wedding night, the bridegroom, wanting to break a lance in honor of his new bride, went out to skirmish near Saint-Omer, where the Sieur d'Estrées, proving the stronger, took him prisoner. And to make the most of his advantage, the young lady, *Forced to let go of her new husband's neck*
Before one winter, and then another, coming round
Had sated her eager love in the long nights, had to come herself and beg him, as a courtesy, to hand over his prisoner to her. This he did, for French nobility never refuses ladies anything.[2]

1.34.4 Does it not seem like a fate with an artist's touch? Constantine, son of Helena, founded the Empire of Constantinople; and so many centuries later Constantine, son of Helena, brought it to an end. Sometimes she likes to outdo our miracles. We hold that when King Clovis was besieging Angoulême, the walls fell of their own accord by divine favor. And Bouchet takes from some author the story that King Robert, besieging a town, slipped away from the siege to go to Orléans to celebrate the feast of Saint Aignan; and while he was at his devotions, at a certain point in the Mass, the walls of the besieged town fell into ruin without any effort.[3] She did just the opposite in our wars in Milan. Captain Renzo, besieging the town of Arona for us, had a mine laid under a great stretch of wall; and the wall, abruptly lifted off the ground, nevertheless fell back all in one piece, so squarely onto its foundation that the besieged were none the worse for it.[4]

1.34.5 Sometimes she plays the doctor. Jason of Pherae, given up by the physicians because of an abscess in his chest, and wanting to be rid of it, at least by death, threw himself recklessly into the thick of the enemy in a battle, where he was wounded right through the body so aptly that his abscess burst and he was

2 Catullus, Poems 68.
3 Constantine XI, the last Byzantine emperor, whose mother was also named Helena, fell in 1453. Jean Bouchet wrote the Annals of Aquitaine (1524).
4 Renzo da Ceri, an Italian captain in French service; Arona is on Lake Maggiore.

cured. Did she not surpass the painter Protogenes in the mastery of his art?[5] He had finished the picture of a tired, exhausted dog, and was satisfied with it in every other respect, but could not render the foam and slaver to his liking. Vexed with his work, he took his sponge, which was soaked with various paints, and threw it at the picture to wipe everything out. Fortune carried the blow precisely to the dog's mouth, and there completed what art had been unable to achieve. Does she not sometimes guide our plans and correct them? Isabella, Queen of England, had to cross back from Zeeland to her kingdom with an army, on behalf of her son and against her husband. She would have been lost if she had reached the port she had planned on, for her enemies were waiting for her there; but fortune threw her elsewhere against her will, and there she landed in complete safety. And that ancient who threw a stone at a dog and struck and killed his stepmother—was he not right to pronounce this line: *Chance takes better counsel than we do*? Fortune has better judgment than we have.[6]

1.34.6 Hicetas had bribed two soldiers to kill Timoleon while he was staying at Adranum in Sicily. They chose their moment for when he would be performing a sacrifice. And as they were mingling with the crowd, signaling to each other that the opportunity was right for their business, along comes a third man who, with a great sword stroke, strikes one of them on the head, lays him dead on the ground, and runs off. The accomplice, thinking himself discovered and lost, ran to the altar asking for sanctuary and promising to tell the whole truth. While he was giving his account of the conspiracy, along comes the third man, who had been caught; the people, taking him for a murderer, were shoving and jostling him through the crowd toward Timoleon and the leading men of the assembly.[7] There he cries for

5 Jason was tyrant of Pherae in Thessaly in the 4th century BC; Protogenes was a Greek painter of the same century.

6 Isabella of France landed in England in 1326 against Edward II; the Greek line is from Menander.

7 Timoleon of Corinth, who freed Syracuse from its tyrants in the 4th century BC; the story is from Plutarch's Life of Timoleon.

mercy, and says he has justly killed his father's murderer; and he proves on the spot, through witnesses whom his good luck supplied most opportunely, that in the town of the Leontines his father had indeed been killed by the man on whom he had taken revenge. They awarded him ten Attic minas for having had the good fortune, in avenging his father's death, to rescue from death the common father of the Sicilians. This fortune surpasses in its ordering the rules of human prudence.

1.34.7 To finish: in this case, do we not see a very express application of her favor, of singular goodness and piety? The Ignatii, father and son, proscribed at Rome by the triumvirs, resolved on this generous office: to give up their lives into each other's hands, and so cheat the cruelty of the tyrants. They ran at each other, sword in hand. She guided the points and made of them two equally mortal blows; and she granted to the honor of so beautiful a friendship that they had just enough strength left to pull their bloody arms, swords still in hand, out of the wounds, and to embrace each other in that state, so tightly that the executioners cut off both their heads together, leaving the bodies still held in that noble knot, and their wounds joined, lovingly drinking in each other's blood and the last of each other's life.[8]

8 The proscriptions of 43 BC; the story is told by Appian, Civil Wars IV.

I.35 Of a Lack in Our Administrations

D'vn defaut de nos polices
Montaigne's father proposed a public registry matching needs and offers; Montaigne also praises his household diary.

1.35.1 MY late father, a man of very clear judgment for one helped only by experience and natural gifts, once told me that he had wanted to set up a scheme whereby in towns there would be a certain designated place where those who needed something could go and have their business registered with an officer appointed for the purpose. For instance: I am looking to sell some pearls; I am looking for pearls for sale; so-and-so wants company for a journey to Paris; so-and-so is looking for a servant of such a kind, another for a master; another wants a workman; one this, another that, each according to his need. And it seems that this means of informing one another would bring no slight convenience to public dealings. For all the time there are situations looking for each other, and because they fail to make contact, they leave men in extreme need.

1.35.2 I hear, to the great shame of our age, that before our very eyes two men of the greatest learning have died without having enough to eat: Lilius Gregorius Giraldus in Italy and Sebastianus Castalio in Germany. And I believe there are a thousand men who would have invited them on very advantageous terms, or helped them where they were, if they had known.[1] The world is not so universally corrupt that I do not know a certain man who would wish with all his heart that the means his family has put

1 Lilio Gregorio Giraldi (1479–1552), Italian humanist; Sébastien Castellion (1515–1563), Protestant theologian at Basel.

into his hands could be used, for as long as it pleases fortune to let him enjoy them, to shelter from want those persons rare and remarkable in some kind of merit whom misfortune sometimes assails to the utmost; and who would at least put them in such a position that, if they were not content, it could only be for want of good sense.

1.35.3 In the management of his household my father had this practice, which I can praise but by no means follow. Besides the register of household business, where the small accounts, payments and transactions not needing a notary are entered, a register kept by a steward, he had the servant who acted as his secretary keep a journal recording every happening of any note, and day by day the memoirs of the history of his house. It is very pleasant to look at when time begins to wipe out the memory of things, and very handy for often saving us trouble. When such a piece of work was begun, when it was finished; what households passed through, how long they stayed; our journeys, our absences, marriages, deaths; the arrival of happy or unhappy news; changes of the chief servants; matters of that kind. An ancient custom, which I think it good to revive, each in his own little home; and I think myself a fool for having failed to do it.

I.36 Of the Custom of Wearing Clothes

De l'vsage de se vestir
Were humans meant to go naked like other creatures? Montaigne argues that custom, not nature, makes cold unbearable to us.

1.36.1 WHEREVER I want to turn, I have to force some barrier of custom, so carefully has it bridled all our approaches. In this chilly season I was pondering whether the habit of going completely naked among those recently discovered nations is forced on them by the hot temperature of the air, as we say of the Indians and the Moors, or whether it is the original way of mankind. Men of understanding, since everything under heaven, as Holy Scripture says, is subject to the same laws, are accustomed, in considerations like these, where natural laws must be distinguished from invented ones, to have recourse to the general order of the world, in which there can be nothing counterfeit. Now since everything else is precisely furnished with needle and thread to maintain its being, it is unbelievable that we alone should have been produced in a defective and needy state, a state that cannot be maintained without outside help. So I hold that, just as plants, trees, animals and everything that lives are naturally equipped with enough covering to protect themselves from the harshness of the weather, *And so almost all things are covered with hide, / Or bristles, or shells, or callus, or bark,* so were we too. But like those who blot out the light of day with artificial light, we have blotted out our own means with borrowed ones.[1]

1 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things IV.

1.36.2 And it is easy to see that it is custom that makes impossible for us what is not impossible. For among those nations that have no knowledge of clothing, some are situated under roughly the same sky as ours, and some under a much harsher sky than ours. And then, the most delicate part of us is the part that is always left uncovered: the eyes, the mouth, the nose, the ears; and for our peasants, as for our forefathers, the chest and the belly. If we had been born needing petticoats and breeches, there is no doubt that nature would have armed with a thicker skin whatever she left exposed to the battering of the seasons, as she has done with our fingertips and the soles of our feet. Why does this seem hard to believe? Between my way of dressing and that of a peasant of my region, I find far more distance than there is between his way and that of a man dressed in nothing but his skin. How many men, especially in Turkey, go naked out of religious devotion? Someone, I forget who, saw one of our beggars in nothing but his shirt in the depth of winter, as lively as any man muffled up to the ears in marten fur, and asked him how he could bear it. "And you, sir," he replied, "you keep your face uncovered; well, I am all face." The Italians tell a story, I believe, about the Duke of Florence's fool. His master asked him how, so poorly dressed, he could stand the cold, which the Duke himself found hard to bear. "Follow my recipe," said the fool, "and pile on all the clothes you have, as I do with mine, and you will suffer from the cold no more than I do." King Masinissa, even in extreme old age, could not be persuaded to go about with his head covered, whatever cold, storm or rain there might be; the same is said of the Emperor Severus. In the battles fought between the Egyptians and the Persians, Herodotus says it was noticed both by others and by himself that among those left dead on the field, the skulls of the Egyptians were incomparably harder than those of the Persians. The reason was that the Persians always kept their heads covered, first with caps and then with turbans, while the Egyptians were shaved from childhood and went bareheaded. And King Agesilaus kept up, into his decrepit old age, the practice of wear-

ing the same clothes in winter as in summer.[2] Caesar, says Suetonius, always marched at the head of his troops, most often on foot and bareheaded, whether it was sunny or raining; and the same is said of Hannibal: *then, with bare head, / to take the raging downpours and the collapse of the sky.* A Venetian who lived there a long time and has only just come back writes that in the kingdom of Pegu, though the other parts of the body are clothed, men and women always go barefoot, even on horseback. And Plato strongly advises, for the health of the whole body, that we give the feet and the head no covering other than the one nature has put there.[3] The man the Poles chose as their king after ours, who is truly one of the greatest princes of our age, never wears gloves, nor does he change, whatever the winter or the weather, the cap he wears indoors. Just as I cannot bear to go about unbuttoned and untrussed, the farm laborers of my neighborhood would feel hobbled if they were buttoned up. Varro holds that when it was decreed that we should uncover our heads in the presence of the gods or of the magistrate, it was done more for our health, and to toughen us against the harshness of the weather, than out of reverence.[4]

1.36.3 And since we are on the subject of cold, and since we French are used to dressing in motley (not I, for I dress almost only in black or white, in imitation of my father), let us stitch on another piece. Captain Martin du Bellay relates that on the Luxembourg campaign he saw frosts so severe that the army's wine supply was cut with axes and hatchets and handed out to the soldiers by weight, and they carried it off in baskets. And Ovid: *The wine stands bare, keeping the shape of the jar; / they drink not draughts of it but chunks handed out.* The frosts are so severe at the mouth of the Maeotian marshes that in the very place where Mithridates' lieutenant had fought the enemy on dry ground and defeated them, when summer came he won another battle

2 Masinissa (c. 240–148 BC) was king of Numidia in North Africa.

3 The verse is from Silius Italicus, Punica. Pegu was a kingdom in what is now Myanmar (Burma).

4 Stephen Báthory, elected king of Poland in 1576 after Henri of Valois left the throne to become Henri III of France.

against them there, this time at sea.[5] The Romans were at a great disadvantage in the battle they fought against the Carthaginians near Piacenza, because they went into the charge with their blood congealed and their limbs stiff with cold. Hannibal, by contrast, had had fires lit throughout his camp to warm his soldiers, and oil handed out among the companies so that, by rubbing it on, they would make their sinews more supple and limber and coat over their pores against the blasts of air and the freezing wind that was blowing then. The retreat of the Greeks from Babylon to their own country is famous for the hardships and difficulties they had to overcome.[6] This was one of them: caught in the mountains of Armenia by a terrible onslaught of snow, they lost all sense of the country and the roads. Hemmed in by it, they went a day and a night without eating or drinking, most of their animals dead; and of the men, many died, many were blinded by the sting of the sleet and the glare of the snow, many were maimed in their hands and feet, many were stiff, frozen and unable to move from the cold while still fully conscious. Alexander saw a nation where fruit trees are buried in winter to protect them from the frost; and we can see this too.

1.36.4 On the subject of dress: the king of Mexico changed his clothes four times a day and never wore them again, using his castoffs for his continual gifts and rewards; likewise no pot, no dish, no utensil of his kitchen or his table was ever served to him twice.[7]

5 Martin du Bellay wrote memoirs of the wars of Francis I. The Maeotian marshes are the Sea of Azov.

6 The battle of the Trebia (218 BC). The retreat of the Ten Thousand (401–400 BC) is told in Xenophon's Anabasis.

7 Montezuma II, the Aztec ruler, as described by the Spanish historian López de Gómara.

I.37 Of Cato the Younger

Du ieune Caton

Montaigne refuses to measure others by himself and defends the greatness of heroic figures like Cato against detractors.

1.37.1 I do not share that common error of judging another by what I am. I readily believe that others have qualities different from mine. Though I feel myself committed to one form, I do not oblige everyone else to follow it, as everyone does. I believe in and can conceive a thousand contrary ways of life; and, unlike most people, I more readily accept the difference between us than the likeness. I relieve another being, as much as you like, of my own qualities and principles, and consider him simply in himself, without relation to me, shaping him on his own model. Though I am not continent myself, I still sincerely acknowledge the continence of the Feuillants and the Capuchins, and think well of their way of life.[1] I slip very easily in imagination into their place, and I love and honor them all the more because they are different from me. I particularly want each of us to be judged on his own, and not to be measured by the common run. My weakness in no way alters the opinions I ought to have of the strength and vigor of those who deserve it. *There are those who recommend nothing but what they are confident they can imitate themselves.* Crawling in the slime of the earth, I still note, up in the clouds, the inimitable loftiness of certain heroic souls. It is a great deal for me to have my judgment well ordered, if my actions cannot be, and to keep at least this sovereign part free

1 The Feuillants were a strict reformed branch of the Cistercians; the Capuchins, a strict reformed branch of the Franciscans.

from corruption.[2] It is something to have good will, when my legs fail me.

1.37.2 This age we live in, at least in our part of the world, is so leaden that not merely the practice but even the idea of virtue is lacking, and it seems to be nothing but schoolroom jargon. *They think virtue is mere words, as / a sacred grove is mere wood; yet they ought to revere it even if they could not grasp it.* It is a trinket to hang in a cabinet, or on the tip of the tongue, as on the tip of an ear, for ornament.[3]

1.37.3 Virtuous action is no longer to be found: the actions that wear its face do not have its essence, for profit, glory, fear, habit and other such outside causes lead us to perform them. The justice, valor and kindness we then exercise may be called so in the eyes of others and for the face they wear in public; but in the doer it is in no way virtue. There is another end in view, another moving cause. Now virtue acknowledges nothing but what is done by it and for it alone.

1.37.4 In that great battle of Potidaea, which the Greeks under Pausanias won against Mardonius and the Persians, the victors, following their custom, came to share out among themselves the glory of the exploit, and awarded the Spartan nation preeminence for valor in that battle. The Spartans, excellent judges of virtue, when they came to decide which individual of their nation should have the honor of having done best that day, found that Aristodemus had risked himself most courageously. Yet they gave him no prize for it, because his valor had been stirred by the desire to clear himself of the reproach he had incurred over Thermopylae, and by a longing to die courageously to redeem his past shame.[4]

1.37.5 Our judgments are still sick, and follow the depravity of our morals. I see most of the minds of my time showing off their cleverness by obscuring the glory of the fine and noble deeds of

2 Adapted from Cicero.
3 Horace, Epistles, followed by a sentence from Cicero.
4 Montaigne means the battle of Plataea (479 BC). Aristodemus was one of the Spartans who did not die at Thermopylae, and was disgraced for it.

antiquity, giving them some base interpretation and inventing vain occasions and causes for them. Great subtlety! Give me the most excellent and pure action, and I will supply it with fifty plausible vicious intentions. God knows, for anyone who wants to stretch them, what a variety of images our inner will allows. These clever fellows, for all their slander, act not so much maliciously as clumsily and crudely.

1.37.6 The same pains people take to detract from these great names, and the same license, I would gladly take to lend them a shoulder and lift them higher. These rare figures, picked out by the consent of the wise as examples for the world, I would not hesitate to load with fresh honor, as far as my invention could, by interpretation and favorable circumstance. And we must believe that the efforts of our invention fall far below their merit. It is the office of good men to portray virtue as beautiful as it can be. And it would not be unseemly if passion should carry us away in favor of such holy forms. What these people do to the contrary, they do either from malice, or from that vice I have just spoken of, of bringing their belief down to their own level; or, as I rather think, because their sight is not strong enough, clear enough or trained to conceive the splendor of virtue in its natural purity. So Plutarch says that in his time some attributed the cause of the younger Cato's death to the fear he had of Caesar; and he is rightly indignant at this. We can judge from that how much more offended he would have been by those who attributed it to ambition. Foolish people![5] He would have done a fine, noble and just deed in disgrace rather than for glory. That man was truly a model whom nature chose to show how far human virtue and firmness could reach.

1.37.7 But I am in no position here to treat this rich subject. I only want to set five Latin poets wrestling together in praise of Cato—for Cato's sake, and incidentally for their own as well. Now a well-brought-up child should find, compared with the others, the first two dragging; the third more vigorous, but brought down by the extravagance of its own strength. He will

5 Cato the Younger (95–46 BC) killed himself at Utica rather than submit to Caesar.

judge that there would be room for one or two more degrees of invention before reaching the fourth, at the high point of which he will clasp his hands in admiration. At the last—first by some distance, but a distance that he will swear no human mind could fill—he will be stunned, he will be awestruck.

1.37.8 Here is a marvel: we have far more poets than judges and interpreters of poetry. It is easier to write it than to understand it. At a certain low level, it can be judged by precepts and by skill. But the good, the supreme, the divine is above rules and reason. Whoever discerns its beauty with a firm and steady gaze does not see it, any more than the splendor of a flash of lightning. It does not work on our judgment; it ravishes and ravages it. The frenzy that goads the man who can penetrate it also strikes a third person who hears him discuss and recite it. Just as the magnet not only attracts a needle but also infuses into it its own power to attract others. And it is seen more clearly in the theater that the sacred inspiration of the Muses, having first stirred the poet to anger, grief, hatred and out of himself, wherever they please, strikes through the poet the actor, and through the actor, in turn, a whole people. It is the chain of our needles, hanging one from another. From my earliest childhood, poetry has had the power to pierce me through and carry me away. But this very lively sensitivity, which is natural in me, has been variously affected by various forms—not so much higher and lower (for they were always the highest of each kind) as different in color. First, a gay and ingenious fluency; later, a keen and lofty subtlety; finally, a mature and steady strength. The example will say it better: Ovid, Lucan, Virgil.

1.37.9 But here are our poets on the racecourse. *Granted, let Cato in his lifetime be greater even than Caesar,* says one. *And Cato unconquered, having conquered death,* says another. And another, speaking of the civil wars between Caesar and Pompey: *The winning cause pleased the gods, but the losing cause pleased Cato.* And the fourth, praising Caesar: *And all the lands subdued, / except the fierce soul of Cato.* And the master of the choir, after setting out in

his picture the names of the greatest Romans, ends in this way: *Cato giving them laws.*[6]

6 The five are Martial, Manilius, Lucan, Horace and Virgil (Aeneid VIII, on the shield of Aeneas).

I.38 How We Weep and Laugh at the Same Thing

Comme nous pleurons et rions d'vne mesme chose
Conflicting feelings can be equally sincere; Montaigne shows how the soul shifts between grief and joy over the same thing.

1.38.1 When we come across in the histories that Antigonus was very displeased with his son for presenting him with the head of King Pyrrhus, his enemy, who had just been killed fighting against him, and that on seeing it he burst into tears; and that Duke René of Lorraine likewise lamented the death of Duke Charles of Burgundy, whom he had just defeated, and wore mourning at his funeral; and that at the battle of Auray (which the Count of Montfort won against Charles of Blois, his rival for the duchy of Brittany) the victor, coming upon the body of his dead enemy, mourned him greatly—we must not immediately exclaim: *And so it happens that the mind hides each*

of its passions beneath a contrary cloak,
with a face now bright, now dark. When Caesar was presented with Pompey's head, the histories say he turned his eyes away as from an ugly and unpleasant sight.[1]

1 The Italian verse is from Petrarch.

> There had been between them such a long understanding and partnership in managing public affairs, so much sharing of fortunes, so many mutual services and ties of kinship, that we must not believe this countenance was entirely false and feigned, as this other poet thinks: *And thinking it now safe*
> *to be a good father-in-law, he shed tears that did not fall of themselves,*
> *and forced groans from a glad heart.* For although in truth most of our actions are nothing but mask and paint, and it may sometimes be true that *The heir's weeping is laughter behind a mask,* still, in judging these events we must consider how our souls are often stirred by different passions.[2]

1.38.2 And just as they say that in our bodies there is a gathering of different humors, of which the master is the one that most usually commands in us, according to our constitutions, so in our soul, although various impulses stir it, one of them must hold the field. But not with so complete an advantage that, because of the volatility and suppleness of our soul, the weaker ones do not on occasion regain ground and make a brief charge in their turn. Hence we see not only children, who follow nature quite artlessly, often crying and laughing at the same thing; but none of us can boast that, however much he may want the journey he is setting out on, he does not still feel his heart quiver at parting from his family and friends. And if tears do not quite escape him, at least he puts his foot in the stirrup with a gloomy and saddened face.

2 Lucan, Pharsalia; the line on the heir is from Publilius Syrus. Pompey had married Caesar's daughter Julia.

> And whatever noble flame warms the hearts of well-born girls, still they have to be pried by force from their mothers' necks to be handed over to their husbands, whatever this good fellow may say: *Do new brides hate Venus, or do they cheat*
> *their parents' joy with false little tears*
> *which they shed in floods inside the bedroom door?*
> *No, so help me the gods, their groans are not true.* So it is not strange to lament the death of a man whom one would by no means want alive.[3]

1.38.3 When I scold my valet, I scold him with all the heart I have; these are real curses, not feigned. But once that smoke has passed, let him need me and I will gladly do him good: I turn the page instantly. When I call him a buffoon, a dull calf, I do not undertake to stitch those titles on him forever; nor do I think I am contradicting myself when I call him a decent fellow shortly after. No quality embraces us purely and universally. If talking to oneself were not the mark of a fool, there is hardly a day or an hour when I would not be heard grumbling to myself and against myself, "Dung on the fool!"—and yet I do not mean that as my definition.

3 Catullus.

> Anyone who, seeing me look now cold, now loving toward my wife, thinks that one or the other is feigned, is a fool. Nero, taking leave of his mother, whom he was sending to be drowned, nevertheless felt the emotion of that maternal farewell, and was struck with horror and pity. They say that the sun's light is not one continuous piece, but that the sun darts new rays at us so thickly and incessantly, one upon another, that we cannot perceive the gap between them. *For the sun in the heavens,*
> *abundant fountain of liquid light,*
> *constantly floods the sky with fresh brightness,*
> *and instantly supplies light with new light.* In the same way our soul darts out its points variously and imperceptibly.[4]

1.38.4 Artabanus caught his nephew Xerxes off guard and chided him for the sudden change in his countenance. Xerxes was surveying the immeasurable size of his forces at the crossing of the Hellespont for the expedition against Greece. First a thrill of joy came over him at seeing so many thousands of men in his service, and he showed it by the gladness and festivity of his face. And all of a sudden, in the same instant, as his thoughts suggested to him that so many lives would have to perish within a century at most, he knit his brow and grew sad to the point of tears.

1.38.5 We have pursued revenge for an injury with resolute will, and felt singular satisfaction at our victory; and yet we weep over it. It is not that we weep for; nothing has changed. But our soul looks at the thing with a different eye and pictures it to itself with a different face; for each thing has many angles and many lights.

4 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.

1.38.6 Kinship, old acquaintances and friendships seize our imagination and stir it for the moment according to their nature; but the turn is so abrupt that it escapes us. *Nothing seems to happen as swiftly as what the mind proposes and itself begins. So the mind stirs itself more swiftly than any of the things whose nature we see plainly before our eyes.* And for this reason, when we try to make one continuous body out of this whole sequence, we deceive ourselves. When Timoleon weeps for the murder he had committed after such mature and noble deliberation, he does not weep for the liberty restored to his country, he does not weep for the tyrant; he weeps for his brother. One part of his duty has been played; let us let him play the other.[5]

5 Timoleon had his brother Timophanes killed for making himself tyrant of Corinth.

I.39 Of Solitude

De la solitude

True solitude is inward: Montaigne urges freeing ourselves from attachments and keeping a back room of the mind for ourselves.

1.39.1 Let us leave aside that long comparison between the solitary life and the active one. And as for that fine saying with which ambition and avarice cloak themselves, that we are born not for our private good but for the public, let us boldly appeal to those who are in the dance; and let them search their consciences whether, on the contrary, ranks, offices and all this bustle of the world are not sought rather to draw private profit from the public. The bad means by which people push themselves forward in our age show clearly that the end is hardly worth much. Let us answer ambition that it is ambition itself that gives us a taste for solitude. For what does it shun so much as company? What does it seek so much as elbowroom? There is room for doing good and evil everywhere. Yet if Bias's saying is true, that the worse part is the larger, or what Ecclesiastes says, that out of a thousand there is not one good: *For good men are rare: there are hardly as many / as the gates of Thebes or the mouths of the rich Nile,* then contagion is very dangerous in a crowd. We must either imitate the vicious or hate them. Both are dangerous: to resemble them, because they are many, and to hate many of them, because they are unlike us.[1] And merchants who go to sea are right to make sure that those who board the same ship are not dissolute, blas-

1 Bias of Priene was one of the Seven Sages of Greece. The verse is from Juvenal.

phemers or wicked men, since they regard such company as unlucky. That is why Bias said wittily to those who were going through the danger of a great storm with him and calling on the gods for help: "Be quiet, so that they do not notice you are here with me." And a more pressing example: Albuquerque, viceroy in India for Manuel, king of Portugal, in extreme peril at sea, took a young boy on his shoulders for this one purpose: that, sharing the peril, the boy's innocence might serve him as surety and recommendation to divine favor, and bring him safe to shore.[2]

1.39.2 It is not that the wise man cannot live contented anywhere, even alone in the crowd of a palace; but if he has the choice, he will shun even the sight of it, he says. He will put up with the one if need be, but if it is up to him he will choose the other. It does not seem to him that he has sufficiently rid himself of vices if he must still contend with those of others. Charondas punished as wicked those convicted of keeping bad company. There is nothing so unsociable and so sociable as man: the one by his vice, the other by his nature. And Antisthenes does not seem to me to have satisfied the man who reproached him for associating with the wicked, when he said that doctors live well enough among the sick. For if they serve the health of the sick, they impair their own through contagion and through constantly seeing and handling diseases.

1.39.3 Now the aim, I believe, is the same in every case: to live more at leisure and at ease. But people do not always look for the right road to it. Often they think they have left business behind, when they have only exchanged it. There is hardly less torment in governing a family than an entire state. Wherever the soul is occupied, it is wholly occupied. And though domestic occupations are less important, they are no less importunate. Moreover, though we have rid ourselves of the court and the marketplace, we have not rid ourselves of the principal torments of our life. *It is reason and wisdom that take away cares, / not a place commanding a wide view of the sea.* Ambition, avarice,

2 Afonso de Albuquerque (1453–1515), Portuguese governor of India.

irresolution, fear and lusts do not leave us when we change our country: *And behind the horseman sits black care.* They often follow us even into cloisters and schools of philosophy. Neither deserts, nor caves hollowed out of rock, nor hair shirts, nor fasts can disentangle us from them: *The deadly arrow clings to her side.*[3]

1.39.4 Someone told Socrates that a certain man had not improved at all by his travels. "I can well believe it," he said; "he took himself along with him." *Why do we exchange our land for lands warmed*
by another sun? What exile from his country
has ever escaped himself as well? If we do not first unburden ourselves and our soul of the weight that oppresses it, moving about will only make it press harder; just as on a ship, cargo is less of a hindrance when it is settled. You do a sick man more harm than good by moving him. You lodge the illness deeper by stirring it, just as stakes sink further in and grow firmer when you shake and work them.

3 Horace, Epistles and Odes; the last line is from Virgil, Aeneid IV, of a wounded deer.

> Therefore it is not enough to have withdrawn from the crowd; it is not enough to change place; we must withdraw from the crowd's dispositions that are within us; we must sequester ourselves and take possession of ourselves again. *"I have broken my chains," you say.*
> *So does a dog that struggles snap its knot; yet as*
> *it runs off, a long length of chain trails from its neck.* We carry our irons along with us. It is not complete freedom; we still turn our eyes back toward what we have left behind; our imagination is full of it. Unless the heart is purged, what battles
> and perils must we then enter against our will!
> How many sharp cares of desire tear
> the anxious man, and how many fears as well!
> And pride, filth and wantonness—what havoc
> they cause![4]

and what of luxury and sloth?

WITHDRAWING INTO ONESELF

True solitude is inward: keep a back shop of one's own, free of every tie.

1.39.5 Our ill has its grip on our soul, and the soul cannot escape from itself: *The fault lies in the mind, which never escapes itself.* So we must bring it back and withdraw it into itself. That is true solitude, and it can be enjoyed in the midst of cities and the courts of kings; but it is enjoyed more comfortably apart. Now since we are undertaking to live alone and to do without company, let us make our contentment depend on ourselves; let us free ourselves from all the ties that bind us to others; let us win from ourselves the power to live truly alone, and to live so at our ease.

1.39.6 Stilpo had escaped from the burning of his city, where he had lost wife, children and goods. Demetrius Poliorcetes, seeing

4 Persius, Satires; the second quotation is from Lucretius.

him with an unshaken face amid such great ruin of his country, asked him whether he had not suffered loss. He replied no, and that, thank God, he had lost nothing of his own. That is what the philosopher Antisthenes meant when he said wittily that a man should provide himself with provisions that would float on the water and could swim with him to escape from shipwreck. Certainly the man of understanding has lost nothing if he has himself.[5] When the city of Nola was ruined by the barbarians, Paulinus, its bishop, having lost everything there and being their prisoner, prayed to God thus: "Lord, keep me from feeling this loss, for you know that they have not yet touched anything that is mine." The riches that made him rich and the goods that made him good were still intact. That is what it means to choose well the treasures that can be safe from harm, and to hide them in a place where no one goes and which can be betrayed only by ourselves. We should have wives, children, goods, and above all health, if we can; but not be so attached to them that our happiness depends on them.[6] We must keep back for ourselves a back shop all our own, entirely free, in which to establish our real liberty and our principal retreat and solitude. Here our ordinary conversation must be between us and ourselves, and so private that no outside acquaintance or communication can find a place in it; here we must reason and laugh as if we had no wife, no children, no goods, no retinue and no servants, so that when the time comes to lose them, it will be nothing new to us to do without them. We have a soul that can turn in upon itself; it can keep itself company; it has the means to attack and the means to defend, the means to receive and the means to give. Let us not fear that in this solitude we shall stagnate in wearisome idleness: *In lonely places, be a crowd to yourself.* Virtue is content with itself, without discipline, without words, without deeds.[7]

1.39.7 In our usual actions, not one in a thousand concerns ourselves. That man you see climbing up the ruins of that wall,

5 Stilpo was a philosopher of Megara; Demetrius "the Besieger" (c. 336–283 BC) was a Macedonian king who took the city.

furious and beside himself, the target of so many arquebus shots; and that other one, covered in scars, numb and pale with hunger, determined to die rather than open the gate to him—do you think they are there for themselves? They are there perhaps for someone they have never seen, who takes no trouble over what they are doing, sunk meanwhile in idleness and pleasures. This fellow, all phlegm, bleary-eyed and grimy, whom you see coming out of his study after midnight—do you think he is searching among his books for how to become a better man, more contented and wiser? Not a bit of it. He will die at it, or else he will teach posterity the meter of Plautus's verses and the correct spelling of a Latin word. Who does not gladly exchange health, rest and life for reputation and glory—the most useless, vain and false coin in circulation among us? Our own death did not frighten us enough; let us burden ourselves besides with that of our wives, our children and our household. Our own affairs did not give us enough trouble; let us take on, besides, tormenting ourselves and racking our brains over those of our neighbors and friends. Ah![8] that any man should set his heart on, or / acquire, something dearer to him than he is to himself! Solitude seems to me more plausible and reasonable for those who have given the world their most active and flourishing years, following the example of Thales. We have lived enough for others; let us live for ourselves at least this tail end of life; let us bring our thoughts and intentions back to ourselves and our own ease. It is no small matter to make a safe retreat; it keeps us busy enough without mixing other undertakings with it. Since God gives us leisure to arrange our departure, let us prepare for it; let us pack our bags; let us take leave of the company in good time; let us break free of those violent grips that engage us elsewhere and draw us away from ourselves.

1.39.8 We must untie these strong bonds, and from now on love this and that, but be wedded to nothing but ourselves. That is to

6 Paulinus, bishop of Nola near Naples (d. 431); the story is told by Saint Augustine in The City of God.
7 Tibullus.

say, let the rest be ours, but not joined and glued to us so tightly that it cannot be detached without flaying us and tearing away a piece of us along with it. The greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to oneself. It is time to untie ourselves from society, since we can bring nothing to it. And let him who cannot lend refrain from borrowing. Our strength is failing us; let us draw it back and gather it within ourselves. Whoever can turn upside down and merge within himself the offices of so many friendships and of company, let him do so. In this decline, which makes him useless, burdensome and troublesome to others, let him take care not to be troublesome to himself, or burdensome and useless. Let him pamper and caress himself, and above all govern himself, respecting and fearing his reason and his conscience, so that he cannot stumble in their presence without shame. *For it is rare for anyone to respect himself enough.*[9]

1.39.9 Socrates says that the young should get instruction; grown men should practice doing good; old men should withdraw from all civil and military occupation, living as they please, without obligation to any fixed office. Some temperaments are better suited than others to these precepts of retirement. Those whose apprehension is soft and slack, and whose affection and will are delicate and do not readily submit or commit themselves—and I am one of them, both by natural disposition and by reasoning—will bend more easily to this advice than active and busy souls, which embrace everything and engage themselves everywhere, which grow passionate about everything, which offer themselves, present themselves and give themselves on every occasion.

1.39.10 We should make use of these accidental advantages outside ourselves insofar as they are pleasant to us, but without making them our main foundation. They are not that; neither reason nor nature wants it so. Why, against their laws, should we enslave our contentment to the power of others? Then again, to anticipate the accidents of fortune; to deprive ourselves of the

8 Terence, The Brothers.
9 Quintilian.

advantages we have in hand, as many have done out of devotion and some philosophers by reasoning; to wait on ourselves, sleep on the hard ground, put out our own eyes, throw our riches into the river, seek out pain (the former in order to win, through the torment of this life, the bliss of another; the latter in order, having settled on the lowest step, to secure themselves against a new fall)—that is the action of an excessive virtue. Let the tougher and stronger natures make even their hiding place glorious and exemplary.

> *I praise a safe and modest lot*
> *when means are lacking, brave enough amid cheap things;*
> *but when something better and richer comes my way, I too*
> *say that they alone are wise and live well whose*
> *money is seen invested in handsome country houses.* There is enough for me to do without going so far. It is enough for me, while I enjoy fortune's favor, to prepare for her disfavor, and, while at my ease, to picture the evil to come as far as imagination can reach; just as we train ourselves with jousts and tournaments and imitate war in the midst of peace.

I do not consider the philosopher Arcesilaus any less reformed because I know he used utensils of gold and silver, as the state of his fortune allowed him; and I esteem him more for using them moderately and generously than if he had given them up.

1.39.11 I see how far natural necessity goes; and considering the poor beggar at my door, often merrier and healthier than I am, I put myself in his place; I try to fit my soul to his last. And running through other examples in this way, though I imagine death, poverty, contempt and sickness at my heels, I easily resolve not to be terrified of what a lesser man than I accepts with such patience. And I refuse to believe that a lowly understanding can do more than a vigorous one, or that the effects of reasoning cannot match the effects of habit. And knowing how little these accessory comforts hang by, I do not fail, even in full enjoyment of them, to beg God, as my supreme request, to make

me content with myself and with the goods that are born of me. I see sturdy young men who nevertheless carry a mass of pills in their trunks, to use when a cold comes upon them; and they fear it all the less because they think they have the remedy at hand. That is what we must do; and further, if we feel ourselves subject to some more serious illness, we should provide ourselves with those medicines that numb and put to sleep the affected part.

HOW TO LIVE IN RETIREMENT

Choose easy occupations, spare one's health, and hold on to the pleasures that remain.

1.39.12 The occupation to choose for such a life must be one that is neither laborious nor tedious; otherwise there would be no point in our having come there in search of rest. That depends on each person's particular taste. Mine does not take at all to household management. Those who like it should devote themselves to it in moderation: *Let them try to subject things to themselves, not themselves to things.* Otherwise household management is a servile office, as Sallust calls it. It has more excusable parts, such as the care of gardens that Xenophon attributes to Cyrus. And a middle way can be found between that low and mean care, tense and full of anxiety, which we see in men who plunge into it entirely, and that deep and extreme carelessness that lets everything go to ruin, which we see in others: *Democritus's flock eats up his fields / and crops, while his swift mind travels abroad without his body.* But let us hear the advice that the younger Pliny gives his friend Cornelius Rufus on this subject of solitude: "I advise you, in that full and rich retreat where you are, to leave to your servants that low and abject care of the household, and devote yourself to the study of letters, so as to draw from it something that is entirely your own."[10] He means reputation—in a humor like that of Cicero, who says he wants to use his solitude and his rest from public affairs to win himself an

10 Pliny the Younger (c. AD 61–113), Letters.

immortal life through his writings. *Is your knowing nothing at all / unless someone else knows that you know it?* It seems reasonable, since we are talking about withdrawing from the world, that we should look outside it. These people do it only halfway. They arrange their affairs well for when they will no longer be in the world; but the fruit of their design they still expect to draw from the world then, when they are absent—a ridiculous contradiction.

1.39.13 The notion held by those who seek solitude out of devotion, filling their hearts with the certainty of God's promises in the other life, is far more soundly matched. They set before themselves God, an object infinite in goodness and in power. There the soul has the means to satisfy its desires in complete freedom. Afflictions and sufferings turn to their profit, since they are spent on acquiring an everlasting health and joy. Death is welcome to them: a passage to so perfect a state. The harshness of their rules is soon smoothed out by habit, and their carnal appetites are rebuffed and lulled to sleep by being refused, for nothing keeps those appetites alive but use and exercise. This single end, another life of blissful immortality, truly deserves that we give up the comforts and sweetness of this life of ours. And whoever can set his soul on fire with the ardor of this living faith and hope, really and constantly, builds himself in solitude a life of pleasure and delight beyond any other kind of life.

1.39.14 So neither the end nor the means of this advice satisfies me: we keep falling from one fever into a worse one. This occupation with books is as laborious as any other, and as much an enemy to health, which ought to be our chief consideration. And we must not let ourselves be lulled by the pleasure we take in it: it is this same pleasure that ruins the man absorbed in his estate, the miser, the sensualist and the ambitious man. The sages teach us well enough to guard against the treachery of our appetites, and to tell true and whole pleasures from pleasures that are mixed and streaked with a greater share of pain. For most pleasures, they say, tickle and embrace us only to strangle

us, like the thieves the Egyptians called Philistae; and if the headache came before the drunkenness, we would take care not to drink too much. But pleasure, to deceive us, walks in front and hides what follows her. Books are pleasant; but if by keeping company with them we end up losing our cheerfulness and our health, the best things we have, let us leave them. I am one of those who think that their fruit cannot outweigh that loss. Men who have long felt themselves weakened by some ailment end up putting themselves at the mercy of medicine, and have its skill lay down certain rules of living for them, so as never to overstep them again. In the same way, the man who withdraws, weary and disgusted with ordinary life, should shape this new life by the rules of reason, ordering and arranging it by forethought and reasoning.

1.39.15 He must have taken leave of every kind of toil, whatever face it wears; he must shun in general the passions that disturb the tranquillity of body and soul, and choose the road that best suits his temperament: *Let each one know his own way to go.* In managing the household, in study, in hunting and every other exercise, we should go as far as the last limits of pleasure, and take care not to engage further, where pain begins to mingle in. We should keep only as much business and occupation as we need to keep ourselves in trim, and to protect ourselves from the troubles that the other extreme, slack and drowsy idleness, brings in its train.[11] There are sterile and thorny branches of learning, most of them devised for the busy crowd: they should be left to those who are in the service of the world. For my part, I love only books that are either pleasant and easy, that tickle me, or those that console me and counsel me how to order my life and my death. *To stroll in silence among the healthful woods, / Pondering whatever is worthy of a wise and good man.*

1.39.16 Wiser people, having a strong and vigorous soul, can forge themselves a wholly spiritual repose. I, whose soul is ordinary, must help hold myself up with bodily comforts. And since age has lately robbed me of those that were most to my

11 The Latin line is from Propertius, Elegies.

fancy, I am training and sharpening my appetite for those that remain, which better suit this later season. We must hold on tooth and claw to the enjoyment of life's pleasures, which our years snatch from our grasp one after another. *Let us pluck life's sweets; the time you live is ours; / You will become ash, a shade, a tale.*

GLORY HAS NO PLACE IN RETREAT

Pliny and Cicero seek fame from retirement; Epicurus and Seneca advise giving it up.

1.39.17 Now as for the end that Pliny and Cicero propose to us, glory, that is far from my reckoning. The temperament most contrary to retirement is ambition. Glory and repose are things that cannot lodge under the same roof. As far as I can see, these men have only their arms and legs out of the crowd; their soul, their intention, remains caught up in it more than ever. *Are you, old man, gathering food for other people's ears?* They have only stepped back to jump the better, and to make, with a stronger momentum, a livelier charge into the throng.

1.39.18 Would you like to see how they fall short by a hair? Let us set against them the advice of two philosophers of two very different schools, one writing to Idomeneus, the other to Lucilius, their friends, to draw them away from the handling of affairs and high office into solitude. You have lived until now, they say, swimming and floating; come and die in the harbor. You have given the rest of your life to the light; give this part to the shade. It is impossible to give up your occupations unless you give up their fruits; for this reason, rid yourself of all concern for name and glory. There is a danger that the glow of your past actions may light you up only too well and follow you right into your den.[12] Along with the other pleasures, give up the one that comes from the approval of others. And as for your learning and ability, do not worry: they will not lose their effect if you yourself are the better for them. Remember the man who was asked

12 Epicurus wrote to Idomeneus and Seneca to Lucilius; the advice that follows comes from Seneca's Letters to Lucilius.

why he took such pains over an art that could come to the knowledge of hardly anyone. "A few are enough for me," he replied; "one is enough for me; none at all is enough for me." He spoke the truth: you and one companion are theater enough for each other, or you for yourself. Let the people be one to you, and let one be the whole people to you. It is a mean ambition to want to draw glory from one's idleness and one's hiding place. We must do as the animals do that wipe out their tracks at the entrance of their den. What you must seek is no longer that the world should talk about you, but how you should talk to yourself. Withdraw into yourself, but first prepare yourself to receive yourself there: it would be folly to trust yourself if you do not know how to govern yourself. One can go wrong in solitude as in company. Until you have made yourself someone before whom you would not dare to limp, and until you feel shame and respect for yourself, *let honorable images be kept before the mind*: always picture Cato, Phocion and Aristides, in whose presence even fools would hide their faults, and make them the overseers of all your intentions.[13] If your intentions go astray, your reverence for these men will set you back on course. They will keep you on this path: to be content with yourself, to borrow nothing except from yourself, to stop and settle your soul on definite and limited thoughts in which it can take pleasure; and, having understood the true goods, which we enjoy in proportion as we understand them, to be content with them, without any desire to prolong either life or name. That is the advice of true and natural philosophy, not of a showy and talkative philosophy like that of the first two.

13 The Latin phrase is from Cicero, Tusculan Disputations.

I.40 A Consideration upon Cicero

Consideration sur Ciceron
Cicero and Pliny's craving for literary fame is unworthy of statesmen; Montaigne also reflects on his own letters and style.

1.40.1 ONE more stroke for the comparison of these pairs. From the writings of Cicero, and of that Pliny who, in my opinion, takes very little after his uncle's temperament, one can draw countless testimonies of a nature ambitious beyond measure. Among others, they solicit the historians of their time, in full view of everyone, not to forget them in their records; and Fortune, as if out of spite, has made the vanity of these requests last down to us, and long ago caused those histories to be lost.[1]

1.40.2 But this surpasses all baseness of heart in persons of such rank: to have wanted to draw some chief glory from chatter and talk, to the point of using for it the private letters written to their friends; so much so that when some of these had missed the moment for being sent, they nevertheless had them published, with this worthy excuse, that they did not want to waste their labor and their late nights. Is it not fitting for two Roman consuls, sovereign magistrates of the commonwealth that was empress of the world, to spend their leisure arranging and neatly trussing up a fine missive, so as to win the reputation of understanding their nurse's language well? What worse could a mere schoolmaster do, who earned his living by it? If the deeds of Xenophon and Caesar had not far surpassed their eloquence, I

1 This is Pliny the Younger, nephew of the naturalist Pliny the Elder.

do not believe they would ever have written them down. They sought to commend not their saying but their doing. And if perfection in speaking well could bring any glory suitable to a great personage, certainly Scipio and Laelius would not have resigned the honor of their comedies, and all the graces and delights of the Latin language, to an African slave. For that this work is theirs, its beauty and excellence sufficiently prove, and Terence admits it himself; and it would displease me to be dislodged from this belief.[2]

1.40.3 It is a kind of mockery and insult to try to make a man look good by qualities unbecoming to his rank, however praiseworthy they may be in other respects, and also by qualities that ought not to be his principal ones. As if one were to praise a king for being a good painter, or a good architect, or even a good shot with the arquebus, or good at running at the ring. Such praises bring no honor unless they are offered in a crowd, following those that are proper to him: namely justice, and the knowledge of how to lead his people in peace and in war. In this way agriculture does honor to Cyrus, and eloquence and knowledge of good letters to Charlemagne. In my time I have seen an even stronger case: persons who owed both their titles and their calling to writing disowning their training, spoiling their pen, and affecting ignorance of so common a skill, one that our people hold is rarely found in learned hands, and taking care to recommend themselves by better qualities. The companions of Demosthenes on the embassy to Philip praised that prince for being handsome, eloquent and a good drinker. Demosthenes said these were praises better suited to a woman, a lawyer and a sponge than to a king.

2 Terence, the Roman comic playwright, was born in Africa and brought to Rome as a slave; it was rumored in antiquity that his patrons Scipio Aemilianus and Laelius had a hand in his plays.

Let him rule, superior to the foe in battle,
Lenient to the fallen enemy. It is not his profession to know
how to hunt well or to dance well. *Others will plead causes,*
will trace the motions of the heavens
With the rod, and tell of the shining stars;
Let this man know how to rule the peoples with his sway.[3]

1.40.4 Plutarch says further that to appear so excellent in these less necessary accomplishments is to bring forward evidence against oneself of having badly spent one's leisure and the study that should have been devoted to more necessary and useful things. So when Philip, king of Macedon, heard his son, the great Alexander, sing at a feast in rivalry with the best musicians, he said to him: "Are you not ashamed to sing so well?" And to this same Philip, a musician with whom he was arguing about his art said: "God forbid, Sire, that so much harm should ever befall you that you understand these things better than I do." A king should be able to answer as Iphicrates answered the orator who pressed him in his invective in this way: "Well, what are you, to swagger so much? Are you a man-at-arms? Are you an archer? Are you a pikeman?" "I am none of those, but I am the one who knows how to command all of them." And Antisthenes took it as proof of little worth in Ismenias that he was praised for being an excellent flute player.

1.40.5 I know well, when I hear someone dwelling on the language of these Essays, that I would rather he kept quiet. It is not so much exalting the words as disparaging the sense, and all the more cuttingly for being more oblique. And yet I am much mistaken if many others give more to take hold of in their matter; and, be it bad or good, I am mistaken if any writer has sown his paper with matter much more substantial, or at any rate more thickly. To fit in more of it, I pile up only the heads. If I were to attach what follows from them, I would multiply this volume several times over. And how many stories have I scattered here

3 The first quotation is from Horace, Secular Hymn; the second adapts Virgil, Aeneid, Book VI.

that say not a word, but from which anyone who cares to pick them apart a little more carefully will produce countless essays? Neither they nor my quotations always serve simply as example, authority or ornament. I do not regard them only for the use I draw from them. They often carry, beyond my subject, the seed of a richer and bolder matter, and often, on the side, a subtler tone, both for myself, who do not wish to express more of it here, and for those who catch my drift.

1.40.6 Returning to the talking virtue, I do not find much to choose between knowing how to say nothing but badly and knowing nothing but how to speak well. *Elegance is no manly ornament.* The sages say that in respect of knowledge there is only philosophy, and in respect of deeds only virtue, that is generally fitting for all ranks and all orders.[4]

1.40.7 There is something similar in those other two philosophers, for they too promise eternity to the letters they write to their friends. But it is in another manner, and they accommodate themselves to the vanity of others for a good end. For they write to them that if the concern to make themselves known to future ages, and the care for renown, still keeps them in the handling of affairs and makes them fear the solitude and retirement to which they want to call them, they should trouble themselves no further about it: they themselves have credit enough with posterity to promise that, were it only through the letters they write to them, they will make their friends' names as well known and famous as their public actions could.[5] And besides this difference, these are not empty, fleshless letters, held up only by a delicate choice of words piled up and arranged in an exact cadence, but letters stuffed full of fine reasonings of wisdom, by which one becomes not more eloquent but wiser, and which teach us not to speak well but to do well. Shame on eloquence that leaves us longing for itself and not for things! Unless one says that Cicero's, being of such extreme perfection, gives itself a body of its own. I will add one more story we read

4 The Latin is from Seneca, Letters to Lucilius.
5 Epicurus and Seneca, mentioned in the previous essay.

about him on this subject, to let us put our finger on his nature. He was to speak in public and was a little short of time to prepare at his ease. Eros, one of his slaves, came to tell him that the hearing had been put off until the next day. He was so delighted that he set him free for this good news.

1.40.8 On this subject of letters, I want to say this: it is a kind of work in which my friends hold that I have some ability. And I would more willingly have chosen this form for publishing my whims, if I had had someone to talk to. I needed, as I once had, a certain relationship that would draw me on, sustain me and lift me up. For I could not negotiate with the wind, as others do, except in dreams; nor forge empty names to address in a serious matter, being the sworn enemy of every kind of falsification. I would have been more attentive and more confident with a strong and friendly addressee than I am looking at the various faces of a public; and I am mistaken if it would not have turned out better for me. I naturally have a comic and private style.[6] But it is a form of my own, unfit for public dealings, as my language is in every way: too compressed, disorderly, abrupt, idiosyncratic.

1.40.9 And I have no skill in ceremonious letters that have no other substance than a fine stringing together of courteous words. I have neither the faculty nor the taste for those long offers of affection and service. I do not believe in them so much, and I dislike saying much beyond what I believe. This is far from present usage: for there was never so abject and servile a prostitution of self-offerings. Life, soul, devotion, adoration, serf, slave: all these words are bandied about so commonly that when people want to convey a more explicit and more respectful intention, they no longer have any way to express it.

1.40.10 I hate like death to smack of the flatterer. This makes me fall naturally into a dry, plain and blunt way of talking that, to those who do not otherwise know me, verges a little on the disdainful. Those I honor most are the ones I show least honor to; and where my soul moves with great eagerness, I forget the

6 The friend he once had was Étienne de La Boétie, who died in 1563.

steps of good form. I offer myself meagerly and proudly to those whose I am, and present myself least to those to whom I have given myself most. It seems to me that they should read it in my heart, and that the expression of my words wrongs my thought. In welcoming, taking leave, thanking, greeting, offering my service, and such wordy compliments of the ceremonious laws of our civility, I know no one so stupidly barren of language as I am. And I have never been employed to write letters of favor and recommendation without the person they were for finding them dry and feeble. The Italians are great printers of letters; I have, I believe, a hundred different volumes of them. Those of Annibale Caro seem to me the best. If all the paper I once scribbled for the ladies, when my hand was truly carried away by my passion, still existed, there might perhaps be found some page worth showing to idle youth, besotted with that frenzy.[7]

1.40.11 I always write my letters post-haste, and so hurriedly that, although my handwriting is unbearably bad, I prefer to write with my own hand than to use another's, for I find no one who can keep up with me; and I never copy them out. I have accustomed the great who know me to put up with crossings-out and overwritings in them, and with paper without folds or margins. The letters that cost me most are the ones worth least. As soon as I drag them out, it is a sign that I am not in them. I like to begin without a plan; the first stroke produces the second. The letters of our time consist more of borders and prefaces than of matter. Just as I would rather compose two letters than close and fold one, and always hand that task over to someone else, so too, when the matter is finished, I would gladly give someone the job of adding those long harangues, offers and prayers that we lodge at the end, and I wish some new usage would relieve us of them. Likewise with addressing them with a legend of qualities and titles: for fear of stumbling over these, I have many times given up writing, especially to men of the law and of finance. So many newly created offices, so difficult an

7 Annibale Caro (1507–1566) was an Italian poet and translator whose letters were published after his death.

allotment and arrangement of different titles of honor, which, being so dearly bought, cannot be exchanged or forgotten without giving offense.[8] I likewise find it graceless to load the front and title page of the books we have printed with them.

8 In Montaigne's France many public offices, with their titles, were bought and sold.

I.41 Of Not Sharing One's Glory

De ne communiquer sa gloire
Glory is the hardest vanity to shed, yet some men have rare greatness enough to give their glory to others.

1.41.1 OF all the fancies in the world, the most accepted and most universal is concern for reputation and glory, which we espouse to the point of giving up wealth, rest, life and health, which are real and substantial goods, to follow that empty image and that mere voice that has neither body nor anything to grasp. *Fame, which with sweet sound beguiles*
Proud mortals and seems so fair,
Is an echo, a dream, nay, the shadow of a dream,
That at every wind melts and vanishes.[1]

1.41.2 And of all the unreasonable dispositions of men, it seems that even the philosophers rid themselves of this one later and more reluctantly than of any other: it is the most intractable and stubborn. *Because it does not cease to tempt even souls that are making good progress.* There is hardly any whose vanity reason exposes so clearly; but it has its roots so alive in us that I do not know whether anyone has ever been able to rid himself of it cleanly. After you have said everything and believed everything to disown it, it produces against your reasoning an inclination so deep within you that you have little to hold out against it.[2] For, as Cicero says, even those who fight it still want the books

1 The Italian lines are from Tasso, Jerusalem Delivered.
2 The Latin is from Saint Augustine, The City of God.

they write about it to bear their name on the title page, and want to win glory from having despised glory.

1.41.3 All other things can be shared. We lend our goods and our lives to our friends in need; but to share one's honor and make a present of one's glory to another is hardly ever seen. Catulus Lutatius, in the war against the Cimbri, having made every effort to stop his soldiers who were fleeing before the enemy, put himself among the fugitives and played the coward, so that they would seem to be following their captain rather than fleeing the enemy: that was abandoning his reputation to cover the shame of others.[3] When Charles the Fifth came into Provence in the year 1537, it is said that Antonio de Leyva, seeing the Emperor resolved on this expedition and judging that it would bring him marvelous glory, nevertheless argued the opposite and advised against it, so that all the glory and honor of the decision would be attributed to his master, and it would be said that his good judgment and foresight had been such that, against everyone's opinion, he had carried so fine an enterprise through to the end: which was honoring him at his own expense. When the Thracian ambassadors were consoling Archileonis, mother of Brasidas, for the death of her son, and praising him so highly as to say that he had left no equal behind him, she refused this private and personal praise in order to give it back to the public. "Do not tell me that," she said; "I know that the city of Sparta has many citizens greater and more valiant than he was."[4] At the battle of Crécy, the Prince of Wales, still very young, had the vanguard to lead, and the main brunt of the encounter fell at that point. The lords accompanying him, finding themselves hard pressed in the fighting, sent word to King Edward to come nearer and help them. He asked how his son was, and when told that he was alive and on horseback, he said: "I would wrong him if I went now and robbed him of the honor of victory in this combat he has sustained so long; whatever the

3 Quintus Lutatius Catulus was a Roman consul who fought the invading Cimbri in 102–101 BC.

4 Brasidas was a Spartan general killed at Amphipolis in 422 BC.

risk, it shall be all his." And he would neither go nor send anyone, knowing that if he had gone, people would have said that all was lost without his help, and the credit for this feat would have been given to him.[5] *For it is always the last thing added that seems to have accomplished the whole.* Many in Rome believed, and it was commonly said, that Scipio's chief fine deeds were partly owed to Laelius, who nevertheless always went on promoting and supporting Scipio's greatness and glory, with no concern for his own. And Theopompus, king of Sparta, said to the man who told him that the state stood firm because he knew how to command well: "It is rather because the people know how to obey well."[6]

1.41.4 Just as women who succeeded to peerages had, notwithstanding their sex, the right to attend and give their opinion in cases belonging to the jurisdiction of the peers, so the ecclesiastical peers, notwithstanding their profession, were obliged to assist our kings in their wars, not only with their friends and servants but in person. So the Bishop of Beauvais, being with Philip Augustus at the battle of Bouvines, took a very courageous part in the action; but it seemed to him that he ought not to touch the fruit and glory of that bloody and violent exercise. With his own hand he brought several of the enemy to submission that day, and handed them over to the first gentleman he found, to cut their throats or take them prisoner, leaving the whole execution to him.[7] And so he did with William, Earl of Salisbury, whom he handed over to Sir Jean de Nesle. His was a subtlety of conscience like that of another man, who was quite willing to club men down but not to wound them, and so fought only with a mace. Someone in my day, reproached by the King for having laid hands on a priest, denied it flatly: the fact was that he had beaten him and trampled him underfoot.

5 Crécy (1346) was won by Edward III of England; his son was Edward, the Black Prince.

6 The Latin is from Livy, History of Rome.

7 At Bouvines (1214) Philip Augustus of France defeated the Emperor Otto IV and his allies, among them William, Earl of Salisbury.

I.42 Of the Inequality That Is Between Us

De l'inegualité qui est entre nous
Men should be valued by their own qualities, not their trappings; Montaigne shows how kingship weighs on those who hold it.

1.42.1 PLUTARCH says somewhere that he does not find so great a distance between beast and beast as he finds between man and man. He is speaking of the ability of the soul and inner qualities. In truth, I find so great a distance between Epaminondas, as I imagine him, and some men I know (men capable of common sense, I mean) that I would gladly go further than Plutarch and say that there is more distance between one man and another than there is between some men and some beasts. *Ah! how one man surpasses another!* And I would say that there are as many degrees of minds as there are fathoms from here to heaven, and just as innumerable.[1]

1 The Latin is from Terence, The Eunuch.

1.42.2 But speaking of how men are valued, it is a marvel that, except for ourselves, nothing is valued except by its own qualities. We praise a horse for being vigorous and nimble, *Thus we praise*

The swift horse, for whom many palms
Glow from easy wins, and victory exults in the roaring circus,

not for its harness; a greyhound for its speed, not for its collar; a bird for its wing, not for its jesses and bells. Why do we not likewise value a man by what is his own? He has a large retinue, a fine palace, so much influence, so much income: all that is around him, not in him.[2]

You do not buy a pig in a poke. If you are bargaining for a horse, you take off its trappings and see it bare and uncovered. Or if it is covered, as horses were presented for sale to princes in former times, it is covered in the less necessary parts, so that you will not be distracted by the beauty of its coat or the breadth of its rump, and will dwell chiefly on examining the legs, the eyes and the hooves, which are the most useful members. *This is the custom of kings: when they buy horses, they inspect them*

Covered, lest, if a handsome forequarter, as often,
Is propped on a weak hoof, it should take in the gaping buyer
Because the haunches are fine, the head small, the neck high.

Why, when you value a man, do you value him all wrapped up and packaged?[3]

He shows us only the parts that are in no way his own, and hides from us those by which alone one can truly judge his worth. It is the value of the sword you are after, not of the scabbard; perhaps you would not give a penny for it once you had stripped it. He must be judged by himself, not by his finery. And as one of the ancients says very wittily: "Do you know why you think him tall? You are counting the height of his thick soles." The pedestal is no part of the statue. Measure him without his

2 The lines are from Juvenal, Satires.
3 The lines are from Horace, Satires.

stilts. Let him put aside his riches and honors, and present himself in his shirt. Has he a body fit for its functions, healthy and lively? What kind of soul has he? Is it beautiful, capable, and happily furnished with all its parts? Is it rich with its own goods or with others'? Has Fortune nothing to do with it? Does it await drawn swords with open eyes? Does it care nothing by what way its life goes out, by the mouth or by the throat? Is it settled, even and content? That is what we must see, and by that judge the extreme differences between us.

> Is he *wise, and master of himself;*
> *Whom neither poverty nor death nor chains dismay;*
> *Who is strong to defy his desires, to scorn honors,*
> *And complete in himself, smooth and round,*
> *So that nothing outside can cling to his polished surface;*
> *Against whom Fortune always charges and falls lame?* Such a man is five hundred fathoms above kingdoms and duchies: he is his own empire to himself. *The wise man, by Pollux, shapes his own fortune.* What is left for him to desire?[4]

> *Do we not see*
> *That nature clamors for nothing but that pain*
> *Be absent and kept from the body, and that the mind enjoy*
> *A pleasant feeling, free from care and fear?* Compare with him the rabble of our men, stupid, base, servile, unstable, and continually tossed on the storm of conflicting passions that drive them back and forth, wholly dependent on others: there is more distance than from heaven to earth. And yet the blindness of our custom is such that we take little or no account of it.[5]

4 The second Latin line is from Plautus, Trinummus.
5 The lines are from Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.

KINGS ARE ONLY MEN

Royal pomp hides an ordinary man, subject to fever, fear and passion like anyone.

1.42.3 Whereas if we consider a peasant and a king, a noble and a commoner, a magistrate and a private man, a rich man and a poor one, an extreme disparity at once presents itself to our eyes, though they differ, so to speak, only in their breeches. In Thrace the king was distinguished from his people in an amusing and very far-fetched way. He had a religion of his own, a god all to himself, whom his subjects had no right to worship: it was Mercury. And he disdained theirs: Mars, Bacchus, Diana. Yet these are only paintings, which make no essential difference.

> Take actors in a comedy: you see them on the stage putting on the airs of a duke or an emperor, but a moment later there they are, turned back into wretched valets and porters, which is their natural and original condition. So too with the emperor whose pomp dazzles you in public,
> *Indeed, great emeralds with their green light*
> *Are set in gold for him, and he constantly wears*
> *The sea-green robe, which, much used, drinks up the sweat of Venus*: see him behind the curtain, and he is nothing but an ordinary man, perhaps more base than the least of his subjects.

That man is happy within; this one's happiness is gilt on the surface. Cowardice, irresolution, ambition, spite and envy agitate him like anyone else: *For neither treasures nor the consul's*
Lictor can drive away the wretched tumults
Of the mind, nor the cares that flit around
Coffered ceilings; and care and fear hold him by the throat in the midst of his armies. *And truly the fears of men and the cares that dog them*
Fear neither the clash of arms nor cruel weapons;
They mingle boldly among kings and the masters of the world,
And stand in no awe of the glitter of gold. Do fever, migraine and gout spare him any more than us? When old age is on his shoulders, will the archers of his guard relieve him of it?[6]

When the terror of death chills him through, will he be reassured by the attendance of the gentlemen of his chamber? When he is in a fit of jealousy and caprice, will our doffings of the cap set him right again? That bed canopy all puffed out with gold and pearls has no power to soothe the gripes of a violent colic. *Nor do hot fevers leave your body any sooner*
If you toss on embroidered tapestries and blushing purple
Than if you must lie in a commoner's blanket. The flatterers of Alexander the Great made him believe that he was the son of Jupiter. One day, being wounded and watching the blood flow from his wound, he said: "Well, what do you say now? Is this not red blood, and purely human?

It is not of the same temper as the blood that Homer makes flow from the wounds of the gods." Hermodorus the poet had written verses in honor of Antigonus in which he called him son of the Sun; and Antigonus, on the contrary, said: "The man who empties my chamber pot knows very well that there is nothing in it."

6 The first Latin sentence is from Seneca, Letters to Lucilius.

1.42.4 He is a man, and that is all. And if he is ill-born in himself, the empire of the universe could not mend him. *Let the girls*
Fight over him; wherever he treads, let roses spring. So what, if his is a coarse and stupid soul? Even pleasure and happiness are not perceived without vigor and intelligence. *These things are as the mind of their possessor:*
Good to him who knows how to use them, bad to him who does not use them rightly. The goods of fortune, such as they are, still require a sense fit to savor them. It is enjoying, not possessing, that makes us happy.[7]

Neither house nor estate, nor heaps of bronze and gold,
Have ever driven the fevers from their owner's sick body,
Or the cares from his mind; the owner must be healthy
If he means to make good use of the things he has gathered.
The man who desires or fears enjoys his house or wealth
As a man with sore eyes enjoys paintings, or a gouty man warm compresses. He is a fool; his taste is dull and blunted; he enjoys it no more than a man with a head cold enjoys the sweetness of Greek wine, or a horse the richness of the harness it has been decked with. Just as Plato says that health, beauty, strength, riches and everything called good are as much evil to the unjust as good to the just, and evil the other way about.

And then, where body and soul are in a bad state, what good are these external comforts? For the slightest pinprick, or passion of the soul, is enough to take from us the pleasure of being monarch of the world. At the first twinge the gout gives him, it is no use his being Sire and Majesty, *All cast in silver, all in gold*: does he not lose the memory of his palaces and his grandeur? If he is angry, does his princely rank keep him from turning red, turning pale, gnashing his teeth like a fool?[8]

1.42.5 Now if he is a capable and well-born man, royalty adds little to his happiness: *If your belly, your sides and your feet are*

7 The first lines are from Persius, Satires.

well, / A king's riches can add nothing greater. He sees that it is nothing but sham and trickery. Yes, perhaps he will share the opinion of King Seleucus, that whoever knew the weight of a scepter would not deign to pick it up if he found it lying on the ground; he said this because of the great and painful responsibilities that fall on a good king. Indeed, it is no small thing to have to govern others, since in governing ourselves so many difficulties present themselves. As for commanding, which seems so sweet: considering the weakness of human judgment and the difficulty of choosing in new and doubtful matters, I am strongly of the opinion that it is much easier and more pleasant to follow than to lead, and that it is a great rest for the mind to have only a marked-out path to keep to, and to answer only for oneself. *So that it is far better to obey in peace / Than to wish to rule the state with sovereign power.* Besides, Cyrus said that no man was fit to command who is not worth more than those he commands.

THE BURDENS OF KINGSHIP

Following Xenophon's Hiero, princes are shown losing pleasure, freedom and true friendship.

1.42.6 But King Hiero, in Xenophon, says further that even in the enjoyment of pleasures, kings are worse off than private persons, since ease and facility take from them the bittersweet sting that we find in them. *Love that is too rich and too powerful turns to tedium for us, / And harms us, as sweet food harms the stomach.* Do we think choirboys take great pleasure in music? Satiety rather makes it tiresome to them. Feasts, dances, masquerades and tournaments delight those who do not see them often and have longed to see them; but for the man who makes them his daily fare, the taste becomes flat and unpleasant. Nor do women excite the man who enjoys them to his heart's content.[9]

8 The Latin line is from Tibullus, Elegies.

9 Xenophon's dialogue Hiero portrays the tyrant of Syracuse discussing the unhappiness of rulers. The Latin lines are from Ovid, Amores.

> He who does not give himself time to be thirsty can take no pleasure in drinking. The farces of the mountebanks delight us, but for the players they are drudgery. And to show that this is so: it is a delight to princes, a holiday for them, to be able sometimes to disguise themselves and come down to the low, common way of living. *Often a change is welcome to the great,*
> *And a neat meal beneath the humble roof of the poor,*
> *Without hangings and purple,*
> *Has smoothed the anxious brow.* Nothing is so cumbersome, so cloying as abundance. What appetite would not be put off at seeing three hundred women at its mercy, as the Sultan has them in his seraglio?

And what appetite and taste for hunting could that ancestor of his have kept for himself, who never went out into the field with fewer than seven thousand falconers?

1.42.7 And besides that, I believe that this luster of greatness brings no slight inconveniences to the enjoyment of the gentler pleasures: princes are too brightly lit and too exposed. And somehow more is demanded of them in hiding and covering their faults. For what in us is indiscretion, in them the people judge to be tyranny, contempt and disdain for the laws. And besides the inclination to vice, it seems that they add to it the pleasure of bullying public observances and trampling them underfoot. Indeed Plato, in his Gorgias, defines a tyrant as one who has license in a city to do whatever he pleases there. And for this reason the display and publication of their vice often wounds more than the vice itself. Everyone dreads being spied on and watched. Princes are watched down to their expressions and their thoughts, since the whole people believe they have the right to judge them and a stake in doing so. Besides, stains grow larger according to the eminence and brightness of the place where they sit, and a mole or a wart on the forehead shows more than a gash does elsewhere. That is why the poets imagine Jupiter's love affairs carried on under some face other than his own; and of all the amorous intrigues they attribute to him,

there is only one, it seems to me, in which he appears in his own greatness and majesty.

1.42.8 But let us return to Hiero. He also relates how many inconveniences he suffers in his kingship from being unable to go about and travel freely, being like a prisoner within the borders of his country, and how in all his actions he finds himself hemmed in by an irksome crowd. Indeed, when I have seen our own kings sitting alone at table, besieged by so many strangers talking and staring, I have often felt more pity for them than envy. King Alfonso used to say that in this respect donkeys were better off than kings: their masters let them graze at their ease, whereas kings cannot get that much from their servants. And it has never entered my head that it was any notable advantage, in the life of a man of understanding, to have a score of supervisors at his close-stool. Nor that the services of a man with an income of ten thousand livres, or one who has taken Casale or defended Siena, are more convenient and acceptable to him than those of a good, well-practiced valet. Princely advantages are almost imaginary advantages. Each degree of fortune has some image of sovereignty in it. Caesar calls all the lords who held rights of justice in France in his day petty kings.[10]

1.42.9 Truly, apart from the title of "Sire," people go a long way toward matching our kings. Look at the provinces far from the court—let us take Brittany as an example. Look at the retinue, the subjects, the officers, the occupations, the service and ceremony of a retired, stay-at-home lord, brought up among his servants; and look too at the flight of his imagination: there is nothing more royal. He hears his master spoken of once a year, as if he were the King of Persia, and acknowledges him only through some old kinship that his secretary keeps on record. In truth our laws are free enough, and the weight of sovereignty touches a French gentleman barely twice in his life. Essential and effective subjection concerns only those among us who invite themselves to it and like to gain honor and wealth by such service. For a

10 Casale was taken from the Spanish by the Maréchal de Brissac in 1555; Siena was defended against the Imperial forces by Blaise de Monluc in 1554–1555.

man who is willing to stay tucked away by his own hearth, and knows how to run his household without quarrels and without lawsuits, is as free as the Doge of Venice. *Slavery holds few men; more men hold fast to slavery.*[11]

1.42.10 But above all Hiero makes much of the fact that he finds himself deprived of all friendship and mutual fellowship, in which lies the most perfect and sweetest fruit of human life. For what testimony of affection and goodwill can I draw from a man who owes me, whether he likes it or not, everything in his power? Can I set any store by his humble speech and courteous reverence, when it is not in him to refuse them to me? The honor we receive from those who fear us is not honor: these respects are due to royalty, not to me.

> *This is the greatest boon of kingship,*
> *that the people are forced to praise their master's deeds*
> *as much as to bear them.* Do I not see that the wicked king and the good one, the hated and the loved, get as much of it, the one as the other? My predecessor was served with the same outward show and the same ceremony, and so my successor will be. If my subjects do not offend me, that is no evidence of any good affection: why should I take it that way, since they could not if they would? No one follows me for any friendship between him and me, for no friendship can be stitched together where there is so little relation and correspondence. My height has put me outside the company of men: there is too much disparity and disproportion.[12]

They follow me for form's sake and out of custom—or rather they follow not me but my fortune, to increase their own. Everything they say and do to me is mere paint, their freedom being bridled on every side by the great power I have over them. I see nothing around me but what is covered and masked. His courtiers were one day praising the Emperor Julian for dispens-

11 Seneca, Letters, 22.
12 Seneca, Thyestes.

ing good justice. "I would gladly be proud of these praises," he said, "if they came from people who would dare to accuse or blame my actions when they went the other way."

1.42.11 All the real advantages that princes have, they share with men of middling fortune. It is for the gods to ride winged horses and feed on ambrosia. Princes have no other sleep and no other appetite than ours; their steel is of no better temper than the steel we arm ourselves with; their crown shelters them neither from the sun nor from the rain. Diocletian, who wore one so revered and so fortunate, resigned it to retire to the pleasure of a private life. Some time later, when the necessity of public affairs required him to come back and take up the charge again, he answered those who begged him to: "You would not undertake to persuade me of this if you had seen the fine rows of trees I have planted with my own hands at home, and the fine melons I have sown there."

1.42.12 In the opinion of Anacharsis, the happiest state of a government would be one where, all other things being equal, precedence would be measured by virtue and rejection by vice.[13]

1.42.13 When King Pyrrhus was undertaking to cross into Italy, Cineas, his wise counselor, wishing to make him feel the vanity of his ambition, asked him: "Well, Sire, to what end are you setting up this great enterprise?" "To make myself master of Italy," he answered at once. "And then," Cineas went on, "once that is done?" "I shall cross into Gaul and Spain," said the other. "And after that?" "I shall go and subjugate Africa; and finally, when I have brought the world under my subjection, I shall rest and live content and at my ease." "For God's sake, Sire," Cineas then pressed him, "tell me what keeps you from being in that state right now, if you wish? Why not settle at once where you say you aspire to be, and spare yourself all the toil and hazard that you put in between?" *No doubt because he did not well know what the limit of possessing is, / and how far true pleasure can grow at all.*[14]

13 Anacharsis was a Scythian prince of the 6th century BC, counted among the sages of Greece.

14 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things, V.

1.42.14 I am going to close this passage with an ancient line that I find singularly fine on this point: *Each man's character shapes his fortune.*[15]

15 The line is quoted by Cornelius Nepos in his Life of Atticus.

I.43 Of Sumptuary Laws

Des lois somptuaires
Laws restricting luxury to princes only make it more desirable; kings could end extravagance by giving it up themselves.

1.43.1 The way in which our laws try to regulate foolish and vain spending on tables and clothes seems contrary to its own end. The true method would be to breed in men a contempt for gold and silk as vain and useless things; instead we increase their honor and value, which is a very inept way of giving men a distaste for them. For to say that only princes may eat turbot, and only they may wear velvet and gold braid, and to forbid these to the people—what is that but to bring such things into esteem and make everyone's desire to use them grow? Let kings boldly give up these marks of greatness; they have enough others. Such excesses are more excusable in anyone than in a prince. From the example of many nations we can learn plenty of better ways to distinguish ourselves and our ranks outwardly (which I truly consider very necessary in a state), without fostering for that purpose this corruption and this so evident harm.

1.43.2 It is a wonder how easily and how suddenly custom plants the foot of its authority in these indifferent matters. We had scarcely spent a year wearing woolen cloth at court in mourning for King Henry II when, certainly, silks had already sunk so low in everyone's opinion that if you saw someone dressed in them you immediately took him for some townsman. They had been left as the portion of physicians and surgeons; and although everyone was dressed in much the same way,

there were still enough other visible marks distinguishing people's ranks.[1] How suddenly, in our armies, do greasy doublets of chamois leather and canvas come into honor, and polish and richness of dress into reproach and contempt! Let kings begin to give up these expenses, and it will be done within a month, without edict or ordinance: we will all follow. The law ought to say the opposite: that crimson and goldsmith's work are forbidden to every sort of person except tumblers and courtesans.

1.43.3 With a similar device Zaleucus corrected the corrupt morals of the Locrians. His ordinances were these: that a freeborn woman might not take more than one maid along with her, unless she was drunk; nor go out of the city at night, nor wear gold jewelry on her person, nor a gown enriched with embroidery, unless she was a public woman and a prostitute; that, except for pimps, no man might wear a gold ring on his finger, nor a delicate gown such as those made of cloth woven in the city of Miletus. And so by these shameful exceptions he ingeniously turned his citizens away from superfluities and pernicious luxuries. It was a very useful way of drawing men to their duty and to obedience through honor and ambition.[2]

1.43.4 Our kings can do anything in such outward reforms: their inclination serves as law. *Whatever princes do, they seem to command.* The rest of France takes the court's rule as its rule. Let them take a dislike to this ugly hose that displays our hidden parts so openly; this heavy padding of doublets that makes us all quite other than we are, and is so awkward when putting on armor; these long, foppish locks of hair; this practice of kissing what we hand to our companions, and our own hands when we greet them, a ceremony once due to princes alone;[3] and the fact that a gentleman will appear in a place calling for respect without a sword at his side, all unbuttoned and untrussed, as if

1 Henry II died in 1559 of a wound received in a tournament.
2 Zaleucus was the lawgiver of Locri, a Greek city in southern Italy, in the 7th century BC.
3 Quintilian, Declamations, 3.

he had just come from the privy; and that, contrary to the custom of our fathers and the particular freedom of the nobility of this kingdom, we stand bareheaded at a great distance around them, wherever they are—and as around them, so around a hundred others, so many thirds and quarters of kings we have; and other such new and corrupt innovations: they will at once be seen to vanish and fall into discredit. These are superficial errors, but of bad omen all the same; and we are warned that the solid masonry is giving way when we see the plaster and the outer crust of our walls cracking.

1.43.5 Plato, in his Laws, considers no plague in the world more harmful to his city than allowing the young the freedom to change from one form to another in dress, gestures, dances, exercises and songs: shifting their judgment now to this position, now to that, running after novelties and honoring their inventors. By this, morals are corrupted, and ancient institutions fall into disdain and contempt. In all things except simply bad ones, change is to be feared: change of seasons, of winds, of diet, of humors. And no laws are held in true esteem except those to which God has granted some ancient duration, so that no one knows their birth, or that they were ever otherwise.

I.44 Of Sleep

Du dormir
Great men like Alexander, Otho, and Cato slept soundly before battle or death, showing remarkable composure.

1.44.1 Reason does indeed bid us always go the same road, but not always at the same pace. And although the wise man must not allow human passions to make him stray from the right course, he may well, without prejudice to his duty, leave it to them to quicken or slow his step, and not plant himself like an immovable, impassive colossus. Were virtue itself incarnate, I believe its pulse would beat harder going into an assault than going in to dinner; indeed it must needs grow heated and stirred. For this reason I have noted it as a rare thing to see great men sometimes, in the loftiest undertakings and the most important affairs, stay so wholly composed that they do not even cut short their sleep.

1.44.2 Alexander the Great, on the day appointed for that furious battle against Darius, slept so soundly and so late into the morning that Parmenion was forced to enter his room and, going up to his bed, call him two or three times by name to wake him, since the time to go into battle was pressing. The Emperor Otho, having resolved to kill himself, that same night, after putting his domestic affairs in order, sharing out his money among his servants and sharpening the edge of a sword with which he meant to strike himself, and waiting only to learn whether each of his friends had withdrawn to safety, fell into so deep a sleep that his valets heard him snoring. The death of this emperor has many things in common with that of the great Cato, including

this one. For Cato, being ready to do away with himself, while he was waiting to be told whether the senators he was sending away had put out from the port of Utica, fell so soundly asleep that he could be heard breathing from the next room. And when the man he had sent to the port woke him to tell him that the storm was keeping the senators from setting sail easily, he sent another, and, burying himself back in the bed, went off to sleep again until this last one assured him of their departure. We can also compare him to Alexander's case in that great and dangerous storm that threatened him through the sedition of the tribune Metellus, who wanted to publish the decree recalling Pompey into the city with his army at the time of Catiline's uprising. Cato alone opposed this decree, and he and Metellus had exchanged hot words and great threats over it in the Senate. But it was the next day, in the Forum, that the thing had to be carried out. There Metellus, besides the favor of the people and of Caesar, who was then conspiring to Pompey's advantage, was to appear accompanied by a host of foreign slaves and gladiators, and Cato fortified by his constancy alone; so that his relatives, his household and many good people were greatly worried, and some of them spent the night together without being willing to rest, or drink, or eat, because of the danger they saw prepared for him. Even his wife and his sisters did nothing but weep and torment themselves in his house. He, on the contrary, comforted everyone, and after supping as usual, went to bed and slept very soundly until morning, when one of his colleagues in the tribunate came to wake him to go to the skirmish. What we know of this man's greatness of courage from the rest of his life allows us to judge with complete assurance that this came from a soul raised so far above such accidents that he did not deign to let them into his head any more than ordinary ones.

1.44.3 In the naval battle that Augustus won against Sextus Pompeius off Sicily, just as he was about to go into combat, he was overcome by so deep a sleep that his friends had to wake him to give the signal for battle. This later gave Mark Antony occasion to reproach him that he had not had the heart even to look with

open eyes at the array of his forces, and that he had not dared to show himself to the soldiers until Agrippa came to announce the news of the victory he had won over the enemy. But as for the young Marius, who did even worse (for on the day of his last battle against Sulla, after drawing up his army and giving the word and signal for battle, he lay down in the shade under a tree to rest and fell so fast asleep that he could hardly be woken by the rout and flight of his men, having seen nothing of the fighting), they say it was because he was so utterly weighed down by toil and lack of sleep that nature could hold out no longer.

1.44.4 And on this subject, let the physicians consider whether sleep is so necessary that our life depends on it. For we do find that King Perseus of Macedon, a prisoner in Rome, was put to death by being prevented from sleeping; but Pliny cites people who lived a long time without sleep. In Herodotus there are nations whose men sleep and wake by half-years. And those who write the life of the wise Epimenides say that he slept for fifty-seven years at a stretch.[1]

1 Epimenides of Crete was a semi-legendary seer and poet of the 6th century BC.

I.45 Of the Battle of Dreux

De la battaille de Dreux
Montaigne defends the Duke of Guise's waiting at Dreux: a soldier must aim at the whole victory, not partial rescues.

1.45.1 There were any number of remarkable incidents in our battle of Dreux. But those who are not very favorable to the reputation of Monsieur de Guise readily put it about that he cannot be excused for having halted and held back with the forces he commanded while the Constable, commander of the army, was being overwhelmed along with the artillery; and that it would have been better to take the risk of attacking the enemy in the flank than to suffer so heavy a loss while waiting for the advantage of having him in the rear.[1] But besides what the outcome demonstrated, anyone who debates the matter without passion will readily admit to me, I think, that the aim and target not only of a captain but of every soldier must be the victory as a whole, and that no particular occurrences, however much may be at stake in them, should divert him from that point. Philopoemen, in an encounter with Machanidas, had sent ahead a good troop of archers and javelin men to open the skirmish. The enemy, after overthrowing them, busied themselves pursuing them at full gallop, and swept on in their victory along the main body where Philopoemen was. Though his soldiers were stirred by this, he did not see fit to budge from his position or to show himself to the enemy to rescue his men. Instead, having let

1 At Dreux (19 December 1562), in the first War of Religion, François de Guise turned the battle against the Protestants after the Constable Anne de Montmorency had been routed and captured.

them be chased and cut to pieces before his eyes, he launched the charge on the enemy's battalion of foot when he saw them completely abandoned by their cavalry. And although they were Lacedaemonians, since he caught them at the moment when, thinking the day was won, they were beginning to break ranks, he easily got the better of them; and that done, he set off in pursuit of Machanidas.[2] This case is first cousin to that of Monsieur de Guise.

1.45.2 In that bitter battle of Agesilaus against the Boeotians, which Xenophon, who was there, says was the hardest he had ever seen, Agesilaus refused the advantage that Fortune offered him of letting the Boeotian battalion pass and then charging them from the rear, however certain the victory he foresaw from it, judging that there was more skill than valor in that. And to show his prowess with a marvelous ardor of courage, he chose instead to strike them head-on.[3] But he was well beaten and wounded for it, and forced in the end to disengage and adopt the course he had refused at the start, opening his ranks to let this torrent of Boeotians through. Then, when they had passed, noticing that they were marching in disorder, like men who thought themselves well out of all danger, he had them followed and charged on the flanks. But even so he could not turn them into headlong flight; instead they withdrew at a slow pace, still showing their teeth, until they had reached safety.

2 Philopoemen defeated and killed Machanidas, tyrant of Sparta, at Mantinea in 207 BC.

3 The battle of Coronea, 394 BC.

I.46 Of Names

Des noms
A hodgepodge on names—unlucky names, families renamed for their lands, and how glory attaches to mere words.

1.46.1 Whatever variety of herbs there may be, it all gets wrapped up under the name of salad. In the same way, under the heading of names, I am going to make a hodgepodge of various items here.

1.46.2 Every nation has some names that are taken, I don't know how, in a bad sense: with us, Jehan, Guillaume, Benoît. Item: in the genealogy of princes there seem to be certain names fatefully assigned, such as Ptolemy to the kings of Egypt, Henry in England, Charles in France, Baldwin in Flanders, and, in our old Aquitaine, Guillaume, from which they say the name Guienne came—a feeble play on words, were there not some just as crude in Plato himself.[1]

1.46.3 Item: it is a slight thing, but worth remembering for its strangeness, and recorded by an eyewitness, that when Henry, Duke of Normandy, son of Henry II, King of England, gave a feast in France, the gathering of nobility was so great that, having divided into groups by likeness of names for amusement, in the first troop, the Williams, there were found a hundred and ten knights seated at table bearing that name, not counting the plain gentlemen and servants.[2]

1 These names were bywords for a dupe or simpleton (Benoît gave "benêt," a simpleton). Guillaume is the French form of William.
2 Henry the Young King (1155–1183), whose feast at Bayeux in 1171 was recorded by the chronicler Robert of Torigni.

1.46.4 It is as amusing to assign the tables by the names of the guests as it was for the Emperor Geta to have the courses of his dishes assigned according to the first letters of the names of the foods: they would serve those that began with M—mutton, young boar, hake, porpoise—and so on with the others.[3]

1.46.5 Item: they say it is good to have a good name, that is, credit and reputation. But in truth it is also convenient to have a name that is easy to pronounce and to remember, for kings and the great know us more easily by it and are less willing to forget us; and even among those who serve us, we more usually give orders to and employ those whose names come most readily to the tongue. I have seen King Henry II unable to say properly the name of a gentleman from this part of Gascony; and for one of the queen's maids of honor he himself advised giving her the general name of her family, because that of her father's house seemed to him too outlandish. And Socrates considers it worthy of a father's care to give his children fine names.

1.46.6 Item: they say that the church of Notre-Dame-la-Grande in Poitiers was founded in this way. A dissolute young man lodging on that spot had got hold of a girl and, asking her name as soon as she arrived, learned it was Marie. At that he felt himself so keenly seized with religion and with respect for that most sacred name of the Virgin Mother of our Savior that he not only sent her away at once but mended the whole rest of his life. And in consideration of this miracle there was built, on the spot where this young man's house stood, a chapel in the name of Our Lady, and later the church that we see there. This correction, a pious one, working through voice and ear, went straight to the soul; this next one, of the same kind, worked its way in through the bodily senses. Pythagoras was in the company of some young men whom he perceived, heated by the festivities, to be plotting to go and violate a chaste household. He ordered the woman playing music to change her tune, and by a heavy,

3 Geta was Roman co-emperor in AD 211. In French the four foods all begin with M: mouton, marcassin, merlus, marsouin.

severe, spondaic music he gently charmed their ardor and lulled it to sleep.

1.46.7 Item: will not posterity say that our present-day reformation has been delicate and exact, in that it not only fought errors and vices and filled the world with devotion, humility, obedience, peace and every kind of virtue, but went so far as to fight these old baptismal names of ours, Charles, Louis, François, so as to people the world with Methuselahs, Ezekiels and Malachis, which smell far more of the faith?[4] A gentleman, a neighbor of mine, weighing the advantages of the old days against ours, did not forget to count the pride and magnificence of the names of the nobility of that time—Dom Grumedan, Quedragan, Agesilan—and said that just hearing them ring out, one could feel they had been quite other people than Pierre, Guillot and Michel.[5]

1.46.8 Item: I am grateful to Jacques Amyot for having left the Latin names whole in the course of his French prose, without tricking them out and altering them to give them a French cadence. That seemed a little harsh at first, but usage, through the credit of his Plutarch, has already removed all their strangeness for us. I have often wished that those who write histories in Latin would leave our names just as they are. For by making Vaudemont into *Vallemontanus*, and metamorphosing names to dress them up in Greek or Roman fashion, they leave us not knowing where we are, and we lose all knowledge of them.[6]

1.46.9 To close our account: it is a nasty practice, and of very bad consequence in our France, to call each man by the name of his land and lordship, and the thing in the world that most muddles families and makes them unrecognizable. A younger son of a good house, having received as his portion an estate under whose name he has been known and honored, cannot decently abandon it. Ten years after his death the estate passes to a stranger, who does the same: guess where we stand in

4 The Protestant Reformation, whose followers favored Old Testament names for their children.

5 Names of knights from the chivalric romance Amadis of Gaul.

6 Jacques Amyot's French translation of Plutarch's Lives (1559) was one of Montaigne's favorite books.

knowing who these men are. We need look for no other examples than our royal house, where there are as many surnames as there are portions; meanwhile the origin of the stock has escaped us. There is such freedom in these changes that in my time I have not seen anyone raised by fortune to some extraordinary greatness who did not at once have genealogical titles attached to him, new and unknown to his father, and was not grafted onto some illustrious stock. And as luck would have it, the most obscure families are the best suited to falsification.

1.46.10 How many gentlemen do we have in France who are of royal blood by their own reckoning? More, I believe, than of any other kind. Was it not neatly done by a friend of mine? A number of them had gathered over a quarrel between one lord and another. This other did in truth have some prerogative of titles and alliances raised above the common nobility. On the subject of this prerogative, each one, trying to make himself his equal, put forward one origin or another—one the resemblance of his name, another his arms, another an old family charter—and the least of them turned out to be the descendant of some king from overseas. When it came to dinner, this friend, instead of taking his place, backed away with deep bows, begging the company to excuse him for having rashly lived among them until then as an equal; but now that he had been newly informed of their ancient ranks, he was beginning to honor them according to their degrees, and it was not fitting for him to sit among so many princes. After his farce, he heaped abuse on them: "In God's name, be content with what our fathers were content with, and with what we are. We are enough if we know how to keep it up well. Let us not disown the fortune and condition of our ancestors, and let us get rid of these silly fancies, which are always there for anyone with the impudence to put them forward."

1.46.11 Coats of arms are no more secure than surnames. My arms are azure, strewn with gold trefoils, with a lion's paw also of gold, armed in gules, set across the middle of the shield. What privilege does this figure have to remain particularly in my house? A son-in-law will carry it into another family; some

paltry buyer will make it his first arms. There is nothing in which more change and confusion is to be found.

1.46.12 But this consideration drags me by force into another field. Let us probe a little closely and, for God's sake, look at what foundation we attach this glory and reputation to, for which the world is turned upside down. Where do we set this renown that we go questing after with such great pains? It is, in the end, Pierre or Guillaume who bears it, takes it into his keeping, and whom it concerns. Oh, what a valiant faculty hope is, which, in a mortal subject and in a moment, goes usurping infinity and immensity, and fills its master's poverty with the possession of all the things he can imagine and desire, as much as it likes! Nature has given us a pretty toy there. And this Pierre or Guillaume—what is it, all told, but a sound? or three or four strokes of the pen, so easy to vary, first of all, that I would gladly ask to whom the honor of so many victories belongs: to Guesquin, to Glesquin, or to Gueaquin? There would be far more reason for a lawsuit here than in Lucian, where Sigma (Σ) sues Tau (T), for *No light or trivial prizes / are sought*: this is serious business. The question is which of these spellings is to be paid for so many sieges, battles, wounds, imprisonments and services rendered to the crown of France by its famous Constable.[7]

1.46.13 Nicolas Denisot cared only for the letters of his name, and rearranged them completely to build out of them the Comte d'Alsinois, whom he endowed with the glory of his poetry and painting. And the historian Suetonius cared only for the meaning of his: setting aside Lenis, his father's surname, he made Tranquillus heir to the reputation of his writings. Who would believe that Captain Bayard has no honor except what he borrowed from the deeds of Pierre Terrail? And that Antoine Escalin lets so many voyages and commands by sea and land be

7 Lucian's dialogue is The Consonants at Law. The Latin is Virgil, Aeneid XII.

stolen from him before his eyes by Captain Poulin and the Baron de la Garde?[8]

1.46.14 Secondly, these are pen strokes common to a thousand men. How many people in every family share the same name and surname? And across different families, ages and countries, how many? History has known three Socrateses, five Platos, eight Aristotles, seven Xenophons, twenty Demetriuses, twenty Theodores—and think how many it has not known. What prevents my groom from calling himself Pompey the Great? But after all, what means, what springs are there that attach to my dead groom, or to that other man who had his head cut off in Egypt, and join to them this glorified sound and these pen strokes so honored, so that they may profit by them? *Do you think ashes and buried shades care about that?*[9]

1.46.15 What do they feel, those two companions of highest worth among men: Epaminondas, of that glorious line that has run in our mouths on his behalf for so many centuries, *By my counsels the glory of the Spartans was cut down*; and Africanus, of this other one, *From the rising sun to beyond the Maeotian marshes / there is no one who can match my deeds*?[10]

1.46.16 The survivors are tickled by the sweetness of these sounds, and, stirred by them to jealousy and desire, they thoughtlessly transfer their own feeling to the dead in fancy, and with a deceiving hope make themselves believe that they will be capable of it in their turn. God knows. Nevertheless, *for these things*

> *the Roman, the Greek and the barbarian commander*
> *has roused himself; the causes of danger and toil*
> *he has found here: so much greater is the thirst for fame than for virtue.*[11]

8 Denisot (1515–1559) signed himself "Comte d'Alsinois," an anagram of his name; Lenis and Tranquillus both mean "calm." Bayard was Pierre Terrail, and Antoine Escalin, Baron de la Garde, was known as Captain Poulin.

9 Virgil, Aeneid, IV.

10 Both lines are quoted by Cicero in the Tusculan Disputations, V; the second is from Ennius. The Maeotian marshes are the Sea of Azov.

11 Juvenal, Satires, X.

I.47 Of the Uncertainty of Our Judgment

De l'incertitude de nostre iugement
On questions of war, good arguments exist on both sides;
Montaigne shows how uncertain our judgment of strategy is.

1.47.1 It is just as this line says: *Wide is the range of words, this way and that*: there is ample license to speak on every side, both for and against. For example: *Hannibal conquered, but did not then know how / to make good use of his victorious fortune.*[1]

1.47.2 Whoever wants to take this side, and make much, with our people, of the mistake of not having pressed home our advantage at Moncontour recently; or whoever wants to accuse the King of Spain of not having known how to use the advantage he had over us at Saint-Quentin, may say that this mistake comes from a soul drunk with its good fortune, and from a heart which, full and gorged with this first taste of success, loses its appetite for increasing it, already too busy digesting what it has. It has its arms full to overflowing and cannot grasp any more—unworthy that Fortune should have put such a good into its hands. For what profit does it get from it if it nonetheless gives its enemy the means to get back on his feet?[2] What hope can one have that he will dare attack them another time, once they are rallied and restored and newly armed with spite and vengeance, when he did not dare, or did not know how, to pursue them while they were all broken and terrified? *While fortune is hot, while terror is finishing everything?* But in the end, what better can

1 Homer, Iliad, XX; the Italian lines are from Petrarch's Canzoniere.
2 Moncontour (1569) was a royal victory over the Protestants; at Saint-Quentin (1557) the Spanish routed the French.

he expect than what he has just lost? It is not as in fencing, where the number of hits wins the bout: as long as the enemy is on his feet, it is all to begin again, harder than ever. It is no victory if it does not put an end to the war.[3] In that skirmish near the town of Oricum where Caesar got the worst of it, he taunted Pompey's soldiers that he would have been lost if their captain had known how to win; and he put on his spurs in quite another way when it was his turn.

1.47.3 But why may one not also argue the contrary? That it is the mark of a headlong and insatiable mind not to know how to set a limit to its greed; that it is an abuse of God's favors to want to make them overstep the measure he has prescribed for them; that to throw oneself back into danger after the victory is to put it once more at the mercy of Fortune; that one of the greatest pieces of wisdom in the art of war is not to drive one's enemy to despair. Sulla and Marius, in the Social War, having defeated the Marsi, and seeing a band of survivors coming back out of despair to hurl themselves at them like furious beasts, did not see fit to wait for them.[4] If Monsieur de Foix's ardor had not carried him away into pursuing the remnants of the victory at Ravenna too fiercely, he would not have sullied it with his death. Yet the fresh memory of his example served to keep Monsieur d'Enghien from a similar mishap at Ceresole. It is dangerous to attack a man whom you have deprived of every other means of escape but arms; for necessity is a violent schoolmistress: *the bites of necessity, once provoked, are the most grievous.*[5] *He is not conquered cheaply who offers his throat to the enemy.* That is why Pharax prevented the King of Sparta, who had just won the day against the Mantineans, from going to confront a thousand Argives who had escaped intact from the rout, and had him let them slip away freely, so as not to come up against a valor stung and enraged by misfortune. Clodomir, King of Aquitaine, after

3 Lucan, Pharsalia, VII.

4 The Social War (91–88 BC) was fought between Rome and its Italian allies.

5 Gaston de Foix was killed pursuing the Spanish after his victory at Ravenna (1512); the Count of Enghien won at Ceresole (1544). The Latin is from Porcius Latro's Declamation against Catiline.

his victory, pursuing Gondemar, King of Burgundy, who was beaten and in flight, forced him to turn and face him; but his stubbornness robbed him of the fruit of his victory, for he died there.[6]

1.47.4 Likewise, if one had to choose between keeping one's soldiers richly and sumptuously armed or armed only for necessity, there would be put forward in favor of the first course—which was the view of Sertorius, Philopoemen, Brutus, Caesar and others—that it is always a spur of honor and glory to a soldier to see himself finely adorned, and a reason to make himself more stubborn in combat, having his arms to save as if they were his goods and inheritance. That is the reason, says Xenophon, why the Asiatics took their wives and concubines to their wars, along with their jewels and most precious riches. But on the other side it would also be put forward that one should rather take away from a soldier his concern for preserving himself than increase it; that this way he will be doubly afraid to risk himself; and besides, that these rich spoils increase the enemy's desire for victory. It has been observed that on other occasions this wonderfully encouraged the Romans against the Samnites. Antiochus was showing Hannibal the army he was preparing against them, splendid and magnificent in every sort of equipment, and asked him: "Will the Romans be satisfied with this army?" "Will they be satisfied with it?" he replied. "Truly, yes, however greedy they may be." Lycurgus forbade his people not only sumptuousness in their equipment but even stripping their defeated enemies, wishing, he said, that poverty and frugality should shine along with the rest of the battle.

1.47.5 In sieges and elsewhere, when circumstances bring us close to the enemy, we readily give our soldiers license to defy him, scorn him and insult him with every kind of taunt. And there is some show of reason in it. For it is no small thing to take away from them all hope of mercy and of terms, by showing them that they can no longer expect these from the man they have so grossly insulted, and that the only remedy left is victory.

6 Lucan, Pharsalia, IV. Clodomir, son of Clovis, was killed at Vézeronce in AD 524.

Yet it turned out badly for Vitellius. He was up against Otho, whose soldiers were of weaker mettle, long out of the habit of war and softened by the pleasures of the city. In the end he goaded them so much with his stinging words, taunting them with their faint-heartedness and their longing for the ladies and feasts they had just left behind in Rome, that by this means he put fresh heart into them, which no exhortations had been able to do. He himself drew them down upon his own head, when no one had been able to push them forward.[7] And indeed, when insults cut to the quick, they can easily make a man who was going sluggishly about the business in his king's quarrel go at it with quite another feeling in his own.

1.47.6 When we consider how important it is to preserve the commander of an army, and that the enemy aims chiefly at that head, on which all the others hang and depend, it seems that no one could question the course we see several great commanders have taken: changing their dress and disguising themselves at the moment of battle. Yet the drawback incurred this way is no less than the one you are trying to avoid. For when the captain is not recognized by his own men, the courage they draw from his example and his presence fails them along with it; and losing sight of his usual marks and insignia, they judge that he is dead, or that he has slipped away in despair of the outcome. And as for experience, we see it favor now one side, now the other. What happened to Pyrrhus in the battle he fought against the consul Laevinus in Italy serves us on both counts. By choosing to hide under the armor of Demogacles and giving him his own, he did indeed save his life, no doubt; but he very nearly incurred the other drawback, of losing the day. Alexander, Caesar and Lucullus liked to mark themselves out in battle by rich dress and armor of a gleaming and distinctive color; Agis, Agesilaus and

7 Vitellius and Otho fought for the Roman throne in AD 69; the episode is from Tacitus' Histories.

the great Gylippus, on the contrary, went to war plainly clad, without the trappings of command.[8]

1.47.7 At the battle of Pharsalus, among other reproaches leveled at Pompey is that he halted his army and stood still waiting for the enemy. For this (I shall steal Plutarch's very words here, which are better than mine) weakens the violence that running gives to the first blows, and at the same time removes the rush of the combatants against one another, which more than anything usually fills them with impetuosity and fury when they come to clash headlong, the shouting and the running increasing their courage; and it leaves the soldiers' ardor, so to speak, cooled and congealed. That is what he says on this score.[9] But if Caesar had lost, who could not just as well have said the opposite: that the strongest and firmest position is the one in which you stand planted without moving, and that the man who halts in his march, gathering and saving his strength within himself for when it is needed, has a great advantage over the man who is on the move and has already used up half his breath in running? Besides, since an army is a body made of so many different parts, it is impossible for it to move in this frenzy with such precision that it does not disturb or break its formation, and that the nimblest man is not already at grips before his comrade can come to his aid. In that ugly battle between the two Persian brothers, Clearchus the Lacedaemonian, who commanded the Greeks on Cyrus' side, led them to the charge quite slowly, without hurrying; but at fifty paces off he set them running, hoping by the shortness of the distance to husband both their order and their breath, while still giving them the advantage of impetus, both for their persons and for their missile weapons. Others have settled this question for their armies in this way: if the enemy charge at you, wait for them standing still; if they wait for you standing still, charge at them.[10]

8 Pyrrhus defeated Laevinus at Heraclea in 280 BC; Plutarch calls the officer Megacles.

9 At Pharsalus in Thessaly, in 48 BC, Caesar defeated Pompey.

10 The battle of Cunaxa (401 BC), where Cyrus the Younger fought his brother, King Artaxerxes II.

1.47.8 When the Emperor Charles V invaded Provence, King Francis was in a position to choose either to go and meet him in Italy or to wait for him in his own lands. He considered how great an advantage it is to keep one's house clean and clear of the troubles of war, so that, with its strength intact, it can continually supply money and help when needed; that the necessities of war constantly require laying waste, which cannot well be done to one's own property, and that the peasant does not bear such ravaging by his own side as meekly as by the enemy, so that seditions and troubles may easily flare up among us; that the license to steal and plunder, which cannot be allowed in one's own country, is a great support in the hardships of war;[11] and that a man who has no other hope of gain than his pay is hard to keep to his duty when he is two steps from his wife and his home; that the one who lays the table always bears the cost; that there is more zest in attacking than in defending; and that the shock of losing a battle in our very bowels is so violent that it can hardly fail to shake the whole body, since there is no passion so contagious as fear, none so easily taken on credit, none that spreads more swiftly; and that the towns which have heard the crash of this storm at their gates, and have taken in their captains and soldiers still trembling and out of breath, are in danger, in the heat of the moment, of throwing themselves into some bad course. Nevertheless he chose to recall the forces he had beyond the mountains and to watch the enemy come. For he could imagine, on the contrary, that being at home and among his friends, he could not fail to have plenty of every convenience; that the rivers and passes, being at his command, would bring him both provisions and money in complete safety and without need of escort; that he would find his subjects all the more devoted the closer the danger came to them; that having so many towns and barriers for his security, it would be up to him to set the terms of battle according to his opportunity and advantage; and that if he chose to play for time, he could watch from shelter and at his ease while his enemy languished

11 Charles V invaded Provence in 1536; Francis I of France.

and wore himself down, beset by the difficulties that would assail him as he pressed on in a hostile land, where there would be nothing in front of him, behind him or on either side that was not making war on him: no means of refreshing his army or spreading it out if sickness broke out, nor of lodging his wounded under cover; no money, no provisions, except at the point of the lance; no leisure to rest and catch his breath; no knowledge of the places or the country to protect him from ambushes and surprises; and if he came to lose a battle, no means of saving what was left. And there was no lack of examples for either course.

1.47.9 Scipio found it far better to go and attack his enemy's lands in Africa than to defend his own and fight him in Italy, where he was; and it turned out well for him. But Hannibal, on the contrary, in that same war, ruined himself by abandoning the conquest of a foreign country to go and defend his own. The Athenians, having left the enemy in their lands to cross to Sicily, had Fortune against them; but Agathocles, king of Syracuse, had her on his side, having crossed into Africa and left the war at home.[12]

12 Scipio's African campaign ended the Second Punic War at Zama (202 BC); the Athenian expedition to Sicily (415–413 BC) ended in disaster; Agathocles invaded Carthaginian Africa in 310 BC.

1.47.10 So we are quite accustomed to say, and with reason, that events and outcomes depend for the most part, especially in war, on Fortune, who will not fall into line with and submit to our reasoning and prudence, as these lines say: *Ill-laid plans are often rewarded, and prudence deceives;*

Fortune does not examine causes or follow the deserving,
But roams through all without distinction.
Clearly there is something greater that compels and rules us,
And leads mortal things under its own laws. But, rightly taken, it seems that our counsels and deliberations depend on her just as much, and that Fortune draws our reasoning too into her turmoil and uncertainty.[13]

We reason rashly and at random, says Timaeus in Plato, because, like ourselves, our reasonings have a large share in the rashness of chance.

13 Manilius, Astronomica.

I.48 Of Warhorses

Des Destriers
Montaigne gathers lore on the warhorses and cavalry customs of the ancients and of various nations.

1.48.1 Here I am turned grammarian—I who never learned any language except by rote, and who still do not know what an adjective, a subjunctive or an ablative is.

1.48.2 I seem to have heard it said that the Romans had horses they called *funales* or *dextrarios*, which were led on the right hand or kept in relay, to be taken fresh when needed; and that is why we call warhorses destriers. And our romances commonly say adestrer for "to accompany." They also called *desultorios equos* horses trained in such a way that, while they galloped at full speed, coupled side by side, without bridle or saddle, Roman gentlemen, even in full armor, would leap back and forth from one to the other in the middle of the race.[1] The Numidian men-at-arms led a second horse by hand, to change mounts in the thick of the fray: *they were accustomed, like trick riders, to lead two horses, and often in the hottest of the fight to leap fully armed from the tired horse onto the fresh one; so great was their agility, and so docile their breed of horses!*[2]

1.48.3 There are many horses trained to help their master, to rush at anyone who shows them a naked sword, and to fling themselves with hooves and teeth on those who attack and confront them; but it more often happens that they harm friends

1 Destrier, the old French word for a warhorse, comes from Latin dextra, "right hand."
2 Livy, History of Rome.

than enemies. Besides, you cannot pull them off at will once they have locked on, and you are left at the mercy of their fight. It went badly wrong for Artybius, general of the Persian army, fighting man to man against Onesilus, king of Salamis, that he was mounted on a horse schooled this way: for it caused his death, Onesilus' squire catching him with a scythe between the shoulders as the horse reared up against his master.[3] As for what the Italians say, that at the battle of Fornovo King Charles's horse rid him by kicking and bucking of the enemies pressing him, and that he would have been lost without it—that was a great stroke of luck, if it is true. The Mamelukes boast that they have the most skillful cavalry horses in the world: that by nature and by training they are made to recognize and distinguish the enemy, on whom they must fling themselves with teeth and hooves at the word or sign given them; and likewise to pick up lances and darts from the field with their mouths and offer them to their master at his command.[4]

1.48.4 It is said of Caesar, and also of Pompey the Great, that among their other excellent qualities they were very good horsemen; and of Caesar, that in his youth, riding bareback on a horse without a bridle, he would put it to a gallop with his hands clasped behind his back. As nature chose to make this man and Alexander two miracles in the art of war, you would say she also took pains to arm them extraordinarily. For everyone knows that Alexander's horse Bucephalus had a head like a bull's, that he would let no one but his master mount him, could be trained by no one but him, was honored after his death, and had a city built in his name. Caesar too had another, whose forefeet were like a man's, the hoof being split in the form of toes; he could be mounted and trained by no one but Caesar, who after its death dedicated its statue to the goddess Venus.

1.48.5 I do not willingly dismount once I am on horseback, for that is the position in which I feel best, both well and ill. Plato recommends it for health; and Pliny too says it is good for the

3 The story is from Herodotus; this Salamis was in Cyprus.
4 At Fornovo (1495) Charles VIII of France fought his way back from Italy.

stomach and the joints. Let us keep going, then, since we are at it.

1.48.6 We read in Xenophon of the law forbidding a man who had a horse to travel on foot. Trogus and Justin say that the Parthians were accustomed to do on horseback not only their fighting but all their public and private business—trading, negotiating, conversing and strolling about—and that the most notable difference between free men and slaves among them is that the one go on horseback, the others on foot: an institution that began with King Cyrus.[5]

1.48.7 There are many examples in Roman history—and Suetonius notes it particularly of Caesar—of commanders who ordered their horsemen to dismount when hard pressed, to take away from the soldiers all hope of flight, and for the advantage they hoped for in this kind of fighting, *in which the Roman undoubtedly excels,* says Livy. Yet the first measure they used to curb the rebellion of newly conquered peoples was to take away their arms and horses. That is why we so often see in Caesar: *he orders the arms to be handed over, the beasts brought out, hostages given.* The Sultan today allows neither Christian nor Jew to have a horse of his own within his empire.

1.48.8 Our ancestors, especially at the time of the wars with the English, in solemn combats and pitched battles, mostly all fought on foot, so as to trust nothing but their own strength and the vigor of their courage and their limbs with something as precious as honor and life. Whatever Chrysantas says in Xenophon, you pledge your valor and your fortune to your horse's. His wounds and his death bring yours in their train; his fright or his fire make you rash or cowardly; if he does not answer to the bit or the spur, it is your honor that must answer for it. For this reason I do not find it strange that those battles were steadier and more furious than those fought on horseback: *Victors and vanquished alike slew, alike fell, / And neither side knew flight.* Their

5 Pompeius Trogus wrote a universal history, known through Justin's abridgment.

battles were far more stoutly contested; nowadays there is nothing but routs: *the first shout and the first charge decide the matter.*[6]

1.48.9 And a thing we call on to share so great a risk ought to be in our own power as far as possible. In the same way I would advise choosing the shortest weapons, those we can best answer for. It is far more reasonable to rely on a sword we hold in our fist than on the ball that escapes from our pistol, which has several parts—the powder, the flint, the wheel—the least of which, if it fails, will make your fortune fail you. A blow carried by the air is dealt very unsurely: *And to let the winds take the wounds where they will;*

The sword has strength, and every race of men
Wages war with swords.[7]

1.48.10 But as for that weapon, I shall speak of it more fully where I compare ancient weapons with ours. Apart from the shock to the ears, to which everyone is by now accustomed, I think it is a weapon of very little effect, and I hope we shall one day give up using it. The weapon the Italians used for throwing, with fire, was more terrifying. They called *Phalarica* a certain kind of javelin, tipped with an iron head three feet long so that it could pierce an armed man right through. It was thrown sometimes by hand in the field, sometimes by engines in defense of besieged places. The shaft, wrapped in tow smeared with pitch and oil, caught fire in its flight, and sticking in the body or the shield it took away all use of weapons and limbs. Yet it seems to me that when it came to close quarters it must also have hindered the attacker, and that a field strewn with these burning stumps must have been a nuisance to both sides in the melee. *Whirled, the phalarica comes with a great hiss, / Driven like a thunderbolt.*[8]

1.48.11 They had other means, in which practice trained them, and which seem incredible to us for lack of experience; with

6 Virgil, Aeneid; the second quotation is from Livy.
7 Lucan, Pharsalia.
8 Virgil, Aeneid.

these they made up for not having our powder and bullets. They hurled their javelins with such force that they often skewered two shields and two armed men with them and stitched them together. The shots of their slings were no less sure or far-reaching: *practicing with round stones and slings over the open sea, and used to sending them through small rings from a great distance, they wounded not only the heads of their enemies but whatever spot they had aimed at.* Their battering engines imitated not only the effect but also the din of ours: *at the blows on the walls, delivered with a terrible noise, fear and panic seized them.*[9] The Gauls, our cousins in Asia, hated these treacherous flying weapons, being used to fighting hand to hand with more courage. *They are not so troubled by gaping wounds; when a wound is broader than it is deep, they even think they are fighting more gloriously. But when the point of an arrow or a sling bullet, buried inside, burns them with a wound slight to look at, then, driven to rage and shame that so small a plague should kill them, they throw themselves on the ground.* A picture very close to a harquebus wound. The Ten Thousand Greeks, in their long and famous retreat, came upon a nation that did them extraordinary damage with great strong bows and arrows so long that, picking them up by hand, one could throw them back like javelins; and they pierced right through a shield and an armed man.[10] The engines that Dionysius invented at Syracuse, for shooting great heavy bolts and stones of horrible size with such long range and force, came very close to our inventions.

1.48.12 Nor must we forget the amusing seat that a certain Master Pierre Pol, doctor of theology, had on his mule: Monstrelet relates that he used to ride about the city of Paris sitting sideways like women. He also says elsewhere that the Gascons had terrible horses, trained to wheel at the gallop, at which the French, Picards, Flemish and Brabanters marveled greatly, not being used to seeing them: those are his words.[11] Caesar, speak-

9 Both quotations are from Livy.
10 The Galatians, Gauls settled in Asia Minor; the passage is from Livy. The retreat of the Ten Thousand is told in Xenophon's Anabasis.
11 Enguerrand de Monstrelet, fifteenth-century French chronicler.

ing of the Swedes: In cavalry encounters, he says, they often leap to the ground to fight on foot, having trained their horses not to stir from the spot meanwhile, and they run back to them quickly if need be; and according to their custom nothing is so base and cowardly as to use saddles and pads, and they despise those who use them, so that, though very few in number, they are not afraid to attack large numbers. What I once admired—seeing a horse trained to turn every way with a switch, the bridle dropped loose over its ears—was common among the Massilians, who used their horses without saddle or bridle.[12]

> *And the Massylian people, riding on the bare back,*
> *Who know nothing of reins and turn their mounts' mouths with a light switch.*
> *And the unbridled Numidians surround them. Horses without bridles: their very gallop is ungainly, as they run with stiff neck and head thrust forward.*[13]

1.48.13 King Alfonso, the one who founded in Spain the order of the Knights of the Band, or of the Sash, gave them among other rules that they should not ride a mule of either sex, on pain of a fine of one mark of silver: as I have just learned from the letters of Guevara, of which those who called them Golden held a very different opinion from mine. The Courtier says that before his time it was a reproach to a gentleman to ride one. The Abyssinians, on the contrary: the closer they stand to Prester John, their prince, the more they make a point, for dignity and pomp, of riding great mules.[14] Xenophon relates that the Assyrians always kept their horses hobbled in their quarters, so vicious and wild were they; and that it took so long to untie and harness them that, so that this delay should not harm them if they were surprised by the enemy while in disorder, they never encamped in

12 Caesar is in fact speaking of the Suebi, a Germanic people. The Massilians here are the Massyli of North Africa, not the people of Marseilles.
13 Lucan, Pharsalia; Virgil, Aeneid; and Livy.
14 Alfonso XI of Castile; Antonio de Guevara's letters were translated as the "Golden Epistles"; The Courtier is Castiglione's book. Prester John was taken to be the ruler of Ethiopia.

a camp that was not ditched and ramparted. His Cyrus, so great a master of horsemanship, kept his horses to the same rule as himself, and had them given nothing to eat until they had earned it by the sweat of some exercise.

1.48.14 The Scythians, when necessity pressed them in war, drew blood from their horses and drank it and fed on it: *The Sarmatian comes too, fed on the horse whose blood he has drunk.* The people of Crete, besieged by Metellus, were so short of any other drink that they had to make use of their horses' urine. To prove how much better Turkish armies are run and maintained than ours, people say that besides the fact that the soldiers drink only water and eat only rice and salt meat ground to powder, of which each man easily carries a month's supply on him, they also know how to live on the blood of their horses, like the Tartars and Muscovites, and they salt it.[15]

1.48.15 These new peoples of the Indies, when the Spaniards arrived there, took both the men and the horses to be either gods or animals nobler than their own nature. Some, after being conquered, coming to ask the men for peace and pardon and to bring them gold and food, did not fail to go and offer the same to the horses, with a speech just like the one made to the men, taking their neighing for the language of terms and truce.

1.48.16 In the East Indies, in former times, the chief and royal honor was to ride an elephant; the second, to go in a coach drawn by four horses; the third, to ride a camel; the last and lowest degree, to be carried or drawn by a single horse. Someone in our time writes that he saw in that region countries where people ride oxen with pack-saddles, stirrups and bridles, and that he was well pleased with how they carried him.

1.48.17 Quintus Fabius Maximus Rutilianus, fighting the Samnites, saw that in three or four charges his horsemen had failed to break the enemy's formation, and took this course: he had them unbridle their horses and spur them with all their might. Since nothing could stop them, they cut a way through the weapons and the men they overthrew for their foot soldiers,

15 Martial, On the Spectacles.

who completed a very bloody defeat. Quintus Fulvius Flaccus gave the same order against the Celtiberians: *You will do it with greater force if you send your horses against the enemy unbridled; it is recorded that Roman cavalry have often done this to their glory. And taking off the bridles, they charged through twice, there and back, with great slaughter of the enemy, breaking all their lances.*

1.48.18 The Duke of Muscovy formerly owed the Tartars this mark of reverence when they sent ambassadors to him: he went out to meet them on foot and presented them with a goblet of mare's milk, a drink they relish; and if, while they drank, a drop fell on their horses' manes, he was bound to lick it off with his tongue. In Russia, the army that the Emperor Bajazet had sent there was overwhelmed by so terrible a snowstorm that, to take shelter and save themselves from the cold, many of them thought of killing and disemboweling their horses and getting inside them, to enjoy that vital warmth. Bajazet, after that fierce battle in which he was routed by Tamerlane, would have made good his escape on an Arab mare, had he not been forced to let her drink her fill while crossing a stream. This made her so slack and chilled that he was very easily overtaken afterward by his pursuers. People do say that horses are slackened by letting them piss; but as for drinking, I would rather have thought it would strengthen her.[16]

1.48.19 Croesus, passing near the city of Sardis, found pastures there with a great quantity of snakes, which the horses of his army ate with a hearty appetite: a bad omen for his affairs, says Herodotus.

1.48.20 We call a horse "entire" when it has its mane and ears; the others do not pass muster. The Lacedaemonians, having defeated the Athenians in Sicily and returning from the victory in pomp into the city of Syracuse, among other bravados had the horses of the vanquished shorn and led them thus in triumph. Alexander fought a nation, the Dahae: they went to war in pairs,

16 Bayezid I, Ottoman sultan, was defeated and captured by Tamerlane at Ankara in 1402.

armed, on horseback, but in the melee one would dismount, and they fought now on foot, now on horseback, one after the other.

1.48.21 I do not think any nation surpasses us in ability and grace on horseback. "A good horseman," in our usage, seems to refer more to courage than to skill. The most knowing, the surest and the most graceful at schooling a horse that I have known was, to my taste, Monsieur de Carnavalet, who served our King Henry II in that capacity.[17] I have seen a man gallop standing with both feet on his saddle; take off his saddle and, on the way back, lift it up again, fit it back on and sit in it again, all the while racing with the reins loose; ride over a cap and then shoot good arrows back at it; pick up whatever he wanted, flinging himself to the ground with one foot while keeping the other in the stirrup; and other such monkey tricks, by which he made his living.

1.48.22 In my time two men were seen at Constantinople on one horse who, at its fastest gallop, would leap by turns to the ground and then back into the saddle. And one who bridled and harnessed his horse with nothing but his teeth. Another who rode at full speed between two horses, one foot on one saddle and the other on the other, carrying a second man in his arms; this second man stood upright on him and shot very accurate arrows from his bow as they went. Several who galloped with their legs in the air and their heads planted on their saddles, between the points of scimitars fastened to the harness. When I was a child, the Prince of Sulmona, at Naples, putting a rough horse through every kind of maneuver, held reales under his knees and under his toes as if they had been nailed there, to show the firmness of his seat.[18]

17 François de Kernevenoy, called Carnavalet, riding master to Henry II of France.
18 Reales were Spanish silver coins.

I.49 Of Ancient Customs

Des coustumes anciennes
Changing fashions blind us to their absurdity; Montaigne surveys Roman customs in dress, bathing, eating, and daily life.

1.49.1 I would willingly excuse our people for having no other pattern and rule of perfection than their own manners and usages; for it is a common vice, not only of the common people but of almost all men, to fix their aim and their limit on the ways they were born into. I am content that when they see Fabricius or Laelius they should find their looks and bearing barbarous, since they are neither dressed nor fashioned in our style. But I do complain of their particular lack of discernment in letting themselves be so thoroughly fooled and blinded by the authority of present usage that they are capable of changing opinion and judgment every month, if custom so pleases, and of judging so variously of themselves.[1] When they wore the busk of their doublets between their breasts, they maintained with lively arguments that it was in its proper place; a few years later, there it is, slipped down between the thighs, and they mock their former practice and find it absurd and unbearable. The present way of dressing makes them at once condemn the old one, with such great conviction and such universal agreement that you would say it was some kind of mania that turns their understanding upside down like this.[2] Because our changes in this are so sudden and so quick that the inventiveness of all the tailors in

1 Gaius Fabricius, a Roman of the early Republic famed for his incorruptibility.
2 The busk was a stiffening strip down the front of a doublet.

the world could not supply enough novelties, it necessarily follows that the despised fashions very often come back into favor, and those very ones fall into contempt shortly after; and that one and the same judgment adopts, in the space of fifteen or twenty years, two or three opinions that are not just different but contrary, with incredible inconstancy and fickleness. There is no one among us so shrewd that he does not let himself be bamboozled by this contradiction, and imperceptibly dazzled in his inner eyes as well as his outer ones.

1.49.2 I want to pile up here some ancient fashions that I remember—some the same as ours, others different—so that, by keeping this continual variation of human things in our imagination, we may have our judgment clearer and firmer.

1.49.3 What we call fighting with sword and cloak was already practiced among the Romans, so Caesar says: *they wrap their left arms in their cloaks and draw their swords.* And he notes even then in our nation the vice that is still there, of stopping passers-by we meet on the road, forcing them to tell us who they are, and taking it as an insult and grounds for a quarrel if they refuse to answer us.

1.49.4 At the baths the ancients took every day before their meal —and they took them as routinely as we take water to wash our hands—at first they washed only their arms and legs. But later, by a custom that lasted several centuries and in most of the nations of the world, they washed all naked in water mixed with perfumes, so that they regarded washing in plain water as a mark of great simplicity. The most refined and dainty perfumed their whole body a good three or four times a day. They often had all their hair plucked out, as French women have lately taken to doing to their foreheads—*That you pluck your chest, your legs, your arms*—although they had ointments suited to the purpose: *She gleams with depilatory paste, or hides away under sour chalk.* They liked to lie softly, and cite sleeping on a mattress as a proof of endurance. They ate lying on couches, in much the same position as the Turks of our time: *Then from his high couch father Aeneas thus began.* And it is said of the younger Cato that

after the battle of Pharsalus, having gone into mourning over the bad state of public affairs, he always ate sitting, adopting an austere way of life.[3]

1.49.5 They kissed the hands of the great to honor them and show them affection. And among friends they kissed each other in greeting, as the Venetians do: *And with my congratulations I would give you kisses and sweet words.* And they touched the knees to petition or greet a great man. Pasicles the philosopher, brother of Crates, instead of putting his hand to the knee, put it to the genitals. When the man he was addressing roughly pushed him away, "What," he said, "is this part not yours as well as the other?" They ate fruit at the end of the meal, as we do.[4]

1.49.6 They wiped their backsides (we must leave to women this empty superstition about words) with a sponge: that is why *spongia* is an obscene word in Latin. This sponge was fastened to the end of a stick, as is shown by the story of the man who was being led out to be thrown to the beasts before the people. He asked leave to go and relieve himself, and having no other means of killing himself, he thrust this stick and sponge down his throat and choked himself with it.[5] They wiped their member with perfumed wool when they had done with it: *I'll do nothing to you; wool will wash my member.* At the crossroads in Rome there were vessels and half-tubs set out for passers-by to piss in: *Little boys, bound fast in sleep, often believe they are lifting their clothes / Beside the basin and the cut-down jars.*[6]

1.49.7 They had snacks between meals. In summer there were sellers of snow for chilling wine; and some people used snow in winter, not finding the wine cold enough even then. The great had their cupbearers and carvers, and their fools to amuse them. In winter their food was served to them on braziers carried to the table; and they had portable kitchens, such as I have seen, in which their whole service was trundled along behind

3 The first two quotations are from Martial's Epigrams, the third from Virgil's Aeneid. The younger Cato is Cato of Utica.
4 Ovid, Letters from the Black Sea.
5 The story is told by Seneca, Letters to Lucilius.
6 Martial, Epigrams; Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.

them. *Keep these feasts for yourselves, you fine folk; / We are put off by a dinner that walks about.*

1.49.8 And in summer they often had cool, clear water run through channels beneath them in their ground-floor rooms, with plenty of live fish in it, which those present would choose and catch by hand, to have it cooked each to his own taste. Fish has always had this privilege, as it still has, that the great like to try their hand at cooking it; and indeed its taste is much more exquisite than that of meat, at least to me.

1.49.9 But in every sort of magnificence, debauchery and voluptuous invention, of softness and sumptuousness, we truly do what we can to equal them: for our will is quite as corrupt as theirs, but our ability cannot reach so far. Our powers are no more able to match them in these vicious qualities than in the virtuous ones, for both spring from a vigor of mind that was incomparably greater in them than in us. And the less strong souls are, the less means they have of doing either very well or very badly.

1.49.10 Among them the place of honor was the middle. Front and back had no significance of rank in writing or speaking, as can plainly be seen in their writings: they will say "Oppius and Caesar" as readily as "Caesar and Oppius," and will say "me and you" as indifferently as "you and me." That is why I once noticed a passage in the life of Flamininus in the French Plutarch where the author, speaking of the jealousy over glory between the Aetolians and the Romans after a battle they had won together, seems to attach some weight to the fact that in Greek songs the Aetolians were named before the Romans—unless there is some ambiguity in the French words.[7]

1.49.11 Ladies at the bathhouses received men there along with them, and there they used their manservants to rub and anoint them. *A slave, his groin girded with a black leather apron, / Stands by you whenever you lie naked in the warm water.* They dusted themselves with some powder to check sweating.

1.49.12 The ancient Gauls, says Sidonius Apollinaris, wore their hair long in front and the back of the head shaved, which is the very fashion now being revived by the soft and spineless usage of this age.[8]

1.49.13 The Romans paid the boatmen what was owed for their fare upon entering the boat, which we do after reaching port. *While the fare is collected and the mule harnessed, / A whole hour goes by.*[9]

1.49.14 Women lay on the side of the bed next to the wall: that is why Caesar was called *King Nicomedes' bedside.*[10]

1.49.15 They took breath while drinking. They watered their wine: *What boy will quickly quench*
The cups of fiery Falernian
In the water flowing by? And the impudent gestures of our lackeys were in use too: *O Janus, whom no stork pecks from behind,*
Whom no nimble hand mimics with white ears,
Nor tongue stuck out as far as an Apulian dog's when it is thirsty![11]

1.49.16 The ladies of Argos and Rome wore white for mourning, as ours used to do, and should go on doing, if I had my way.

1.49.17 But there are whole books written on this subject.

7 The French Plutarch is Jacques Amyot's translation of the Lives (1559).
8 Sidonius Apollinaris, fifth-century Gallo-Roman poet and bishop.
9 Horace, Satires.
10 A jibe recorded by Suetonius about Caesar's rumored affair with Nicomedes IV of Bithynia.
11 Horace, Odes; Persius, Satires.

I.50 Of Democritus and Heraclitus

De Democritus et Heraclitus
Montaigne tests his judgment on all subjects, and prefers Democritus's laughter at human folly to Heraclitus's tears.

1.50.1 Judgment is a tool for every subject, and it has a hand in everything. That is why, in these essays, the trials I make of it here, I use every kind of occasion. If it is a subject I do not understand at all, I try my judgment out on that very thing, sounding the ford from a good way off; then, finding it too deep for my height, I keep to the bank. And this recognition that I cannot go any further is one of the things it achieves, and indeed one of those it is proudest of. Sometimes, on a vain and trifling subject, I test it to see whether it will find something to give the subject body, something to prop it up and shore it up. Sometimes I take it for a walk to a noble, well-worn subject, where it can find nothing of its own, since the road is so beaten that it can only walk in other people's tracks. There it plays its game by choosing the route that seems best to it, and out of a thousand paths it says that this one or that one was the best chosen. I take the first subject that Fortune offers me: they are all equally good to me. And I never plan to treat them whole. For I do not see the whole of anything. Nor do those who promise to show it to us. Of the hundred limbs and faces that each thing has, I take one: sometimes only to lick it, sometimes to brush its surface, and sometimes to pinch it to the bone. I make a thrust at it, not as widely but as deeply as I know how. And more often I like to catch things from some unaccustomed angle. I would venture to treat some matter thoroughly if I knew myself less

well and were deceived about my own incapacity. I scatter a word here, another there, samples cut from their piece, set apart, without design and without promise. I am not bound to make good on them, nor to stick to them myself without changing when I please, and giving myself up to doubt and uncertainty, and to my ruling form, which is ignorance.

1.50.2 Every movement reveals us. That same soul of Caesar that shows itself in ordering and drawing up the battle of Pharsalus shows itself also in arranging idle and amorous affairs. We judge a horse not only by watching it put through its paces on a course, but also by seeing it walk, and even by seeing it at rest in the stable.

1.50.3 Among the functions of the soul there are some low ones. Whoever does not see it on that side too does not fully know it. And perhaps we observe it best where it goes at its simple pace. The winds of passion catch it more in its lofty postures. Besides, it throws itself wholly into each matter and exercises itself wholly there, and never treats more than one at a time; and it treats that matter not according to the matter but according to itself. Things in themselves may have their own weights and measures and conditions; but inwardly, in us, the soul cuts them to its own pattern as it sees fit. Death is frightful to Cicero, desirable to Cato, indifferent to Socrates. Health, conscience, authority, knowledge, wealth, beauty and their opposites are stripped at the entrance and receive new clothing from the soul, and whatever coloring it pleases: brown, light, green, dark; sharp, sweet, deep, superficial—whatever pleases each individual soul. For souls have not agreed among themselves on their styles, rules and forms: each is queen in her own realm. So let us no longer make excuses from the external qualities of things: it is up to us to account for them. Our good and our ill depend on ourselves alone. Let us make our offerings and our vows there, not to Fortune: she has no power over our ways; on the contrary, our ways drag her along in their train and mold her to their form. Why should I not judge Alexander at table, chatting and drinking deep? Or if he was playing chess, what string of his

mind is not touched and put to work by this silly, childish game? I hate it and avoid it because it is not game enough, and amuses us too seriously; I am ashamed to give it the attention that would be enough for some good thing. He was no more absorbed in planning his glorious passage into the Indies; nor was that other man in unraveling a passage on which the salvation of the human race depends. See how much our soul complicates this ridiculous pastime, and whether every one of its sinews is not strained! How amply it allows everyone, in this, to know himself and to judge himself rightly.[1] In no other posture do I see and probe myself more thoroughly. What passion does it not exercise in us? Anger, spite, hatred, impatience, and a vehement ambition to win, in a thing in which it would be more excusable to be ambitious of losing. For rare excellence, above the common level, ill becomes a man of honor in a frivolous thing. What I say in this example can be said in all others. Every particle, every occupation of a man betrays him and shows him as well as any other.

1.50.4 Democritus and Heraclitus were two philosophers. The first, finding the human condition vain and ridiculous, never went out in public without a mocking, laughing face. Heraclitus, feeling pity and compassion for this same condition of ours, wore a continually sad face, and his eyes were laden with tears. *One of them laughed each time he moved a foot from his doorstep and set it forward; the other, in contrast, wept.* I prefer the first temperament, not because it is pleasanter to laugh than to weep, but because it is more disdainful and condemns us more than the other; and it seems to me that we can never be despised as much as we deserve.[2]

Lamenting and pity are mixed with some esteem for the thing we lament; the things we mock we consider worthless. I do not think there is as much unhappiness in us as there is vanity, nor

1 Montaigne puns on "passage": Alexander's route to India, and a passage of Scripture on which salvation hangs.
2 Juvenal, Satires X.

as much malice as foolishness. We are not so full of evil as of emptiness; we are not so wretched as we are base. Thus Diogenes, who pottered about by himself, rolling his tub and turning up his nose at the great Alexander, and who took us for flies or bladders full of wind, was a sharper and more stinging judge, and therefore, to my mind, a juster one, than Timon, the man who was nicknamed the hater of men.[3] For what we hate, we take to heart. The latter wished us ill, was passionately eager for our ruin, and shunned our company as dangerous, as the company of wicked men with depraved natures. The other thought so little of us that we could neither disturb him nor change him by our contagion; he kept away from our company not out of fear but out of disdain for dealing with us. He did not think us capable of doing either good or evil.

1.50.5 Of the same stamp was the answer of Statilius, whom Brutus approached to bring him into the conspiracy against Caesar: he found the undertaking just, but he did not find men worthy of anyone taking any trouble for them. This is in keeping with the teaching of Hegesias, who said that the wise man should do nothing except for himself, since he alone is worthy to have anything done for him; and with that of Theodorus, that it is unjust for the wise man to risk himself for the good of his country and put wisdom in peril for the sake of fools. Our own condition is as ridiculous as it is laughable.[4]

3 Timon of Athens, the legendary misanthrope.

4 Hegesias and Theodorus were Greek philosophers of the Cyrenaic school; Statilius's answer is reported by Plutarch in his Life of Brutus.

I.51 Of the Vanity of Words

De la vanité des paroles
Rhetoric deceives judgment and flourishes in disordered states; Montaigne also mocks inflated words, from cooks to titles.

1.51.1 A rhetorician of times past said that his trade was to make small things look great and be taken for great. He is a shoemaker who knows how to make big shoes for a small foot. In Sparta they would have had him whipped for professing a deceitful and lying art. And I believe that Archidamus, who was king there, was not a little astonished to hear the reply of Thucydides, whom he had asked which was the better wrestler, Pericles or he. "That," he said, "would be hard to prove: for when I have thrown him in wrestling, he persuades those who saw it that he did not fall, and wins."[1] Those who mask and paint women do less harm: for it is no great loss not to see them in their natural state. These men, on the other hand, make it their business to deceive not our eyes but our judgment, and to debase and corrupt the essence of things.

1.51.2 The republics that have kept themselves in an orderly and well-governed state, like the Cretan or the Spartan, did not think much of orators. Ariston wisely defined rhetoric as the science of persuading the people; Socrates and Plato, as an art of deceiving and flattering. And those who deny this in their general description confirm it everywhere in their precepts. The Muslims forbid teaching it to their children because it is useless. And the Athenians, perceiving how pernicious was its use,

1 This Thucydides, son of Melesias, was Pericles' political rival, not the historian; the story is in Plutarch.

which carried all the weight in their city, ordered that its principal part, which is stirring the emotions, be removed, together with opening addresses and perorations. It is a tool invented to manage and stir up a mob and an unruly populace; and it is a tool that is used only in sick states, like medicine. In those where the common people, the ignorant, where everyone has been able to do everything, as in Athens, Rhodes and Rome, and where affairs have been in perpetual storm, there orators have flocked. And in truth, you see few men in those republics who pushed their way to great influence without the help of eloquence. Pompey, Caesar, Crassus, Lucullus, Lentulus, Metellus drew from it their main support in climbing to the height of authority that they finally reached; and they relied on it more than on arms, contrary to the opinion of better times. For Lucius Volumnius, speaking in public in favor of the election of Quintus Fabius and Publius Decius to the consulship, said: "These are men born for war, great in deeds; in the combat of chatter, unpolished: truly consular minds. The subtle, the eloquent and the learned are good for the city, as praetors to administer justice."[2] Eloquence flourished most in Rome when affairs were in the worst state and the storm of civil wars was tossing them about; just as a free and untamed field bears the lustiest growth. It seems from this that governments that depend on a monarch need it less than others. For the stupidity and pliancy found in the common people, which make them liable to be managed and led by the ears by the sweet sound of this harmony, without coming to weigh and know the truth of things by the force of reason—this pliancy, I say, is not so easily found in a single person; and it is easier to protect him from the impression of this poison by good upbringing and good counsel. No orator of renown was ever seen to come out of Macedonia or Persia.

1.51.3 I have said this much on the subject of an Italian I have just been talking with, who served the late Cardinal Caraffa as steward until his death. I had him tell me about his duties. He gave me a discourse on this science of the gullet with a gravity

2 From Livy, History of Rome X.22.

and a magisterial air, as if he had been speaking to me of some great point of theology.[3] He spelled out for me a difference in appetites: the one you have when fasting, and the one you have after the second and third courses; the means now simply of pleasing it, now of waking it up and pricking it; the government of his sauces, first in general, and then going into the qualities of the ingredients and their effects; the differences between salads according to their season, which one must be warmed, which one wants to be served cold, the way to garnish and embellish them to make them pleasing to the eye as well. After that he went on to the order of service, full of fine and important considerations.

> *And it surely makes no small difference*
> *with what gesture you carve a hare, and with what a hen.* And all this puffed up with rich and magnificent words, the very ones used in discussing the government of an empire. I was reminded of my man: *This is too salty, this is burnt, this is not washed enough;*
> *that one is right, remember to do it that way again. I give them careful*
> *advice as best I can, according to my wisdom.*
> *Finally, Demea, I bid them look into the dishes as into a mirror,*
> *and I advise them what needs to be done.* Even so, the Greeks themselves greatly praised the order and arrangement that Paulus Aemilius observed at the feast he gave them on his return from Macedonia; but I am not speaking here of deeds, I am speaking of words.[4]

1.51.4 I do not know whether others are affected the way I am; but when I hear our architects puffing themselves up with those big words—pilasters, architraves, cornices of Corinthian and Doric work, and the like from their jargon—I cannot stop my imagination from immediately seizing on the palace of

3 Carlo Carafa, nephew of Pope Paul IV, executed in 1561.
4 The first quotation is from Juvenal, Satires V; the second from Terence, The Brothers, where the slave Syrus parodies his master's moral lectures. Paulus Aemilius conquered Macedonia in 168 BC.

Apolidon; and in fact I find that they are the paltry parts of my kitchen door.[5]

1.51.5 When you hear people say metonymy, metaphor, allegory and other such grammatical names, does it not seem that they mean some rare and exotic form of language? They are labels that apply to your chambermaid's chatter.

1.51.6 A cheat close to this one is calling the offices of our state by the proud titles of the Romans, even though they bear no resemblance in function, and still less in authority and power. And this one too, which will one day, I think, be held against our age: bestowing unworthily, on anyone we please, the most glorious surnames with which antiquity honored one or two figures in the course of several centuries. Plato carried off the surname "divine" by a universal consent that no one has tried to begrudge him. And the Italians, who boast, and with reason, of having generally livelier minds and sounder reasoning than the other nations of their time, have just bestowed it on Aretino. Yet in him, apart from a way of speaking that is inflated and bubbling over with conceits—ingenious, to be sure, but far-fetched and fanciful—and apart from his eloquence, after all, such as it may be, I do not see that there is anything above the common authors of his century; so far is he from approaching that ancient divinity. And the surname "the Great" we attach to princes who have nothing above the greatness of ordinary people.[6]

5 Apolidon's enchanted palace appears in the chivalric romance Amadis of Gaul.
6 Pietro Aretino (1492–1556), Italian satirist and letter writer, known as "the divine Aretino."

I.52 Of the Frugality of the Ancients

De la parsimonie des anciens
Romans like Regulus, Cato, and Scipio lived on little, even at the height of power and glory.

1.52.1 Atilius Regulus, general of the Roman army in Africa, in the midst of his glory and his victories against the Carthaginians, wrote to the state that a farmhand whom he had left alone in charge of his property, which amounted in all to seven acres of land, had run off with his farming tools; and he asked for leave to go home and see to it, for fear that his wife and children might suffer. The Senate saw to it by appointing someone else to manage his property, had what had been stolen from him restored, and ordered that his wife and children be fed at public expense.[1]

1.52.2 The elder Cato, returning from Spain as consul, sold his warhorse to save the money it would have cost to bring it back by sea to Italy. And while he was governor of Sardinia he made his tours of inspection on foot, with no other retinue than one public officer who carried his gown and a vessel for making sacrifices; and most often he carried his bag himself. He boasted that he had never had a gown that cost more than ten crowns, nor sent more than ten sous to the market for one day; and that of his country houses, none was plastered and rendered on the outside.

1.52.3 Scipio Aemilianus, after two triumphs and two consulships, went on an embassy with only seven servants. It is said

1 Marcus Atilius Regulus, Roman consul in the First Punic War (256 BC).

that Homer never had more than one, Plato three, and Zeno, the head of the Stoic sect, not one. Tiberius Gracchus was allowed only five and a half sous a day when he went on a commission for the state, though he was then the foremost man among the Romans.

I.53 Of a Saying of Caesar

D'vn mot de Cæsar
Taking up a saying of Caesar, Montaigne finds we never rest content with present things and always crave the absent.

1.53.1 If we sometimes took the trouble to consider ourselves, and spent in sounding ourselves the time we spend in checking up on others and in getting to know things outside us, we would easily feel how much this whole fabric of ours is built of weak and failing pieces. Is it not a singular proof of imperfection that we cannot settle our contentment on any one thing, and that even in desire and imagination it is beyond our power to choose what we need? Good evidence of this is the great dispute that has always gone on among the philosophers about finding man's sovereign good, and that still goes on and will go on forever, without resolution and without agreement.

> *While what we long for is absent, it seems to surpass*
> *all the rest; then, once we have it, we long for something else,*
> *and the same thirst holds us.*[1]

1 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things III.

1.53.2 Whatever comes within our knowledge and enjoyment, we feel that it does not satisfy us, and we go gaping after things to come and unknown, because present things do not fill us up. Not, in my opinion, that they do not have enough in them to fill us, but because we seize them with a sick and disordered grip. *For when he saw that what need demands for living*
was nearly all already provided for mortals,
that men, powerful in wealth, honor and praise,
were abounding, and excelled in the good name of their children,
and yet that at home no one had a heart the less anxious,
and that the mind was forced to slave under hostile complaints,
he understood then that the fault lay in the vessel itself,
and that by its fault everything was spoiled within,
whatever good things were gathered from outside and came into it.[2]

1.53.3 Our appetite is irresolute and uncertain; it can neither hold on to anything nor enjoy anything in the right way. Man, thinking it is the fault of the things he holds, fills and feeds himself with other things that he does not know and does not understand, on which he sets his desires and hopes, and holds them in honor and reverence. As Caesar says: *It happens through a common fault of nature that we have more confidence in things unseen, hidden and unknown, and are more violently terrified by them.*

2 Lucretius again, On the Nature of Things VI, speaking of Epicurus.

I.54 Of Vain Subtleties

Des vaines subtilitez
Admiring difficult trifles shows weak judgment; Montaigne notes how extremes meet, as in ignorance before and after knowledge.

1.54.1 There are some frivolous and empty subtleties by means of which men sometimes seek recognition: like the poets who make whole works of lines beginning with the same letter. We see eggs, balls, wings and axes shaped long ago by the Greeks with the measure of their lines, lengthening or shortening them so that they come to represent this figure or that. Such was the science of the man who amused himself by counting in how many ways the letters of the alphabet could be arranged, and found that incredible number which you can see in Plutarch.[1] I approve the view of the man to whom someone presented a man trained to throw a grain of millet with such skill that he would always pass it through the eye of a needle without missing; and afterwards he was asked for some present as a reward for so rare an ability. Whereupon he ordered, very amusingly and, in my opinion, justly, that this craftsman be given two or three bushels of millet, so that such a fine art should not go without practice. It is a marvelous testimony to the weakness of our judgment that it values things for their rarity or novelty, or even for their difficulty, if goodness and usefulness are not joined to them.[2]

1.54.2 We have just been playing a game at my house: who could find the most things that meet at their two extreme ends. For

1 Greek pattern poems, whose lines form the shape of their subject, such as those attributed to Simmias of Rhodes.

example, "Sire" is a title given to the most exalted person in our state, the King, and also given to the common sort, such as merchants, but it does not touch those in between. Women of rank are called Dames, those of middling rank Damoiselles, and Dames again those of the lowest grade. Canopies spread over tables are permitted only in the houses of princes and in taverns. Democritus said that gods and beasts had keener senses than men, who are on the middle floor.[3] The Romans wore the same clothing on days of mourning and on feast days.

1.54.3 It is certain that extreme fear and extreme ardor of courage equally upset the bowels and loosen them. The nickname "the Trembler," given to Sancho XII, King of Navarre, teaches us that boldness as well as fear produces trembling in the limbs. Those who were arming him, or some other man of the same nature whose skin was shivering, tried to reassure him by making light of the danger he was about to throw himself into. "You know me ill," he told them. "If my flesh knew how far my courage will soon carry it, it would freeze stiff with fright." The weakness that comes to us from coldness and distaste in the exercises of Venus comes to us also from too vehement an appetite and a disordered heat. Extreme cold and extreme heat both cook and roast. Aristotle says that ingots of lead melt and run from the cold and rigor of winter as they do from a fierce heat. Desire and satiety fill with pain the seats above and below pleasure.

1.54.4 Stupidity and wisdom meet at the same point of feeling and resolution in enduring human misfortunes: the wise rebuke misfortune and command it, and the others are unaware of it. These others are, so to speak, on this side of misfortunes; the wise are beyond them. After weighing and considering their qualities well, after measuring them and judging them for what they are, the wise leap above them by the force of a vigorous courage. They disdain them and trample them underfoot, having a strong and solid soul against which the arrows of Fortune,

2 Quintilian tells this story of Alexander the Great.

3 In Montaigne's day "Damoiselle" was the title of the wife of an untitled gentleman.

when they strike, must necessarily rebound and be blunted, meeting a body on which they can make no impression. The ordinary and middling condition of men lodges between these two extremes: it is that of people who perceive misfortunes, feel them, and cannot bear them. Childhood and decrepitude meet in feebleness of brain; avarice and prodigality in a like desire to draw in and acquire.

1.54.5 It can plausibly be said that there is an ABC ignorance that comes before knowledge, and another, doctoral ignorance that comes after knowledge: an ignorance that knowledge makes and engenders, just as it undoes and destroys the first. Out of simple minds, less curious and less instructed, good Christians are made, who out of reverence and obedience believe simply and keep themselves under the laws. In minds of middling vigor and middling capacity, erroneous opinions are engendered. They follow the appearance of the first sense, and they have some grounds for interpreting as simple-mindedness and stupidity the fact that we hold to the old ways, looking at those of us who are not instructed in these matters by study. Great minds, more settled and clear-sighted, make another kind of good believers: by long and religious investigation they penetrate a deeper and more abstruse light in the Scriptures, and sense the mysterious and divine secret of our Church's order. And so we see some of them who have reached this last stage by way of the second, with marvelous fruit and confirmation, as at the farthest limit of Christian understanding, and who enjoy their victory with consolation, thanksgiving, reformation of conduct and great modesty. And in this rank I do not mean to place those others who, to purge themselves of the suspicion of their past error and to reassure us about themselves, become extreme, immoderate and unjust in the conduct of our cause, and stain it with endless charges of violence. Simple peasants are decent people, and decent people are the philosophers—or, as our age calls them, strong and clear natures, enriched with a broad instruction in useful sciences. Those in between, who have disdained the first seat, ignorance of letters, and could not

reach the other—their backside between two saddles, like me and so many others—are dangerous, inept and tiresome: these are the ones who trouble the world. That is why, for my part, I draw back as far as I can into the first and natural seat, which I tried in vain to leave.

1.54.6 Popular and purely natural poetry has a naturalness and graces by which it bears comparison with the principal beauty of poetry perfected according to art, as can be seen in the villanelles of Gascony and in the songs reported to us from nations that have no knowledge of any science, nor even of writing. Middling poetry, which stops between the two, is disdained, without honor and without value.

1.54.7 But once the way was opened to my mind, I found, as usually happens, that we had taken for a difficult exercise and a rare subject something that is not so at all, and that once our inventiveness is warmed up it discovers an infinite number of similar examples. So I will add only this one: that if these Essays were worth judging, it might turn out, in my opinion, that they would hardly please common and ordinary minds, nor much please singular and excellent ones. The former would not understand enough in them, the latter would understand too much. They might scrape a living in the middle region.

I.55 Of Smells

Des Senteurs
The best bodily smell is none; Montaigne describes his own keen nose and the power of perfumes on the mind.

1.55.1 It is said of some people, like Alexander the Great, that their sweat gave off a sweet smell, owing to some rare and extraordinary constitution; Plutarch and others look for the cause of it. But the common way of bodies is the contrary, and the best condition they can be in is to be free of smell. Even the sweetness of the purest breath has nothing more perfect about it than to be without any odor that offends us, like the breath of very healthy children. That is why, says Plautus, *A woman smells good when she smells of nothing.* The most exquisite scent of a woman is to smell of nothing. And borrowed perfumes, however good, we are right to regard as suspect in those who use them, and to think they are used to cover some natural defect in that quarter. Hence those quips of the ancient poets: to smell good is to stink. *You laugh at us, Coracinus, because we smell of nothing: / I would rather smell of nothing than smell good.* And elsewhere: *Postumus, he who always smells good does not smell good.*[1]

1 Martial, Epigrams VI.55 and II.12.

1.55.2 Yet I am very fond of being surrounded by good smells, and I hate bad ones beyond measure, and I catch them from farther off than anyone else: *For I alone sniff out more keenly,*
whether a polyp or a rank goat lurks in hairy armpits,
than a keen hound sniffs out where the boar is hiding. The simplest and most natural scents seem to me the most agreeable.[2]

1.55.3 And this concern is chiefly the ladies' business. In the thickest barbarism, the Scythian women, after washing, powder and encrust their whole body and face with a certain fragrant drug that grows in their land; and when they have removed this paint to approach the men, they find themselves both smooth and perfumed.

1.55.4 Whatever smell it may be, it is marvelous how it clings to me, and how apt my skin is to soak it up. The man who complains that nature left us without an instrument for carrying smells to the nose is wrong, for smells carry themselves. But in my case particularly, my moustache, which is thick, does the job: if I bring my gloves or my handkerchief near it, the smell will stay there a whole day. It gives away where I have been. The close kisses of youth, savory, greedy and sticky, used to glue themselves to it and stay there for several hours afterwards. And yet I find myself little subject to epidemic diseases, which are caught from contact with people and arise from infection of the air; and I have escaped those of my time, of which there have been several kinds in our towns and in our armies. We read of Socrates that, though he never left Athens during the many recurrences of plague that tormented it so often, he alone was never the worse for it.

1.55.5 Physicians could, I believe, make more use of smells than they do; for I have often noticed that they change me and act on my spirits according to what they are. This makes me approve what people say, that the use of incense and perfumes in

2 Horace, Epodes XII.

churches, so ancient and so widespread among all nations and religions, aims at this: to gladden, rouse and purify our senses, to make us fitter for contemplation.

1.55.6 In order to judge of it, I would very much have liked to have had a share in the handiwork of those cooks who know how to season foods with foreign fragrances as well as with their own flavor. This was particularly remarked in the service of the King of Tunis, who in our time landed at Naples to confer with the Emperor Charles. His dishes were stuffed with fragrant spices with such lavishness that a peacock and two pheasants came, according to his accounts, to a hundred ducats to prepare in their fashion. And when they were carved, not only the hall but all the rooms of his palace and the streets around were filled with a very sweet vapor that did not vanish quickly.[3]

1.55.7 My chief concern in choosing where to live is to avoid stinking, heavy air. Those beautiful cities, Venice and Paris, spoil the affection I have for them by their sharp smell: the one from its marshes, the other from its mud.

3 Mulay Hassan, King of Tunis, met the Emperor Charles V at Naples in 1543.

I.56 Of Prayers

Des prieres
Montaigne recommends the Lord's Prayer and warns against praying while unrepentant and against careless use of sacred texts.

1.56.1 I put forward notions that are shapeless and unresolved, as do those who publish doubtful questions to be debated in the schools: not to establish the truth but to seek it. And I submit them to the judgment of those whose business it is to regulate not only my actions and my writings but even my thoughts. Condemnation will be as acceptable and as useful to me as approval, since I hold as absurd and impious anything that may be found, set down ignorantly or inadvertently in this rhapsody, contrary to the holy resolutions and prescriptions of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church, in which I die and in which I was born. And so, always submitting to the authority of their censure, which has absolute power over me, I meddle rashly in this way with every sort of subject—as here.

1.56.2 I do not know whether I am mistaken; but since, by a particular favor of divine goodness, a certain form of prayer was prescribed and dictated to us word for word by the mouth of God, it has always seemed to me that we ought to use it more commonly than we do. And if I had my way, at the beginning and end of our meals, at our rising and our going to bed, and at all the particular actions with which we are accustomed to mix prayers, I would want it to be the Lord's Prayer that Christians used—if not exclusively, at least always. The Church may extend and vary prayers according to the needs of our instruction; for I

know well that it is always the same substance and the same thing. But that one ought to have been given the privilege of being continually in the mouths of the people; for it is certain that it says everything that needs saying and is most fitting for every occasion. It is the only prayer I use everywhere, and I repeat it instead of changing. That is why there is none I have so well by heart as that one.

1.56.3 I was just now wondering where this error of ours comes from: having recourse to God in all our plans and undertakings, calling on him in every kind of need and wherever our weakness wants help, without considering whether the occasion is just or unjust; and crying out his name and his power in whatever state or action we may be, however vicious it is. He is indeed our sole and only protector, and can do anything to help us; but although he deigns to honor us with this sweet fatherly alliance, he is nonetheless as just as he is good and as he is powerful. And he uses his justice far more often than his power, and favors us according to the reason of that justice, not according to our requests.

1.56.4 Plato, in his Laws, distinguishes three kinds of insulting belief about the gods: that there are none; that they do not concern themselves with our affairs; that they refuse nothing to our vows, offerings and sacrifices. The first error, in his opinion, never lasted unchanged in any man from his childhood to his old age. The two others can be held steadily.

1.56.5 His justice and his power are inseparable. In vain do we implore his strength in a bad cause. We must have a clean soul, at least at the moment when we pray to him, and one unburdened of vicious passions; otherwise we ourselves hand him the rods to punish us with. Instead of mending our fault, we double it, offering to him from whom we must ask pardon a feeling full of irreverence and hatred. That is why I do not readily praise those whom I see praying to God more often and more regularly than others, if the actions close to their prayer do not

show me some amendment and reformation. *If, as a nighttime adulterer, / you hide your head under a Santonic hood.*[1]

1.56.6 And the position of a man who mixes devotion with an abominable life seems somewhat more condemnable than that of a man who is consistent with himself and dissolute throughout. That is why our Church every day refuses the favor of admission and fellowship to those whose ways persist obstinately in some notorious wickedness.

1.56.7 We pray out of habit and custom; or, to put it better, we read or recite our prayers. In the end it is nothing but show. And it displeases me to see people make three signs of the cross at the Benedicite and as many at Grace (and it displeases me all the more because it is a sign I hold in reverence and use continually, even when I yawn), and meanwhile to see all the other hours of the day given over to hatred, avarice and injustice. To the vices their hour, to God his hour, as if by way of compensation and compromise. It is a miracle to see such different actions carried on in so even a tenor that no interruption or change can be felt even at the borders, in the passage from one to the other.[2] What monstrous conscience can be at rest while it harbors under the same roof, in such harmonious and peaceful fellowship, the crime and the judge?

1.56.8 A man whose lechery rules his head without cease, and who judges it most odious in the sight of God—what does he say to God when he speaks to him about it? He pulls himself back, but suddenly falls again. If the thought of divine justice and its presence struck and chastised his soul, as he says, then however short his penance, fear itself would bring his thoughts back to it so often that he would soon find himself master of those vices that have become habitual and ingrained in him. But what of those who stake a whole life on the fruit and profit of a sin they know to be mortal? How many trades and accepted occupations do we have whose essence is vicious? And the man who, con-

1 Juvenal, Satires VIII; the hooded cloak came from the Santones, a people of Gaul.
2 The Benedicite is the blessing said before a meal, Grace the thanksgiving said after it.

fessing to me, told me that for a whole lifetime he had professed and practiced a religion which in his view was damnable, and contrary to the one he had in his heart, so as not to lose his standing and the honor of his offices—how did his heart endure such reasoning? In what language do such people converse with divine justice on this subject? Since their repentance would have to consist in visible and tangible reparation, they lose, both toward God and toward us, the means of pleading it. Are they so bold as to ask pardon without satisfaction and without repentance? I hold that it goes with the first kind as with these; but obstinacy is not so easy to convict in them. This contrariety and volatility of opinion, so sudden and so violent, which they pretend to us, seems to me something of a miracle. They present us with the state of an indigestible agony.

1.56.9 How fantastic the notion seemed to me of those who, in recent years, used to reproach everyone in whom some brightness of mind shone, and who professed the Catholic religion, with doing it in pretense! They even held, to do him honor, that whatever he said outwardly, inwardly he could not fail to have his belief reformed to their pattern. A grievous disease, to believe in oneself so firmly that one is persuaded no one can believe the contrary! And more grievous still, to be persuaded that such a mind would prefer some disparity or other of present fortune to the hopes and threats of eternal life![3] They can take my word for it: if anything could have tempted me in my youth, the ambition of facing the risk and difficulty that went with this recent enterprise would have had a good part in it.

SCRIPTURE IN THE COMMON TONGUE

Montaigne objects to the Psalms sung casually and the Bible translated for everyone.

1.56.10 It is not without good reason, it seems to me, that the Church forbids the indiscriminate, rash and thoughtless use of

the holy and divine songs that the Holy Spirit dictated to David. We should bring God into our actions only with reverence, and with an attention full of honor and respect. That voice is too divine to have no other use than to exercise our lungs and please our ears. It is from the conscience that it should come, not from the tongue.[4]

1.56.11 It is not reasonable to allow a shop boy to toy and amuse himself with them amid his idle and frivolous thoughts. Nor, surely, is it reasonable to see the holy book of the sacred mysteries of our faith knocked about in the hall and the kitchen. They used to be mysteries. Now they are pastimes and entertainments.

1.56.12 So serious and venerable a study should not be handled in passing and in a hurry. It should be a deliberate and settled act. We should always add to it that preface of our service, *Lift up your hearts*, and bring to it even our body, composed in a bearing that shows a particular attention and reverence. It is not a study for everyone. It is the study of persons dedicated to it, whom God calls to it. The wicked and the ignorant grow worse by it. It is not a story to be told; it is a story to be revered, feared and worshipped. Amusing people, who think they have made it manageable for the common people by putting it into the common tongue! Is it only the words that keep them from understanding everything they find in writing? Shall I say more?[5] By bringing it this little bit closer to them, they push it further away. Pure ignorance, which relied entirely on others, was far more salutary and more learned than this verbal and empty knowledge, the nurse of presumption and rashness.

1.56.13 I also believe that giving everyone the freedom to scatter so religious and important a word into so many kinds of languages is much more dangerous than useful. The Jews, the Muslims and almost all others have espoused and revere the lan-

3 Montaigne plays on "reformed": the Protestants called their faith the Reformed religion.

4 The Psalms, which French Protestants sang in the vernacular versions of Clément Marot and Théodore de Bèze.

5 *Sursum corda*, the opening words of the preface of the Mass.

guage in which their mysteries were originally conceived, and any alteration or change in it is forbidden—not without reason. Are we quite sure that in the Basque country and in Brittany there are judges enough to authorize this translation made into their language? The universal Church has no judgment to make that is more difficult or more solemn. In preaching and speaking, interpretation is loose, free, changeable, and covers only a fragment; so it is not the same thing.

1.56.14 One of our Greek historians rightly accuses his age because the secrets of the Christian religion were spread all over the marketplace, in the hands of the meanest artisans, and anyone could debate them and say what he thought of them. He says it ought to be a great shame to us, who by the grace of God enjoy the pure mysteries of piety, to let them be profaned in the mouths of ignorant and common people, since the pagans forbade Socrates, Plato and the wisest men to inquire into and speak of the things entrusted to the priests of Delphi. He also says that the factions of princes on the subject of theology are armed not with zeal but with anger.[6] Zeal, he says, partakes of divine reason and justice when it conducts itself in an orderly and moderate way; but it turns into hatred and envy, and produces tares and nettles instead of wheat and grapes, when it is led by a human passion. And that other man was right too who, advising the Emperor Theodosius, said that disputes did not so much lull the schisms of the Church to sleep as wake them up and stir heresies to life; that one should therefore shun all contentions and dialectical argumentation, and simply abide by the prescriptions and formulas of the faith established by the ancients.[7] And the Emperor Andronicus, having come upon some leading men in his palace locked in verbal combat with Lapodius over one of our points of great importance, rebuked them so sharply that he threatened to throw them into the river if they went on. In our day, children and women lecture men older and more experienced than themselves on the laws of the

6 The Byzantine historian Nicetas Choniates (c. AD 1155–1217).
7 Theodosius I, Roman emperor AD 379–395.

Church; whereas the first of Plato's laws forbids them even to inquire into the reasons for the civil laws, which are to stand in place of divine ordinances. And while allowing the old to discuss them among themselves and with the magistrate, he adds: provided it is not in the presence of the young and of the uninitiated.[8]

1.56.15 A bishop has left it in writing that at the other end of the world there is an island which the ancients called Dioscorides, favored with fertility in all sorts of trees and fruits and with a healthy air. Its people are Christian, with churches and altars adorned only with crosses and no other images. They are great observers of fasts and feast days, exact payers of tithes to the priests, and so chaste that none of them may know more than one woman in his life. For the rest, they are so content with their lot that, in the middle of the sea, they do not know the use of ships; and so simple that of the religion they observe so carefully they do not understand a single word.[9] An incredible thing to anyone who did not know it: that the pagans, such devout idolaters, knew nothing of their gods but simply their name and their statue. The original opening of Melanippe, a tragedy by Euripides, ran thus: *O Jupiter, for of you I know / Nothing at all except the name.*

1.56.16 In my time I have also heard complaints about certain writings because they are purely human and philosophical, with no admixture of theology. Yet anyone who argued the contrary would not be without some reason. He might say that divine doctrine better keeps its rank apart, as queen and sovereign; that it must be first everywhere, not subordinate and auxiliary; and that examples for grammar, rhetoric and logic might perhaps more fittingly be taken from elsewhere than from so holy a subject, as might the plots of plays, games and public spectacles. He might say that divine reasons are contemplated

8 Andronicus I Comnenus, Byzantine emperor AD 1183–1185; the story also comes from Nicetas.

9 Socotra, in the Arabian Sea; the bishop is the Portuguese historian Jerónimo Osório.

more venerably and reverently alone and in their own style than when paired with human reasonings. That the fault more often seen is that theologians write too humanly, rather than the other, that humanists write too little theologically. Philosophy, says Saint Chrysostom, has long since been banished from the holy school as a useless servant, and judged unworthy even to glimpse in passing, from the entrance, the sanctuary of the holy treasures of heavenly doctrine. That human speech has its humbler forms, and should not make use of the dignity, majesty and sovereignty of divine speech. For my part, I let it say, *in undisciplined words*, fortune, destiny, accident, good luck and bad luck, and the gods, and other such phrases, after its own fashion.[10] I put forward human notions, and my own, simply as human notions, considered separately—not as settled and regulated by heavenly ordinance, beyond doubt and dispute. Matter of opinion, not matter of faith. What I reason out by my own lights, not what I believe by God's; in a lay manner, not a clerical one, but always a very religious one. As children put forward their essays: to be taught, not to teach. And might one not also say, not without reason, that a rule forbidding anyone but those who make express profession of it to meddle with writing about religion, except very guardedly, would not lack some semblance of usefulness and justice—and that perhaps I too should keep quiet about it?

1.56.17 I have been told that even those who are not of our persuasion forbid among themselves the use of God's name in ordinary talk. They do not want it used as a kind of interjection or exclamation, nor to swear by, nor in comparisons; and in that I find they are right. In whatever way we call God into our dealings and company, it must be done seriously and religiously.

1.56.18 There is, I believe, a discussion in Xenophon in which he shows that we ought to pray to God more rarely, since it is not easy for us to bring our soul so often into that ordered, reformed and devout condition in which it must be to do so; otherwise our prayers are not only vain and useless, but vicious. "Forgive us,"

10 *Verbis indisciplinatis* is from Saint Augustine, City of God X.

we say, "as we forgive those who have offended us." What do we mean by that, if not that we offer him our soul free of vengeance and rancor? And yet we call on God and his help in the conspiracy of our misdeeds, and invite him to injustice.

> *Things you could not ask of the gods unless you took them aside.*
>
> The miser prays to him for the vain and superfluous preservation of his treasures; the ambitious man for his victories and the steering of his fortune. The thief enlists him to help get past the risks and difficulties that stand in the way of his wicked schemes, or thanks him for the ease with which he managed to cut a passerby's throat. At the foot of the house they are about to scale or blow open with a petard, they say their prayers, their intention and hope full of cruelty, lust and greed. *This very prayer with which you try to win Jupiter's ear,*
>
> *Come, say it to Staius. "O Jupiter, O good," he would cry, "Jupiter!" And would Jupiter himself not cry out?*[11]

1.56.19 Queen Marguerite of Navarre tells of a young prince—and though she does not name him, his greatness has made him recognizable enough—who, going to a lovers' rendezvous to sleep with the wife of a Paris lawyer, had a way that led him through a church; and he never passed through that holy place, going to or coming back from his enterprise, without saying his prayers and orisons. I leave you to judge, with his soul full of that fine thought, what he was using divine favor for. Yet she cites this as evidence of singular devotion. But this is not the only proof one could give that women are hardly suited to handling matters of theology.[12]

1.56.20 A true prayer, a religious reconciliation of ourselves with God, cannot occur in a soul that is impure and subject, at that very moment, to the dominion of Satan. The man who calls God to his aid while he is in the course of vice is like a cutpurse who would call the law to his aid, or like those who bring forward

11 Both quotations are from Persius, Satires II.

12 Marguerite of Navarre (1492–1549), in the Heptameron, tale 25; the prince is usually taken to be her brother, Francis I.

God's name to witness a lie. *In a silent whisper we frame / Our wicked vows.* There are few men who would dare to bring into the open the secret requests they make to God.[13]

> *It is not for everyone to banish murmurs and low whispers*
> *From the temples, and to live with vows spoken aloud.* That is why the Pythagoreans wanted prayers to be public and heard by all, so that no one would ask God for anything indecent and unjust, like this man: *When he has clearly said "Apollo!"*
> *He moves his lips, afraid of being heard: "Fair Laverna,*
> *Grant me to deceive, grant me to seem just and holy;*
> *Cast night over my sins and a cloud over my frauds."*[14]

1.56.21 The gods punished Oedipus's iniquitous wishes grievously by granting them. He had prayed that his children should settle the succession to his state between themselves by arms, and he was wretched enough to see himself taken at his word. We should not ask that all things follow our will, but that they follow wisdom.

1.56.22 It seems, in truth, that we use our prayers like a jargon, and like those who employ holy and divine words for sorcery and magical effects; and that we reckon their effect depends on the texture, or sound, or sequence of the words, or on our bearing. For with our soul full of concupiscence, untouched by repentance or by any fresh reconciliation with God, we go and present him with the words that memory lends our tongue, and hope to get from them an expiation of our faults. Nothing is so easy, so gentle and so favorable as the divine law. It calls us to itself, sinful and detestable as we are; it holds out its arms to us and takes us into its bosom, however vile, foul and muddy we may be now and may be in time to come. But in return we must at least look on it kindly; we must at least receive this pardon with thanksgiving; and, at least for the moment when we address ourselves to it, have a soul sorry for its faults and hostile

13 Lucan, Pharsalia V.
14 Persius, Satires II, then Horace, Epistles I.16; Laverna was the Roman goddess of thieves.

to the passions that drove us to offend it. Neither the gods nor good men, says Plato, accept the gift of a wicked man.

If a guiltless hand has touched the altar,
No costly victim will soothe
The offended Penates better
Than holy meal and crackling salt.[15]

15 Horace, Odes III.23; the Penates were the Roman household gods.

I.57 Of Age

De l'Aage

Few people die of old age, so Montaigne thinks we should start careers early; the mind reaches its prime by about twenty.

1.57.1 I cannot accept the way we fix the length of our life. I see that the wise shorten it considerably compared with common opinion. "What!" said the younger Cato to those who wanted to stop him from killing himself, "am I now of an age where I can be reproached for leaving life too early?" Yet he was only forty-eight. He considered that age quite ripe and well advanced, seeing how few men reach it. And those who comfort themselves with the thought that some course or other, which they call natural, promises them a few more years could do so if they had a privilege exempting them from the great number of accidents to which each of us is exposed by a natural subjection, and which can interrupt the course they promise themselves. What a fantasy it is to expect to die of the failing of strength that extreme old age brings, and to set that as the goal of our lifespan, when it is the rarest kind of death of all and the least common! We call it the only natural one, as if it were against nature to see a man break his neck in a fall, drown in a shipwreck, or be caught by the plague or a pleurisy—and as if our ordinary condition did not expose us to all these mishaps. Let us not flatter ourselves with these fine words. We ought perhaps rather to call natural what is general, common and universal.

1.57.2 To die of old age is a rare, singular and extraordinary death, and so much less natural than the others. It is the last and extreme way of dying; the further it is from us, the less it is to be

hoped for. It is indeed the boundary beyond which we shall not go, which the law of Nature has prescribed so that it shall not be overstepped; but it is a rare privilege of hers to make us last until then. It is an exemption she grants by special favor to one man alone in the space of two or three centuries, relieving him of the obstacles and difficulties she has thrown in between along this long course. So my opinion is that we should consider the age we have reached as an age few people reach. Since in the ordinary course men do not get that far, it is a sign that we are well along. And since we have passed the usual limits, which are the true measure of our life, we should not hope to go much further. Having escaped so many occasions of death, at which we see everyone stumble, we should recognize that an extraordinary fortune like the one that keeps us going, outside the common practice, is not likely to last us much longer.

1.57.3 It is a fault of the laws themselves to have this false notion. They do not want a man to be capable of managing his property until he is twenty-five, and he will hardly keep the management of his life until then. Augustus cut five years off the old Roman ordinances and declared that it was enough for those taking up judicial office to be thirty. Servius Tullius exempted knights who had passed forty-seven from the toils of war; Augustus brought it down to forty-five. To send men into retirement before fifty-five or sixty does not seem to me very reasonable.[1] I would be in favor of extending our vocation and employment as far as possible, for the public good; but I find the fault lies on the other side, in not putting us to work soon enough. He himself had been judge of the whole world at nineteen, and he wants a man to be thirty before he can rule on where to put a gutter.

1.57.4 As for me, I consider that at twenty our souls are fully unfolded, as they are meant to be, and that they promise all they ever can. Never has a soul that did not give a very evident pledge of its strength at that age given proof of it afterward. Natural qualities and virtues show within that term, or never,

1 Servius Tullius, the sixth king of Rome according to tradition.

whatever vigor and beauty they have. *If the thorn does not prick when it is born, / It will hardly ever prick,* they say in Dauphiné.

1.57.5 Of all the fine human actions that have come to my knowledge, of whatever kind, I think I would find that the greater number, in ancient times and in our own, were done before the age of thirty rather than after. Yes, and often in the lives of the very same men. May I not say so with complete assurance of those of Hannibal and of Scipio, his great adversary? They lived the better half of their lives on the glory won in their youth: great men afterward compared with all others, but not at all compared with themselves. As for me, I hold it certain that since that age both my mind and my body have diminished more than they have grown, and gone backward more than forward.

> It is possible that for those who use their time well, knowledge and experience grow with life; but liveliness, quickness, firmness and other qualities much more our own, more important and essential, wither and languish. *When the body has been shaken by the hard blows of time*
> *And the limbs have given way, their strength blunted,*
> *The mind limps, and tongue and wits wander.*[2]

1.57.6 Sometimes it is the body that surrenders first to old age; sometimes too it is the mind. I have seen plenty of people whose brains were enfeebled before their stomach and legs. And since it is an ailment the sufferer hardly feels, and whose signs are obscure, it is all the more dangerous. This time my complaint against the laws is not that they leave us at work too late, but that they set us to work too late. It seems to me that, considering the frailty of our life and how many ordinary and natural reefs it is exposed to, we should not give so large a share of it to infancy, idleness and apprenticeship.

2 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things III.

II.1 Of the Inconstancy of Our Actions

De l'inconstance de nos actions
Human conduct contradicts itself so constantly that Montaigne doubts anyone can be judged by a single action—or understood as a single self.

2.1.1 Those who make it their business to scrutinize human actions are never so baffled as when they try to piece them together and show them in a single light; for they commonly contradict one another so strangely that it seems impossible they came out of the same shop. The younger Marius is now a son of Mars, now a son of Venus. Pope Boniface VIII, they say, entered his office like a fox, conducted himself in it like a lion, and died like a dog.[1] And who would believe that it was Nero, that very image of cruelty, who, when the sentence of a condemned criminal was presented to him for signature in the usual form, replied, "Would to God I had never learned to write!"—so wrung was his heart at condemning a man to death? Everything is so full of such examples—indeed each of us can supply himself with so many—that I find it strange to see men of understanding sometimes taking pains to match up these pieces, since irresolution seems to me the most common and evident vice of our nature. Witness that famous line of Publius the farce writer: *It is a bad plan that cannot be changed.*[2]

2.1.2 There is some sense in judging a man by the most ordinary features of his life; but given the natural instability of our

1 Gaius Marius the Younger (d. 82 BC); Boniface VIII was pope AD 1294–1303.
2 Publilius Syrus, Roman writer of mimes in the first century BC, whose maxims were collected.

ways and opinions, it has often seemed to me that even good authors are wrong to insist on fashioning a constant and solid fabric out of us. They pick a general character and, following that image, go about arranging and interpreting all of a person's actions; and if they cannot twist them enough, they put them down to dissimulation. Augustus has escaped them. For in that man there is so evident, sudden and continual a variety of actions throughout the whole course of his life that even the boldest judges have had to let him go, whole and undecided.

2.1.3 Nothing is harder for me to believe of men than constancy, and nothing easier than inconstancy. Whoever judged them in detail and distinctly, piece by piece, would more often hit on the truth. In all antiquity it is hard to pick out a dozen men who set their lives to a definite and steady course, which is the principal aim of wisdom. For to sum it up in a word, says an ancient, and to embrace all the rules of our life in one, it is to will and not to will always the same thing. "I would not deign," he says, "to add 'provided the will is just'; for if it is not just, it cannot always be one."[3] Indeed, I once learned that vice is nothing but disorder and lack of measure, and consequently it is impossible to attach constancy to it. It is a saying of Demosthenes, they say, that the beginning of all virtue is consultation and deliberation, and its end and perfection constancy. If we set out on a definite path by reasoning, we would choose the finest; but no one has thought of it. *What he sought he spurns; he seeks again what he just left; / He seethes, and his whole life is at odds with itself.*[4]

2.1.4 Our ordinary way is to follow the inclinations of our appetite, left and right, uphill and down, as the wind of circumstance carries us. We think about what we want only at the moment we want it, and we change like that animal which takes the color of the place where it is laid. What we resolved just now we soon change, and soon again we retrace our steps: it is nothing but wavering and inconstancy. *We are led, like a wooden pup-*

3 Seneca, Letters 20.
4 Horace, Epistles I.1.

pet, by strings that others pull. We do not go; we are carried along, like things that float, now gently, now violently, as the water is angry or calm.[5]

> *Do we not see*
> *That each man does not know what he wants, and is always seeking,*
> *Changing place, as if he could lay down his burden?* Every day a new notion, and our temperaments shift with the shifts of the weather. *Men's minds are like the fruitful light*
> *With which father Jupiter himself has lit the earth.*[6]

2.1.5 We float between different opinions: we will nothing freely, nothing absolutely, nothing constantly. In anyone who had prescribed and established definite laws and a definite order of government in his head, we would see an evenness of conduct shine out everywhere in his life, an order and an unfailing relation of one thing to another. (Empedocles noticed this inconsistency in the people of Agrigentum: they abandoned themselves to pleasures as if they were to die the next day, and built as if they were never to die.) It would be easy to give an account of such a man. You can see it in the younger Cato: touch one key of him and you have touched them all; he is a harmony of perfectly concordant sounds that cannot belie itself. With us, on the contrary, as many actions, so many separate judgments are needed. The surest thing, in my opinion, would be to relate them to the immediate circumstances, without going into any longer inquiry and without drawing any further conclusion from them.

2.1.6 During the disorders of our poor country, I was told that a girl from very near where I was had thrown herself from a high window to escape being forced by a rascal of a soldier quartered in her house. The fall had not killed her, and to renew her attempt she had tried to cut her throat with a knife, but she had been prevented. Even so, after wounding herself quite badly, she

5 Horace, Satires II.7.
6 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things III; the second quotation is Cicero's Latin version of Homer, Odyssey XVIII.

admitted herself that the soldier had so far pressed her only with requests, entreaties and gifts, but that she had been afraid he would end by using force. And on top of that, the words, the bearing, and that blood bearing witness to her virtue, in the true manner of a second Lucretia.[7] Now I have learned for a fact that before and since she had been a girl not so hard to come to terms with. As the tale says: handsome and honorable as you may be, when you have failed in your pursuit, do not at once conclude that your mistress is of inviolable chastity; it does not follow that the muleteer will not find his moment.

2.1.7 Antigonus, having taken a liking to one of his soldiers for his virtue and valor, ordered his physicians to treat him for a long-standing internal illness that had tormented him for a long time. Noticing after his cure that he went into action much more coolly, he asked him what had changed him so and made him a coward. "You yourself, sire," he replied, "by relieving me of the ills that made me hold my life of no account."[8]

2.1.8 A soldier of Lucullus, having been robbed by the enemy, carried out a fine exploit against them to get his revenge. When he had recouped his loss, Lucullus, who had formed a good opinion of him, wanted to use him in some risky venture, with all the finest exhortations he could think of, *With words that might have put heart even into a coward.* "Use some wretched soldier who has been robbed," he replied—*However rustic he was: "He will go, / He will go where you wish, the man who has lost his purse," he said*—and he flatly refused to go.[9]

2.1.9 We read that Mehmed harshly abused Hasan, the commander of his Janissaries, because he saw his troop broken by the Hungarians and Hasan himself fighting like a coward; and that Hasan, by way of answer, went and hurled himself furiously, alone, just as he was, weapon in hand, into the first body of enemies that came before him, where he was at once swal-

7 Lucretia, the Roman matron who killed herself after being raped by Sextus Tarquinius.

8 The story is in Plutarch.

9 The quotations are from Horace, Epistles II.2, which tells the story.

lowed up. This was perhaps not so much self-justification as a change of heart, nor so much natural prowess as fresh spite.[10] That man you saw so venturesome yesterday, do not find it strange to see him just as cowardly the next day. Anger, or necessity, or company, or wine, or the sound of a trumpet had put fire in his belly; it is not a heart formed in that way by reasoning. These circumstances stiffened it for him; it is no wonder if he has become someone else through other, contrary circumstances. This variation and contradiction that we see in ourselves, so supple, has led some to imagine that we have two souls, and others two powers that accompany us and drive us each in its own way, the one toward good, the other toward evil, since so abrupt a diversity cannot well be reconciled with a single subject.

2.1.10 Not only does the wind of events stir me according to its bent, but besides, I stir and trouble myself by the instability of my stance; and anyone who looks at himself closely will hardly find himself twice in the same state. I give my soul now one face, now another, depending on which side I lay it on. If I speak of myself in different ways, it is because I look at myself in different ways. All the contradictions are found there, in some turn and in some fashion. Bashful, insolent; chaste, lustful; talkative, taciturn; hardworking, soft; ingenious, dull-witted; morose, good-natured; lying, truthful; learned, ignorant; and liberal, and miserly, and prodigal: all this I see in myself to some extent, according to how I turn. And anyone who studies himself really attentively finds in himself, yes, even in his very judgment, this volatility and discord. I have nothing to say about myself entirely, simply and solidly, without confusion and without mixture, or in one word. *I distinguish* is the most universal member of my logic.[11]

2.1.11 Though I am always for speaking well of what is good, and for taking in a good sense whatever can be so taken, still the strangeness of our condition is such that we are often driven to

10 Mehmed II, Ottoman sultan AD 1451–1481.

11 *Distinguo*, the scholastic disputant's formula for drawing a distinction.

do good by vice itself—were it not that doing good is judged by intention alone. So one courageous deed should not lead us to conclude that a man is valiant. A man who was truly valiant would be so always and on every occasion. If it were a habit of virtue and not a sudden sally, it would make a man equally resolute in every circumstance: the same alone as in company, the same in single combat as in a battle. For whatever people say, there is not one kind of valor in the street and another in the field. He would bear an illness in his bed as courageously as a wound in the field, and would fear death no more at home than in an assault. We would not see the same man charge into the breach with brave assurance and afterward torment himself, like a woman, over the loss of a lawsuit or a son. When a man who is cowardly in the face of disgrace is steadfast in poverty; when a man who is soft before the barber's razor is unflinching before the swords of his adversaries, the action is praiseworthy, not the man. Many Greeks, says Cicero, cannot look the enemy in the face, and yet are steadfast in illness; the Cimbrians and Celtiberians quite the reverse. *For nothing can be consistent that does not proceed from a fixed principle.*

2.1.12 There is no valor more extreme of its kind than Alexander's; but it is so only of its kind, and is not full enough everywhere, or universal. Incomparable as it is, it still has its blemishes. That is why we see him so frantically distraught at the slightest suspicions he conceives of plots by his own people against his life, and conducting his investigation with such vehement and indiscriminate injustice, and with a fear that overturns his natural reason. The superstition with which he was so deeply tainted also bears some mark of faint-heartedness. And the excess of his penitence for the murder of Clitus is further evidence of the unevenness of his courage.[12] Our doings are nothing but patchwork, and we want to win honor under false colors. Virtue wants to be pursued only for its own sake; and if we sometimes borrow its mask for some other purpose, it soon snatches it from our face. It is a vivid, strong dye, once the

12 Clitus (Cleitus), Alexander's companion, whom he killed in a drunken quarrel.

soul is steeped in it, and it does not come out without taking the cloth with it. That is why, to judge a man, we must follow his tracks long and carefully. If constancy does not hold there on its own foundation—*a man whose way of life has been considered and planned in advance*—if the variety of events makes him change his pace (I mean his path, for the pace may be quickened or slowed), let him run: that man goes down the wind, as the motto of our Talbot says.[13]

2.1.13 It is no wonder, says an ancient, that chance has so much power over us, since we live by chance. A man who has not directed his life as a whole toward a definite end cannot possibly arrange his particular actions. A man who does not have a shape of the whole in his head cannot possibly put the pieces in order. What use is a supply of colors to someone who does not know what he is to paint? No one makes a definite plan for his life; we deliberate about it only piecemeal. The archer must first know what he is aiming at, and then adjust his hand, his bow, the string, the arrow and his movements to it. Our counsels go astray because they have no direction and no aim.[14] No wind serves the man who has no port in view. I do not agree with the judgment made in Sophocles' favor, declaring him competent to manage his household affairs, against his son's accusation, on the strength of having seen one of his tragedies. Nor do I find the inference of the Parians, sent to reform the Milesians, sufficient for the conclusion they drew from it. Touring the island, they noted the best-cultivated lands and the best-run country houses. Having recorded the names of their owners, they assembled the citizens in the town and named those owners as the new governors and magistrates, judging that men careful of their private affairs would be careful of public ones.[15]

2.1.14 We are all made of scraps, and of so shapeless and varied a texture that every piece, every moment, plays its own game.

13 The Latin is from Cicero, Paradoxes of the Stoics V. John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury (d. 1453), was the English commander in Guyenne.

14 Seneca, Letters 71.

15 Accused by his son of senility, Sophocles is said to have read the court his Oedipus at Colonus; the Parians' story is in Herodotus V.

And there is as much difference between us and ourselves as between us and others. *Consider it a great thing to play the part of one single man.* Ambition can teach men valor, and temperance, and liberality, and even justice. Greed can plant in the heart of a shop boy, brought up in the shade and in idleness, the confidence to cast himself so far from his home, at the mercy of the waves and of angry Neptune, in a frail boat; and it also teaches discretion and prudence. Venus herself supplies resolution and boldness to young people still under discipline and the rod, and arms the tender hearts of maidens in their mothers' laps: *With her as guide, the girl, stealing past her sleeping guards, / Comes alone in the dark to the young man.* Since all this is so, it is not the act of a settled understanding to judge us simply by our outward actions. We must probe right into the inside and see by what springs the motion is given.[16] But since this is a hazardous and lofty undertaking, I would wish fewer people meddled with it.

16 Seneca, Letters 120; the verse is from Tibullus, Elegies II.1.

II.2 Of Drunkenness

De l'yurongnerie
Montaigne denies that all vices are equal, finds drunkenness gross but less malicious than most, and weighs the case for drink.

2.2.1 The world is nothing but variety and dissimilarity. Vices are all alike in that they are all vices, and perhaps that is how the Stoics understand it; but though they are equally vices, they are not equal vices. That the man who has overstepped the limits by a hundred paces, *Beyond and short of which right cannot stand,* is in no worse condition than the one who is only ten paces past them is not believable; nor that sacrilege is no worse than stealing a cabbage from our garden: *Nor will reason prove that the sin is the same and as great*
For one who breaks off tender cabbages in another man's garden
And for one who steals by night the sacred objects of the gods.[1]

2.2.2 There is as much diversity in this as in anything else. Confusing the order and measure of sins is dangerous. Murderers, traitors and tyrants gain too much by it: it is not right that their conscience should be relieved because some other man is idle, or lascivious, or less assiduous in devotion. Each man bears down on his fellow's sin and makes light of his own. Even our teachers often rank them badly, to my mind. Socrates said that the chief office of wisdom was to distinguish good things from bad. We others, in whom even the best is always tainted with

1 Horace, Satires I.1 and I.3.

vice, ought to say the same of the science of distinguishing vices; without it, and an exact one, the virtuous and the wicked remain mixed up and unrecognized.

2.2.3 Now drunkenness, among others, seems to me a gross and brutish vice. The mind has more share in the others; and there are vices that have something noble about them, if one may put it so. There are some in which knowledge plays a part, and diligence, valor, prudence, skill and cunning; this one is wholly bodily and earthly. And so the grossest nation of all those that exist today is the only one that holds it in esteem. Other vices impair the understanding; this one overturns it, and stuns the body. *When the force of wine has penetrated,*
Heaviness of the limbs follows; the legs stagger
And are hampered, the tongue grows slow, the mind is sodden,
The eyes swim; shouting, hiccups and quarrels grow.[2]

2.2.4 The worst state of man is when he loses knowledge and control of himself. Among other things, it is said that, just as boiling must in a vat pushes up everything at the bottom, so wine makes the most intimate secrets spill out of those who have taken it beyond measure. *You lay bare the cares of the wise*
And their secret counsel
Through playful Lyaeus. Josephus relates that he wormed the secrets out of a certain ambassador whom the enemy had sent him, by making him drink deep.[3]

Yet Augustus, having confided his most private affairs to Lucius Piso, the conqueror of Thrace, was never let down; nor was Tiberius by Cossus, onto whom he unloaded all his plans—though we know that both were so given to wine that they often had to be carried back from the Senate, the pair of them drunk: *His veins swollen, as usual, with yesterday's wine.* And the plan to kill Caesar was entrusted to Cimber as faithfully as to Cassius, a

2 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things III.
3 Horace, Odes III.21, addressed to a wine jar; Lyaeus is a name of Bacchus.

water drinker, though Cimber often got drunk; hence his witty reply: "Me, bear a tyrant—I who cannot bear my wine!" We see our Germans, drowned in wine, still remember their quarters, the password and their rank.[4] *Nor is victory easy over men who are soaked, / Stammering and staggering with wine.*[5]

2.2.5 I would not have believed in a drunkenness so deep, so stifled and buried, had I not read this in the histories. Attalus, wishing to do a signal indignity to that Pausanias who later, over this very matter, killed Philip, King of Macedon (a king whose fine qualities bore witness to the upbringing he had received in the house and company of Epaminondas), invited him to supper. He made him drink so much that he was able to hand over his beauty, without his feeling a thing, like the body of a hedgerow prostitute, to the muleteers and a crowd of the lowly servants of his household.[6] And there is what I was told by a lady whom I honor and esteem highly. Near Bordeaux, toward Castres, where her house is, a village woman, a widow of chaste reputation, feeling the first suspicions of pregnancy, told her neighbors that she would think she was with child if she had a husband. But as the grounds for this suspicion grew from day to day, and finally to the point of being evident, she went so far as to have it announced from the pulpit of her church that whoever had been party to this deed, if he owned up to it, she promised to forgive him, and, if he was willing, to marry him.[7] One of her young farmhands, emboldened by this proclamation, declared that one feast day, when she had taken her wine very liberally, he had found her asleep by her hearth, so deeply and in so indecent a posture that he was able to make use of her without waking her. They are still living together as man and wife.

4 The verse is from Virgil, Eclogues VI, describing Silenus. Lucius Tillius Cimber was one of Caesar's assassins in 44 BC.

5 Juvenal, Satires XV.

6 Philip II of Macedon was assassinated by Pausanias in 336 BC; the story of Attalus' outrage is told by Diodorus Siculus.

2.2.6 It is certain that antiquity did not much decry this vice. The writings even of several philosophers speak of it very mildly; and even among the Stoics there are some who advise allowing oneself now and then to drink deep and get drunk, to relax the soul. *In this contest of virtues too, they say, the great*

Socrates once won the palm. That censor and corrector of others, Cato, was reproached for drinking hard. *It is told that even old Cato's virtue*

Was often warmed with wine. Cyrus, that much-renowned king, among his other claims to praise, cites as a reason for ranking himself above his brother Artaxerxes that he could hold his drink far better than he. And in the best-ordered and best-governed nations this trial of drinking deep was very much in use.[8]

I have heard Sylvius, an excellent Paris physician, say that to keep the powers of our stomach from growing lazy, it is good once a month to rouse them by this excess, and to prod them to keep them from going numb. And it is written that the Persians deliberated on their chief affairs after wine.[9]

2.2.7 My taste and constitution are more hostile to this vice than my reasoning is. For besides the fact that I readily make my beliefs captive to the authority of ancient opinions, I do indeed find it a slack and stupid vice, but less malicious and harmful than the others, which nearly all strike more directly at public society. And if we cannot give ourselves pleasure without its costing us something, as they hold, I find that this vice costs our conscience less than the others; besides which it takes no trouble to prepare and is not hard to find—a consideration not to be despised. A man advanced in rank and in age, among three

7 Castres-Gironde, a village south of Bordeaux, not the town of Castres in Languedoc.

8 The verses are from Maximianus, Elegies (once attributed to Cornelius Gallus), and Horace, Odes III.21. Cyrus is Cyrus the Younger, who rebelled against his brother Artaxerxes II (Plutarch, Artaxerxes).

9 Jacques Dubois, known as Sylvius (1478–1555), physician and anatomist who taught in Paris.

principal comforts that he told me were left to him in life, counted this one; and where would one look for them more rightly than among the natural ones? But he went about it the wrong way. Fastidiousness is to be avoided here, and the careful choosing of wine. If you base your pleasure on drinking it choice, you condemn yourself to the pain of drinking it otherwise. You need a slacker and freer taste. To be a good drinker, you must not have so tender a palate. The Germans drink almost any wine with equal pleasure. Their aim is to swallow it rather than to taste it. They get a far better bargain. Their pleasure is much more plentiful and more ready to hand.

2.2.8 Secondly, to drink in the French fashion, at two meals and in moderation, is to restrict the favors of this god too much. More time and constancy are needed. The ancients spent whole nights at this exercise, and often tacked the days on to them. And so one must set one's ordinary allowance larger and steadier. I have seen a great lord of my time, a man of lofty enterprises and famous successes, who without effort, and in the course of his everyday meals, drank hardly less than five lots of wine; and on rising from table showed himself only too wise and shrewd, at the expense of our interests. The pleasure we want to reckon on in the course of our life should take up more room in it.[10] We ought, like shop boys and laborers, to refuse no occasion to drink, and always to have this desire in our heads. It seems that every day we cut down on the practice of it, and that in our houses, as I saw in my childhood, breakfasts, afternoon snacks and light suppers were more frequent and usual than now. Could it be that in some respect we are moving toward improvement? Truly not. But it may be that we have thrown ourselves much more into lechery than our fathers did. These are two occupations that hinder each other in their vigor. Lechery has weakened our stomach on the one hand; and on the other, sobriety serves to make us more dapper and more the ladies' man for the exercise of love.

10 The lot was a liquid measure of the Bordeaux region, roughly two liters.

MY FATHER

His father's tales of a chaste age, his bearing, his agility and his late marriage.

2.2.9 It is a marvel, the accounts I have heard my father give of the chastity of his age. He was the one to speak of it, being very well suited, both by skill and by nature, to the company of ladies. He spoke little and well, and mixed into his speech some ornament from books in the vernacular, especially Spanish ones; and among the Spanish, the one they call Marcus Aurelius was a constant companion of his. His bearing had a gentle gravity, humble and very modest. Singular care for the propriety and decency of his person and his clothes, whether on foot or on horseback. Prodigious faithfulness to his word; and a conscience and religion in general leaning rather toward superstition than toward the other extreme.[11] As for his person: a man of small stature, full of vigor, with an upright, well-proportioned build, a pleasant face tending to the dark; adroit and accomplished in all noble exercises. I have still seen canes filled with lead, with which, they say, he exercised his arms to prepare for throwing the bar or the stone, or for fencing; and shoes with leaded soles, to make himself lighter for running and jumping. Of his leaping he has left the memory of little miracles. I have seen him past sixty make a mockery of our nimbleness: throw himself onto a horse in his furred gown, go around the table on his thumb, and hardly ever go up to his room without bounding three or four steps at a time. On my subject, he said that in a whole province there was hardly one woman of quality who had a bad name. He would tell of strange intimacies, notably his own, with respectable women, without any suspicion whatever. And of himself he solemnly swore that he had come a virgin to his marriage—and this after having long taken part in the wars beyond the mountains, of which he left us a journal in his own

11 The Marcus Aurelius is Antonio de Guevara's popular moralizing romance, the Libro áureo de Marco Aurelio (1528).

hand, following point by point what happened there, both in public matters and in his private ones. And so he married well on in age, in the year 1528, which was his thirty-third, on his way home from Italy. Let us return to our bottles.

2.2.10 The discomforts of old age, which need some support and refreshment, might with reason breed in me a desire for this faculty; for it is almost the last pleasure that the course of the years steals from us. Natural heat, say the boon companions, takes hold first in the feet: that belongs to childhood. From there it climbs to the middle region, where it settles for a long time and produces there, in my opinion, the only true pleasures of bodily life. The other pleasures are asleep by comparison. Toward the end, like a vapor that keeps rising and evaporating, it reaches the throat, where it makes its last halt. Yet I cannot understand how people come to prolong the pleasure of drinking beyond thirst, and to forge in their imagination an artificial appetite, against nature. My stomach would not go that far: it has trouble enough getting through what it takes for its needs. My constitution is to care for drink only as a sequel to eating; and for this reason I always make the last draught the biggest. And because in old age we bring a palate clogged with phlegm, or altered by some other bad condition, wine seems better to us in proportion as we have opened and washed our pores. At least it hardly ever happens that I get the taste of it properly the first time. Anacharsis was astonished that the Greeks drank from bigger cups at the end of a meal than at the beginning. It was, I think, for the same reason that the Germans do it, who only then begin their contest of drinking deep.

2.2.11 Plato forbids children to drink wine before eighteen, and to get drunk before forty. But those who have passed forty he excuses for taking pleasure in it and for mixing rather liberally into their banquets the influence of Dionysus—that good god who gives back gaiety to men and youth to the old, who softens and mollifies the passions of the soul as iron is softened by fire. And in his Laws he finds such drinking gatherings useful (provided there is a leader of the company to restrain and regu-

late them): drunkenness being a good and sure test of each man's nature, and at the same time apt to give elderly people the courage to make merry in dancing and music—useful things, which they dare not undertake when sober.[12] That wine is capable of providing temperance for the soul and health for the body. However, these restrictions, partly borrowed from the Carthaginians, please him: that it should be avoided on military expeditions; that every magistrate and every judge should abstain from it when about to carry out his office and to deliberate on public affairs; that the day, a time owed to other occupations, should not be given to it, nor the night set aside for making children. They say that the philosopher Stilpo, weighed down by old age, deliberately hastened his end by drinking unmixed wine. The same cause, though not by his own design, also stifled the strength of the philosopher Arcesilaus, already worn down by age.[13]

WISDOM AND FRENZY

Even the wise are shaken by wine and illness; great deeds come from a soul beside itself.

2.2.12 But it is an old and amusing question whether the soul of the wise man would yield to the strength of wine: *If it brings force to bear on fortified wisdom.* How far into vanity does this good opinion we have of ourselves push us? The best-ordered and most perfect soul in the world has only too much to do to stay on its feet and keep from being thrown to the ground by its own weakness. Out of a thousand there is not one that is upright and settled for a single instant of its life; and it could be doubted whether, in its natural condition, it can ever be so. But to join constancy to that is its ultimate perfection—I mean if nothing were to jolt it, which a thousand accidents can do. Lucretius, that great poet, may philosophize and brace himself all he likes: there he is, driven mad by a love potion. Do they think an apo-

12 Plato, Laws, Books I–II.
13 Both stories come from Diogenes Laertius.

plexy would not stun Socrates as well as a porter? Some have forgotten even their own name through the force of an illness, and a slight wound has overturned the judgment of others. Let him be as wise as he likes, in the end he is a man: what is there more frail, more wretched, more of a nothing? Wisdom does not overpower our natural conditions.

> *And so we see sweat and pallor break out over the whole*
> *Body, the tongue falter and the voice fail,*
> *The eyes grow dim, the ears ring, the limbs give way,*
> *And in short men collapse, from terror of the mind.* He must blink at the blow that threatens him; he must shudder, set at the edge of a precipice, like a child. Nature has wished to reserve for herself these slight marks of her authority, impregnable to our reason and to Stoic virtue, to teach him his mortality and our foolishness. He turns pale with fear, he blushes with shame, he groans with colic—if not in a desperate and piercing voice, at least in a broken and hoarse one.[14]

Let him think nothing human foreign to him. The poets, who invent everything as they please, dare not relieve their heroes even of tears: *So he speaks, weeping, and gives the fleet free rein.* Let it suffice him to bridle and moderate his inclinations; for to do away with them is not in his power. Even our Plutarch, so perfect and excellent a judge of human actions, seeing Brutus and Torquatus kill their children, came to doubt whether virtue could reach that far, and whether these men had not rather been driven by some other passion. All actions beyond the ordinary bounds are open to sinister interpretation, since our taste no more reaches what is above it than what is below it.[15]

2.2.13 Let us leave aside that other sect, which makes an express profession of haughtiness. But when, in the very sect considered the softest, we hear these boasts of Metrodorus: *I have forestalled you, Fortune, and caught you; I have blocked all your approaches, so*

14 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things III.

15 Adapted from Terence, The Self-Tormentor; the verse is Virgil, Aeneid VI. Lucius Junius Brutus and Titus Manlius Torquatus had their own sons put to death.

that you cannot reach me. When Anaxarchus, laid in a stone trough by order of Nicocreon, tyrant of Cyprus, and battered with blows of iron mallets, keeps on saying: "Strike, smash: this is not Anaxarchus; it is his casing you are pounding." When we hear our martyrs cry to the tyrant in the midst of the flames: "That side is roasted enough; chop it, eat it, it is cooked; start on the other."[16] When we hear in Josephus of that child, all torn by biting pincers and pierced by the awls of Antiochus, still defying him and crying in a firm and assured voice: "Tyrant, you are wasting your time; here I am, still at my ease. Where is that pain, where are those torments you threatened me with? Is this all you know? My constancy gives you more trouble than I feel from your cruelty. O cowardly wretch, you are giving in, and I am growing stronger. Make me complain, make me bend, make me surrender if you can. Put heart into your henchmen and your executioners: look, they have lost heart, they can do no more. Arm them, set them on."[17] Certainly we must confess that in those souls there is some derangement, and some frenzy, however holy it may be.

2.2.14 When we come to these Stoic flights—"I would rather be mad than given to pleasure," a saying of Antisthenes: *Better to be mad than to feel pleasure*; when Sextius tells us that he would rather be run through by pain than by pleasure; when Epicurus undertakes to have himself coddled by gout, and, refusing rest and health, light-heartedly defies ills, and, scorning lesser pains and disdaining to wrestle and fight with them, calls for and longs for strong, piercing ones worthy of him: *And among the timid flocks he prays that a foaming boar / Be granted him, or that a tawny lion come down from the mountain*—who does not judge that these are the thrusts of a courage that has leapt out of its lair?[18]

2.2.15 Our soul could not reach so high from its own seat: it must leave it and rise, and, taking the bit between its teeth,

16 "That other sect" is the Stoics, the "softest" the Epicureans; Metrodorus of Lampsacus, Epicurus' disciple, is quoted in Cicero, Tusculan Disputations V.
17 From the account of the Maccabean martyrs under Antiochus IV in the book then attributed to Josephus (4 Maccabees).

carry off and sweep away its man so far that afterward he is himself astonished at what he has done. So, in feats of war, the heat of battle often drives brave soldiers to cross such hazardous passes that, once they come back to themselves, they are the first to freeze with astonishment at it. So too poets are often seized with admiration for their own works, and no longer recognize the track along which they ran so fine a course. This is what is also called, in them, ardor and mania. And as Plato says that a sober-minded man knocks in vain at the door of poetry, so Aristotle says that no excellent soul is free from an admixture of folly. And he is right to call folly any leap, however praiseworthy, that surpasses our own judgment and reasoning, inasmuch as wisdom is a regulated management of our soul, which it conducts with measure and proportion, and for which it answers. Plato argues thus: that the faculty of prophesying is above us; that we must be outside ourselves when we exercise it; our prudence must be clouded either by sleep or by some illness, or carried off from its place by a heavenly rapture.[19]

18 Virgil, Aeneid IV. Quintus Sextius was a Roman philosopher of the 1st century BC, much admired by Seneca.

19 Plato, Phaedrus; the saying ascribed to Aristotle comes through Seneca, On Tranquillity of Mind.

II.3 A Custom of the Island of Cea

Coustume de l'Isle de Cea
Through a string of ancient examples, Montaigne weighs the arguments for and against suicide and asks what circumstances might excuse it.

2.3.1 IF to philosophize is to doubt, as they say, then all the more must trifling and indulging fancies, as I do, be doubting; for it is for apprentices to inquire and debate, and for the master in the chair to resolve. My master in the chair is the authority of the divine will, which governs us beyond dispute and holds its rank above these vain human contentions.

2.3.2 When Philip had entered the Peloponnese in arms, someone was saying to Damidas that the Lacedaemonians would have much to suffer if they did not get back into his good graces. "Why, coward," he replied, "what can they suffer who do not fear death?" Someone also asked Agis how a man could live free. "By despising death," he said. These propositions, and a thousand like them that one comes across on this subject, clearly ring of something beyond waiting patiently for death when it comes to us; for there are in life many accidents worse to endure than death itself. Witness that Lacedaemonian boy, captured by Antigonus and sold as a slave, who, being pressed by his master to take on some menial service, said: "You will see whom you have bought; it would be a shame for me to serve, with freedom so close at hand"; and so saying, he threw himself from the top of the house. When Antipater was harshly threatening the Lacedaemonians to bring them round to a certain demand of his, they replied: "If you threaten us with worse than

death, we shall die all the more willingly." And to Philip, who had written to them that he would thwart all their undertakings: "What? Will you also prevent us from dying?"

2.3.3 This is what is meant by the saying that the wise man lives as long as he ought, not as long as he can; and that the most favorable gift Nature has given us, and the one that takes away all grounds for complaining of our condition, is to have left us the key to the fields. She has ordained only one entrance into life, and a hundred thousand exits. We may lack land to live on, but land to die in we cannot lack, as Boiocalus answered the Romans. Why do you complain of this world? It does not hold you: if you live in pain, your cowardice is the cause. To die, nothing is needed but the will. Death is everywhere: God has provided well for that.[1] / Anyone can take a man's life from him, / But no one his death: a thousand ways lie open to it.

2.3.4 And it is not the remedy for one illness only: death is the remedy for all ills. It is a very safe harbor, never to be feared and often to be sought. It all comes to the same, whether a man gives himself his end or suffers it, whether he runs ahead of his day or waits for it. Wherever it comes from, it is always his own. Wherever the thread breaks, that is all of it: it is the end of the spool. The most voluntary death is the finest. Life depends on the will of others; death on our own. In nothing should we accommodate ourselves to our own temperament so much as in that. Reputation has no bearing on such an undertaking; it is folly to pay it any regard. Living is slavery if the freedom to die is lacking. The common course of healing is carried on at the expense of life: they cut into us, they cauterize us, they lop off our limbs, they withdraw our food and our blood; one step further, and there we are, cured altogether. Why is the vein in our throat not as much at our command as the median vein? For the strongest diseases, the strongest remedies. Servius the grammarian, having gout, found no better counsel than to apply poison to kill his legs: let them be gouty as they pleased, so long

1 Seneca, The Phoenician Women. Boiocalus was a chief of the Ampsivarii, a Germanic people (Tacitus, Annals XIII).

as they felt nothing.[2] God gives us leave enough when he puts us in such a state that living is worse for us than dying. It is weakness to give way to ills, but folly to nourish them. The Stoics say that it is living in accordance with Nature for the wise man to depart from life, even when he is in full happiness, if he does it at the right moment; and for the fool to hold on to his life, even if he is wretched, provided he is in possession of the greater part of the things they say are according to Nature. Just as I do not break the laws made against thieves when I carry off my own property and cut my own purse, nor those against arsonists when I burn my own wood, so I am not answerable to the laws made against murderers for having taken my own life. Hegesias said that as the condition of life, so the condition of death should depend on our choice. And Diogenes, meeting the philosopher Speusippus, who was afflicted with a long dropsy and was having himself carried in a litter, was hailed by him: "Good health, Diogenes!" "None to you," he replied, "who put up with living in such a state." And indeed, some time later Speusippus had himself put to death, worn down by so painful a condition of life.

2 The median vein of the arm, the usual site for bloodletting.

THE CASE AGAINST SUICIDE

Many hold that we may not leave our post without God's leave, and that enduring is braver.

2.3.5 But this does not go unchallenged. For many hold that we cannot abandon this garrison of the world without the express command of him who placed us in it; and that it is for God, who sent us here not for ourselves alone but for his glory and the service of others, to give us leave when it pleases him, not for us to take it; that we are not born for ourselves, but also for our country. The laws call us to account for ourselves, in their own interest, and have an action for homicide against us. Otherwise, as deserters from our post, we are punished in the other world: *Next, those sad ones hold the nearest places who, guiltless,*

Brought death on themselves by their own hand, and, hating the light,

Flung away their lives.[3]

3 Virgil, Aeneid VI.

2.3.6 There is far more constancy in wearing out the chain that holds us than in breaking it, and more proof of firmness in Regulus than in Cato. It is indiscretion and impatience that hasten our steps. No accidents make living virtue turn its back: it seeks out ills and pain as its nourishment. The threats of tyrants, tortures and executioners rouse it and bring it to life. *Like the holm oak lopped by hard axes*
On Algidus, rich in dark foliage,
Through losses, through slaughter, from the very steel
It draws strength and spirit. And as the other says: *Virtue, father, is not, as you think,*
To fear life, but to stand up against great ills,
And not to turn one's back and retreat.[4]

/ In adversity it is easy to despise death; / He acts more bravely who can bear to be wretched.[5]

2.3.7 It is the part of cowardice, not of virtue, to go and crouch in a hole, under a massive tomb, to avoid the blows of Fortune. Virtue does not break off its road and its course, whatever storm may blow: *Should the world break and fall upon him,*
The ruins will strike him unafraid. Most commonly, it is flight from other troubles that drives us to this one. Indeed, sometimes flight from death makes us run to it: *Is it not madness, I ask, to die so as not to die?* Like those who for fear of the precipice throw themselves over it. The very fear of evil to come has sent many
Into the gravest dangers: the bravest man is he
Who is ready to suffer what is to be feared, if it presses close,
And yet can put it off.[6]

4 Horace, Odes IV.4, and Seneca, The Phoenician Women. Regulus went back to Carthage to be tortured to death rather than break his word.
5 Martial, Epigrams XI.
6 Horace, Odes III.3; Martial, Epigrams II; Lucan, Pharsalia VII.

/ So far, through fear of death, does hatred of life
And of seeing the light seize human beings,
That with grieving heart they decree their own death,
Forgetting that this fear is the source of their cares.[7]

2.3.8 Plato in his Laws ordains an ignominious burial for one who has deprived his nearest and dearest friend—namely himself—both of life and of the course of his destiny, not compelled by public judgment, nor by some sad and inevitable accident of Fortune, nor by unbearable shame, but by the cowardice and weakness of a fearful soul. And the opinion that disdains our life is ridiculous. For after all, it is our being, it is our all. Things that have a nobler and richer being may find fault with ours; but it is against Nature that we despise ourselves and hold ourselves of no account. It is a peculiar malady, and one not seen in any other creature, to hate and disdain oneself.

> It is from a like vanity that we desire to be something other than what we are. The fruit of such a desire does not reach us, inasmuch as it contradicts and obstructs itself: he who desires to be turned from a man into an angel does nothing for himself. He would be none the better for it; for, being no more, who will rejoice in this improvement and feel it on his behalf? *For he to whom misery and suffering are to come*
> *Must himself also exist at that time, when ill*
> *Can befall him.* Security, freedom from pain, impassivity, the absence of the ills of this life, which we buy at the price of death, bring us no benefit.

In vain does he avoid war who cannot enjoy peace; and in vain does he flee toil who has nothing with which to savor rest.

2.3.9 Among those of the first opinion there has been great doubt as to what occasions are just enough to make a man take this course of killing himself. They call it *a well-reasoned departure*. For although they say that we must often die for slight causes, since those that keep us alive are hardly strong, still

7 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things III.

some measure is needed. There are fanciful and unreasoning moods that have driven not only individual men but whole peoples to do away with themselves.[8] I have cited examples of this earlier; and we read besides of the maidens of Miletus that, by a frenzied conspiracy, they hanged themselves one after another, until the magistrate took measures, ordering that any found hanged in this way should be dragged naked through the town by the same rope.

2.3.10 Therycion urged Cleomenes to kill himself because of the bad state of his affairs: having escaped the more honorable death in the battle he had just lost, he should accept this other one, which is second to it in honor, and not give the victor the leisure to make him suffer either a shameful death or a shameful life. Cleomenes, with Lacedaemonian and Stoic courage, rejected this advice as cowardly and spineless. "It is a remedy," he said, "that can never fail me, and one that must not be used as long as there is a finger's breadth of hope left"; living, he said, is sometimes constancy and valor; he wanted even his death to serve his country, and meant to make it an act of honor and virtue.[9] Therycion took his own advice then and there, and killed himself. Cleomenes did the same later, but only after having tried Fortune to the very last.

2.3.11 Not all troubles are worth wanting to die to escape them. And then, since there are so many sudden changes in human affairs, it is hard to judge at what point we have truly come to the end of our hope: *The beaten gladiator in the cruel arena still hopes, / Though the crowd threatens him with hostile thumb.*[10]

2.3.12 "All things," said an ancient saying, "are to be hoped for by a man while he lives." "Yes, but," replies Seneca, "why should I keep in mind this, that Fortune can do all things for the living, rather than that, that Fortune can do nothing against one who knows how to die?" We see Josephus caught in a danger so evid-

8 The Greek *eulogos exagōgē* is the Stoic term for a rational suicide.
9 Cleomenes III of Sparta, defeated at Sellasia in 222 BC, fled to Egypt and killed himself there in 219 BC (Plutarch, Cleomenes).
10 From a short poem on hope attributed to Pentadius, in the Latin Anthology.

ent and so imminent, a whole people having risen against him, that by reasoning there could be no way out. Nevertheless, when, as he says, one of his friends advised him on this point to do away with himself, it served him well to persist in hope; for Fortune turned this accident around beyond all human reason, so that he found himself delivered from it without any harm.

> And Cassius and Brutus, on the contrary, completed the ruin of the last remnants of Roman liberty, of which they were the protectors, by the haste and rashness with which they killed themselves before the time and occasion. At the battle of Ceresole, Monsieur d'Enghien twice tried to stab himself in the throat with his sword, despairing of the outcome of the fight, which was going badly where he was; and by his haste he nearly deprived himself of the enjoyment of so fine a victory. I have seen a hundred hares escape from right under the greyhounds' teeth: *Many a man has outlived his executioner. Time and the shifting toil of changing ages*
> *Have often brought things to a better state; Fortune, visiting many by turns,*
> *Has mocked them, and set them again on solid ground.*[11]

EXAMPLES OF VOLUNTARY DEATH

Peoples and individuals who chose death to escape pain, capture, dishonor or defeat.

2.3.13 Pliny says there are only three kinds of illness to escape which one has the right to kill oneself; the harshest of all is the stone in the bladder, when the urine is blocked by it. Seneca says only those that unsettle the functions of the soul for a long time. To avoid a worse death, some are of the opinion that one should take it at one's own choosing. Damocritus, chief of the Aetolians, brought as a prisoner to Rome, found a way to escape by night. But, pursued by his guards, rather than let himself be recaptured, he ran his sword through his body. Antinous and

11 The quotations are from Seneca, Letters, and Virgil, Aeneid XI.

Theodotus, when their city in Epirus had been reduced to extremity by the Romans, advised the people to kill themselves, all of them. But when the advice to surrender instead won the day, they went to seek death, hurling themselves on the enemy with the intention of striking, not of protecting themselves. When the island of Gozo was taken by the Turks a few years ago, a Sicilian who had two beautiful daughters of marriageable age killed them with his own hand, and afterward their mother, who came running at their death. That done, he went out into the street with a crossbow and an arquebus and with two shots killed the first two Turks who came near his door; and then, sword in hand, he flung himself furiously into the fray, where he was at once surrounded and cut to pieces—thus saving himself from slavery after having delivered his family from it.[12] The Jewish women, after having their children circumcised, went and threw themselves headlong to their deaths together with them, fleeing the cruelty of Antiochus. I have been told that when a prisoner of rank was in our jails, his relatives, warned that he would certainly be condemned, to avoid the shame of such a death set up a priest to tell him that the sovereign remedy for his deliverance was to commend himself to such-and-such a saint, with such-and-such vows, and to go eight days without taking any food, whatever faintness and weakness he felt. He believed him, and by this means, without thinking of it, rid himself of his life and of the danger. Scribonia, advising her nephew Libo to kill himself rather than await the hand of justice, told him that to preserve his life only to hand it over to those who would come looking for it three or four days later was really doing someone else's business; and that to keep his blood only to throw it to his enemies as their quarry was to serve them.[13]

2.3.14 We read in the Bible that Nicanor, persecutor of the law of God, sent his henchmen to seize the good old man Razis, who

12 Gozo, next to Malta, was raided by the Ottomans in 1551 and most of its people carried off into slavery.

13 Marcus Scribonius Libo Drusus, accused of conspiracy under Tiberius, killed himself in AD 16 (Seneca, Letters 70).

was called, in honor of his virtue, the Father of the Jews. When this good man saw no other way out, his door burned, his enemies ready to seize him, he chose to die nobly rather than fall into the hands of the wicked and let himself be mauled against the honor of his rank, and he struck himself with his sword. But the blow, in his haste, was badly aimed, so he ran and threw himself from the top of a wall into the midst of the troop; and as they scattered and made way for him, he fell straight on his head.[14] Nevertheless, feeling some remnant of life still in him, he rekindled his courage and, rising to his feet, all covered in blood and wounds, he broke through the crowd and reached a certain steep, sheer rock. There, at the end of his strength, he seized his entrails with both hands through one of his wounds, tearing and crushing them, and threw them at his pursuers, calling down divine vengeance upon them and calling it to witness.

2.3.15 Of the violences done to conscience, the one most to be avoided, in my opinion, is that done to the chastity of women, inasmuch as some bodily pleasure is naturally mixed in with it; and for that reason the refusal cannot be complete enough, and it seems that the force is mixed with some willingness. Ecclesiastical history holds in reverence many such examples of devout persons who called on death to protect them from the outrages tyrants were preparing against their religion and conscience. Pelagia and Sophronia, both canonized: the former threw herself into the river with her mother and sisters to escape being forced by some soldiers; and the latter also killed herself to escape being forced by the Emperor Maxentius.[15]

2.3.16 It will perhaps be to our honor in centuries to come that a learned author of our time, and a Parisian at that, takes pains to persuade the ladies of our age to take any other course rather than enter into the horrible counsel of such despair. I am sorry he did not know, to put among his stories, the good saying I

14 2 Maccabees 14.

15 Saint Pelagia of Antioch and Saint Sophronia of Rome, early 4th-century martyrs.

learned at Toulouse from a woman who had passed through the hands of some soldiers: "God be praised," she said, "that at least once in my life I have had my fill of it without sin." In truth these cruelties are not worthy of French gentleness. And so, thank God, our air has been infinitely purged of them since this good warning. It is enough for them to say "No" while doing it, following the rule of good Marot.[16]

2.3.17 History is full of those who in a thousand ways have exchanged a painful life for death. Lucius Arruntius killed himself, as he said, to flee both the future and the past. Granius Silvanus and Statius Proximus, after being pardoned by Nero, killed themselves, either so as not to live by the grace of so wicked a man, or so as not to be troubled another time over a second pardon, given how readily he entertained suspicions and accusations against good men. Spargapises, son of Queen Tomyris, a prisoner of war of Cyrus, used the first favor Cyrus did him, that of having him unbound, to kill himself, having sought no other fruit of his freedom than to avenge on himself the shame of his capture.[17] Boges, governor of Eion for King Xerxes, besieged by the Athenian army under the command of Cimon, refused the terms of returning safely to Asia with all his wealth, unable to bear surviving the loss of what his master had given into his keeping. After defending his town to the last extremity, with nothing left to eat, he first threw into the river Strymon all the gold and everything from which it seemed to him the enemy could make the most booty. And then, having ordered a great pyre to be lit and the women, children, concubines and servants to have their throats cut, he put them in the fire, and then himself.[18]

2.3.18 Ninachetuen, an Indian lord, having caught the first wind of the Portuguese viceroy's plan to strip him, without any apparent cause, of the office he held in Malacca, in order to give it to

16 An allusion to an epigram by the poet Clément Marot (1496–1544) praising a woman's coy "sweet no".

17 Tomyris, queen of the Massagetae; the story is in Herodotus I.

18 Eion, at the mouth of the Strymon in Thrace, was taken by Cimon about 476 BC (Herodotus VII).

the King of Campar, came to this resolution on his own. He had a scaffold built, longer than it was wide, supported on columns, royally hung with tapestries and adorned with flowers and perfumes in abundance. Then, having dressed in a robe of cloth of gold loaded with a quantity of precious stones of great price, he went out into the street and climbed the steps up onto the scaffold, in one corner of which a pyre of aromatic wood had been lit. People came running to see what these unaccustomed preparations were for.[19] Ninachetuen, with a bold and angry face, set forth what the Portuguese nation owed him and how faithfully he had conducted himself in his office: having so often shown for others, weapons in hand, that honor was far dearer to him than life, he was not going to neglect it for himself; since Fortune denied him any means of resisting the injury they meant to do him, his courage at least commanded him to rid himself of the feeling of it, and not to become a tale for the people and a triumph for persons worth less than he. So saying, he threw himself into the fire.

2.3.19 Sextilia, the wife of Scaurus, and Paxaea, the wife of Labeo, wanted to encourage their husbands to escape the dangers pressing on them. The women had no share in those dangers except through the bond of married love, yet they willingly laid down their lives, to serve their husbands in that extreme necessity as example and as company. What they did for their husbands, Cocceius Nerva did for his country, less usefully but with equal love. This great jurist was flourishing in health, wealth, reputation and standing with the Emperor, and he had no other reason to kill himself than pity for the wretched state of the Roman commonwealth. Nothing could be more delicate than the death of the wife of Fulvius, an intimate of Augustus.[20] Augustus discovered that Fulvius had let out an important secret he had confided to him, and one morning when Fulvius

19 Malacca, on the Malay Peninsula, was taken by the Portuguese in 1511; Montaigne's source is Simon Goulart's French version of Jerónimo Osório's history of Portugal.

20 These suicides under Tiberius, around AD 33–34, are recorded by Tacitus, Annals VI; Cocceius Nerva was a leading jurist and the emperor's companion.

came to see him, he gave him a cold look. Fulvius goes back home full of despair and tells his wife, most piteously, that since he had fallen into this misfortune he was resolved to kill himself. She answered quite frankly: "You will only be doing what is right, since you have often enough experienced how loose my tongue is, and yet you did not guard against it. But let me kill myself first." And without further haggling she ran a sword into her body.[21]

2.3.20 Vibius Virius despaired both of saving his city, which the Romans were besieging, and of their mercy. At the last deliberation of their senate, after many speeches had been made to that end, he concluded that the finest course was to escape Fortune by their own hands. The enemy would honor them for it, and Hannibal would feel how faithful were the friends he had abandoned.[22] He invited those who approved his advice to come and eat a good supper that had been prepared at his house. There, after a good feast, they would drink together whatever would be brought to him: "a drink that will deliver our bodies from torments, our souls from insults, our eyes and ears from witnessing all the vile evils that the vanquished must suffer from victors who are utterly cruel and have been offended. I have arranged," he said, "for there to be suitable people to throw us onto a pyre in front of my door once we have breathed our last." Plenty approved this lofty resolution; few imitated it. Twenty-seven senators followed him. After trying to drown that grim thought in wine, they ended their meal with that deadly dish. They embraced one another, after lamenting together the misfortune of their country; then some went home, while others stayed to be buried with Vibius in his fire. And all of them had so long a death, since the fumes of the wine had filled their veins and slowed the effect of the poison, that some came within an hour of seeing the enemy inside Capua, which was taken the

21 Told by Plutarch, On Talkativeness.

22 Capua, Hannibal's ally, was besieged and taken by the Romans in 211 BC; Livy, History of Rome XXVI, tells the story.

next day, and of incurring the miseries they had fled at such cost.

2.3.21 Taurea Jubellius, another citizen of that place, saw the consul Fulvius returning from the shameful butchery he had made of two hundred and twenty-five senators. He called him back proudly by name and, having stopped him, said: "Order them to slaughter me too, after so many others, so that you can boast of having killed a much braver man than yourself."[23] Fulvius disdained him as a madman; besides, he had just that moment received letters from Rome condemning the inhumanity of his executions, which tied his hands. Jubellius went on: "My country is taken, my friends are dead, and I have slain my wife and children with my own hand to spare them the desolation of this ruin. Since I am forbidden to die the death of my fellow citizens, let us take from courage our revenge on this hateful life." And drawing a blade he had hidden, he drove it through his chest and fell backward, dying at the consul's feet.

2.3.22 Alexander was besieging a city in India. Those inside, finding themselves hard pressed, resolved vigorously to deprive him of the pleasure of this victory, and set themselves on fire, every one of them, together with their city, in defiance of his humanity. A new kind of war: the enemy fought to save them, they fought to destroy themselves, and to make sure of their death they did all the things one does to make sure of one's life.

2.3.23 The Spanish city of Astapa had walls and defenses too weak to withstand the Romans. So the inhabitants heaped up their riches and goods in the public square. They placed the women and children on top of this heap and surrounded it with wood and other material that would catch fire quickly. Then, leaving fifty young men from among them to carry out their resolution, they made a sortie in which, as they had vowed, since they could not conquer, they all got themselves killed.[24] The fifty massacred every living soul still scattered through their city, set

23 Quintus Fulvius Flaccus, the Roman consul who took Capua.
24 Astapa, in southern Spain, fell to the Romans in 206 BC; Livy, History of Rome XXVIII.

fire to the heap, and threw themselves into it too. So they ended their noble liberty in a state that was insensible rather than painful and shameful. They showed the enemy that, had Fortune willed it, they would have had the courage to take the victory from them, just as they had had the courage to make it both futile and hideous for them, and even deadly. For many Romans, lured by the gleam of the gold melting in that flame, came near in great numbers and were suffocated and burned there, unable to retreat because of the crowd pressing behind them.

2.3.24 The people of Abydos, hard pressed by Philip, made the same resolution. But they were caught too short. The king was horrified to see the rash haste of this execution, and once the treasures and goods they had condemned some to the fire and some to the sea had been seized, he withdrew his soldiers and granted them three days to kill themselves in better order and at greater leisure. They filled those days with blood and slaughter beyond any cruelty of an enemy, and not a single person who had power over himself escaped.[25]

2.3.25 There are countless examples of such resolutions taken by whole peoples, which seem harsher because their effect is more universal. In fact they are less harsh than when each person acts alone. What reasoning would not achieve in each individual, it achieves in all: the ardor of the group sweeps away individual judgments.

2.3.26 Under Tiberius, condemned men who waited for their execution lost their property and were denied burial; those who forestalled it by killing themselves were buried and could make a will.

2.3.27 But we also sometimes desire death in the hope of a greater good. “I desire,” says Saint Paul, “to be dissolved, to be with Jesus Christ”; and “Who will deliver me from these bonds?” Cleombrotus of Ambracia, having read Plato’s Phaedo, was seized with so great an appetite for the life to come that, with no other reason, he went and threw himself into the sea. This

25 Philip V of Macedon besieged Abydos, on the Hellespont, in 200 BC; Livy, History of Rome XXXI.

shows how wrongly we call despair this voluntary dissolution, to which we are often carried by the warmth of hope, and often by a calm and settled inclination of our judgment.[26]

2.3.28 Jacques du Chastel, Bishop of Soissons, was on Saint Louis's crusade overseas. Seeing the king and the whole army on the point of returning to France with the cause of religion left unfinished, he resolved to go off to Paradise instead. He bade farewell to his friends and charged alone, in full view of everyone, into the enemy army, where he was cut to pieces.[27] In a certain kingdom of these new lands, there is a solemn procession on a day when the idol they worship is paraded in public on a chariot of marvelous size. Many people can be seen cutting pieces from their own living flesh to offer to it, and besides them a number of others can be seen throwing themselves down in the middle of the square and having themselves ground and crushed under the wheels, so as to win after their death the veneration due to holiness, which is duly paid them. The death of this bishop, weapons in hand, has more nobility and less suffering, since the heat of combat took his mind off part of it.[28]

2.3.29 Some governments have taken it upon themselves to regulate when voluntary deaths are just and timely. In our own Marseille, in times past, poison prepared from hemlock was kept at public expense for anyone who wished to hasten his days, once he had first justified the reasons for his undertaking to the Six Hundred, which was their senate. It was not permitted to lay hands on oneself in any other way, except by leave of the magistrate and for legitimate reasons. This law existed elsewhere too.[29]

26 Paul, Philippians 1:23 and Romans 7:24. Plato's Phaedo recounts Socrates' last day and his arguments for the immortality of the soul.
27 Louis IX's crusade to Egypt ended in defeat in 1250; Joinville records the bishop's death.
28 Probably a Hindu chariot festival in India, as described in Portuguese accounts of the East Indies.
29 Valerius Maximus, Memorable Deeds and Sayings II.6, describes this custom of ancient Massalia (Marseille).

THE OLD WOMAN OF CEA

Watched by Sextus Pompeius, a ninety-year-old woman calmly drinks poison among her family.

2.3.30 Sextus Pompeius, on his way to Asia, passed through the island of Cea, near Negropont. It happened by chance while he was there, as one of his company tells us, that a woman of great standing, having explained to her fellow citizens why she had resolved to end her life, begged Pompeius to attend her death to make it more honorable. This he did. For a long time he tried in vain, by force of eloquence (which came to him wonderfully readily) and persuasion, to turn her from this plan; in the end he allowed her to have her way.[30] She was over ninety and had lived in a very happy state of mind and body. Now, lying on her bed, which was more finely decked than usual, and propped on her elbow, she said: "O Sextus Pompeius, may the gods, rather those I am leaving than those I am going to meet, reward you for not disdaining to be both the counselor of my life and the witness of my death. For my part, I have always known the favorable face of Fortune; and for fear that the desire to live too long might make me see her other face, I am going, by a happy end, to dismiss what remains of my soul, leaving behind me two daughters and a legion of grandchildren." That done, she preached to her family and urged them to unity and peace, divided her goods among them, and commended the household gods to her eldest daughter. Then she took the cup containing the poison with a steady hand, made her vows to Mercury and prayed him to guide her to some happy dwelling in the other world, and briskly swallowed the deadly drink. After that she kept the company informed of how it was working, and of how the parts of her body felt the cold seize them one after another; until at last, having said that it was reaching her heart and her innards, she

30 The witness is Valerius Maximus (II.6), who traveled with Sextus Pompeius. Cea is the Greek island of Kea.

called her daughters to perform the last office for her and close her eyes.

2.3.31 Pliny tells of a certain Hyperborean nation where, thanks to the mild temperature of the air, lives commonly end only by the inhabitants' own will. When they are weary and sated with living, at the end of a long life, it is their custom to have a good feast and then throw themselves into the sea from the top of a certain rock set aside for this purpose.[31]

2.3.32 Pain, and a worse death, seem to me the most excusable incentives.

31 Pliny the Elder, Natural History IV. The Hyperboreans were a legendary people of the far north.

II.4 Business Tomorrow

A demain les affaires
Praise for Amyot's French Plutarch leads to Montaigne's own heedlessness, and the question of whether urgent letters should ever wait.

2.4.1 I give the palm, rightly I think, to Jacques Amyot over all our French writers. This is not only for the natural ease and purity of his language, in which he surpasses all others, nor for his perseverance in so long a labor, nor for the depth of his learning, which allowed him to unfold so happily an author so thorny and knotty. For people may tell me what they like: I understand nothing of Greek, but I see a meaning so well connected and sustained throughout his translation that either he has certainly grasped the author's true thought, or else, having by long acquaintance planted vividly in his soul a general idea of Plutarch's soul, he has at least lent him nothing that belies or contradicts him. But above all I am grateful to him for having known how to pick and choose a book so worthy and so fitting to make a present of it to his country.[1] We ignorant folk would have been lost if this book had not pulled us out of the mire. Thanks to him we now dare to speak and to write; ladies use it to school the schoolmasters; it is our breviary. If this good man is still alive, I hand Xenophon over to him to do the same. It is an easier task, and all the more suited to his old age. And besides, I don't know how, it seems to me that although he gets out of a tight spot very

1 Amyot (1513–1593) also translated Plutarch's Moral Works (1572); he became bishop of Auxerre.

briskly and neatly, his style is nonetheless more at home when it is not hurried and rolls along at its ease.

2.4.2 I was just now at the passage where Plutarch says of himself that Rusticus, attending one of his lectures in Rome, received a packet from the Emperor and put off opening it until everything was over; for which, he says, the whole audience singularly praised this man's gravity.[2] Indeed, since Plutarch was on the subject of curiosity, and of that avid and greedy passion for news which makes us so tactlessly and impatiently drop everything to talk to a newcomer, and lose all respect and composure in tearing open on the spot, wherever we are, the letters brought to us, he was right to praise Rusticus's gravity. He could have added praise for his civility and courtesy in not wanting to interrupt the course of the lecture. But I doubt whether he could be praised for prudence. For when one receives letters unexpectedly, and especially from an emperor, it could well happen that putting off reading them would do great harm.

2.4.3 The vice opposite to curiosity is heedlessness, toward which I plainly lean by temperament. I have seen many men so extreme in it that three or four days later the letters sent to them were still found unopened in their pockets. I have never opened any letters—not only those entrusted to me, but not even those that Fortune happened to pass through my hands. And I feel a scruple if my eyes inadvertently steal some knowledge of the important letters a great man is reading when I am beside him. Never did a man inquire less, or pry less, into other people's affairs.

2.4.4 In our fathers' time Monsieur de Boutières nearly lost Turin because, being in good company at supper, he put off reading a warning sent him about treacheries being plotted against that city, where he was in command. And this same Plutarch has taught me that Julius Caesar would have saved himself if, on his way to the Senate on the day the conspirators killed

2 Arulenus Rusticus, a Stoic senator later put to death by Domitian; the passage is in Plutarch's essay On Curiosity.

him there, he had read a note that was handed to him.[3] Plutarch also tells the story of Archias, tyrant of Thebes. On the evening before Pelopidas was to carry out his plot to kill him and restore his country's liberty, another Archias, an Athenian, wrote to him, point by point, what was being prepared against him. This packet was delivered to him during supper, and he put off opening it, saying the words that afterward became a proverb in Greece: "Business tomorrow."[4]

2.4.5 In my opinion a wise man may, for the sake of others—so as not to break up company unbecomingly, like Rusticus, or not to interrupt some other important business—put off hearing news brought to him. But for his own interest or private pleasure, especially if he holds public office, so as not to interrupt his dinner, or even his sleep, it is inexcusable to do so. In ancient Rome, the place at table they called the consular place was the most honorable, because it was freer and more accessible to anyone who might arrive to speak with the person sitting in it. This shows that being at table did not make them withdraw from dealing with other business and unexpected events.[5] But when all is said, it is hard, in human actions, to lay down by rational argument a rule so exact that Fortune does not keep her rights over it.

3 Guigues Guiffrey de Boutières commanded the French in Piedmont under Francis I in the late 1530s.

4 Pelopidas freed Thebes from the pro-Spartan oligarchy in 379 BC; Plutarch, Life of Pelopidas.

5 Plutarch, Table Talk I.3.

II.5 Of Conscience

De la Conscience
A tense wartime encounter shows how a guilty conscience betrays itself, and why torture is a poor test of truth.

2.5.1 One day during our civil wars, as my brother the Sieur de la Brousse and I were traveling, we met a gentleman of good bearing. He belonged to the party opposed to ours, but I knew nothing of it, for he passed himself off as something else. And the worst of these wars is that the cards are so shuffled that it is hard to avoid confusion and disorder: your enemy is not distinguished from you by any visible mark, neither by language nor by bearing, and he was brought up under the same laws, customs and air. This made me fear, myself, to run into our own troops somewhere I was not known, and so be in trouble when I had to give my name, or worse, perhaps.[1] That had happened to me once before: in such a mistake I lost both men and horses, and among others they pitifully killed a page of mine, an Italian of gentle birth whom I was carefully bringing up; and with him was extinguished a very fine boyhood, full of great promise. But this man was so wildly afraid, and I saw him go so deathly pale whenever we met horsemen or passed through towns that held for the King, that I finally guessed these were alarms his conscience was raising. It seemed to this poor man that through his mask and the crosses on his cloak they would read his secret intentions right into his heart. So marvelous is the power of conscience. It makes us betray, accuse and fight ourselves, and for

1 Pierre de Montaigne, sieur de La Brousse, was one of Montaigne's younger brothers.

want of an outside witness it brings us forward to testify against ourselves: *Brandishing a hidden lash, the mind its own torturer.*[2]

2.5.2 This story is in every child's mouth. Bessus the Paeonian, reproached for having wantonly knocked down a nest of sparrows and killed them, said he had been right to, because those little birds never stopped falsely accusing him of murdering his father. Until then this parricide had been hidden and unknown; but the avenging furies of conscience made it come out from the very man who was to pay the penalty for it. Hesiod corrects Plato's saying that punishment follows close upon sin: for he says it is born at the very instant, together with the sin. Whoever awaits punishment suffers it, and whoever has deserved it awaits it. Wickedness fashions torments against itself.[3] *Evil counsel is worst for the counselor.* Just as the wasp stings and hurts others, but itself more, for it loses its sting and its strength forever: *And they leave their lives in the wound.* Blister beetles have in them some part that serves as an antidote to their own poison, by a contrariety of nature.[4]

2 Juvenal, Satires XIII.

3 The story and the sayings come from Plutarch, On the Delays of Divine Vengeance.

4 The first quotation is a proverb cited by Aulus Gellius; the second is Virgil, Georgics IV.

So too, at the very moment we take pleasure in vice, an opposite displeasure is engendered in our conscience, which torments us, waking and sleeping, with many painful imaginings: *For many, often talking in their dreams,*
Or raving in sickness, are said to have betrayed themselves
And brought to light sins long concealed. Apollodorus dreamed that he saw himself being flayed by the Scythians and then boiled in a pot, and that his heart murmured, saying: "I am the cause of all these ills for you." No hiding place helps the wicked, said Epicurus, because they can never be sure they are hidden, since their conscience reveals them to themselves: *This is the first punishment: that no guilty man*
Is acquitted when he is his own judge.[5]

2.5.3 Just as conscience fills us with fear, so it fills us with assurance and confidence. And I can say that I have walked into many dangers with a much firmer step because of the secret knowledge I had of my own will and of the innocence of my intentions. *As each man's mind knows what he has done, so within his breast / He conceives hope or fear according to his deeds.* There are a thousand examples; it will be enough to cite three about the same person. Scipio was accused one day before the Roman people on a serious charge. Instead of excusing himself or flattering his judges, he said to them: "It would suit you well indeed to set about passing judgment on the life of the man through whom you have the authority to judge the whole world."[6] Another time, as his only answer to the charges a tribune of the people laid against him, instead of pleading his case, he said: "Come, my fellow citizens, let us go and give thanks to the gods for the victory they gave me over the Carthaginians on this very day." And as he set off walking ahead toward the temple, off

5 The first verses are from Lucretius, On the Nature of Things V; the last are Juvenal. Apollodorus was a cruel tyrant of Cassandreia in Macedonia.
6 Ovid, Fasti I. Scipio Africanus the Elder, conqueror of Hannibal, faced prosecutions in Rome in the 180s BC.

went the whole assembly after him, and even his accuser. And when Petilius had been put up by Cato to demand an account of the money handled in the province of Antioch, Scipio came to the Senate for that purpose and produced the account book from under his robe, saying that it contained a true record of receipts and expenses. But when they asked him for it so that it could be deposited in the record office, he refused, saying he did not wish to do himself that shame; and with his own hands, in the presence of the Senate, he tore it apart and ripped it to pieces. I do not believe that a seared soul could counterfeit such assurance. He had a heart too great by nature, says Livy, and too used to high fortune, to know how to be a criminal and to stoop to the baseness of defending his innocence.

2.5.4 Torture is a dangerous invention, and it seems to be a test of endurance rather than of truth. The man who can bear it hides the truth, and so does the man who cannot. For why should pain make me confess what is so, rather than force me to say what is not? And conversely, if the man who has not done what he is accused of is enduring enough to bear these torments, why should not the man who has done it be so too, when so fine a reward as his life is held out to him? I think the basis of this invention lies in a view of the power of conscience. For in the guilty man conscience seems to help the torture make him confess his fault, and to weaken him; while on the other hand it seems to strengthen the innocent against the torture. To tell the truth, it is a means full of uncertainty and danger. What would one not say, what would one not do, to escape such grievous pains? *Pain forces even the innocent to lie.* So it happens that the man the judge has tortured so as not to put him to death innocent, he puts to death both innocent and tortured. Thousands upon thousands have loaded their heads with false confessions. Among them I place Philotas, considering the circumstances of the trial Alexander brought against him and the course of his torture.[7] But be that as it may, it is, they say, the least bad thing

7 Publilius Syrus, Sentences. Philotas, one of Alexander's generals, was tortured and executed in 330 BC for an alleged conspiracy (Quintus Curtius VI).

that human weakness has been able to invent; most inhumanly, however, and most uselessly, in my opinion.

2.5.5 Many nations, less barbarous in this respect than the Greeks and Romans who call them so, consider it horrible and cruel to torment and break a man whose guilt you are still in doubt about. Is it his fault that you do not know? Are you not unjust, you who, so as not to kill him without cause, do worse to him than kill him? To see that this is so, consider how often he would rather die without reason than go through this inquiry, which is more painful than the execution and often, by its harshness, forestalls the execution and carries it out. I do not know where I got this story, but it exactly reflects the conscience of our justice. A village woman accused a soldier, before the general of an army who was a stern dispenser of justice, of having snatched from her little children the bit of porridge she had left to feed them, since the army had ravaged everything. There was no proof at all. The general warned the woman to be very careful what she was saying, since she would be guilty of her own accusation if she lied; and when she persisted, he had the soldier's belly cut open to establish the truth of the matter. And the woman turned out to be right. An instructive sentence.[8]

8 Froissart's Chronicles tell this story of the Ottoman sultan Bayezid I.

II.6 Of Practice

De l'exercitation
Montaigne recounts his near-fatal fall from a horse to show how gently dying may come, then defends writing about himself.

2.6.1 It is hard for reasoning and instruction, however willingly our belief embraces them, to be powerful enough to carry us all the way to action, unless in addition we exercise and train our soul by experience in the course we want to set it on; otherwise, when it comes to the point of acting, it will no doubt find itself at a loss. That is why, among the philosophers, those who sought to attain some greater excellence were not content to await the rigors of Fortune in shelter and at rest, for fear she might catch them inexperienced and new to the fight. Instead they went out to meet her and deliberately threw themselves into the test of hardships. Some gave up their riches to train themselves in voluntary poverty; others sought out labor and a painful austerity of life to harden themselves to pain and toil; others deprived themselves of the dearest parts of the body, such as their sight and their organs of generation, for fear that the too pleasant and too soft service of these might slacken and soften the firmness of their soul.

2.6.2 But for dying, which is the greatest task we have to perform, practice cannot help us. We can fortify ourselves by habit and experience against pain, shame, poverty and other such accidents; but as for death, we can try it only once. We are all apprentices when we come to it.

2.6.3 There have been men in ancient times who managed their time so well that they tried to taste and savor death even as they died, and strained their minds to see what this passage was like; but they have not come back to tell us the news. *No one wakes and rises again / Once the cold pause of life has overtaken him.*[1]

2.6.4 Canius Julius, a Roman nobleman of singular virtue and firmness, was condemned to death by that scoundrel Caligula. Besides many marvelous proofs he gave of his resolution, when he was on the point of submitting to the executioner's hand, a philosopher who was his friend asked him: "Well, Canius, what state is your soul in now? What is it doing? What are your thoughts?"[2] "I was thinking," he answered, "of holding myself ready and braced with all my strength, to see whether in this instant of death, so short and brief, I shall be able to perceive the soul moving out, and whether it will have any feeling of its departure; so that, if I learn anything about it, I may come back afterward, if I can, and let my friends know." This man philosophizes not only up to death but in death itself. What assurance it was, and what pride of courage, to want his death to serve him as a lesson, and to have the leisure to think of other things in so great a business! *Such command over his mind he kept in dying.*[3]

2.6.5 It seems to me, however, that there is some way of taming ourselves to death and trying it out in some measure. We can have an experience of it which, if not whole and perfect, is at least not useless, and makes us stronger and more assured. If we cannot reach it, we can approach it, we can reconnoiter it; and if we do not get as far as its fortress, at least we shall see and travel the roads that lead to it. It is not without reason that we are told to look at our very sleep, for the resemblance it bears to death. How easily we pass from waking to sleeping! With how little concern we lose awareness of the light and of ourselves! Perhaps the faculty of sleep, which deprives us of all action and all feeling, might seem useless and contrary to Nature, were it not that

1 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things III.
2 The story is told by Seneca, On Tranquility of Mind 14.
3 Lucan, Pharsalia VIII.

through it Nature teaches us that she has made us for dying as much as for living, and while we are still alive shows us the eternal state she keeps for us after life, to accustom us to it and take away our fear of it.

2.6.6 But those who have fainted from some violent accident and lost all feeling—those, in my view, have come very close to seeing death's true and natural face. For as to the instant and point of passing, there is no need to fear that it brings any pain or distress with it, since we can have no feeling without time. Our sufferings need time, and in death time is so short and so hurried that death must necessarily be imperceptible. It is the approaches we have to fear; and those can fall within our experience.

2.6.7 Many things seem greater to us in imagination than in reality. I spent a good part of my life in perfect and entire health: I say not only entire, but lively and full of fire. That state, so full of vigor and festivity, made the thought of illness so horrible to me that when I came to experience it, I found its pangs mild and feeble compared with my fear. Here is what I find every day. If I am snug and warm under cover in a good room while a stormy, tempestuous night is going on outside, I am dismayed and distressed for those who are out in the open country; if I am out there myself, I do not even wish to be elsewhere. Just being shut up in a room all the time seemed unbearable to me; I was soon trained to stay there a week, and a month, full of agitation, disturbance and weakness. And I have found that when I was healthy I pitied the sick much more than I find myself to be pitied when I am sick, and that the force of my apprehension inflated the substance and truth of the thing by nearly half. I hope the same will happen to me with death, and that it is not worth all the trouble I take over the many preparations I make and the many aids I call up and assemble to withstand its assault. But at all events, we can never give ourselves too much of an advantage.

THE FALL FROM THE HORSE

Montaigne recounts being knocked senseless in a riding accident during the civil wars.

2.6.8 During our third troubles, or the second—I do not remember that well—I went out riding one day a league from my house, which is set at the very hub of all the turmoil of the civil wars of France. I thought myself perfectly safe and so near home that I had no need of better equipment, and I had taken a horse that was very easy to ride but not very sturdy.[4] On my way back, a sudden occasion arose to use this horse for a task it was not much used to. One of my men, big and strong, was riding a powerful workhorse that had a desperately hard mouth but was otherwise fresh and vigorous. To show off his daring and get ahead of his companions, he spurred it at full tilt straight into my path, came down like a colossus on the little man and the little horse, and struck us like a thunderbolt with all his stiffness and weight, sending us both heels over head. So there lay the horse, knocked down and completely stunned, and there was I, ten or twelve paces beyond, stretched out on my back, my face all bruised and skinned, my sword, which I had had in my hand, more than ten paces further on, my belt in pieces, with no more movement or feeling than a log. It is the only time I have fainted, up to now. Those who were with me tried every means they could to bring me round; then, taking me for dead, they lifted me in their arms and carried me with great difficulty toward my house, which was some way off, about half a French league. On the way, after I had been taken for dead for more than two full hours, I began to move and breathe: for so much blood had poured into my stomach that Nature had to revive her forces to get rid of it. They set me on my feet, and I threw up a whole bucketful of clots of pure blood; and several times along the way I had to do the same. That is how I began to recover a little life;

4 The second and third civil wars between Catholics and Protestants ran from 1567 to 1568 and from 1568 to 1570.

but it came bit by bit, and over so long a stretch of time that my first sensations were much closer to death than to life. *For, still uncertain of its return, / The stunned mind cannot steady itself.*[5]

2.6.9 This memory, deeply imprinted on my soul, shows me death's face and image so true to life that it somewhat reconciles me to it. When I began to see, it was with sight so blurred, so weak and so dead that I still could make out nothing but the light, *—like one who now opens, now closes / His eyes, halfway between sleep and waking.* As for the functions of the soul, they came back at the same pace as those of the body. I saw I was covered in blood, for my doublet was stained all over with the blood I had thrown up. The first thought that came to me was that I had taken an arquebus shot in the head; and in fact several shots were being fired around us at that same moment. It seemed to me that my life was hanging on only by the tip of my lips. I closed my eyes in order, as it seemed to me, to help push it out, and I took pleasure in growing languid and letting myself go. It was a notion that merely floated on the surface of my soul, as tender and as feeble as all the rest; but in truth it was not only free from distress but mingled with that sweetness people feel when they let themselves slip into sleep.

2.6.10 I believe this is the very state in which we find those whom we see fainting from weakness in the throes of death; and I hold that we pity them without cause, thinking they are racked by grievous pains or that their souls are oppressed by painful thoughts.

5 Tasso, Jerusalem Delivered XII.

> It has always been my view, against the opinion of many, and even of Étienne de La Boétie, that those whom we see thus prostrate and drowsy as their end approaches, or overwhelmed by the length of their illness, or struck by apoplexy or the falling sickness, *(often, overcome by the violence of the disease,*
> *A man falls before our eyes as if struck by lightning,*
> *And foams at the mouth; he groans, his limbs tremble,*
> *He raves, his sinews stiffen, he writhes, he pants,*
> *And wears out his limbs in fitful tossing.)* or wounded in the head, whom we hear rattle in their throats and sometimes utter piercing sighs—although we draw from these some signs that seem to show that some awareness remains to them, as we do from certain movements we see them make with their bodies—I have always thought, I say, that both their soul and their body were buried and asleep.[6]

He lives, and is himself unaware of his life. And I could not believe that, with the limbs so stunned and the senses so far gone, the soul could keep any strength within by which to recognize itself; and so I believed that they had no reasoning to torment them and make them judge and feel the wretchedness of their condition, and consequently that they were not much to be pitied.[7]

2.6.11 I can imagine no state so unbearable and horrible for me as having my soul alive and afflicted with no means of expressing itself. I would say the same of those who are sent to execution with their tongues cut out—were it not that in this kind of death the most silent seems to me the most becoming, if it is accompanied by a firm and grave countenance. And the same goes for those wretched prisoners who fall into the hands of the vile soldier-torturers of our time, who torment them with every kind of cruel treatment to force them into paying some excess-

6 The verses are from Lucretius, On the Nature of Things VI.
7 Ovid, Tristia I.3.

ive and impossible ransom, while keeping them in such a condition and place that they have no means whatever of expressing and making known their thoughts and their misery.

2.6.12 The poets have imagined certain gods who favor the deliverance of those who are thus dragging out a lingering death: *This I bear, as bidden, sacred to Dis, / And release you from that body.* And the short, disjointed words and answers sometimes wrung from them by shouting in their ears and badgering them, or the movements that seem to show some assent to what is asked of them, are no proof that they are alive, at least not with a full life.[8] The same thing happens to us in the first stammerings of sleep, before it has entirely taken hold of us: we sense, as if in a dream, what is going on around us, and we follow voices with a blurred and uncertain hearing that seems to touch only the edges of the soul; and we give answers, following on from the last words spoken to us, that have more luck than sense.

2.6.13 Now that I have tested it in practice, I have no doubt that I judged rightly until now. For first, while I was quite unconscious, I was struggling to tear open my doublet with my bare nails (for I was unarmed), and yet I know that I felt nothing in my imagination that hurt me. For there are many movements in us that do not proceed from our command.

8 Virgil, Aeneid IV: the goddess Iris cuts a lock of the dying Dido's hair to free her soul; Dis is the god of the underworld.

The half-dead fingers twitch and clutch at the sword again.
People who fall throw their arms out in front of them in this way as they fall, by a natural impulse which makes our limbs lend one another their services and have stirrings of their own, apart from our reasoning: *They tell how scythe-bearing chariots lop off limbs so swiftly*
that what has fallen, severed from the body, is seen to quiver
on the ground, while yet the man's mind and strength,
through the speed of the harm, cannot feel the pain. My stomach was oppressed with that clotted blood, and my hands ran to it of their own accord, as they often do where we itch, against the advice of our will. There are many animals, and even men, in whom muscles can be seen to contract and move after they are dead.[9]

Everyone knows from experience that he has parts that often stir, stand up and lie down without his leave. Now these passions that touch us only on the bark cannot be called ours. To make them ours, the whole man must be engaged in them; and the pains that the foot or the hand feels while we are asleep are not ours.

2.6.14 As I approached my house, where the alarm of my fall had already run ahead, and my household had come to meet me with the cries customary on such occasions, not only did I answer a word or two to what I was asked, but they say I even thought to order that a horse be given to my wife, whom I saw stumbling and struggling along the road, which is hilly and rough. It would seem that this consideration must have come from a soul that was awake; and yet I was not there at all. These were empty thoughts, up in the clouds, stirred up by the senses of the eyes and ears; they did not come from inside me. Yet I did not know where I was coming from or where I was going, nor could I weigh and consider what I was asked. These are slight effects that the senses produced by themselves, as if out of habit. What the soul contributed was in a dream, touched very

9 Virgil, Aeneid X.396; Lucretius, On the Nature of Things III.642–645.

lightly, and as it were only licked and sprinkled by the soft impression of the senses. Meanwhile my state was in truth very gentle and peaceful. I felt no distress either for others or for myself; it was a languor and an extreme weakness, without any pain. I saw my house without recognizing it. When they had put me to bed, I felt an infinite sweetness in that rest, for I had been wretchedly hauled about by those poor people, who had taken the trouble to carry me in their arms over a long and very bad road, and had worn themselves out two or three times, taking turns. They offered me plenty of remedies, of which I accepted none, being certain that I was mortally wounded in the head. It would truly have been a very happy death; for the weakness of my reasoning kept me from judging anything of it, and the weakness of my body from feeling anything. I was letting myself slip away so gently, in so soft and easy a manner, that I can hardly feel any action less burdensome than that one was.

2.6.15 When I came back to life and regained my strength, *When at last my senses grew strong again*, which was two or three hours later, I felt myself caught up all at once in pain again, my limbs all battered and bruised from my fall; and for two or three nights afterward I was so ill from it that I thought I would die all over again, but this time a death more keenly felt; and I still feel the shock of that bruising. I do not want to forget this: the last thing I was able to recover was the memory of this accident. I had them tell me several times where I was going, where I was coming from, at what time it had happened to me, before I could take it in.[10] As for the way I fell, they hid it from me, out of consideration for the man who had caused it, and made up other versions for me. But long afterward, the next day, when my memory began to open a little and to bring back to me the state I had been in at the instant I saw that horse bearing down on me (for I had seen it at my heels and taken myself for dead, but that thought had been so sudden that fear had no time to arise from it), it seemed to me that it was a flash of lightning striking my

10 Ovid, Tristia I.3.14.

soul with a jolt, and that I was coming back from the other world.

PORTRAYING ONESELF

Why studying and describing himself is useful, and why speaking of oneself is no vice.

2.6.16 This account of so trivial an event would be rather pointless, were it not for the lesson I have drawn from it for myself; for truly, to grow used to death, I find there is nothing for it but to draw near to it. Now, as Pliny says, each man is a very good schooling for himself, provided he has the ability to spy on himself from close up. What I give here is not my teaching but my study; it is not a lesson for others, but for me. And yet no one should hold it against me if I share it. What serves me may also by chance serve someone else. Besides, I spoil nothing; I use only what is mine. And if I play the fool, it is at my own expense and without harm to anyone; for it is a folly that dies with me and has no consequences. We have word of only two or three ancients who have beaten this path; and even so we cannot say whether it was at all in the same way as this, since we know only their names. No one since has followed in their tracks. It is a thorny undertaking, more so than it seems, to follow a course as wandering as that of our mind; to penetrate the opaque depths of its inner folds; to pick out and pin down so many slight nuances of its stirrings. And it is a new and extraordinary pastime, which draws us away from the common occupations of the world—yes, and from the most highly recommended.

2.6.17 For many years now I have had nothing but myself as the target of my thoughts; I examine and study nothing but myself. And if I study anything else, it is to apply it at once to myself—or rather, within myself. And I do not think I am at fault if, as is done with the other sciences, which are incomparably less useful, I share what I have learned in this one, though I am hardly satisfied with the progress I have made in it. There is no description equal in difficulty to the description of oneself, nor cer-

tainly in usefulness. Even so, one has to do one's hair, one has to tidy and arrange oneself before going out in public. Now I am constantly dressing myself up, for I am constantly describing myself.

2.6.18 Custom has made speaking of oneself a vice, and stubbornly forbids it out of hatred for the boasting that always seems to be attached to testimony about oneself. Where one ought to wipe the child's nose, this amounts to cutting it off. *Fleeing a fault leads into vice.* I find more harm than good in this remedy. But even if it were true that it is necessarily presumptuous to entertain people with talk about oneself, I must not, given my general plan, refuse an action that displays this unhealthy quality, since it is in me; and I must not hide this fault, which I not only practice but profess. Still, to say what I think of it, this custom is wrong to condemn wine because many get drunk on it.[11] Only good things can be abused. And I believe this rule concerns only the failings of ordinary people. These are bridles for calves, with which neither the saints, whom we hear speaking of themselves so loftily, nor the philosophers, nor the theologians bridle themselves. Nor do I, though I am as little the one as the other. If they do not write about themselves expressly, at least, when occasion leads them to it, they do not hesitate to step well out onto the public promenade. What does Socrates discuss more fully than himself? To what does he more often lead his disciples' talk than to speaking of themselves—not of the lesson in their book, but of the being and motion of their soul? We speak of ourselves devoutly to God and to our confessor, as our neighbors do to the whole congregation. "But we tell only our accusations," someone will answer. Then we tell everything; for even our virtue is faulty and calls for repentance. My trade and my art is living. Whoever forbids me to speak of it according to my own sense, experience and practice, let him order the architect to speak of buildings not according to himself but according to his neighbor, according to someone else's knowledge and not his own. If it is glory-seeking to proclaim one's own merits one-

11 Horace, Art of Poetry 31.

self, why does Cicero not put forward the eloquence of Hortensius, and Hortensius that of Cicero? Perhaps they mean that I should bear witness to myself by works and deeds, not by bare words.[12] What I portray is chiefly my thoughts, a shapeless subject that cannot be turned into tangible works. Only with great difficulty can I set it down in this airy body of the voice. Some of the wisest and most devout men have lived avoiding all visible deeds. Deeds would say more about Fortune than about me. They bear witness to their own part, not mine, except by conjecture and uncertainly: samples that show only a single detail. I lay myself out whole: it is a *skeletos*, where at a single glance the veins, the muscles, the tendons appear, each part in its place. The effect of a cough would reveal one part of it; the effect of pallor or a pounding heart another, and doubtfully at that. It is not my deeds that I write; it is myself, it is my essence.[13]

2.6.19 I hold that one must be careful in assessing oneself, and equally conscientious in bearing witness to it, whether low or high, without distinction. If I seemed to myself good and wise through and through, I would sing it out at the top of my voice. To say less of oneself than is true is stupidity, not modesty; to rate oneself at less than one is worth is cowardice and pusillanimity, according to Aristotle. No virtue helps itself with falsehood, and truth is never matter for error. To say more of oneself than is true is not always presumption; often it is also stupidity. To be pleased beyond measure with what one is, to fall into an indiscreet love of oneself, is in my opinion the substance of this vice. The supreme remedy to cure it is to do the exact opposite of what these people prescribe, who, by forbidding us to speak of ourselves, consequently forbid even more strongly that we think of ourselves. Pride lies in thought; the tongue can have only a very slight share in it.

12 "Our neighbors" are the Protestants, who practiced a general public confession. Quintus Hortensius was Cicero's great rival in Roman oratory.

13 Greek for a dried body; here, an anatomical figure showing the body's inner structure.

2.6.20 To them, occupying oneself with oneself seems to mean being pleased with oneself; frequenting and keeping company with oneself seems to mean being too fond of oneself. But this excess arises only in those who feel themselves out only superficially, who look at themselves only after their business is done, who call it daydreaming and idleness to converse with oneself, to furnish and build oneself up—building castles in Spain—regarding themselves as a third party, a stranger to themselves. If someone is intoxicated with his learning, looking at those beneath him, let him turn his eyes upward toward past ages: he will lower his horns, finding there so many thousands of minds that trample him underfoot. If he falls into some flattering presumption about his valor, let him recall the lives of Scipio, of Epaminondas, of so many armies, so many peoples, who leave him so far behind. No particular quality will make a man proud who at the same time takes into account so many other imperfect and weak qualities that are in him, and in the end the nothingness of the human condition. Because Socrates alone had seriously taken to heart the precept of his god, to know himself, and through that study had come to despise himself, he alone was judged worthy of the name of Wise. Whoever knows himself in this way, let him boldly make himself known with his own mouth.[14]

14 "Know thyself" was inscribed at Apollo's temple at Delphi, whose oracle declared Socrates the wisest of men.

II.7 Of Rewards of Honor

Des récompenses d'honneur
Honors without monetary value reward virtue best, Montaigne argues, but only while rare—as France's Order of Saint Michael no longer is.

2.7.1 Those who write the life of Augustus Caesar note this about his military discipline: that he was marvelously generous with gifts to those who deserved them, but quite as sparing with purely honorary rewards. And yet he himself had been granted every military reward by his uncle before he had ever been to war.[1] It was a fine invention, and one accepted in most governments of the world, to establish certain marks that are empty and of no monetary value in order to honor and reward virtue: such as crowns of laurel, of oak, of myrtle; the cut of a certain garment; the privilege of riding in a carriage through the city, or of going about at night with a torch; some special seat at public assemblies; the prerogative of certain surnames and titles; certain marks on coats of arms; and similar things, whose use has been variously received according to the opinion of nations, and still endures.

2.7.2 We, for our part, and several of our neighbors, have orders of knighthood, which are established for this purpose alone. It is truly a very good and profitable custom to find a way of recognizing the worth of rare and excellent men, and of contenting and satisfying them with payments that are no burden at all on the public and cost the Prince nothing. And what has always

1 The source is Suetonius, Life of Augustus 25; the "uncle" was in fact his great-uncle Julius Caesar.

been known from ancient experience, and what we too could once see among ourselves—that people of quality were more eager for such rewards than for those that brought gain and profit—is not without reason and strong likelihood. If with a prize that ought to be purely one of honor we mix other advantages and wealth, this mixture, instead of increasing its esteem, debases and diminishes it. The Order of Saint Michael, which was in credit among us for so long, had no greater advantage than this: that it brought with it no other advantage. That is why there was once no office or position, whatever it might be, to which the nobility aspired with as much desire and eagerness as to the Order, nor any rank that brought more respect and grandeur: virtue more willingly embracing and aspiring to a reward that is purely its own, glorious rather than useful.[2]

2.7.3 For in truth other gifts are not put to so worthy a use, since they are employed on all sorts of occasions. With riches we pay for a valet's service, a courier's diligence, dancing, vaulting, speaking, and the vilest services we receive; indeed vice is paid with them too—flattery, pimping, treachery. It is no wonder if virtue accepts and desires this sort of common coin less willingly than the kind that is proper and peculiar to it, wholly noble and generous. Augustus was right to be much more thrifty and sparing with the latter than with the former, since honor is a privilege that draws its principal essence from rarity—and so does virtue itself. *If no one is bad, who can be good?* We do not mention, in praise of a man, that he takes care to bring up his children, because it is a common action, however right it may be—any more than we notice a tall tree where the whole forest is the same. I do not think any citizen of Sparta prided himself on his valor, for it was a common virtue in their nation; and just as little on loyalty and contempt for riches. No reward falls due to a virtue, however great it may be, that has become customary;

2 Founded by Louis XI in 1469, the Order was conferred so freely during the civil wars that it lost its prestige; Montaigne received it in 1571.

and I am not sure, besides, that we would ever call it great when it is common.[3]

2.7.4 Since, then, these rewards of honor have no other value and esteem than this, that few people enjoy them, the only way to destroy them is to hand them out freely. Even if there were more men than in times past who deserved our Order, its esteem should not therefore have been corrupted. And it may easily happen that more do deserve it; for there is no virtue that spreads so easily as military valor. There is another valor, true, perfect and philosophical, of which I am not speaking (and I use this word in our ordinary sense), much greater than this one and fuller: a strength and assurance of the soul, despising equally every kind of adverse accident; even, uniform and constant; of which ours is only a very small ray.

2.7.5 Practice, education, example and custom can do all they wish in establishing the kind I am speaking of, and easily make it common, as is very easy to see from the experience our civil wars give us. And if someone could unite us now and set our whole people fiercely upon a common enterprise, we would make our ancient military name flourish again. It is quite certain that in times past the reward of the Order did not concern valor alone; it looked further. It was never the pay of a valiant soldier, but of a famous captain. The science of obeying did not deserve so honorable a reward. In former times a more universal military expertise was required for it, one that embraced most of a military man's qualities, and the greatest of them—*for the skills of a soldier and those of a general are not the same*—and the man was also required to be, in addition, of a rank suited to such a dignity. But I say that even if more people were worthy of it than were found in former times, one should not therefore have become more liberal with it; and it would have been better to fail to bestow it on all those to whom it was due than to lose forever, as we have just done, the use of so useful an invention. No man of spirit deigns to pride himself on what he has in com-

3 Martial, Epigrams XII.82.

mon with many.[4] And those today who have least deserved this reward make the greatest show of disdaining it, so as thereby to place themselves among those who are wronged when this mark, which was particularly due to them, is unworthily scattered about and cheapened.

2.7.6 Now to expect, by effacing and abolishing this order, to be able suddenly to restore a similar custom to credit and renew it is not an undertaking suited to so licentious and sick a season as the one we find ourselves in now; and the result will be that the new one will incur from its birth the drawbacks that have just ruined the other. The rules for dispensing this new order would need to be extremely tight and strict to give it authority; and this tumultuous season is not capable of a short, controlled rein. Besides, before it can be given credit, the memory of the first must be lost, along with the contempt into which it has fallen.[5]

2.7.7 This might be the place for some reasoning on the nature of valor and how this virtue differs from the others; but since Plutarch has often returned to this subject, I would be meddling to no purpose if I repeated here what he says of it. This is worth considering: that our nation gives valor the first rank among the virtues, as its name shows, for it comes from "value"; and that in our usage, when we speak of a man who is worth a great deal, or a man of worth, in the style of our court and our nobility, it means nothing other than a valiant man—in a way similar to the Romans. For with them the general term for virtue takes its etymology from strength.[6] The proper, sole and essential form of nobility in France is the military profession. It is likely that the first virtue to show itself among men, and to give some the advantage over others, was this one, by which the strongest and most courageous made themselves masters of the weaker and acquired special rank and reputation; whence this honor and dignity of language has remained attached to it. Or else these

4 Livy, History of Rome XXV.19.
5 Henry III founded the Order of the Holy Spirit in 1578.
6 Latin virtus (virtue) derives from vir, "man," and carried the sense of manly strength and courage.

nations, being very warlike, gave the prize and the worthiest title to the virtue that was most familiar to them. Just as our passion and the feverish anxiety we have about the chastity of women also brings it about that a good woman, a woman of worth, a woman of honor and virtue, in effect means nothing else to us than a chaste woman: as if, to bind them to this duty, we neglected all the others and gave them free rein for every other fault, striking a bargain to make them give up this one.

II.8 Of the Affection of Fathers for Their Children

De l'affection des pères aux enfants
Addressed to Madame d'Estissac, this essay argues that fathers should earn their children's love through reason, not hoard their wealth and authority.

2.8.1 *To Madame d'Estissac.*[1]

2.8.2 Madam, if strangeness and novelty, which usually give value to things, do not save me, I shall never come out of this foolish undertaking with honor; but it is so fantastic, and has a face so remote from common practice, that this may let it pass. It was a melancholy humor—and therefore a humor very hostile to my natural temperament—produced by the gloom of the solitude into which I had thrown myself some years ago, that first put into my head this daydream of meddling with writing. And then, finding myself entirely unprovided and empty of any other matter, I offered myself to myself as argument and subject. It is the only book in the world of its kind, and of a wild and extravagant design. Nor is there anything in this work worth remarking except this oddity; for on so vain and base a subject the best craftsman in the world could not have put a form that deserves to be taken into account. Now, Madam, since I have to portray myself to the life, I would have left out an important feature if I had not represented the honor I have always paid to your merits. And I wanted to say it particularly at the head of

1 Louise de La Béraudière, widow of Louis d'Estissac; her son Charles accompanied Montaigne on his journey to Italy in 1580.

this chapter, since among your other good qualities, the love you have shown your children holds one of the first places. Whoever knows at what age Monsieur d'Estissac, your husband, left you a widow; the great and honorable matches that have been offered you, as many as to any lady in France of your station; the constancy and firmness with which, for so many years and through so many thorny difficulties, you have sustained the charge and management of their affairs, which have driven you about to every corner of France and still keep you besieged; and the happy progress you have brought them to by your own prudence or good Fortune—will readily say with me that we have no example of maternal affection in our time more striking than yours. I praise God, Madam, that it has been so well employed; for the good hopes that Monsieur d'Estissac, your son, gives of himself are sufficient assurance that when he comes of age you will receive from him the obedience and gratitude of a very good son. But since, because of his childhood, he has not been able to notice the extreme services he has received from you in such great number, I want him—if these writings should one day fall into his hands, when I no longer have mouth or speech to say it—to receive this testimony from me in all truth (and it will be borne out still more vividly to him by the good effects he will feel, if it please God): that there is no gentleman in France who owes more to his mother than he does, and that he can give no surer proof in the future of his goodness and his virtue than by acknowledging you as such.

WHY LOVE FLOWS DOWNWARD

Parents love their children more than children love parents, since the giver loves more than the receiver.

2.8.3 If there is any truly natural law, that is to say any instinct seen to be universally and perpetually imprinted in animals and in us (which is not without controversy), I can say, in my opinion, that after the care every animal has for its own preservation and for avoiding what harms it, the affection that the begetter

bears its offspring holds second place in this ranking. And because Nature seems to have commended it to us, looking to extend and carry forward the successive pieces of this machine of hers, it is no wonder if, going backward from children to fathers, it is not so great. Add to this another, Aristotelian consideration: that he who does good to someone loves him more than he is loved by him.[2] And he to whom something is owed loves more than he who owes it; and every craftsman loves his work more than he would be loved by it if the work had feeling, since we hold being dear, and being consists in movement and action. Therefore each man is in some way in his work. He who does good performs a fine and honorable action; he who receives performs only a useful one. Now the useful is much less lovable than the honorable. The honorable is stable and permanent, furnishing the one who did it with a constant gratification. The useful is easily lost and slips away, and its memory is neither so fresh nor so sweet. Things are dearer to us the more they have cost us. And giving costs more than taking.

2.8.4 Since it has pleased God to endow us with some capacity for reasoning, so that we should not, like the animals, be slavishly subjected to the common laws, but should apply ourselves to them by judgment and voluntary freedom, we must indeed yield a little to the simple authority of Nature, but not let ourselves be tyrannically carried away by her: reason alone must have the guidance of our inclinations. For my part, my taste is strangely dull toward those propensities that are produced in us without the command and mediation of our judgment. So, on the subject I am speaking of, I cannot accept that passion with which people embrace children barely born, who have neither movement in their soul nor recognizable form in their body by which they could make themselves lovable; and I have not willingly allowed them to be nursed near me. A true and well-regulated affection ought to be born and to grow with the knowledge they give us of themselves; and then, if they are worth it, natural propensity marching along with reason, we

2 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics IX.7.

should cherish them with a truly paternal love; and we should judge likewise if they are otherwise, always submitting to reason in spite of natural force. It very often goes the other way, and most commonly we feel more moved by the stamping, games and childish silliness of our children than we are later by their fully formed actions—as if we had loved them for our amusement, like monkeys, and not as human beings. And a man who supplies toys very liberally for their childhood turns tight-fisted at the slightest expense they need once they are grown. Indeed it seems that the jealousy we feel at seeing them make their appearance and enjoy the world, just when we are about to leave it, makes us more sparing and close-fisted with them. It annoys us that they tread on our heels, as if urging us to leave. And if we had to fear that, since the order of things provides that they cannot, to tell the truth, exist or live except at the expense of our existence and our life, we should not have meddled with being fathers.

SHARING WITH GROWN CHILDREN

Old fathers who hoard their goods drive their sons to despair and even to theft.

2.8.5 As for me, I find it cruel and unjust not to admit them to a share and partnership in our goods, and as companions in the understanding of our domestic affairs when they are capable of it, and not to cut back and restrict our own comforts to provide for theirs, since we begot them for that purpose. It is unjust that an old father, broken and half dead, should enjoy alone, in a corner by the fire, goods that would suffice for the advancement and maintenance of several children, and meanwhile let them, for lack of means, lose their best years without making their way into public service and the knowledge of men. They are driven to the despair of seeking some means, however unjust, to provide for their needs. So I have seen in my time several young men of good family so given to theft that no correction could turn them from it. I know one, well connected, to whom I once

spoke for this purpose at the request of his brother, a very honorable and gallant gentleman. He answered and confessed to me quite frankly that he had been led into this filthy practice by the harshness and avarice of his father, but that now he was so used to it that he could not keep from it. And at that very time he had just been caught stealing the rings of a lady, at whose morning rising he had been present along with many others. He reminded me of a story I had heard told about another gentleman, so practiced and trained in this fine trade in his youth that when he later came into his property and resolved to give up this traffic, he still could not keep himself, if he passed near a shop where there was something he needed, from stealing it, even though he then took the trouble to send payment for it. And I have seen several so trained and broken to it that even among their own companions they habitually stole things they meant to give back. I am a Gascon, and yet there is no vice I understand less.[3] I hate it a little more by temperament than I condemn it by reasoning; not even in desire do I take anything from anyone. This region is, truth to tell, a little more decried for it than the other parts of the French nation. And yet in our time we have seen, on various occasions, men of good family from other regions in the hands of justice, convicted of several horrible robberies. I fear that for this depravity we must to some extent blame this vice of the fathers.

2.8.6 And if I am answered as a lord of good understanding once answered me—that he saved up his riches not to get any other fruit or use from them than to make himself honored and sought after by his family; and that, since age had taken away all his other strengths, this was the only remedy left to him to maintain his authority in his household and to avoid falling into contempt and disdain with everyone (indeed, according to Aristotle, not only old age but every weakness promotes avarice)—that is something; but it is the medicine for an ailment whose birth one ought to have prevented. A father is very wretched who holds his children's affection only through their need of his

3 Gascons had a proverbial reputation for thieving and boasting.

help—if that can be called affection. One must make oneself respected by one's virtue and ability, and loved by one's kindness and gentleness of manner. Even the ashes of a rich substance have their value; and the bones and relics of honorable persons we are accustomed to hold in respect and reverence.

> No old age can be so decrepit and stale, in a man who has spent his life in honor, that it is not venerable; and especially to his children, whose souls he must have trained to their duty by reason, not by necessity and need, nor by harshness and force. *And he is far mistaken, in my opinion at least,*
> *who believes that authority is weightier or more stable*
> *when founded on force than when it is joined by friendship.*[4]

AGAINST THE ROD

Montaigne condemns violence in education and recalls how gently he and his daughter were raised.

2.8.7 I condemn all violence in the education of a tender soul that is being trained for honor and freedom. There is something servile about rigor and constraint; and I hold that what cannot be done by reason, prudence and skill is never done by force. That is how I was brought up: they say that in all my early years I tasted the rod only twice, and very softly. I owed the same to the children I have had. They all died on me while at nurse; but Léonor, an only daughter who escaped that misfortune, has reached the age of six and more without anything being used to guide her or to punish her childish faults—her mother's indulgence readily lending itself to this—other than words, and very gentle ones. And even if my hopes were disappointed in this, there are plenty of other causes to blame without finding fault with my method, which I know to be just and natural. I would have been still more scrupulous about this with boys, who are less born to serve and of a freer condition: I would have liked to swell their hearts with candor and frankness. I have seen no

4 Terence, The Brothers 65–67.

other effect of the rod than to make souls more cowardly, or more maliciously stubborn.

2.8.8 Do we want to be loved by our children? Do we want to take away their reason for wishing us dead? (Although no reason for so horrible a wish can be either just or excusable: *no crime has a reason*.) Let us furnish their lives reasonably with what is in our power. For that, we ought not to marry so young that our age comes almost to merge with theirs. For this drawback throws us into many great difficulties.[5] I say this especially to the nobility, who are of an idle condition and live, as they say, only on their rents; for elsewhere, where life depends on earning, having many children around is a convenience for the household: they are so many new tools and instruments for growing rich.

2.8.9 I married at thirty-three, and I approve of thirty-five, the age said to be Aristotle's opinion. Plato does not want people to marry before thirty; but he is right to mock those who perform the works of marriage after fifty-five, and he condemns their offspring as unworthy of food and life. Thales set the truest limits: when he was young, he answered his mother, who was pressing him to marry, that it was not yet time; and when he was getting on in years, that it was no longer time. One must deny opportunity to every inopportune action.

5 Livy, History of Rome XXVIII.28.

> The ancient Gauls considered it an extreme disgrace to have had intercourse with a woman before the age of twenty, and they particularly recommended to men who wanted to train for war that they keep their virginity until well on in years, since courage is softened and diverted by coupling with women. *But now, joined to a young bride,*
> *happy at last in his children, he had grown soft*
> *in the affections of father and husband.* Muleasses, King of Tunis, the one whom the Emperor Charles V restored to his states, reproached the memory of his father Mahomet for his frequenting of women, calling him a sluggard, spineless, a begetter of children.[6]

Greek history notes of Iccus of Tarentum, of Chryso, of Astylus, of Diopompus and others that, to keep their bodies firm for running in the Olympic Games, for wrestling and such exercises, they deprived themselves of every kind of act of Venus for as long as that concern lasted. In a certain region of the Spanish Indies, men were not allowed to marry until after forty, and yet girls were allowed to at ten.[7] A gentleman of thirty-five: it is not yet time for him to make way for his son of twenty. He himself is in the midst of making his appearance, on military expeditions and at his Prince's court; he needs his resources. He should certainly share them, but share them in such a way that he does not forget himself for others. And to such a man the reply that fathers commonly have on their lips may justly apply: "I don't want to undress before I go to bed."

2.8.10 But a father crushed by years and ailments, deprived by his weakness and poor health of the common company of men, wrongs himself and his family by uselessly brooding over a great heap of riches. He is in a fit state, if he is wise, to want to undress for bed—not down to his shirt, but down to a good warm nightgown. The rest of the finery, for which he has no fur-

6 Tasso, Jerusalem Delivered X.39.

7 Iccus of Tarentum was a celebrated athlete whose continence Plato cites in the Laws.

ther use, he should willingly bestow on those to whom by natural order it ought to belong. It is reasonable that he should leave them the use of it, since Nature deprives him of it; otherwise there is no doubt malice and envy in it. The finest of the Emperor Charles V's actions was this, in imitation of some ancients of his caliber: that he was able to recognize that reason commands us to undress when our robes weigh on us and hamper us, and to go to bed when our legs fail us. He resigned his wealth, greatness and power to his son when he felt failing in himself the firmness and strength to conduct affairs with the glory he had won in them. *Be sensible and unharness the aging horse in good time, lest / at the end he stumble, a laughingstock, and heave his flanks.*[8]

KNOWING WHEN TO STEP ASIDE

Old men should hand over their affairs in time, as Charles V did.

2.8.11 This failing has ruined the reputation of most of the great men of the world: not knowing how to recognize ourselves in good time, and not feeling the impotence and extreme alteration that age naturally brings to both body and soul. In my opinion it affects both equally, unless the soul gets more than half. In my time I have seen, and known intimately, persons of great authority who had plainly fallen a marvelous distance from that former ability which I knew from the reputation they had won in their best years. For their honor's sake I would gladly have wished them retired to their homes at their ease, relieved of public and military duties that were no longer for their shoulders. I was once on intimate terms in the household of a gentleman who was a widower and very old, though his old age was still quite green. He had several daughters to marry off and a son already old enough to make his appearance in the world. This burdened his house with many expenses and with visits from outsiders, which gave him little pleasure. This was not

8 Charles V abdicated in 1555–1556 in favor of his son Philip II and retired to the monastery of Yuste. The verse is Horace, Epistles I.1.8–9.

only out of concern for economy, but still more because, on account of his age, he had adopted a way of life very far removed from ours. One day, a little boldly, as is my habit, I told him it would become him better to make way for us. He should leave his main house to his son, for it was the only one he had that was well built and well furnished, and retire to an estate of his nearby, where no one would disturb his repose. Given his children's situation, he could not otherwise escape our importunity. He took my advice afterward, and was the better for it.

2.8.12 This is not to say that we should give to them by a binding deed that we could never go back on. I am in a position to play this part myself. I would leave them the enjoyment of my house and my property, but with the freedom to repent of it if they gave me cause. I would leave them the use of it because it was no longer convenient for me. And of authority over affairs in general, I would keep as much for myself as I pleased. For I have always judged that it must be a great satisfaction for an old father to set his children on the way to managing his affairs himself, and to be able to oversee their conduct during his lifetime. He can furnish them with instruction and advice from his own experience. He can hand on the ancient honor and order of his house into the hands of his successors himself, and so assure himself of the hopes he may place in their future conduct. And to that end I would not shun their company. I would want to watch over them from close by, and to enjoy their gaiety and their festivities, as far as my age allowed. Perhaps I could not live among them without spoiling their gatherings with the moroseness of my age and the constraints of my illnesses, and without also forcing and bending the rules and ways of living I would then have. If so, I would at least want to live near them, in a part of my house—not the showiest, but the most comfortable. Not as I saw, some years ago, a Dean of Saint Hilary's at Poitiers, reduced to such solitude by the burden of his melancholy that when I entered his room, he had not taken a single step out of it for twenty-two years. And yet all his movements were free and easy, except for a catarrh that settled on his stomach. Barely

once a week would he allow anyone to come in to see him. He always kept himself shut up alone in his room, locked from the inside, except that once a day a valet brought him his food, and the valet did nothing but come in and go out. His occupation was walking up and down and reading some book, for he had some acquaintance with letters. For the rest, he was determined to die in this way of life, as he did soon after. I would try, by gentle conversation, to foster in my children a lively affection and an unfeigned goodwill toward me. That is easily won with well-born natures. For if they are raging beasts, such as our age produces by the thousands, they must be hated and shunned as such.

2.8.13 I dislike the custom of forbidding children to call their fathers "father" and requiring them to use some other title, as being more respectful—as if Nature had not sufficiently provided for our authority. We call Almighty God father, and we disdain to have our children call us so. I have reformed this error in my family. It is also folly and injustice to deprive grown children of familiarity with their fathers, and to try to keep up a stern and disdainful haughtiness toward them, hoping thereby to keep them in fear and obedience. For it is a quite useless farce, which makes fathers irksome to their children and, what is worse, ridiculous. They have youth and strength in their hands, and consequently the wind and favor of the world. And they greet with mockery these proud and tyrannical airs of a man who has no blood left either in his heart or in his veins—real scarecrows in a hemp field. Even if I could make myself feared, I would still rather make myself loved. There are so many kinds of defects in old age, so much impotence, and it is so liable to contempt, that the best acquisition it can make is the affection and love of its own people. Command and fear are no longer its weapons.

THE DECEIVED OLD MASTER

An imperious old man believes he rules his house while everyone cheats him.

2.8.14 I have seen one man whose youth had been very imperious. Now that he has come to old age, though he is getting through it as healthily as anyone can, he strikes, he bites, he swears—the most tempestuous master in France. He eats himself up with worry and vigilance. All of it is mere play-acting, and his own household is in on the plot. Others have the best part of the use of the granary, the cellar, and even his purse, while he keeps the keys in his pouch, dearer to him than his eyes. While he contents himself with a thrifty and stingy table, there is debauchery going on in various corners of his house—gambling, spending, and swapping tales of his futile anger and precautions. Everyone keeps watch against him. If by chance some wretched servant becomes devoted to him, that servant is at once made suspect in his eyes—and suspicion is a trait old age is all too ready to bite at of its own accord. How many times has he boasted to me of the tight rein he kept on his people, the exact obedience and reverence he received from them, and how clearly he saw into his affairs! *He alone knows nothing of it all.* I know of no man who could bring more qualities, natural and acquired, suited to keeping mastery than he does, and yet he has lost it like a child. That is why I have chosen him, among several such situations that I know, as the most instructive example. Whether he is better off this way or otherwise would make a matter for a scholastic debate. In his presence, everything gives way to him.[9] They let his authority run its empty course so far that no one ever resists him. He is believed, he is feared, he is respected to his heart's content. Does he dismiss a valet? The man packs his bundle, and off he goes—but only out of his sight. The steps of old age are so slow and its senses so dim that the man will live in the same house and do his job for a year without being noticed.

9 Terence, The Brothers (Adelphoe).

And when the time is ripe, letters are made to arrive from far away, pitiful and pleading, full of promises to do better, and by this means he is restored to favor. Does Monsieur make some bargain or send some dispatch that others dislike? It is suppressed, and soon afterward enough reasons are forged to excuse the failure to carry it out or to reply. Since no letters from outside are brought to him first, he sees only those that seem convenient for him to know about. If by some chance he gets hold of them, he is in the habit of relying on a certain person to read them to him, and that person finds in them on the spot whatever is wanted. Time and again they make a man beg his pardon who is insulting him in his letter. In short, he sees his affairs only through an image that has been arranged, designed, and made as satisfying as possible, so as not to stir up his ill humor and his wrath. Under different guises, I have seen plenty of households, long-lasting and steady, run with exactly the same result.

2.8.15 Women are always inclined to be at odds with their husbands. They seize with both hands every pretext for opposing them, and the first excuse serves them as full justification. I knew one who robbed her husband heavily so that, as she told her confessor, she could make her alms more generous. Trust that pious dispensation! No management seems to them to have enough dignity if it comes as a grant from the husband. They must usurp it, either craftily or boldly, and always wrongfully, to give it grace and authority. This is what happens in the case I am speaking of. When it is against a poor old man and on behalf of the children, they seize on that title and serve their passion with it, and pride themselves on it. As if in a common servitude, they readily conspire against his rule and government. If the children are sons, grown and flourishing, they too promptly suborn the steward, the receiver, and all the rest, by force or by favor. Those who have neither wife nor son fall into this misfortune less easily, but also more cruelly and shamefully. Old Cato said in his day: so many servants, so many enemies. Consider the distance between the purity of his age and ours, and see

whether he did not mean to warn us that wife, son, and servant are so many enemies to us. Decrepitude does us a service by supplying the sweet benefit of not noticing and not knowing, and the ease with which we let ourselves be deceived. If we took it to heart, what would become of us? Especially in these times, when the judges who have to settle our disputes are commonly partisans of the young, and interested ones.

2.8.16 If I fail to see this cheating, at least I do not fail to see that I am very easy to cheat. And can anyone ever say enough about the value of a friend, compared with these civil ties? Even the image of friendship that I see in animals, so pure—with what reverence I respect it! If others cheat me, at least I do not cheat myself into thinking I can guard against it, nor rack my brains to make myself able to. I save myself from such betrayals in my own bosom, not by an anxious and turbulent curiosity, but rather by diversion and resolution. When I hear someone's situation described, I do not dwell on him; I immediately turn my eyes on myself, to see how I stand. Everything that touches him concerns me. His misfortune warns me and puts me on my guard on that side. Every day and at every hour we say of another what we could more properly say of ourselves, if we knew how to turn our attention back on ourselves as well as to extend it outward. And many authors harm the defense of their own cause in this way. They charge rashly forward against the cause they attack, and hurl at their enemies darts that could be hurled back at them to better effect.

2.8.17 The late Marshal de Monluc had lost his son, who died on the island of Madeira, truly a brave gentleman and of great promise. Among his other regrets, he stressed to me the sorrow and heartbreak he felt at never having opened himself to him. Through that humor of paternal gravity and grimace, he had lost the chance of enjoying and truly knowing his son, and also of telling him of the extreme affection he bore him and the high opinion he had of his virtue. "And that poor boy," he said, "saw nothing of me but a scowling face full of contempt, and has carried away the belief that I could neither love him nor esteem

him as he deserved."[10] "Whom was I saving it for, the revealing of that singular affection I bore him in my soul? Was it not he who should have had all the pleasure of it and all the obligation? I constrained and tormented myself to keep up this empty mask. In doing so I lost the pleasure of his company, and with it his goodwill, which can only have been very cold toward me, since he never received anything from me but harshness, nor felt anything but a tyrannical manner." I find that this complaint was well taken and reasonable. For, as I know by an all too certain experience, there is no consolation so sweet in the loss of our friends as the knowledge that we left nothing unsaid to them, and that we had a perfect and complete communication with them. O my friend! Am I the better for having had the taste of it, or am I the worse? I am certainly much the better. My grief for him consoles me and honors me. Is it not a pious and pleasant duty of my life to keep up his funeral rites forever? Is there any enjoyment worth this loss?[11]

2.8.18 I open myself to my family as much as I can, and very willingly let them know the state of my will and of my judgment toward them, as toward everyone. I hasten to bring myself forward and present myself, for I do not want anyone to be mistaken about me in any respect. Caesar tells us that our ancient Gauls had several customs of their own, and this was one of them: children did not present themselves to their fathers, nor dare appear in public in their company, until they began to bear arms. It was as if they meant that this was also the time for fathers to admit them into their familiarity and acquaintance.[12]

10 Blaise de Monluc (c. 1500–1577), marshal of France and author of memoirs; his son Pierre-Bertrand died on Madeira in 1566.

11 Montaigne's friend Étienne de La Boétie, who died in 1563.

12 Caesar, The Gallic War, VI.18.

WILLS AND WIDOWS

Fathers should not leave everything to their wives, and estates should follow the custom of the country.

2.8.19 I have seen yet another kind of indiscretion in some fathers of my time. They are not content to have deprived their children, throughout their own long lives, of the share they should naturally have had in their fortunes. They also leave this same authority over all their property to their wives after them, with the right to dispose of it as they fancy. I knew a certain lord, one of the first officers of our Crown, who had expectations of inheriting more than fifty thousand crowns a year in income. Yet he died needy and buried in debt at more than fifty years of age. His mother, in her extreme decrepitude, still enjoyed all the property by the father's will—and the father had himself lived nearly eighty years. That does not seem reasonable to me in any way. So I see little advantage for a man whose affairs are going well in seeking a wife who burdens him with a large dowry; no outside debt brings more ruin to families. My forebears commonly followed this advice, very wisely, and so have I. But those who advise us against rich wives, for fear that they may be less tractable and grateful, are mistaken. They make us lose a real advantage for the sake of so frivolous a conjecture. For an unreasonable woman, it costs no more to override one reason than another. Such women like themselves best where they are most in the wrong. Injustice entices them, as the honor of their virtuous actions entices good women. And good women are the more gracious the richer they are, just as they are chaste more willingly and proudly for being beautiful.

2.8.20 It is reasonable to leave the administration of affairs to mothers while the children are not of legal age to take on the charge. But the father has brought them up very badly if he cannot hope that in their maturity they will have more wisdom and ability than his wife, given the ordinary weakness of the sex. Yet it would truly be more against Nature to make mothers depend

on the discretion of their children. They should be given generously the means to keep up their station according to the rank of their house and their age. Need and want are much more unbecoming to them, and much harder for them to bear, than for men. The burden should rather be put on the children than on the mother.

2.8.21 In general, the soundest way of distributing our goods at death seems to me to be to let them be distributed according to the custom of the country. The laws have thought about it better than we have, and it is better to let them err in their choice than to risk erring rashly in ours. These goods are not properly ours, since by civil prescription, and without us, they are destined for certain heirs. And although we have some freedom beyond that, I hold that it takes a great and very evident cause to make us take away from someone what his fortune had won for him and what common justice called him to. It is an unreasonable abuse of that freedom to make it serve our frivolous and private fancies. My lot has done me the favor of not presenting me with occasions that might tempt me and divert my affection from the common and lawful order. I see some people with whom it is a waste of time to spend long care on good offices. One word taken the wrong way wipes out the merit of ten years. Happy the man who is on hand at the right moment to anoint their will at that last passage! The latest act carries the day. Not the best and most frequent services, but the most recent and present ones do the trick. These are people who play with their wills as with apples or rods, to reward or punish every action of those who claim an interest in them. It is a matter of too long consequence and too much weight to be carried about like this at every moment. Wise men take their stand on it once and for all, looking above all to reason and public custom.

2.8.22 We take these entails in the male line a little too much to heart, and propose a ridiculous eternity for our names. We also give too much weight to the vain conjectures about the future that children's minds give us. It might have been an injustice to displace me from my rank for having been the dullest and most

leaden, the slowest and most unwilling at my lessons. I was worse not only than all my brothers but than all the children in my province, whether the lessons were exercises of the mind or exercises of the body. It is folly to make extraordinary selections on the strength of such divinations, in which we are so often deceived.[13] If this rule may be broken, and the destinies corrected in their choice of our heirs, there is more reason for doing so on account of some remarkable and enormous bodily deformity. That is a constant, incurable defect, and, in the eyes of people like us who prize beauty so highly, a seriously damaging one.

2.8.23 The pleasant dialogue between Plato's lawgiver and his citizens will do honor to this passage. "What then," they say, feeling their end approaching, "may we not dispose of what is ours to whom we please? O gods, what cruelty! That we should not be allowed to give more or less to our people, as we fancy, according to how they have served us in our illnesses, in our old age, in our affairs!" To which the lawgiver replies as follows: "My friends, who no doubt are soon to die, it is hard for you to know yourselves, and to know what is yours, as the Delphic inscription bids.[14] "I, who make the laws, hold that neither are you your own, nor is what you enjoy your own. Both you and your goods belong to your family, past as well as future. But still more do your family and your goods belong to the public. Some flatterer in your old age or your illness, or some passion, might wrongly urge you to make an unjust will, and I will guard you against that. I will have regard both to the universal interest of the city and to that of your house. So I will establish laws, and make it felt, as is right, that private advantage must give way to the common good. Go your way cheerfully where human necessity calls you. "It is for me, who regard no one thing more than another and who take care of the general good as far as I can, to concern myself with what you leave behind."

13 Entails ("substitutions") were legal settlements binding an estate to pass down a fixed line of heirs, usually male.

14 Plato, Laws, Book XI. The inscription on Apollo's temple at Delphi read "Know thyself."

2.8.24 To return to my subject, it seems to me in every way that women are rarely born to whom mastery over men is due, except the maternal and natural kind. The exception is for the punishment of men who, from some feverish humor, have voluntarily submitted to them. But that does not apply at all to old women, whom we are speaking of here. It is the plausibility of this consideration that has made us so ready to invent this law and give it footing, though no one ever saw it: the law that excludes women from succession to this crown. There is hardly a lordship in the world where it is not alleged, as it is here, on the strength of a plausible reason that authorizes it. But Fortune has given it more credit in some places than in others.[15] It is dangerous to leave the dispensing of our estate to their judgment, according to the choice they will make among the children, which is unfair and capricious every time. For that disordered appetite and sick taste they have in their pregnancies, they have in their souls at all times. Commonly you see them devote themselves to the weakest and most ill-favored, or to those, if they have any, who still hang about their necks. They do not have enough power of reasoning to choose and embrace what deserves it. So they more readily let themselves go where Nature's impulses act alone—like animals, which know their young only while they hang at their teats.

2.8.25 Moreover, it is easy to see by experience that this natural affection to which we give so much authority has very weak roots. For a very slight profit we tear their own children from mothers' arms every day and make them take charge of ours. We make them abandon theirs to some wretched nurse to whom we would not want to entrust ours, or to some goat. We forbid them not only to suckle their own children, whatever danger the children may run as a result, but even to take any care of them, so that they may devote themselves wholly to the service of ours. And in most of these women we see a spurious affection soon arise through habit, more vehement than the natural one, and a greater solicitude for the preservation of the borrowed children

15 The so-called Salic law, invoked to bar women from the French throne.

than of their own. The reason I spoke of goats is that around my home it is common to see village women call goats to their aid when they cannot feed children at their breasts. And at this moment I have two lackeys who never sucked woman's milk for more than a week. These goats are quickly trained to come and suckle these little children. They recognize their voices when they cry, and come running. If they are offered a child other than their nursling, they refuse it, and the child does the same with another goat. The other day I saw a child whose goat was taken away from him because his father had only borrowed it from a neighbor. He could never take to the other goat he was offered, and died, no doubt of hunger. Animals alter and corrupt natural affection as easily as we do. I believe that in what Herodotus relates of a certain district of Libya there is often a mistake. He says that there men mate with women indiscriminately, but that when the child has the strength to walk, it takes as its father the man toward whom, in the crowd, its natural inclination carries its first steps.[16]

CHILDREN OF THE MIND

Books are offspring dearer than bodily children, as Labienus, Lucan and Epicurus show.

2.8.26 Now consider this simple reason for loving our children: that we begot them, which is why we call them our other selves. It seems that there is indeed another production coming from us that deserves no less esteem. For what we beget by the soul—the offspring of our mind, of our courage and ability—is produced by a nobler part than the body, and is more our own. We are father and mother together in this generation. These children cost us much more dearly, and bring us more honor, if there is anything good in them. For the worth of our other children is much more theirs than ours; the share we have in it is very slight. But in these, all the beauty, all the grace and value is ours. So they represent us and reflect us much more vividly than the

16 Herodotus, Histories, IV.180.

others. Plato adds that these are immortal children, who immortalize their fathers and even deify them, like Lycurgus, Solon, and Minos. Now since histories are full of examples of the common love of fathers for their children, it did not seem out of place to me to pick out a few examples of this other kind too. Heliodorus, that good bishop of Tricca, preferred to lose the dignity, the revenue, and the devotion of so venerable a prelacy rather than lose his daughter. She is a daughter who still survives, very charming, but perhaps a little too elaborately and softly frilled for the daughter of a churchman and priest, and of too amorous a fashion. There was a Labienus at Rome, a person of great worth and authority, who among other qualities excelled in every kind of literature. He was, I believe, the son of the great Labienus, the foremost of the captains who served under Caesar in the Gallic War. That Labienus later threw in his lot with Pompey the Great and held out valiantly until Caesar defeated him in Spain.[17] Many people envied the virtue of the Labienus I am speaking of. As is likely, the courtiers and favorites of the emperors of his time were his enemies, hostile to his frankness and to the temper inherited from his father, which he still kept up against tyranny. It may be believed that he had tinged his writings and books with it. His adversaries prosecuted him before the magistrate at Rome and obtained a sentence condemning several of his published works to be burned. It was with him that this new kind of punishment began, which was later continued at Rome against several others: punishing with death the writings themselves, and the studies.[18] Apparently there were not enough means and matter for cruelty unless we mixed in things that Nature has exempted from all feeling and all suffering, like reputation and the inventions of our mind. We had to go on and extend bodily ills to the disciplines and monuments of the Muses. Now Labienus could not bear this loss, nor

17 Heliodorus, Greek author of the romance Aethiopica (the story of Theagenes and Chariclea), was said to have given up his bishopric rather than disown the book.

18 Titus Labienus, orator and historian under Augustus, whose books were burned by order of the Senate.

survive his own beloved offspring. He had himself carried and shut up alive in the tomb of his ancestors, where at one stroke he saw to killing himself and burying himself together. It is hard to show any other paternal affection more vehement than that. Cassius Severus, a very eloquent man and his friend, seeing his books burned, cried out that by the same sentence they ought to condemn him to be burned alive along with them, for he carried and preserved in his memory what they contained. A similar misfortune befell Cremutius Cordus, accused of having praised Brutus and Cassius in his books. That base, servile, and corrupt Senate, worthy of a worse master than Tiberius, condemned his writings to the fire. He was content to keep them company in their death, and killed himself by refusing food.[19] Good Lucan was condemned by that scoundrel Nero. In the last moments of his life, most of his blood had already drained out through the veins of his arms, which he had had his doctor cut so that he might die, and the cold had seized the extremities of his limbs and was beginning to approach the vital parts. The last thing he had in his memory was some lines from his book on the war of Pharsalia. He recited them, and died with those last words on his lips.[20] What was that but a tender, fatherly leave-taking of his children, like the farewells and close embraces we give our own when we die? And what was it but an effect of that natural inclination which, in that extremity, brings back to our memory the things we have held dearest during our life?

2.8.27 Epicurus, dying tormented, as he says, by the extreme pains of colic, found all his consolation in the beauty of the doctrine he was leaving to the world. Do we think he would have received as much satisfaction from a number of well-born and well-brought-up children, if he had had any, as he did from producing his rich writings? And if he had had the choice of leaving behind him a deformed and ill-born child or a foolish and inept

19 Montaigne's text reads "Greuntius"; Aulus Cremutius Cordus, Roman historian, died in AD 25.

20 Lucan (AD 39–65), Roman poet of the Pharsalia, ordered to die after the conspiracy of Piso.

book, do we think he would not have chosen to incur the first misfortune rather than the other? And not he alone, but any man of like ability? Suppose Saint Augustine, for example, were offered the choice between burying his writings, from which our religion reaps such great fruit, and burying his children, if he had had any. It would perhaps be impiety in him not to prefer burying his children. And I am not sure that I would not much rather have produced one perfectly formed child from my union with the Muses than from my union with my wife. To this one, such as it is, what I give, I give purely and irrevocably, as one gives to the children of the body. The little good I have done it is no longer mine to dispose of. It may know plenty of things that I no longer know, and hold from me what I have not retained myself, which I would have to borrow from it, just like a stranger, if I needed it. If I am wiser than it, it is richer than I. There are few men devoted to poetry who would not be more gratified to be the father of the Aeneid than of the handsomest boy in Rome, and who would not bear the loss of the boy more easily than the loss of the poem. For according to Aristotle, of all craftsmen the poet is the one most especially in love with his work. Epaminondas boasted that he left as his only posterity daughters who would one day bring honor to their father; these were the two noble victories he had won over the Lacedaemonians. It is hard to believe that he would willingly have agreed to exchange them for the most gorgeous girls in all Greece. It is equally hard to believe that Alexander and Caesar ever wished to be deprived of the greatness of their glorious feats of war for the convenience of having children and heirs, however perfect and accomplished they might be. Indeed, I very much doubt that Phidias, or any other excellent sculptor, cared as much for the preservation and survival of his natural children as he would for an excellent statue that he had perfected by long labor and study, according to his art.[21] And as for those vicious and frenzied passions that have sometimes inflamed fathers with love for their daughters, or mothers for their sons, similar ones

21 The Theban general's victories at Leuctra (371 BC) and Mantinea (362 BC).

are found in this other kind of parenthood too. Witness what is told of Pygmalion. Having made the statue of a woman of singular beauty, he fell so desperately and madly in love with this work of his that the gods, in favor of his frenzy, had to bring her to life for him: *Touched, the ivory softens, and, its hardness gone, / Yields to his fingers.*[22]

22 Ovid, Metamorphoses, X.

II.9 Of the Arms of the Parthians

Des armes des Parthes
Montaigne faults the nobles of his day for arming only at the last moment and compares heavy French armor with ancient practice.

2.9.1 It is a vicious habit of the nobility of our time, and one full of softness, not to take up arms until the point of extreme necessity, and to lay them aside as soon as there is the slightest sign that the danger has passed. Many disorders follow from this. With everyone shouting and running for his arms just as the charge begins, some are still lacing up their cuirass when their comrades are already routed. Our fathers had their helmet, lance, and gauntlets carried for them, but did not give up the rest of their equipment as long as the expedition lasted. Our troops are now all disordered and misshapen by the jumble of baggage and of valets who cannot leave their masters because of their arms. Livy says of our people: *Their bodies, utterly unable to endure toil, could scarcely carry their arms on their shoulders.* Several nations still go to war without protection, and did so in ancient times, or protected themselves with useless defenses: *Their helmets were bark stripped from the cork tree.* Alexander, the most daring captain who ever lived, very seldom wore armor. And those of us who scorn it hardly make their bargain any worse.[1] If one sees someone killed for lack of armor, hardly fewer have been lost through the encumbrance of armor: pinned under its weight, or bruised and broken by a jolt, or in

1 The second quotation is from Virgil, Aeneid, VII.

some other way. For truly, judging by the weight and thickness of ours, it seems that we seek only to defend ourselves, and we are more loaded down than covered by it. We have enough to do just to bear its weight, hobbled and constrained, as if we were to fight only by the impact of our armor, and as if we were not as obliged to defend it as it is to defend us. Tacitus gives an amusing picture of warriors among our ancient Gauls, armed like this merely to protect themselves, unable either to harm or to be harmed, or to get up again once knocked down. Lucullus saw certain Median men-at-arms forming the front of Tigranes' army, heavily and awkwardly armed, as if in an iron prison. He concluded that he could easily defeat them, and it was with them that he began his charge and his victory. And now that our musketeers are in favor, I expect someone will invent a way to wall us in to protect us from them, and have us dragged to war shut up in bastions, like the ones the ancients had their elephants carry.[2]

2.9.2 This humor is very far from that of the younger Scipio. He sharply reproached his soldiers for having laid caltrops under the water in the part of the moat through which the people of a town he was besieging could make sallies against him. Those who attack, he said, should think about attacking, not about fearing. And he rightly feared that this precaution would lull their vigilance in guarding themselves. He also said to a young man who was showing him his fine shield: "It is truly fine, my son, but a Roman soldier should put more trust in his right hand than in his left."

2 Lucullus defeated Tigranes, king of Armenia, at Tigranocerta in 69 BC.

2.9.3 Now it is only custom that makes the burden of our armor unbearable to us. *Hauberk on back and helmet on head*
Two of the warriors I sing of wore;
Nor night nor day, since they came into this
Chamber, had they once put them aside,
For they found them as easy to wear as clothing,
So long had they been used to them. The Emperor Caracalla went about the country on foot, fully armed, leading his army.[3]

The Roman foot soldiers carried not only helmet, sword, and shield—for as to arms, says Cicero, they were so used to having them on their backs that they hindered them no more than their own limbs: *for they say that arms are a soldier's limbs*. Along with these they also carried as much food as they needed for fifteen days, and a certain number of stakes for building their ramparts, up to sixty pounds in weight. And Marius' soldiers, loaded like this and marching in battle order, were trained to cover five leagues in five hours, and six if there was need for haste. Their military discipline was much harsher than ours, and so it produced very different results. The younger Scipio, reforming his army in Spain, ordered his soldiers to eat only standing up, and nothing cooked. On this subject, here is a marvelous touch: a Lacedaemonian soldier was reproached because, while on campaign, he had been seen under the shelter of a house. They were so hardened to toil that it was shameful to be seen under any roof but the sky's, whatever the weather. We would not lead our men very far at that price.

2.9.4 Moreover, Marcellinus, a man raised in the Roman wars, takes careful note of the way the Parthians armed themselves, and notes it all the more because it was so different from the Roman way. They had, he says, armor woven in the manner of little feathers, which did not hinder the movement of their bodies; and yet it was so strong that our darts rebounded when they struck it. These are the scales that our ancestors were very

3 Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, XII.

much in the habit of using. And in another place he says: They had strong, sturdy horses, covered with thick leather, and they themselves were armed from head to foot with thick plates of iron, arranged with such skill that at the joints of the limbs they yielded to the movement.[4]

> You would have said they were men of iron. Their headpieces were so neatly fitted, and reproduced the shape and features of the face so naturally, that there was no way to strike them except through little round holes matching their eyes, which gave them a little light, and through slits at the nostrils, through which they drew breath with some difficulty. *The supple plate takes life from the limbs it covers,*
> *dreadful to behold; you would think iron statues were moving,*
> *and men breathing in the metal grown onto them.*
> *The horses wear the same: with iron brows they threaten,*
> *and, safe from wounds, they move their iron-clad shoulders.*
>
> Here is a description that comes very close to the equipment of a French man-at-arms, with all his horse armor.[5]

Plutarch says that Demetrius had a complete suit of armor made for himself and for Alcinus, the chief soldier about him, each weighing a hundred and twenty pounds, whereas ordinary suits weighed only sixty.[6]

4 Ammianus Marcellinus (4th century AD), Roman soldier and historian.
5 Claudian, Against Rufinus.
6 Plutarch's Life of Demetrius names the officer Alcimus.

II.10 Of Books

Des Liures

Montaigne reviews the authors he reads for pleasure and use—poets, Plutarch, Seneca, historians—and judges Cicero and others with candid freedom.

2.10.1 I have no doubt that I often happen to speak of things that are better and more truthfully treated by the masters of the craft. This is purely a trial of my natural faculties, and not at all of acquired ones. Whoever catches me out in ignorance will score nothing against me. I could hardly answer to others for my reasonings, when I do not answer for them to myself and am not satisfied with them. Whoever is in search of knowledge, let him fish for it where it lives: there is nothing I make less profession of. These are my notions, and through them I am not trying to make things known, but myself. The things may perhaps become known to me one day, or may have been once, depending on whether Fortune has been able to bring me to the places where they were made clear. But I no longer remember them. And if I am a man of some reading, I am a man of no retention. So I guarantee no certainty, except to make known how far my knowledge of them reaches at this moment.

2.10.2 Let people pay attention not to the matter but to the shape I give it. Let them see, in what I borrow, whether I have known how to choose something that properly enhances or supports the invention, which always comes from me. For I make others say—not ahead of me but following in my train—what I cannot say so well myself, through the weakness of my language or the weakness of my sense. I do not count my borrowings; I

weigh them. Had I wanted them to impress by their number, I would have loaded myself with twice as many. They are all, or very nearly all, from names so famous and ancient that they seem to me to name themselves well enough without me. As for reasons, comparisons and arguments, if I transplant any of them into my own soil and blend them with mine, I deliberately hide the author. I do it to rein in the rashness of those hasty verdicts that pounce on every kind of writing—especially new writings by men still living, and in the vernacular, which lets everybody talk about it and seems to convict the conception and design of being just as common. I want them to flick Plutarch on the nose when they flick mine, and to scald themselves insulting Seneca in me. I have to hide my weakness under these great reputations. I will love anyone who knows how to pluck my borrowed feathers—I mean by clearness of judgment, and solely by telling apart the strength and beauty of the remarks. For I, who for lack of memory am caught short every time I try to sort them by recognizing where they come from, know very well, measuring my own reach, that my soil is quite incapable of producing certain overly rich flowers that I find sown in it, and that all the fruits of my own growing could never pay for them. This much I am bound to answer for: if I trip myself up; if there is vanity and fault in my reasonings that I do not perceive, or that I am incapable of perceiving when it is pointed out to me. For faults often slip past our eyes; but the sickness of judgment consists in being unable to see them when someone else reveals them to us. Knowledge and truth can lodge in us without judgment, and judgment can also be there without them; indeed, recognizing one's ignorance is one of the finest and surest testimonies of judgment I know. I have no other drill sergeant to line up my pieces than Fortune. As my daydreams present themselves, I heap them up: sometimes they crowd in all together, sometimes they straggle in single file. I want people to see my natural, ordinary gait, as off-kilter as it is. I let myself go as I find myself. Besides, these are not matters that one is forbidden to be ignorant of, or to speak of casually and rashly.

2.10.3 I would like to have a more perfect understanding of things, but I do not want to buy it at the price it costs. My plan is to spend what remains of my life pleasantly and not laboriously. There is nothing I am willing to rack my brains over—not even knowledge, however great its value.

2.10.4 In books I seek only to give myself pleasure by a decent pastime; or if I study, I seek only the knowledge that deals with knowing myself, and that may teach me to die well and to live well. *This is the goal my horse must sweat to reach.*[1]

2.10.5 Difficulties, if I meet any in reading, I do not bite my nails over; I leave them there after making a charge or two at them. If I planted myself in front of them, I would lose myself, and my time too, for my mind works at the first leap. What I do not see at the first charge, I see less by persisting. I do nothing without gaiety; and too steady a persistence and strain dazzles my judgment, saddens it and tires it. My sight grows confused and scattered. I have to withdraw it and bring it back in sudden jerks —just as, to judge the sheen of scarlet cloth, we are told to pass our eyes over it, running over it with various glances, in sudden, repeated takes. If one book annoys me, I take another; and I give myself to reading only at the hours when the weariness of doing nothing begins to seize me. I hardly ever take up the new ones, because the ancients seem to me fuller and sturdier; nor the Greek ones, because my judgment cannot do its work with a childish, apprentice's understanding.

2.10.6 Among books that are simply entertaining, I find, among the moderns, Boccaccio's Decameron, Rabelais, and the Kisses of Johannes Secundus (if they may be lodged under that heading) worth amusing oneself with. As for the Amadis and writings of that sort, they did not have the credit to hold even my childhood. I will say this too, either boldly or rashly: this heavy old soul of mine no longer lets itself be tickled not only by Ariosto but even by good Ovid. His facility and his inventions, which once ravished me, hardly hold my attention now. I speak my mind freely about all things, even those that perhaps exceed

1 Propertius, Elegies.

my competence and that I in no way consider to be within my jurisdiction.[2] What I opine about them is meant to declare the measure of my sight, not the measure of things. When I find myself put off by Plato's Axiochus, as a work without force considering such an author, my judgment does not trust itself. It is not so presumptuous as to set itself against the authority of so many other famous ancient judgments, which it regards as its tutors and masters, and with which it would rather be wrong. It blames itself and condemns itself, either for stopping at the bark, unable to get through to the core, or for looking at the thing in some false light. It is content merely to protect itself from confusion and disorder; as for its weakness, it recognizes it and readily admits it.[3] It thinks it gives a fair interpretation of the appearances its conception presents to it; but these are feeble and imperfect. Most of Aesop's fables have several senses and meanings. Those who interpret them as allegories pick some aspect that fits the fable well; but for the most part it is only the first, superficial aspect. There are others, more vital, more essential and inward, which they have not managed to penetrate. That is how it goes with me.

THE POETS HE LOVES

Virgil, Lucretius, Catullus and Horace come first; Terence wins over Plautus, Virgil over Ariosto.

2.10.7 But to keep to my route: it has always seemed to me that in poetry Virgil, Lucretius, Catullus and Horace hold the first rank by a long way—and especially Virgil in his Georgics, which I consider the most accomplished work of poetry. Compared with it, one can easily see that there are places in the Aeneid to which the author would have given a few more strokes of the comb had he had the leisure. And the fifth book of the Aeneid seems to me the most perfect. I also love Lucan and read him readily, not so

2 Johannes Secundus (1511–1536), Dutch poet of the Latin Basia (Kisses).
3 The Axiochus, a dialogue on death, was attributed to Plato; it is now considered spurious.

much for his style as for his own worth and the truth of his opinions and judgments. As for good Terence, the very delicacy and grace of the Latin language, I find him admirable at portraying to the life the movements of the soul and the condition of our manners; at every turn our actions send me back to him. I can never read him so often that I do not find some new beauty and grace in him. Those who lived close to Virgil's time complained that some people compared Lucretius to him. I am of the opinion that it is indeed an unequal comparison; but I have a hard time holding firm in this belief when I find myself caught by some fine passage of Lucretius. If they were stung by that comparison, what would they say of the barbarous stupidity and dullness of those who now compare Ariosto to him? And what would Ariosto himself say? *O age without sense or wit!* I think the ancients had even more cause to complain of those who paired Plautus with Terence (the latter has much more the air of a gentleman) than of those who paired Lucretius with Virgil. For the esteem and preference given to Terence, it counts for much that the father of Roman eloquence has him so often on his lips, alone of his kind; and so does the verdict that the foremost judge of Roman poets passes on his fellow poet.[4]

2.10.8 It has often occurred to me how, in our time, those who take to writing comedies (like the Italians, who are quite successful at it) use three or four plots from the plays of Terence or Plautus to make one of their own. They heap five or six of Boccaccio's tales into a single comedy. What makes them load themselves with so much matter is that they do not trust themselves to stand up on their own graces. They have to find a body to lean on; and not having enough of their own to hold us, they want the story to entertain us. With my author it is quite the opposite: the perfections and beauties of his way of speaking make us lose our appetite for his subject. His elegance and charm hold us everywhere. He is so delightful everywhere, *Flowing, and most like a*

4 Catullus. The "father of Roman eloquence" is Cicero; the "foremost judge of Roman poets" is Horace, who judged Plautus severely.

pure stream, and fills our soul so full of his graces, that we forget those of his plot.[5]

2.10.9 This same consideration leads me further. I see that the good ancient poets avoided affectation and straining after effect —not only the fantastic flights of the Spanish and the Petrarchists, but even the gentler and more restrained conceits that are the ornament of all the poetic works of the centuries that followed. Yet there is no good judge who misses them in these ancients, or who does not admire, beyond all comparison, the even polish and the perpetual sweetness and flowering beauty of Catullus' epigrams more than all the stings with which Martial sharpens the tails of his. It is for the same reason I gave just now, as Martial said of himself: *his wit had less work to do, since the subject had taken its place.* The former, without getting excited or goading themselves, make themselves felt well enough: they have something to laugh at everywhere, and need not tickle themselves. The latter need outside help: the less wit they have, the more body they need. They get on horseback because they are not strong enough on their own legs. Just so, at our balls, those men of low condition who run dancing schools, unable to reproduce the bearing and decorum of our nobility, try to recommend themselves by daring leaps and other strange, acrobatic movements. And ladies have an easier time with their deportment in dances full of intricate steps and agitation of the body than in certain other dances of state, where they simply have to walk with a natural step and show a natural bearing and their ordinary grace. And I have also seen excellent clowns, dressed in their everyday clothes and with an ordinary countenance, give us all the pleasure that can be drawn from their art, while the apprentices, not so highly schooled, need to flour their faces, dress up in disguise, and contort themselves into wild grimaces to set us laughing. This notion of mine can be recognized better than anywhere else by comparing the Aeneid with the Orlando Furioso.[6] The one we see soaring at full wing, in a

5 Horace, Epistles.
6 Orlando Furioso (1516–1532), Ariosto's epic romance.

high, steady flight, always holding its course; the other fluttering and hopping from tale to tale as from branch to branch, trusting its wings only for a very short crossing, and landing at every field's end for fear that its breath and strength might fail: *And it tries short flights.* There, then, as regards this kind of subject, are the authors who please me most.[7]

PLUTARCH AND SENECA

His two favorite moral authors are compared: Plutarch guides us, Seneca pushes us.

2.10.10 As for my other reading, which mixes a little more profit with the pleasure, and from which I learn to order my opinions and my conduct, the books that serve me are Plutarch, since he became French, and Seneca. They both have this notable advantage for my temperament: the knowledge I seek in them is treated in disconnected pieces, which do not impose the obligation of long labor, of which I am incapable. Such are Plutarch's Moral Essays and Seneca's Letters, which are the finest and most profitable part of their writings. It takes no great undertaking to get me into them, and I leave off wherever I please, for they have no sequence and do not depend on one another. These authors agree in most of the useful and true opinions; and their fortune likewise had them born at about the same time. Both were tutors to Roman emperors; both came from foreign lands; both were rich and powerful. Their teaching is the cream of philosophy, presented in a simple and pertinent way. Plutarch is more uniform and constant; Seneca more undulating and diverse. Seneca toils, braces and strains to arm virtue against weakness, fear and vicious appetites; the other seems not to rate their power so highly, and disdains to quicken his pace or put himself on guard against them. Plutarch's opinions are Platonic, mild and suited to civil society; the other's are Stoic and Epicurean, further removed from common practice, but in my view better suited to private life, and firmer. It shows in Seneca that

7 Virgil, Georgics, describing bees.

he yields a little to the tyranny of the emperors of his time; for I hold it certain that it is with a forced judgment that he condemns the cause of those noble-hearted murderers of Caesar. Plutarch is free throughout. Seneca is full of points and sallies, Plutarch of substance. The former warms you more and moves you; the latter satisfies you more and repays you better. He guides us; the other pushes us.

CICERO'S LONG PREAMBLES

Cicero's prefaces and definitions bore him; he wants arguments that strike at once.

2.10.11 As for Cicero, the works of his that can serve my purpose are those that deal with philosophy, especially moral philosophy. But to confess the truth boldly (for once you have crossed the barriers of impudence, there is no more holding back), his way of writing seems tedious to me, and so does every other way like it. His prefaces, definitions, divisions and etymologies use up most of his work. Whatever is lively and marrowy in it is smothered by these long-drawn-out preparations. If I have spent an hour reading him, which is a lot for me, and I recall what juice and substance I have drawn from it, most of the time I find nothing but wind; for he has not yet come to the arguments that serve his purpose, or to the reasons that really touch the knot I am looking for. For me, who ask only to become wiser, not more learned or eloquent, these logical and Aristotelian arrangements are beside the point. I want a writer to begin with the last point. I understand well enough what death and pleasure are; let him not waste time dissecting them. I look for good, solid reasons from the outset, to teach me how to withstand their assault. Neither grammatical subtleties nor the ingenious weaving of words and arguments are of any use here. I want reasonings that make their first charge at the strongest point of the doubt; his languish around the edges of the pot. They are good for the school, the bar and the pulpit, where we have leisure to doze off, and are still in good time, a quarter of an hour later, to pick up

the thread. That is how one has to speak to judges whom one wants to win over, rightly or wrongly; to children; and to the common people, to whom one must say everything and see what hits home. I do not want anyone to labor to make me attentive, crying out to me fifty times, "Now hear this!" in the manner of our heralds. The Romans said in their religion, *Attend to this*, as we say in ours, *Lift up your hearts*: these are so many words wasted on me. I come from home fully prepared; I need no enticement and no sauce; I can eat my meat quite raw. And instead of whetting my appetite, these preliminaries and preambles tire it and dull it. Will the license of our times excuse me for this sacrilegious audacity of finding even Plato's dialogues dragging too, smothering his matter far too much? And for lamenting the time that a man who had so many better things to say spends on these long, empty, preparatory exchanges? My ignorance will excuse me better, since I see nothing in the beauty of his language. In general I ask for books that make use of the sciences, not those that set them up. The first two, and Pliny, and their like, have no *Attend to this*; they want to deal with people who have alerted themselves. Or if they do have one, it is a substantial *Attend to this*, with a body of its own.[8]

2.10.12 I also enjoy reading the letters to Atticus, not only because they contain very ample instruction on the history and affairs of his time, but much more to discover his private temperament in them. For I have a singular curiosity, as I have said elsewhere, to know the soul and the natural judgments of my authors. We must indeed judge their ability, but not their character, nor themselves, by the display of their writings that they put on in the theater of the world. I have regretted a thousand times that we have lost the book Brutus wrote on virtue; for it is a fine thing to learn the theory from those who know the practice well.[9] But since the sermon is one thing and the preacher another, I like seeing Brutus in Plutarch just as much as in his own work. I would rather know truly what he talked about in his

8 The "first two" are Plutarch and Seneca.

9 Cicero's letters to his close friend Titus Pomponius Atticus.

tent with one of his intimate friends on the eve of a battle than the speech he made to his army the next day; and what he did in his study and his bedroom than what he did in the public square and the Senate.

2.10.13 As for Cicero, I share the common judgment that, apart from his learning, there was not much excellence in his soul. He was a good citizen, of a kindly nature, as fat and jesting men like him tend to be; but of softness and ambitious vanity he had, to tell the truth, a great deal. And I do not know how to excuse him for having thought his poetry worth publishing. It is no great imperfection to write bad verse; but it is an imperfection not to have sensed how unworthy his verses were of the glory of his name. As for his eloquence, it is wholly beyond comparison; I believe no man will ever equal it. Young Cicero, who resembled his father only in name, was commanding in Asia when one day several strangers happened to be at his table, among them Cestius, seated at the lower end, as people often push their way in at the open tables of the great. Cicero asked one of his men who he was, and the man told him his name. But like someone whose mind was elsewhere and who forgot what he was told, he asked again two or three times afterward. The servant, to spare himself the trouble of repeating the same thing so often, and to make him know the man by some circumstance, said: "It is that Cestius who, you were told, does not think much of your father's eloquence compared with his own." Cicero, suddenly stung by this, ordered that poor Cestius to be seized and had him soundly flogged in his presence. There's a discourteous host for you.[10] Even among those who have judged this eloquence of his incomparable, all things considered, there have been some who did not fail to note faults in it. Thus the great Brutus, his friend, said that it was a broken eloquence, weak in the back: *broken and loinless*. Orators close to his century also criticized in him his elaborate care for a certain long cadence at the end of his periods, and remarked on the words *it would seem to be*, which he

10 Marcus Tullius Cicero the Younger, the orator's son; the story is told by Seneca the Elder.

uses so often. For my part, I prefer a cadence that falls shorter, cut into iambs. Yet he does sometimes jumble his rhythms quite roughly, though rarely. My ears have noted this passage: *For my part, I would rather be old for a shorter time than be old before my time.*[11]

HISTORIANS

He prefers simple chroniclers or excellent ones, and above all Caesar and Plutarch's lives.

2.10.14 Historians are right in my court, for they are pleasant and easy; and at the same time man in general, whom I seek to know, appears in them more alive and more whole than anywhere else: the variety and truth of his inner qualities, in the mass and in detail, the diversity of the ways he is put together, and of the accidents that threaten him. Now those who write lives, since they dwell more on intentions than on events, more on what comes from within than on what happens outside, suit me best. That is why, in every way, Plutarch is my man. I am very sorry that we do not have a dozen Laertiuses, or that he is not more ample or more able.[12] For I am just as curious to know the fortunes and lives of these great teachers of the world as to know the diversity of their doctrines and notions. In this kind of historical study, one must leaf through all sorts of authors without distinction, old and new, in outlandish tongues and in French, to learn the things they treat in their various ways.

2.10.15 But Caesar in particular seems to me to deserve study, not only for the knowledge of history but for himself, so far does his perfection and excellence rise above all the others, though Sallust is one of them. Indeed I read this author with a little more reverence and respect than one reads human works: sometimes considering the man himself through his actions and the miracle of his greatness, sometimes the purity and inimit-

11 Brutus' phrase is reported by Tacitus, Dialogue on Orators; the last quotation is from Cicero, On Old Age.

12 Diogenes Laertius (3rd century AD), author of the Lives of the Philosophers.

able polish of his language, which surpassed not only all historians, as Cicero says, but perhaps even Cicero himself. There is such sincerity in his judgments when he speaks of his enemies that, apart from the false colors with which he tries to cover his bad cause and the filth of his pestilent ambition, I think the only fault one can find in him is that he was too sparing in speaking of himself. For so many great things cannot have been carried out by him without his own share in them being much greater than he puts in.

2.10.16 I like historians who are either very simple or excellent. The simple ones, who have nothing of their own to mix in, and who bring only the care and diligence to gather everything that comes to their notice and to record everything in good faith, without choosing or sorting, leave our judgment intact for discerning the truth. Such, for example, among others, is good Froissart, who went about his undertaking with such frank naturalness that, having made a mistake, he is not in the least afraid to acknowledge and correct it at the point where he was told of it; and who gives us even the diversity of the rumors that were going around and the different reports that were made to him.[13] That is the raw material of history, bare and unshaped; each person can profit from it as far as his understanding allows. The truly excellent ones have the ability to choose what is worth knowing; they can pick out, of two reports, the more likely one; from the situation and temperament of princes they infer their intentions and attribute fitting words to them. They are right to take on the authority to regulate our belief by theirs; but certainly that belongs to very few people. Those in between, who are the commonest kind, spoil everything for us. They want to chew our food for us; they give themselves license to judge, and consequently to bend history to their own notion. For once judgment leans to one side, one cannot help turning and twisting the narrative in that direction. They take it upon themselves to choose the things worth knowing, and often hide from us some word, some private action, that would teach us more; they

13 Jean Froissart (c. 1337–c. 1405), chronicler of the Hundred Years' War.

leave out as incredible the things they do not understand, and perhaps some things too because they cannot express them in good Latin or French. Let them boldly display their eloquence and their reasoning; let them judge as they please; but let them also leave us something to judge after them. And let them neither alter nor rearrange anything in the body of the material by their abridgments and their choices, but hand it on to us pure and whole in all its dimensions.

2.10.17 Most often, and especially in these times of ours, people are chosen for this task from among the common sort, for the sole reason that they know how to speak well—as if what we were looking to learn from it were grammar! And they are right, having been hired only for that and having put nothing up for sale but their chatter, to care mainly about that part. So, by dint of fine words, they knead us a fine pastry out of the rumors they pick up at the town crossroads. The only good histories are those written by the very men who were in command of affairs, or who had a part in conducting them, or who at least had the fortune to conduct others of the same kind. Such are almost all the Greek and Roman ones. For when several eyewitnesses have written on the same subject (as happened in those times, when greatness and learning commonly went together), if there is any error it must be marvelously slight, and about some very doubtful incident. What can one expect from a doctor writing about war, or a scholar writing about the designs of princes? If we want to see how scrupulous the Romans were in this, we need only this example. Asinius Pollio found, even in Caesar's histories, some errors he had fallen into—either because he had not been able to cast his eyes over every part of his army and had believed individuals who often reported to him things not sufficiently verified, or because he had not been informed carefully enough by his lieutenants of the operations they had conducted in his absence.[14] You can see from this how delicate a thing this search for truth is, since one cannot trust the knowledge of the

14 Gaius Asinius Pollio (76 BC–AD 4), Roman statesman and historian; his criticism is reported by Suetonius.

man who commanded a battle about that battle, nor the soldiers about what happened near them, unless, as in a judicial inquiry, the witnesses are confronted and objections are admitted on proof of the finest details of each incident. Truly, the knowledge we have of our own affairs is much looser. But this has been treated sufficiently by Bodin, and in line with my own view.[15]

NOTES IN THE BACK OF HIS BOOKS

He copies out the verdicts he wrote on Guicciardini, Commynes and the du Bellay memoirs.

2.10.18 To make up a little for the treachery of my memory and its failing—so extreme that it has happened to me more than once to pick up again, as new and unknown to me, books I had read carefully a few years before and scribbled over with my notes—I have made it my custom for some time now to add at the end of each book (I mean those I intend to use only once) the date when I finished reading it and the judgment I formed of it as a whole, so that this may at least bring back to me the general air and idea I had conceived of the author while reading him. I want to transcribe some of these annotations here.

2.10.19 Here is what I wrote about ten years ago in my Guicciardini (for whatever language my books speak, I speak to them in mine): He is a diligent historian, from whom, in my opinion, one can learn the truth about the affairs of his time as exactly as from anyone; indeed, in most of them he was himself an actor, and in an honorable rank. There is no sign that he disguised things out of hatred, favor or vanity. The free judgments he passes on the great bear witness to this, notably on those who had advanced him and employed him in office, such as Pope Clement VII. As for the part he seems to want to pride himself on most, namely his digressions and reflections, there are good ones, enriched with fine touches; but he took too much pleasure in them. For in not wanting to leave anything unsaid, with a

15 Jean Bodin (1530–1596), in his Method for the Easy Understanding of History (1566).

subject so full and ample and almost infinite, he becomes slack and smacks a little of scholastic chatter. I have also noticed this: of all the souls and deeds he judges, of all the motives and intentions, he never attributes a single one to virtue, religion or conscience, as if those qualities were entirely extinct in the world. And for every action, however fine it may appear in itself, he throws the cause back on some vicious motive or some profit. It is impossible to imagine that among the infinite number of actions he judges there was not at least one produced by way of reason. No corruption can have seized men so universally that someone does not escape the contagion. This makes me fear that there was some flaw in his own taste, and that he may have judged others by himself.

2.10.20 In my Philippe de Commynes there is this: You will find here a gentle and pleasant language, of natural simplicity; a pure narrative, in which the author's good faith shines out clearly, free of vanity when he speaks of himself and of partiality and envy when he speaks of others; his reflections and exhortations marked more by good zeal and truth than by any exquisite ability; and, throughout, authority and gravity, showing him to be a man of good family, brought up in great affairs.[16]

2.10.21 On the Memoirs of Monsieur du Bellay: It is always a pleasure to see things written by those who have tried out how they should be managed. But it cannot be denied that these two lords show a great falling-off from the frankness and freedom of writing that shine in the older writers of their kind—such as the Sire de Joinville, of the household of Saint Louis; Einhard, chancellor of Charlemagne; and, more recently, Philippe de Commynes. This is a plea for King Francis against the Emperor Charles V rather than a history.[17] I am unwilling to believe that they changed anything in the main facts; but they make a practice of twisting the judgment of events in our favor, often against

16 Philippe de Commynes (c. 1447–1511), counselor of Louis XI and author of Memoirs.

17 The Memoirs (1569) were by the brothers Martin and Guillaume du Bellay; Einhard wrote a life of Charlemagne.

reason, and of omitting everything ticklish in their master's life. Witness the disgraces of Messieurs de Montmorency and de Brion, which are left out; indeed, the very name of Madame d'Étampes is nowhere to be found. Secret actions may be covered up; but to keep silent about what everyone knows, and about things that have had public effects of such consequence, is an inexcusable fault. In short, if you want a full knowledge of King Francis and of what happened in his time, look elsewhere, if you take my advice.[18] Whatever profit can be had here lies in the detailed account of the battles and feats of arms in which these gentlemen took part; in some private words and actions of certain princes of their time; and in the dealings and negotiations conducted by the Seigneur de Langey, which contain plenty of things worth knowing, and reflections out of the ordinary.

18 Anne de Montmorency and Philippe Chabot, seigneur de Brion, both fell from royal favor; Madame d'Étampes was the mistress of Francis I.

II.11 Of Cruelty

De la cruauté
Distinguishing struggling virtue from easy natural goodness, Montaigne declares his horror of cruelty, even toward animals, as the extreme of all vices.

2.11.1 It seems to me that virtue is something different from, and nobler than, the inclinations to goodness that are born in us. Souls that are well regulated of themselves and well born follow the same course, and show the same face in their actions, as virtuous ones. But virtue has the ring of something greater and more active than letting oneself, through a happy disposition, be led gently and peacefully in the train of reason. A man who, out of natural gentleness and easiness, made light of the injuries done him would do a very fine thing, worthy of praise. But a man who, stung and outraged to the quick by an injury, armed himself with the arms of reason against this furious appetite for vengeance, and after a great struggle finally mastered it, would without doubt do much more. The first would be acting well, the second virtuously; the one action might be called goodness, the other virtue. For it seems that the very name of virtue presupposes difficulty and struggle, and that it cannot be exercised without an opponent. That is perhaps why we call God good, mighty, generous and just, but we do not call him virtuous. His workings are all natural and effortless.

2.11.2 Some philosophers—not only Stoics but even Epicureans (and this "even" I borrow from common opinion, which is false, whatever may be said for that witty retort of Arcesilaus to the man who reproached him that many people went over from his

school to the Epicurean, and never the other way round: "I can well believe it. Plenty of capons are made out of cocks, but no cock was ever made out of a capon." For in truth, in firmness and rigor of opinions and precepts, the Epicurean sect yields nothing to the Stoic. And a certain Stoic, showing better faith than those debaters who, to combat Epicurus and give themselves an easy game, make him say what he never thought, twisting his words the wrong way and arguing by the rules of grammar for another meaning in his way of speaking, and another belief, than the one they know he had in his soul and in his conduct—this Stoic says that he gave up being an Epicurean for this reason among others: that he found their road too lofty and inaccessible. *And those who are called* lovers of pleasure *are in fact* lovers of honor *and* lovers of justice, *and they cultivate and practice all the virtues*).[1] Of these Stoic and Epicurean philosophers, I say, there are many who have judged that it was not enough to have the soul well settled, well ordered and well disposed to virtue; it was not enough to have our resolutions and our reasoning above all the assaults of Fortune; we must also seek out occasions to put them to the proof. They want to go looking for pain, need and contempt, in order to fight them and keep their soul in training: *virtue gains much when it is challenged*.[2]

2.11.3 This is one of the reasons why Epaminondas, who belonged to yet a third sect, refuses riches that Fortune puts into his hands by a perfectly legitimate means: in order, he says, to have poverty to fence with; and he always kept himself in extreme poverty. Socrates tested himself, it seems to me, still more harshly, keeping his wife's ill temper for his exercise—which is a trial with sharpened blades.[3] Metellus, alone of all the Roman senators, undertook by the strength of his virtue to withstand the violence of Saturninus, tribune of the people at Rome,

1 Cicero, Letters to Friends.
2 Seneca, Letters.
3 Epaminondas was a follower of the Pythagoreans. Socrates' wife was Xanthippe, proverbial for her bad temper.

who was determined at all costs to pass an unjust law in favor of the common people. Having thereby incurred the capital penalties that Saturninus had established against those who refused, he talked in this way to those who, in this extremity, were leading him to the public square: that it was too easy and too cowardly a thing to do wrong; that to do right where there was no danger was a common thing; but that to do right where there was danger was the proper duty of a man of virtue.[4] These words of Metellus show us very clearly what I wanted to establish: that virtue refuses ease as a companion, and that the easy, gentle, downhill path along which the well-regulated steps of a good natural inclination are guided is not the path of true virtue. Virtue demands a rough and thorny road. It wants to have either external difficulties to wrestle with, like those of Metellus, by means of which Fortune delights in breaking the momentum of its course, or internal difficulties, brought to it by the disordered appetites and imperfections of our condition.

SOCRATES AND CATO

The greatest souls act well without struggle, which seems to unsettle the claim that virtue needs difficulty.

2.11.4 I have come this far quite at my ease. But at the end of this reasoning it pops into my head that the soul of Socrates, which is the most perfect that has come to my knowledge, would by my reckoning be a soul of little merit. For I cannot conceive in that man any stirring of vicious desire. In the course of his virtue I can imagine no difficulty and no constraint: I know his reason to have been so powerful and so much the mistress in him that it would never have given a vicious appetite the means even to be born. Against a virtue as lofty as his I can set up no opponent. I seem to see it marching with a victorious and triumphant step, in state and at its ease, without hindrance or disturbance. If virtue can shine only through combat with contrary

4 Quintus Caecilius Metellus Numidicus refused to swear to Saturninus's agrarian law in 100 BC and went into exile.

appetites, shall we say, then, that it cannot do without the help of vice, and that it owes vice this much—that vice brings it credit and honor? And what, too, would become of that brave and noble Epicurean pleasure, which claims to nurse virtue tenderly in its lap and let it frolic there, giving it for toys shame, fevers, poverty, death and tortures? If I assume that perfect virtue is known by its fighting and patiently bearing pain, by withstanding the onslaughts of gout without being shaken from its seat; if I give it harshness and difficulty as its necessary object—what will become of the virtue that has risen so high as not only to despise pain but to rejoice in it, and to be tickled by the stabs of a severe colic? Such is the virtue the Epicureans have established, and many of them have left us very certain proofs of it by their actions. So have many others, who I find surpassed in deed the very rules of their own discipline. Witness the younger Cato.

2.11.5 When I see him dying and tearing out his own entrails, I cannot be content simply to believe that his soul was then wholly free of turmoil and fear. I cannot believe that he merely held himself in the bearing that the rules of the Stoic sect prescribed for him—composed, without emotion and impassive. There was, it seems to me, too much gaiety and vigor in this man's virtue for it to stop there. I believe without doubt that he felt pleasure and delight in so noble an act, and that he took more satisfaction in it than in any other act of his life. *So he departed this life, rejoicing that he had found a reason to die.* I believe this so far that I wonder whether he would have wanted the occasion for so fine an exploit to be taken from him. And if the goodness that made him embrace the public interest more than his own did not hold me in check, I would easily fall into this opinion: that he was grateful to Fortune for having put his virtue to so fine a test, and for having helped that brigand trample underfoot the ancient liberty of his country.[5] I seem to read in this act some indescribable rejoicing of his soul, an emotion of extraordinary pleasure and of manly delight, as it contemplated the nobility and loftiness of its undertaking: *Fiercer*

5 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations. The "brigand" is Julius Caesar.

for having resolved on death. It was not spurred by any hope of glory, as the common and spineless judgments of some men have supposed—for that consideration is too base to touch a heart so noble, so lofty and so unbending—but by the beauty of the thing itself, which he, who handled its springs, saw far more clearly and in its perfection than we can.[6] Philosophy has given me the pleasure of judging that so fine an action would have been unbecomingly lodged in any other life than Cato's, and that it belonged to his alone to end in this way. That is why he rightly ordered both his son and the senators who were with him to provide for their affairs in some other way. *Since nature had given Cato an incredible gravity, which he himself had strengthened by unfailing constancy, and since he had always held firm to his purpose, he had to die rather than look upon the face of a tyrant.* Every death must be of a piece with its life. We do not become different in order to die. I always interpret the death by the life. And if I am told of some death that seems strong, attached to a weak life, I hold that it was produced by a weak cause, in keeping with that life.

2.11.6 Shall we say, then, that the ease of this death, and the facility he had acquired by the strength of his soul, must take something away from the luster of his virtue? And who among those whose brains are even slightly tinged with true philosophy can be content to imagine Socrates as merely free from fear and passion in the misfortune of his imprisonment, his chains and his condemnation? And who does not recognize in him not only firmness and constancy—that was his ordinary state—but also some new contentment, and a playful cheerfulness in his last words and ways? In that thrill of pleasure he feels at scratching his leg after the irons were taken off, does he not reveal a like sweetness and joy in his soul at being unfettered from past discomforts and on the point of entering into the knowledge of things to come? Cato will forgive me, if he pleases: his death is more tragic and more strained, but this one is still, I know not how, more beautiful. Aristippus said to those who

6 Horace, Odes (of Cleopatra).

were lamenting it: "May the gods send me one like it." In the souls of these two men and of their imitators (for I very much doubt that there have been any like them) one sees so perfect a habit of virtue that it has become their very constitution.[7] It is no longer a laborious virtue, nor the ordinances of reason, which their soul must stiffen itself to maintain: it is the very essence of their soul, its natural and ordinary gait. They made it so by long practice of the precepts of philosophy, having come upon a fine and rich nature. The vicious passions that arise in us no longer find any way into them. The strength and firmness of their soul stifles and extinguishes desires as soon as they begin to stir.

2.11.7 Now I do not think there is any doubt that it is finer, by a lofty and divine resolution, to prevent the birth of temptations, and to have so shaped oneself to virtue that the very seeds of the vices are uprooted, than to check their progress by main force—and, having let oneself be caught by the first stirrings of the passions, to arm and brace oneself to halt their course and overcome them. Nor is there any doubt that this second achievement is finer still than simply to be endowed with an easy and good-natured disposition, of itself averse to debauchery and vice. For this third and last way does seem to make a man innocent, but not virtuous: free from doing wrong, but not apt enough to do right. Besides, this condition is so close to imperfection and weakness that I do not really know how to sort out their boundaries and tell them apart. That is why the very names of goodness and innocence are, to some extent, terms of contempt.

2.11.8 I see that several virtues, such as chastity, sobriety and temperance, can come to us through bodily failing. Firmness in danger (if firmness it must be called), contempt of death, patience in misfortune, can come to men, and are often found in them, from a failure to judge such events rightly and to conceive them as they are. Lack of apprehension and stupidity thus sometimes counterfeit virtuous deeds. So I have often seen men praised for what deserved blame. An Italian lord once said this

7 Socrates' last day is told in Plato's Phaedo.

in my presence, to the disadvantage of his own nation: that the subtlety of the Italians and the quickness of their minds were so great that they foresaw the dangers and mishaps that might befall them from so far off that it should not seem strange if in war they were often seen providing for their safety even before they had perceived the peril; that we and the Spaniards, who were not so sharp, went further, and had to be made to see the danger with our own eyes and touch it with our hands before we took fright, and that even then we could no longer stand firm; but that the Germans and the Swiss, coarser and duller, hardly had the sense to think better of it even when they were already being crushed under the blows. Perhaps it was only in jest. Still, it is quite true that in the profession of war beginners very often throw themselves into hazards with a heedlessness quite different from what they show after they have been burned. *Not unaware how much fresh glory in arms / And the sweet honor of a first battle can do.* That is why, when we judge a particular action, we must consider many circumstances, and the whole man who produced it, before we christen it.[8]

AN INNOCENCE OWED TO LUCK

Montaigne credits his own good conduct to birth and temperament rather than to effort.

2.11.9 To say a word about myself: I have sometimes seen my friends call prudence in me what was luck, and count as an advantage of courage and patience what was an advantage of judgment and opinion, and give me one title in place of another, sometimes to my gain, sometimes to my loss. For the rest, I am so far from having reached that first and most perfect degree of excellence, where virtue becomes a habit, that even of the second I have given scarcely any proof. I have not put myself to great effort to curb the desires that pressed upon me. My virtue is a virtue—or rather, to put it better, an innocence—that is accidental and fortuitous. If I had been born with a more unruly

8 Virgil, Aeneid.

constitution, I fear it would have gone badly for me; for I have scarcely tested any firmness in my soul for withstanding passions, had they been even slightly violent. I do not know how to nurse quarrels and conflict within me.

2.11.10 So I can give myself no great thanks for being free of many vices: *If my nature is flawed by a few middling faults,*
But otherwise sound, as if you were to find fault
With moles scattered over a handsome body. I owe this more to my fortune than to my reason.

Fortune caused me to be born of a family famous for integrity, and of a very good father. I do not know whether he passed on to me some part of his temperament, or whether the examples at home and the good upbringing of my childhood imperceptibly helped, or whether I was simply born this way, *Whether Libra looks on me, or Scorpio,*
Dread and more violent part
Of my natal hour, or Capricorn, tyrant
Of the western wave. But at any rate most vices I hold in horror of my own accord. The answer of Antisthenes to the man who asked him what was the best apprenticeship—"To unlearn evil"—seems to rest on this picture.[9]

I hold them in horror, I say, by a judgment so natural and so much my own that I have kept the same instinct and impression I brought away from my nurse, and no occasion has ever been able to alter it—not even my own reasonings, which, having broken away from the common road in some matters, would readily license me to actions that this natural inclination makes me hate. I will say something monstrous, but I will say it all the same: in many things I find more steadiness and rule in my conduct than in my opinions, and my desire less debauched than my reason. Aristippus set out opinions so bold in favor of pleas-

9 Antisthenes (c. 445–365 BC), a pupil of Socrates, was regarded as the forerunner of the Cynics.

ure and riches that he set all philosophy in an uproar against him. But as for his conduct: when Dionysius the tyrant presented him with three beautiful girls so that he might take his pick, he replied that he picked all three, and that Paris had come to grief for preferring one over her companions. But having brought them to his lodging, he sent them away without tasting them. When his servant found himself overloaded on the road by the money he was carrying behind him, he ordered him to pour out and throw away, then and there, whatever was too much for him. And Epicurus, whose doctrines are irreligious and pleasure-loving, conducted himself in his life very devoutly and laboriously.[10] He writes to a friend that he lives on nothing but brown bread and water, and asks him to send a little cheese for when he wants to have a sumptuous meal. Could it be true that, to be wholly good, we must be so by some hidden, natural and universal property, without law, without reason, without example?

2.11.11 The excesses I have found myself involved in are not, thank God, of the worst. I have duly condemned them in myself, as they deserve, for my judgment has not been infected by them. On the contrary, I accuse them more strictly in myself than in another. But that is all. For otherwise I put up too little resistance, and let myself lean too easily to the other side of the scale—except that I keep them in order and prevent them from mixing with other vices, which for the most part hold together and are chained one to another, if one does not take care. My own I have cut back and confined, as solitary and as simple as I could: *nor do I indulge / My error further.*[11]

2.11.12 For as to the opinion of the Stoics, who say that the wise man, when he acts, acts by all the virtues together, though one is more apparent according to the nature of the action (and here the analogy of the human body might serve them somewhat, for the action of anger cannot be carried out without all the humors helping us, though choler predominates): if from this they want

10 Paris's choice of Aphrodite over Hera and Athena led to the Trojan War.
11 Juvenal, Satires.

to draw a similar conclusion, that when the wrongdoer does wrong he does wrong by all the vices together, I do not take their word for it so simply—or else I do not understand them, for I feel the contrary in practice. These are sharp, insubstantial subtleties, on which philosophy sometimes dwells. I follow some vices, but I flee others as much as any saint could. The Peripatetics, too, disown this connection and indissoluble seam; and Aristotle holds that a man may be prudent and just and yet intemperate and incontinent. Socrates admitted to those who detected in his physiognomy some inclination to vice that this was indeed his natural propensity, but that he had corrected it by discipline. And the intimates of the philosopher Stilpo said that, though born prone to wine and women, he had made himself, by study, very abstinent in both.

HATING CRUELTY

He cannot bear to see suffering, condemns torture in justice, and recounts the cruelties of the civil wars.

2.11.13 What good I have, I have, on the contrary, by the luck of my birth; I do not hold it from law or precept or any other apprenticeship. The innocence that is in me is a simple-minded innocence: little vigor and no skill. Among other vices, I cruelly hate cruelty, both by nature and by judgment, as the extreme of all vices. But this goes so far, and makes me so soft, that I cannot see a chicken's throat cut without distress, and cannot bear to hear a hare squeal in the teeth of my dogs—though hunting is a violent pleasure. Those who have to combat pleasure readily use this argument to show that it is wholly vicious and unreasonable: that when it is at its height it masters us so completely that reason can have no access to it. And they cite the experience we have of it in intercourse with women, *When the body already foretastes its joys, / And Venus is about to sow the woman's fields,* where it seems to them that pleasure carries us so far out of ourselves

that our reason, all paralyzed and ravished in pleasure, could not then do its office.[12]

2.11.14 I know it can go otherwise, and that one can sometimes manage, if one wants, to throw the soul back onto other thoughts at that very moment; but one must brace and stiffen it deliberately. I know that one can master the force of this pleasure—I know myself well in this—and I have not found Venus so imperious a goddess as many people, and more strait-laced than I, testify. I do not take it for a miracle, as the Queen of Navarre does in one of the tales of her Heptameron (a fine book for its matter), nor for a thing of extreme difficulty, to spend whole nights, in all convenience and freedom, with a long-desired mistress, keeping the promise one has given her to be content with kisses and simple caresses. I think the example of the pleasure of hunting would be more fitting here. There is less pleasure in it, but more rapture and surprise, by which our reason, stunned, loses the leisure to prepare itself against it—when, after a long search, the animal suddenly springs into view, in a place where perhaps we least expected it. That shock, and the ardor of the hallooing, strike us so that it would be hard for those who love this sort of little hunt to turn their thoughts elsewhere at that moment. And the poets make Diana victorious over Cupid's torch and arrows. *Who, amid these pursuits, does not forget / The wretched cares that love brings?*

2.11.15 To return to my subject: I feel very tender compassion for the afflictions of others, and would readily weep for company, if I knew how to weep for any occasion whatever. Nothing tempts my tears but tears—not only real ones, but any kind at all, feigned or painted. The dead I scarcely pity, and would rather envy; but I pity the dying very much. The peoples of the New World do not offend me so much by roasting and eating the bodies of the dead as those do who torment and persecute them alive. Even the executions of justice, however reasonable they may be, I cannot watch with a steady eye. Someone, wishing to testify to the clemency of Julius Caesar, says: "He was mild in his

12 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.

revenges. Having forced the pirates who had earlier taken him prisoner and held him for ransom to surrender to him, since he had threatened to have them crucified, he condemned them to it —but only after having them strangled. His secretary Philemon, who had tried to poison him, he punished no more harshly than with a simple death." Without saying who this Latin author is who dares to cite as evidence of clemency merely killing those who have offended us, it is easy to guess that he was struck by the vile and horrible examples of cruelty that the Roman tyrants put into practice.[13]

2.11.16 As for me, even in justice, anything beyond simple death seems to me pure cruelty—especially for us, who ought to take care to send souls off in a good state, which cannot be done once they have been agitated and driven to despair by unbearable torments. Not long ago a soldier who was a prisoner noticed from a tower where he was held that people were gathering in the square and that carpenters were putting up their structures there, and believed it was for him. Having resolved to kill himself, he found nothing to help him do it but an old rusty cart nail that Fortune offered him. With it he first gave himself two great blows around the throat; but seeing that they had had no effect, soon afterward he gave himself a third, in the belly, where he left the nail stuck. The first of his guards to come in found him in this state, still alive, but lying down and much weakened by his blows. To make use of the time before he expired, they hastened to pronounce his sentence. When he heard it, and that he was condemned only to have his head cut off, he seemed to take fresh courage. He accepted some wine, which he had refused, and thanked his judges for the unexpected mildness of their sentence. He said that he had decided to call on death for fear of a harsher and more unbearable death, having formed the opinion, from the preparations he had seen being made in the square, that they meant to torment him with some horrible torture. And he seemed to have been delivered from death by having exchanged it.

13 The author is Suetonius, Life of Julius Caesar.

2.11.17 I would advise that these examples of severity, by which one seeks to keep the people in line, be carried out on the bodies of criminals. For to see them deprived of burial, to see them boiled and quartered, would strike the common people almost as much as the punishments inflicted on the living, though in fact it amounts to little or nothing, as God says: *Who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do*. And the poets make singularly much of the horror of this picture, as something beyond death: Alas![14] that the remains of a half-burned king, his bones laid bare, / Should be foully dragged across the earth, smeared with gore. I happened to be in Rome one day just when they were executing Catena, a notorious robber. They strangled him without any emotion from the onlookers; but when they came to quarter him, the executioner gave no blow without the people following it with a plaintive cry and exclamation, as if each one had lent his own feelings to that carcass. These inhuman excesses should be practiced on the bark, not on the living wood.[15] In the same way, in a somewhat similar case, Artaxerxes softened the harshness of the ancient laws of Persia. He ordered that lords who had failed in their office, instead of being whipped as was customary, should be stripped and their clothes whipped in their place; and that instead of having their hair torn out as was customary, they should only have their tall hats taken off. The Egyptians, so devout, thought they gave full satisfaction to divine justice by sacrificing pigs to it in effigy and in images. A bold invention, to try to pay God, so essential a substance, in paint and shadow.[16]

2.11.18 I live in a time when we abound in incredible examples of this vice, through the license of our civil wars; and one sees nothing in ancient histories more extreme than what we experience every day. But this has not at all made me used to it. I could hardly persuade myself, before I had seen it, that there were

14 Luke 12:4.
15 Ennius, quoted by Cicero. Montaigne saw Catena's execution in January 1581, during his journey to Italy.
16 The story of Artaxerxes is told by Plutarch.

souls so fierce that they would commit murder for the sheer pleasure of it: hack and lop off other people's limbs, sharpen their wits to invent unaccustomed torments and new deaths, without enmity, without profit, and for the sole purpose of enjoying the pleasant spectacle of the pitiful gestures and movements, the groans and lamentable cries, of a man dying in anguish. For that is the furthest point cruelty can reach. *That man should kill man, not in anger, not in fear, but only to watch.*

KINDNESS TO ANIMALS

Our cruelty to beasts leads to cruelty to men; we owe some kindness even to animals and trees.

2.11.19 For my part, I have never been able even to watch without distress an innocent animal being pursued and killed, which is defenseless and from which we receive no offense. And when, as commonly happens, the stag, feeling himself out of breath and strength and with no other remedy left, turns back and surrenders to us, his very pursuers, begging us for mercy with his tears, *bleeding, with his moans, / And like one imploring,* that has always seemed to me a most unpleasant spectacle. I hardly ever take an animal alive without giving it back to the fields. Pythagoras used to buy them from fishermen and fowlers to do the same. *And it was with the slaughter of wild beasts, I think, / That steel first grew warm, stained with blood.* Natures that are bloodthirsty toward animals show a natural propensity to cruelty. After people at Rome had grown used to spectacles of the slaughter of animals, they went on to men and gladiators. Nature herself, I fear, has attached to man some instinct for inhumanity. No one takes any amusement in watching animals play together and caress each other, and no one fails to take it in watching them tear each other apart and dismember each other. And lest anyone mock this sympathy I have with them, theology itself enjoins on us some kindness toward them.[17] And considering that one and the same master has lodged us in this palace for

17 Ovid, Metamorphoses.

his service, and that they, like us, are of his household, it has good reason to enjoin on us some respect and affection toward them.

2.11.20 Pythagoras borrowed metempsychosis from the Egyptians, but since then it has been accepted by many nations, and notably by our Druids: *Souls are free from death; ever leaving their former*

Dwelling, they live in new homes, and dwell where they are received. The religion of our ancient Gauls held that souls, being eternal, never ceased moving and changing place from one body to another; and to this notion they added some consideration of divine justice. For according to the soul's conduct while it had been, say, in Alexander, they said God assigned it another body to live in, more or less painful, and suited to its condition: The mute bonds of beasts

He forces them to bear; he thrusts the ferocious into bears,
Robbers into wolves, adds the deceitful to foxes.[18]

/ And when through many years, through a thousand shapes,
He has driven them on, purged at last in the river of Lethe,
He calls them back again to the first beginnings of human form. *If it had been valiant, they lodged it in the body of a lion; if voluptuous, in that of a pig; if cowardly, in that of a stag or a hare; if cunning, in that of a fox; and so on with the rest, until, purified by this chastisement, it took on the body of some other man again.* I myself—for I remember it—in the time of the Trojan War
Was Euphorbus, son of Panthous.[19]

2.11.21 As for that kinship between us and the animals, I do not set much store by it; nor by the fact that many nations, and not-

18 Metempsychosis is the transmigration of souls. The second quotation is from Claudian, Against Rufinus.
19 Pythagoras claimed to have been the Trojan warrior Euphorbus in an earlier life.

ably some of the most ancient and noble, have not only received animals into their society and company but given them a rank far above themselves—some regarding them as familiars and favorites of their gods and holding them in more than human respect and reverence, and others recognizing no other god or divinity than them.

> *Animals consecrated by the barbarians for the benefits they conferred*: *This part*
> *Worships the crocodile, that one dreads the ibis gorged with serpents;*
> *Here gleams the golden image of a sacred long-tailed monkey;*
> *here they revere a river fish, there*
> *Whole towns worship a dog.* And the very interpretation Plutarch gives of this error, which is very well taken, is still honorable to them. For he says that it was not the cat or the ox, for example, that the Egyptians worshiped, but that they worshiped in those animals some image of the divine faculties: in this one patience and usefulness; in that one liveliness, or—like our neighbors the Burgundians, together with all Germany—impatience at being shut in, by which they represented liberty, which they loved and worshiped beyond every other divine faculty; and so with the others.

But when I come across, among the more moderate opinions, the arguments that try to show how closely we resemble the animals, how large a share they have in our greatest privileges, and how plausibly they are matched with us, I certainly abate much of our presumption, and willingly resign that imaginary kingship over the other creatures that we are given.

2.11.22 Even if all that were set aside, there is still a certain respect that binds us, and a general duty of humanity, not only to animals, which have life and feeling, but even to trees and plants. We owe justice to men, and grace and kindness to the other creatures that may be capable of them. There is some dealing between them and us, and some mutual obligation. I am not afraid to admit that my nature is so childishly tender that I can-

not well refuse my dog the fuss he offers me, or asks of me, out of season. The Turks have alms and hospitals for animals. The Romans took public care of feeding the geese by whose vigilance their Capitol had been saved. The Athenians ordered that the she-mules and mules that had served in building the temple called Hecatompedon should be free, and allowed to graze anywhere without hindrance. The Agrigentines had a common custom of solemnly burying the animals they had held dear, such as horses of rare merit, useful dogs and birds, or even those that had served as playthings for their children.[20] And the magnificence that was usual with them in all other things appeared singularly in this too, in the sumptuousness and number of the monuments raised for this purpose, which remained on display for several centuries afterward. The Egyptians buried wolves, bears, crocodiles, dogs and cats in sacred places, embalmed their bodies and went into mourning at their deaths. Cimon gave an honorable burial to the mares with which he had three times won the prize for the race at the Olympic Games. The elder Xanthippus had his dog buried on a headland by the sea, which has kept its name ever since.[21] And Plutarch, he says, had scruples about selling an ox that had served him a long time and sending it to the butcher for a slight profit.

20 The geese of Juno's temple gave the alarm when the Gauls attacked the Capitol in 390 BC. The Hecatompedon is the Parthenon.

21 Cimon was the father of Miltiades, the victor of Marathon. Xanthippus, father of Pericles, buried the dog that had swum after his ship to Salamis.

II.12 Apology for Raymond Sebond

Apologie de Raimond de Sebonde
Defending Sebond's natural theology, Montaigne dismantles human reason's pretensions, comparing us unfavorably with animals and ending in skeptical doubt and faith.

2.12.1 In truth, knowledge is a very useful and important accomplishment; those who despise it show their stupidity plainly enough. But I do not, for all that, value it to the extreme degree that some attribute to it—like Herillus the philosopher, who placed the sovereign good in it and held that it was in its power to make us wise and content, which I do not believe; nor do I believe what others have said, that knowledge is the mother of all virtue, and that all vice is produced by ignorance. If that is true, it needs a long interpretation.[1]

TRANSLATING SEBOND

His father's learned guests gave him Sebond's Natural Theology, which Montaigne translated at his request.

2.12.2 My house has long been open to learned men, and is well known for it. For my father, who ruled it for fifty years and more, was fired with that new ardor with which King Francis I embraced letters and brought them into favor. He sought the acquaintance of learned men with great care and expense, receiving them in his home like holy persons who had some special inspiration of divine wisdom, collecting their sayings

1 Herillus of Carthage (3rd century BC) was a pupil of Zeno, the founder of Stoicism.

and discourses like oracles—and with all the more reverence and religious awe as he was less qualified to judge them, for he had no knowledge of letters, any more than his forebears. As for me, I like them well enough, but I do not worship them.

2.12.3 Among others, Pierre Bunel, a man of great reputation for learning in his day, having stayed some days at Montaigne in my father's company, with other men of his kind, made him a present on leaving of a book entitled Natural Theology, or Book of Creatures, by Master Raymond Sebond.[2] And because the Italian and Spanish languages were familiar to my father, and this book is built of a Spanish jargon with Latin endings, he hoped that with very little help he could profit from it, and recommended it to him as a very useful book, suited to the time when he gave it to him. This was when Luther's novelties were beginning to gain credit and to shake our ancient belief in many places. In this he showed very good judgment, clearly foreseeing by rational reasoning that this incipient disease would easily degenerate into execrable atheism. For the common people do not have the ability to judge things in themselves, and let themselves be carried away by chance and appearances. Once they have been given the boldness to despise and criticize the opinions they had held in extreme reverence, such as those on which their salvation depends, and once some articles of their religion have been put in doubt and in the balance, they soon easily throw all the other parts of their belief into similar uncertainty, for these had no more authority or foundation for them than the ones that have been shaken. And they shake off like a tyrannical yoke all the impressions they had received from the authority of the laws or from reverence for ancient custom, *For what was too much feared before is eagerly trampled underfoot;* resolving from then on to accept nothing to which they have not applied their own decree and given their particular consent.[3]

2.12.4 Now, a few days before his death, my father, having by chance come across this book under a heap of other discarded

2 Pierre Bunel (1499–1546) was a humanist from Toulouse. Raymond Sebond (d. 1436), a Catalan, taught theology at Toulouse.

papers, ordered me to put it into French for him. It is good to translate authors like that one, where there is little but the matter to render; but those who have given much to grace and elegance of language are dangerous to undertake, especially when bringing them into a weaker idiom.[4] It was a very strange and new occupation for me; but happening to have leisure at the time, and being unable to refuse anything to the command of the best father there ever was, I got through it as best I could. He took singular pleasure in it, and gave orders for it to be printed—which was done after his death.

2.12.5 I found this author's ideas fine, the structure of his work well sustained, and his purpose full of piety. Many people enjoy reading it, especially the ladies, to whom we owe more service, so I have often found myself in a position to help them by clearing their book of the two main objections made against it. His aim is bold and courageous, for he undertakes to establish and prove all the articles of the Christian religion against the atheists by human and natural reasons. In this, to tell the truth, I find him so firm and so successful that I do not think it possible to do better on that subject, and I believe no one has equaled him. This work seemed to me too rich and too fine for an author whose name is so little known. All we know of him is that he was a Spaniard who practiced medicine at Toulouse some two hundred years ago. So I once asked Adrianus Turnebus, who knew everything, what this book might be. He answered that he thought it was some quintessence drawn from Saint Thomas Aquinas. In truth that mind, full of boundless learning and admirable subtlety, was the only one capable of such ideas. Be that as it may, whoever its author and inventor may be, he was a very able man with many fine qualities. And it is not right to take that title away from Sebond without stronger reason.

3 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.

4 Montaigne's father died in June 1568; the translation of Sebond appeared in Paris in 1569.

THE FIRST OBJECTION: FAITH AND REASON

Faith alone grasps divine truth, but reason may still serve it, as Christians fail to show by their lives.

2.12.6 The first criticism made of his work is that Christians do themselves wrong in trying to support their belief with human reasons, since it is conceived only by faith and by a particular inspiration of divine grace. There seems to be some pious zeal in this objection, and for that reason we must try all the more gently and respectfully to satisfy those who put it forward. This task would suit a man versed in theology better than me, for I know nothing of it. Nevertheless, this is my judgment. This truth, with which God in his goodness has been pleased to enlighten us, is so divine and so lofty, and surpasses human understanding by so far, that he must surely lend us his help as well, by an extraordinary and privileged favor, if we are to conceive it and lodge it within us. I do not believe that purely human means are in any way capable of it. If they were, so many rare and excellent souls in ancient times, so richly furnished with natural powers, would not have failed to reach this knowledge by their reasoning.

2.12.7 It is faith alone that embraces the high mysteries of our religion vividly and surely. But that is not to say that it is not a very fine and very praiseworthy undertaking to adapt the natural and human tools God has given us to the service of our faith as well. There is no doubt that this is the most honorable use we could put them to. No occupation or design is more worthy of a Christian than to aim, through all his studies and thoughts, at embellishing, extending and amplifying the truth of his belief. We are not content to serve God with mind and soul. We owe him bodily reverence as well, and we render it: we apply even our limbs, our movements and external things to honoring him. We must do the same here and accompany our faith with all the reason that is in us. But we must always keep this reservation: we must not think that faith depends on us, or that our efforts

and arguments can attain to so supernatural and divine a knowledge.

2.12.8 If it does not enter into us by an extraordinary infusion, if it enters not only by reasoning but also by human means, then it is not there in its dignity or its splendor. And yet I certainly fear that this is the only way we enjoy it.

> If we held to God through a living faith, if we held to God through him and not through ourselves, if we had a divine footing and foundation, human occurrences would not have the power to shake us as they do. Our fortress would not be likely to surrender to so weak a battery. Love of novelty, the compulsion of princes, the good fortune of one party, the rash and accidental changes in our opinions would not have the strength to shake and alter our belief. We would not let it be troubled at the mercy of a new argument, or by persuasion, no, not even by all the rhetoric there ever was. We would withstand these waves with an unbending and immovable firmness: *As a vast rock throws back the waves that dash against it,*
>
> *And scatters the various billows barking all around it*
> *By its sheer mass.*[5]

2.12.9 If this ray of divinity touched us at all, it would show everywhere. Our words and our deeds alike would bear its gleam and luster, and everything that came from us would be seen lit by this noble brightness. We ought to be ashamed of this. Among human sects there has never been a follower who did not to some extent conform his conduct and his life to his doctrine, however difficult and strange it was. Yet so divine and heavenly a teaching marks Christians out only by their tongues. Do you want to see this? Compare our morals with a Muslim's or a pagan's: you always come off worse. Given the superiority of our religion, we ought instead to shine in excellence by an

5 Verses of uncertain authorship, echoing Virgil's image of a rock standing firm against the sea (Aeneid VII).

extreme and incomparable distance. People ought to say: "Are they so just, so charitable, so good? Then they are Christians." All other outward signs are common to all religions: hope, trust, events, ceremonies, penance, martyrdoms. The distinctive mark of our truth ought to be our virtue, for it is also the most heavenly mark and the most difficult, and the worthiest product of truth. So our good Saint Louis was right to act as he did. That Tartar king who had become a Christian was planning to come to Lyons to kiss the Pope's feet and to see there the holiness he hoped to find in our ways. Louis earnestly urged him not to come, for fear that our dissolute way of life would instead put him off so holy a belief. Yet things later turned out quite otherwise for another man, who went to Rome for the same purpose. Seeing the dissoluteness of the prelates and people of that time, he became all the more firmly settled in our religion. He reasoned that it must have great strength and divinity to keep its dignity and splendor amid so much corruption and in such vicious hands.[6]

2.12.10 If we had a single drop of faith, Holy Writ says, we would move mountains from their place. Our actions, guided and accompanied by divinity, would not be merely human; they would have something miraculous about them, like our belief. *The training for an honorable and happy life is short, if you believe.* Some make the world believe that they believe what they do not believe. Others, a greater number, make themselves believe it, for they cannot fathom what it is to believe.[7]

2.12.11 In the wars now pressing on our state, we find it strange to see events fluctuate and vary in a common and ordinary way. That is because we bring nothing to them but what is our own. Justice, which is on one of the sides, is there only as ornament and cover. It is indeed invoked, but it is not received, or lodged, or wedded there. It is there as it is in the lawyer's mouth, not as it is in the heart and affection of his client. God owes his

6 Louis IX of France (reigned 1226–1270). The visitor to Rome recalls the Jew Abraham in Boccaccio's Decameron (I.2).
7 Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory XII.

extraordinary help to faith and religion, not to our passions. Here men are the leaders, and they make use of religion. It ought to be quite the opposite. Feel whether it is not our own hands that steer religion, as we draw so many contrary shapes from so straight and firm a rule, as if from wax. When has this been seen more clearly than in France in our day? Some have taken it to the left and some to the right, some call it black and some call it white. Yet they all use it so alike for their violent and ambitious enterprises, and follow so similar a course of excess and injustice, that the difference of opinion they claim seems doubtful and hard to believe, on a matter on which the conduct and law of our life depends. Could you see morals more alike, more one and the same, coming from the same school and discipline?

2.12.12 See the horrible impudence with which we bat divine reasons back and forth like a ball. See how irreligiously we have both rejected them and taken them up again, as Fortune has shifted our place in these public storms. Take that solemn proposition: whether it is lawful for a subject to rebel and take up arms against his prince in defense of religion. Remember in whose mouths, last year, the affirmative was the buttress of one party, and which other party had the negative for its buttress. And hear now which quarter the voice and teaching of each comes from, and whether arms make less noise for this cause than for that.[8] And we burn people who say that truth must be made to bear the yoke of our needs. How much worse does France do than say it? Let us confess the truth. Suppose someone sifted out from the army, even the lawful one, those who march in it solely out of religious zeal, and also those who look only to the protection of their country's laws or the service of their prince. He could not make up one complete company of men-at-arms from them. How is it that so few have kept the same will and the same pace in our public upheavals? Why do

8 After the Protestant Henry of Navarre became heir to the throne in 1584, the Catholic League adopted the right of resistance the Huguenots had earlier defended, and the Huguenots abandoned it.

we see them now merely walking, now riding at full gallop? and the same men now spoiling our affairs by their violence and harshness, now by their coldness, softness and sluggishness? It can only be that they are driven by private and chance considerations, and they move according to how these vary.

2.12.13 I see this plainly: we willingly lend devotion only those services that flatter our passions. There is no hostility so excellent as Christian hostility. Our zeal works wonders when it seconds our leaning toward hatred, cruelty, ambition, avarice, slander, rebellion. Against the grain, toward goodness, kindness and temperance, it will neither walk nor fly, unless by some miracle a rare temperament carries it there. Our religion is made to root out vices; instead it covers them, nourishes them, incites them. We must not try to fob God off with a straw beard, as the saying goes.[9] Suppose we believed in him, I do not say by faith, but with a simple belief. Indeed, and I say it to our great shame, suppose we believed in him and knew him as we do any other history, or one of our companions. Then we would love him above all other things, for the infinite goodness and beauty that shine in him. At the very least he would hold the same rank in our affection as riches, pleasures, glory and our friends. The best of us is not afraid of outraging him as he is afraid of outraging his neighbor, his kinsman or his master. Is any mind so simple that it would trade one for the other, with the object of one of our vicious pleasures on one side, and on the other the state of immortal glory, known and believed with equal conviction? And yet we often renounce that glory out of pure contempt. For what desire draws us to blaspheme, unless perhaps the very desire to offend? The philosopher Antisthenes was being initiated into the mysteries of Orpheus. The priest told him that those who devoted themselves to this religion were to receive eternal and perfect goods after their death. "If you believe that," Antisthenes said to him, "why don't you die yourself?" Diogenes, more bluntly as was his way, and further from our point, spoke to a priest who was likewise urging him to join

9 A proverbial expression: to mock someone, or to try to fool him with a sham.

his order so as to attain the goods of the other world: "Do you want me to believe that Agesilaus and Epaminondas, such great men, will be wretched, while you, who are nothing but a calf and do nothing worthwhile, will be blessed because you are a priest?"

> If we accepted these great promises of eternal bliss on the same authority as a philosophical argument, we would not hold death in such horror as we do: *The dying man would no longer complain of being dissolved,*
> *But would rather rejoice to go out and leave his garment behind, as a snake does,*
> *Or an old stag its overlong antlers.* "I desire to be dissolved," we would say, "and to be with Jesus Christ." The force of Plato's reasoning on the immortality of the soul did indeed drive some of his disciples to their death, so that they might enjoy sooner the hopes he gave them.[10]

A RELIGION RECEIVED LIKE ANY OTHER

We hold our religion by custom and country, as others hold theirs.

2.12.14 All this is a very clear sign that we receive our religion only in our own way and by our own hands, no differently from the way other religions are received. Either we happened to be in the country where it was practiced, or we respect its antiquity or the authority of the men who have upheld it. Or we fear the threats it holds over unbelievers, or we follow its promises. Those considerations should be applied to our belief, but only as auxiliaries; they are human ties. Another region, other witnesses, similar promises and threats could imprint a contrary belief on us in the same way. We are Christians by the same title as we are Perigordians or Germans.

2.12.15 Plato says that few men are so firm in atheism that a pressing danger will not bring them back to acknowledging divine power. That role does not concern a true Christian. It is

10 Saint Paul, Philippians 1:23. Ancient writers tell of Cleombrotus, who killed himself after reading Plato's Phaedo.

for mortal and human religions to be received by human means. What sort of faith must it be that cowardice and faintness of heart plant and establish in us? A fine faith, which believes what it believes only because it lacks the courage to disbelieve it! Can a vicious passion, such as inconstancy or terror, produce anything well ordered in our soul? Such men, he says, establish by the reasoning of their judgment that what is told of hell and future punishments is invented. But the chance to test it comes when old age or illness brings them near death. Then the terror of death fills them with a new belief, through horror of their condition to come. Because such impressions make hearts fearful, he forbids in his Laws all teaching of such threats. He also forbids the belief that any harm can come to man from the gods, except for his greater good when it befalls him, and as a kind of medicine. They tell of Bion that he was infected with the atheisms of Theodorus and had long mocked religious men. But when death overtook him, he surrendered to the most extreme superstitions, as if the gods withdrew and returned according to Bion's business. Plato and these examples mean to conclude that we are brought back to belief in God either by reason or by force. Atheism is a proposition that is, as it were, unnatural and monstrous, and also difficult and hard to establish in the human mind, however insolent and unruly that mind may be. Yet plenty of men have been seen to profess it for show. They do it out of vanity, and from pride in conceiving opinions that are not common and would reform the world. Foolish enough they may be, but they are not strong enough to have planted it in their conscience. So they will not fail to clasp their hands toward heaven if you deal them a good sword-thrust in the chest. And once fear or sickness has crushed and weighed down the licentious fervor of their fickle temperament, they will not fail to come back. They will very discreetly let themselves be guided by public beliefs and examples. A seriously digested doctrine is one thing; these superficial impressions are another. They are born of the debauchery of an unhinged mind and go floating

rashly and uncertainly in the imagination. Truly wretched and brainless men, who try to be worse than they can!

2.12.16 The error of paganism and ignorance of our holy truth let that great soul fall into this other, neighboring error as well. He was great, but with human greatness only. The error is that children and old men are more susceptible to religion, as if religion were born of our weakness and drew its credit from it. The knot that should bind our judgment and our will, that should clasp our soul and join it to our Creator, ought to take its folds and its strength not from our considerations, our reasons and passions. It ought to take them from a divine and supernatural grip, which has only one form, one face and one luster: the authority of God and his grace. Now since our heart and our soul are ruled and commanded by faith, it is right that faith should draw all our other parts into the service of its purpose, according to their capacity. Nor is it credible that this whole machine should not bear some marks imprinted by the hand of that great architect. There must be some image in the things of the world that corresponds in some way to the workman who built and formed them. He has left the stamp of his divinity in these lofty works, and only our weakness keeps us from discovering it. He tells us so himself: he makes his invisible operations manifest to us through the visible ones. Sebond labored at this worthy study and shows us that no part of the world belies its maker. It would wrong divine goodness if the universe did not agree with our belief. The sky, the earth, the elements, our body and our soul all conspire to it; we have only to find the way to use them. They teach us, if we are capable of understanding. For this world is a most holy temple into which man is brought to contemplate statues. These are not wrought by mortal hand. They are the ones that divine thought has made perceptible to the senses, the sun, the stars, the waters and the earth, to represent the intelligible ones to us.

> The invisible things of God, says Saint Paul, are made plain by the creation of the world, for his eternal wisdom and his divinity are seen in his works. *And so God himself does not begrudge the world the sight of heaven's face;*
> *He reveals his features and his body*
> *By ever turning it; he impresses and offers himself,*
> *So that he may be well known, and teach by being seen*
> *How he moves, and teach us to heed his laws.*[11]

2.12.17 Now our reasons and our human reasonings are like heavy, barren matter. The grace of God is their form; it is grace that gives them shape and value. The virtuous actions of Socrates and Cato remain vain and useless because they did not have their proper end. They did not look to the love and obedience of the true creator of all things, and they did not know God. It is just the same with our ideas and reasonings. They have a sort of body, but it is a shapeless mass, without form and without light, unless the faith and grace of God are joined to them. When faith comes to tinge and illuminate Sebond's arguments, it makes them firm and solid. They can then serve an apprentice as a first step and a first guide, setting him on the road to this knowledge. They shape him somewhat and make him receptive to the grace of God, through which our belief is afterward completed and perfected. I know a man of authority, brought up in letters, who confessed to me that Sebond's arguments had brought him back from the errors of unbelief. Now suppose they are stripped of this ornament and of the help and approval of faith, and taken as purely human notions, to fight those who have plunged into the frightful and horrible darkness of irreligion. Even then they will be found as solid and as firm as any others of the same kind that can be set against them. So we shall be in a position to say to our opponents: *If you have anything better, bring it out; or else submit.* Let them either accept the

11 Romans 1:20. The verses are from Manilius, Astronomica IV.

force of our proofs, or show us others that are better woven and of better stuff, elsewhere and on some other subject.[12]

THE SECOND OBJECTION: WEAK ARGUMENTS

Against those who call Sebond's reasons weak, Montaigne sets out to humble human reason itself.

Without meaning to, I have already half engaged in the second objection, which I had set out to answer on Sebond's behalf.

2.12.18 Some say that his arguments are weak and unfit to prove what he intends, and they set out to knock them down easily. These people must be shaken a little more roughly, for they are more dangerous and more malicious than the first. People readily bend what others say to fit the opinions they have already formed. To an atheist, all writings lean toward atheism; he infects innocent matter with his own venom. These people have some prejudice in their judgment that dulls their palate for Sebond's reasons. Moreover, they think they are being dealt a winning hand when they are left free to fight our religion with purely human weapons. They would not dare attack it in its majesty, full of authority and command. The means I take to beat down this frenzy, and the one that seems to me most fitting, is to crush human pride and arrogance and trample it underfoot. I will make them feel the inanity, the vanity and the nothingness of man. I will wrench the puny weapons of their reason from their fists, and make them bow their heads and bite the dust under the authority and reverence of the divine majesty. To that majesty alone belong knowledge and wisdom. It alone can value itself as something, and from it we steal whatever we reckon ourselves to be and whatever we prize in ourselves. *For God allows no one but himself to think proud thoughts.* Let us beat down this conceit, the first foundation of the tyranny of the evil spirit. *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.* Intelligence is in all the gods, says Plato, and in men little or none.[13]

12 Horace, Epistles I.5.

13 The Greek is from Herodotus VII.10; the Latin from 1 Peter 5:5.

Yet it is a great consolation for a Christian to see our mortal and perishable tools so fittingly matched to our holy and divine faith. When they are applied to subjects that are mortal and perishable by nature, they are no more uniformly or more forcefully suited to them.

2.12.19 Let us see, then, whether man has in his power other reasons stronger than Sebond's, and indeed whether it is in him to reach any certainty by argument and reasoning. Saint Augustine, pleading against these people, has occasion to reproach them for their injustice. They hold to be false those parts of our belief that our reason fails to establish. To show that many things can exist and have existed whose nature and causes our reasoning could not establish, he puts before them certain known and indubitable experiences in which man confesses he sees nothing. He does this, like everything else, with careful and ingenious research.[14] We must do more. We must teach them that there is no need to go picking out rare examples to convict their reason of weakness. Reason is so defective and so blind that nothing is so clear and easy as to be clear enough for it. The easy and the difficult are all one to it. All subjects equally, and nature in general, disown its jurisdiction and its meddling.

2.12.20 What does truth preach to us when it preaches that we should flee worldly philosophy, when it so often drives home to us that our wisdom is but folly before God, that of all vanities the vainest is man, that the man who presumes on his knowledge does not yet know what knowing is, and that man, who is nothing, deceives and misleads himself if he thinks he is something? These sentences of the Holy Spirit express so clearly and vividly what I want to maintain that I would need no other proof against people who would surrender to his authority with all submission and obedience.[15] But these people want to be whipped at their own expense, and will not allow their reason to be fought except by reason itself.

14 Saint Augustine, The City of God XXI.
15 Colossians 2:8; 1 Corinthians 3:19 and 8:2; Galatians 6:3.

MAN WITHOUT GRACE

Stripped of divine help, man claims mastery of a universe he cannot even understand.

2.12.21 Let us consider, then, for the present, man alone, without outside help, armed only with his own weapons. Let us take him stripped of divine grace and knowledge, which are his whole honor, his strength and the foundation of his being. Let us see how well he holds his ground in this fine array. Let him make me understand, by the effort of his reasoning, on what foundations he has built those great advantages he thinks he has over the other creatures. Who has persuaded him that the admirable motion of the heavenly vault was established for his convenience and service? Or the eternal light of those torches rolling so proudly over his head, or the terrifying movements of that infinite sea? Who told him that they continue through so many centuries for his sake? Is it possible to imagine anything so ridiculous? This miserable and puny creature is not even master of himself and is exposed to injury from all things. Yet he calls himself master and emperor of the universe, when it is not in his power to know the smallest part of it, much less to command it. Then there is the privilege he claims, of being the only one in this great edifice able to recognize its beauty and its parts. He alone can give thanks to the architect and keep the accounts of the world's receipts and expenses. Who sealed this privilege for him? Let him show us his letters patent for this fine and great office. Were they granted to the wise alone? That covers very few people. Are fools and the wicked worthy of so extraordinary a favor? Being the worst part of the world, do they deserve to be preferred to all the rest? Shall we believe the man who says: *For whose sake, then, shall we say the world was made? For the sake of those living beings that use reason. These are gods and men, and surely nothing is better than they.* We shall never mock enough the

impudence of this pairing. But the poor wretch, what has he in himself worthy of such an advantage?[16]

2.12.22 Consider the incorruptible life of the heavenly bodies, their beauty, their size, their motion kept up by so exact a rule: *When we look up at the heavenly temples of the great universe*

Above us, and the ether set with glittering stars,
And the courses of the moon and sun come to mind. Consider the dominion and power those bodies have, not only over our lives and the conditions of our fortune, *For he makes the deeds and lives of men hang on the stars*, but over our very inclinations, our reasonings, our wills. They govern, drive and stir these at the mercy of their influences, as our reason teaches and finds: *Observing from afar, it perceives*

That the stars rule by silent laws,
That the whole world moves in alternating cycles,
And that the turns of the fates are discerned by sure signs. See how not one man alone, not one king, but monarchies, empires and all this world below move to the swing of the slightest heavenly motions:

16 Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods II, where the speaker is the Stoic Balbus.

And how great are the changes so small a movement makes:
So great is this kingdom that rules over kings themselves! Our virtue, our vices, our ability and knowledge, even this very reasoning we make about the power of the stars and this comparison between them and us, all come, as our reason judges, through their means and by their favor: *One man is mad with love,*
And can swim across the sea and overthrow Troy;
Another's lot is fitted for the writing of laws;
See, sons kill fathers, and fathers kill sons,
And brothers take up arms and clash to wound each other.
This war is not ours; they are forced to stir up such turmoil,
And to be carried to their own punishment and the tearing of their limbs;
This too is fated: thus to weigh fate itself. If we hold this share of reason that we have by heaven's distribution, how can it make us equal to heaven?

How can it subject heaven's essence and conditions to our knowledge?

2.12.23 Everything we see in those bodies astounds us. *What labor, what iron tools, what levers, what machines, what workmen were there for so great a work?* Why do we deprive them of soul, of life and of reasoning? Have we found some immobile and insensible stupidity in them, we who have no dealings with them except to obey? Shall we say that we have seen the use of a rational soul in no creature but man? So what? Have we seen anything like the sun? Does it cease to exist because we have seen nothing like it? Do its movements cease to exist because there are no others like them? If what we have not seen does not exist, our knowledge is wonderfully shrunk. *What great narrowness of mind is this?* Are they not dreams of human vanity, to make the moon a heavenly earth? To imagine mountains and valleys there, like Anaxagoras? To set up human habitations and dwellings there and found colonies for our convenience, as Plato and Plutarch do? Or to make our earth a bright and shining star? *Among the other drawbacks of our mortal state is this darkness of*

minds: not only the necessity of erring, but the love of errors. The corruptible body weighs down the soul, and the earthly dwelling presses down the mind that ponders many things.[17]

PRESUMPTION, OUR NATURAL MALADY

Man sets himself above the animals without knowing their minds.

2.12.24 Presumption is our natural and original malady. The most calamitous and frail of all creatures is man, and at the same time the proudest. He feels and sees himself lodged here amid the mud and dung of the world. He is fastened and nailed to the worst, deadest and most stagnant part of the universe, on the lowest story of the house and the farthest from the vault of heaven, with the animals of the worst of the three conditions. And yet in imagination he sets himself up above the circle of the moon and brings the sky under his feet.[18]

2.12.25 It is by the vanity of this same imagination that he makes himself God's equal and attributes divine qualities to himself. He picks himself out and separates himself from the crowd of other creatures. He carves out the shares of the animals, his brothers and companions, and hands them whatever portion of faculties and powers he sees fit. How does he know, by the effort of his intelligence, the inner and secret stirrings of animals? By what comparison between them and us does he conclude that they are as stupid as he says? When I play with my cat, who knows whether she is not passing her time with me more than I am with her? We entertain each other with reciprocal monkey tricks. If I have my moment to begin or to refuse, so has she. In his picture of the golden age under Saturn, Plato counts among the chief advantages of the men of that time their communication with the beasts. By inquiring of them and learning from them, a man knew the true qualities and differences of each kind. In this way he acquired a very perfect understanding and

17 The first sentence is from Seneca, On Anger II; the second from the Book of Wisdom (9:15), as quoted by Saint Augustine.

18 The three kinds of animals are those of the air, the water and the land.

prudence, and conducted his life far more happily than we could. Do we need better proof of human impudence where beasts are concerned? That great author held that in most of the bodily form Nature gave them, she considered only the prognostications people drew from them in his time.[19]

HOW ANIMALS COMMUNICATE

Beasts understand one another and us; our hands and gestures are a speech as rich as words.

2.12.26 This defect that hinders communication between them and us, why is it not as much ours as theirs? It is anyone's guess whose fault it is that we do not understand each other, for we understand them no more than they understand us. By the same reasoning they may consider us beasts, as we consider them. It is no great wonder if we do not understand them; we do not understand the Basques and the Troglodytes either. Yet some have boasted of understanding them, like Apollonius of Tyana, Melampus, Tiresias, Thales and others. And the cosmographers say there are nations that accept a dog as their king. If so, they must surely give some interpretation to its voice and movements.[20]

19 Plato, Statesman, the myth of the age of Cronos (the Roman Saturn). The prognostications are omens drawn from animals.
20 The Troglodytes were a cave-dwelling people of Africa described by ancient geographers. Apollonius of Tyana was a sage of the 1st century AD; Melampus and Tiresias were legendary seers.

We must notice the parity between us. We have a middling understanding of what they mean, and the beasts have about the same understanding of what we mean. They fawn on us, threaten us and beg of us, and we do the same to them. Besides, we can see quite plainly that among themselves they have full and complete communication. They understand each other, not only those of the same species but also those of different species: *And mute cattle, and even the races of wild beasts*
Utter different and varied cries
When they feel fear or pain, or when joy swells in them. From a certain kind of barking, the horse knows the dog is angry; at a certain other sound from it, the horse is not frightened.

2.12.27 Even with beasts that have no voice, the services we see them render each other let us easily infer some other means of communication. Their movements reason and negotiate. *In much the same way, it seems, the very inability to speak*
Drives children to gesture. Why not? Those among us who cannot speak argue, debate and tell stories by signs. I have seen some so supple and practiced at it that in truth they lacked nothing of perfection in making themselves understood. Lovers grow angry, make up, plead, thank, make appointments, and in short say everything with their eyes. *And silence too can*
Hold prayers and words.[21]

2.12.28 And what of the hands? We request, promise, call, dismiss, threaten, pray, entreat, deny, refuse, question, admire, count, confess, repent, fear, show shame, doubt, instruct, command, incite, encourage, swear, testify, accuse, condemn, absolve, insult, scorn, defy, vex, flatter, applaud, bless, humble, mock, reconcile, recommend, exalt, celebrate, rejoice, complain, sadden, discourage, despair, astonish, exclaim, fall silent.

21 Tasso, Aminta II.

And what not? All with a variety and multiplicity that rival the tongue's. With the head we invite, send away, approve, disapprove, contradict, welcome, honor, venerate, disdain, ask, turn down, cheer, lament, caress, scold, submit, defy, exhort, threaten, reassure, inquire. And what of the eyebrows? What of the shoulders? There is no movement that does not speak, in a language intelligible without instruction, and a public language. Given the variety and the distinct usage of the other languages, this one should rather be judged the language proper to human nature. I leave aside what necessity quickly teaches in particular to those who need it, the finger alphabets and grammars of gesture, and the sciences that are practiced and expressed only through gestures. I leave aside, too, the nations that Pliny says have no other language. An ambassador from the city of Abdera, after speaking at length to King Agis of Sparta, asked him: "Well, Sire, what answer do you want me to take back to our citizens?" "That I let you say all you wanted, and for as long as you wanted, without ever saying a word." Is that not a silence that speaks, and very intelligibly?

THE SKILLS OF ANIMALS

Bees, swallows and spiders work with an art that implies judgment, not mere instinct.

2.12.29 For the rest, which of our abilities do we not recognize in the workings of animals? Is there any government regulated with more order, divided into more charges and offices, and more steadily maintained, than that of the honeybees? Can we imagine so orderly an arrangement of actions and occupations being conducted without reasoning and prudence? *From these signs and following these examples, some*
Have said that bees have a share of the divine mind
And draughts of the ether. On the return of spring we see the swallows ferreting through every corner of our houses. Do they search without judgment? Do they choose without discernment, out of a thousand places, the one most convenient to lodge in?[22]

And in the fine and admirable structure of their buildings, can birds use a square shape rather than a round one, an obtuse angle rather than a right angle, without knowing their properties and effects? Do they take now water, now clay, without judging that moistening softens what is hard? Do they floor their palace with moss or down without foreseeing that their young's tender limbs will lie there more softly and comfortably? Do they shelter from the rainy wind and set their dwelling toward the east without knowing the different qualities of these winds, and without considering that one is healthier for them than the other? Why does the spider thicken its web in one place and slacken it in another? Why does it use now this kind of knot, now that one, unless it has deliberation, thought and conclusion?

2.12.30 We recognize well enough, in most of their works, how far animals excel us and how feeble our skill is at imitating

them. Yet in our own cruder works we see the faculties we bring to them, and that our soul uses all its powers on them. Why do we not think the same of them? Why do we attribute to some kind of natural, servile inclination works that surpass anything we can do by nature or by skill? In doing so, without realizing it, we give them a very great advantage over us. We make Nature, with a mother's tenderness, accompany and guide them as if by the hand in all the actions and conveniences of their life, while she abandons us to chance and to fortune, to seek out by skill the things we need to survive. At the same time she denies us the means of reaching, by any amount of education and mental effort, the natural competence of beasts, so that their brutish stupidity surpasses, in every convenience, all that our divine intelligence can do. Truly, on that reckoning we would have good reason to call her a most unjust stepmother. But nothing of the sort is true: the order that governs us is not so misshapen and unruly.

2.12.31 Nature has embraced all her creatures universally, and there is none she has not very fully supplied with every means necessary to preserve its being. For there are these common complaints I hear men make (as the license of their opinions now lifts them above the clouds and then drags them down to the Antipodes): that we are the only animal abandoned, naked on the naked earth, bound and tied up, with nothing to arm and cover ourselves with but the spoils of others; whereas Nature has clothed all the other creatures in shells, husks, bark, hair, wool, spines, hide, down, feathers, scales, fleece and silk, according to the needs of their being. She has armed them with claws, teeth and horns, to attack and to defend, and has herself taught them what is proper to them: to swim, to run, to fly, to sing. Man, meanwhile, cannot walk, or speak, or eat, or do anything but cry, without being taught.

22 Virgil, Georgics IV.

Then again the child, like a sailor cast up by the cruel waves,
lies naked on the ground, speechless, lacking every
help for life, as soon as into the shores of light
nature has poured him forth with labor from his mother's womb,
and he fills the place with mournful wailing, as is only fitting
for one who has so many evils still to pass through in life.
But the various flocks, herds and wild beasts grow up;
they have no need of rattles, nor must any of them be given
the coaxing, broken prattle of a fond nurse;
they seek no change of clothes to suit the season;
and lastly they need no weapons, no high walls
to guard their own, since for all of them all things
are lavishly brought forth by the earth herself and by nature, the
cunning craftsman of things.[23]

2.12.32 These complaints are false. There is, in the order of the world, a greater equality and a more uniform relationship. Our skin is provided as adequately as theirs with toughness against the harshness of the weather: witness several nations that have not yet tried any use of clothing. Our ancient Gauls wore hardly any clothes, nor do our neighbors the Irish, under so cold a sky. But we can judge it better from ourselves, for every part of the body that we choose to expose to the wind and the air turns out to be fit to bear it. If there is any part of us that is weak and seems likely to fear the cold, it ought to be the stomach, where digestion takes place. Our fathers wore it uncovered, and our ladies, soft and delicate as they are, sometimes go about with their bodices open down to the navel. Binding and swaddling children is not necessary either: the Spartan mothers raised theirs in complete freedom to move their limbs, without tying them up or folding them in. Our crying is shared by most other animals, and there are hardly any that are not seen to whimper and moan long after their birth, since that is a bearing well suited to the weakness they feel themselves in. As for eating, it is in us, as in them, natural and untaught. *For every creature*

23 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things, Book V.

senses what its powers are and how far it can use them. Who doubts that a child, once he had the strength to feed himself, would know how to seek out his food? And the earth produces enough of it and offers him enough for his needs, without any further cultivation or artifice. And if it does not do so at all times, neither does it for the beasts: witness the provisions we see ants and others laying up for the barren seasons of the year.

2.12.33 These nations we have just discovered, so abundantly supplied with natural food and drink, without effort or preparation, have just taught us that bread is not our only nourishment, and that without plowing, our mother Nature had furnished us in plenty with all we needed—indeed, as is likely, more fully and more richly than she does now that we have mixed our artifice into it: *And the earth herself, of her own accord, first created for mortals*

shining crops and joyful vineyards;
she herself gave sweet fruits and joyful pastures,
which now scarcely grow, though increased by our toil;
and we wear out our oxen and the strength of the farmers; the excess and unruliness of our appetite outrunning every invention by which we try to satisfy it.[24]

2.12.34 As for weapons, we have more natural ones than most other animals, more varied movements of the limbs, and we get more service from them naturally and without lessons. Those trained to fight naked are seen throwing themselves into the same dangers as we do. If some beasts surpass us in this advantage, we surpass many others. And the skill of strengthening the body and covering it by acquired means we have by a natural instinct and precept. To prove it: the elephant sharpens and grinds the tusks it uses in war (for it has special ones for this purpose, which it spares and never uses for its other tasks). When bulls go into battle, they scatter and toss the dust around them; boars hone their tusks; and the ichneumon, when it is

24 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things, Book II.

about to come to grips with the crocodile, fortifies its body, coating and crusting it all over with tightly packed, well-kneaded mud, as with a breastplate. Why shall we not say that it is just as natural for us to arm ourselves with wood and iron?[25]

2.12.35 As for speech, it is certain that if it is not natural, it is not necessary. Nevertheless I believe that a child raised in complete solitude, far from all company (which would be a hard experiment to make), would have some kind of speech to express his ideas; and it is not credible that Nature has refused us this means, which she has given to many other animals. For what else is speaking but this faculty we see in them of complaining, rejoicing, calling one another for help, inviting one another to love, as they do by using their voices? How could they not speak among themselves? They certainly speak to us, and we to them. In how many ways do we speak to our dogs, and they answer us?

> We converse with them in a different language, with different names, from those we use with birds, with pigs, oxen and horses; and we change idiom according to the species. *So, within their dark troop,*
>
> *one ant touches snouts with another,*
>
> *perhaps to spy out their way and their fortune.* It seems to me that Lactantius attributes to beasts not only speech but laughter as well. And the difference of language we see among ourselves, according to the difference of regions, is also found in animals of the same species.[26]

25 The ichneumon is the Egyptian mongoose.

26 Dante, Purgatorio XXVI. Lactantius was a Christian writer of the late 3rd and early 4th centuries AD.

> Aristotle cites on this point the song of partridges, which varies with the location: *And the various birds*
> *utter very different cries at different times,*
> *and some change, along with the weather,*
> *their raucous songs.* But the question is what language that child would speak; and what is said about it by guesswork is not very plausible. If someone objects to this opinion that people deaf from birth do not speak, I answer that this is not only because they could not receive instruction in speech through their ears, but rather because the sense of hearing, which they lack, is bound up with that of speech, and the two are held together by a natural seam.

So whatever we speak, we must first speak it to ourselves and make it sound within, in our own ears, before sending it out to other people's.

2.12.36 I have said all this to maintain the likeness that exists with human things, and to bring us back and join us to the crowd. We are neither above nor below the rest. All that is under heaven, says the wise man, runs under one law and one fortune. *All things are bound by their own fated chains.* There is some difference; there are orders and degrees; but it is under the face of one and the same nature: *Each thing proceeds in its own way, and all / keep their distinctions by a fixed covenant of nature.*[27]

2.12.37 We must constrain man and line him up within the barriers of this order. The poor wretch has no way of actually stepping over them: he is shackled and bound, subjected to the same obligation as the other creatures of his rank, and of a very middling condition, without any prerogative or true and essential preeminence. The preeminence he grants himself by opinion and fancy has neither body nor flavor. And if it is true that he alone of all animals has this freedom of imagination and this unruliness of thought, which represent to him what is, what is

27 The "wise man" is the author of Ecclesiastes; both Latin quotations are from Lucretius, Book V.

not, and what he wants, the false and the true, it is an advantage sold to him very dear, and one he has very little reason to boast of. For from it springs the main source of the evils that press upon him: sin, sickness, irresolution, confusion, despair.

BEASTS REASON TOO

The fox on the ice and the dog at the crossroads reason as we would.

2.12.38 I say, then, to return to my subject, that there is no likelihood in thinking that beasts do by natural and compelled inclination the same things we do by our choice and ingenuity. From like effects we must conclude like faculties, and from richer effects richer faculties; and consequently we must admit that the same reasoning, the same method we follow in working, the animals follow too—or some other, better one.

2.12.39 Why do we imagine this natural compulsion in them, we who experience nothing of the kind? Besides, it is more honorable, and closer to divinity, to be led and obliged to act in an orderly way by a natural and inevitable condition than to act in an orderly way by a rash and accidental freedom; and it is safer to leave the reins of our conduct to Nature than to ourselves. The vanity of our presumption makes us prefer to owe our abilities to our own powers rather than to her bounty. So we credit the other animals with the natural goods and hand those over to them, in order to honor and ennoble ourselves with acquired goods—a very simple-minded attitude, it seems to me, for I would prize graces that were wholly mine and natural just as highly as those I had gone begging and seeking from learning. It is not in our power to acquire a finer recommendation than to be favored by God and by Nature.

2.12.40 Take the fox, then, which the inhabitants of Thrace use when they want to venture across the ice of some frozen river, letting it loose ahead of them for this purpose. If we saw it at the water's edge putting its ear close to the ice, to sense whether it could hear the water running beneath from far off or near by, and then, according as it found by this that the ice was thicker

or thinner, drawing back or going forward—would we not be right to judge that the same reasoning passes through its head as would pass through ours, and that it is a ratiocination and inference drawn from natural sense: What makes a noise moves; what moves is not frozen; what is not frozen is liquid; and what is liquid gives way under a weight? For to attribute this solely to a keen sense of hearing, without reasoning and without inference, is a fantasy that cannot enter our imagination. We must think the same of the many kinds of tricks and contrivances by which beasts protect themselves from the designs we have on them.

2.12.41 And if we want to claim some advantage from the very fact that it is in our power to seize them, make use of them and treat them as we please, that is only the same advantage we have over one another. On these terms we have our slaves. And were not the Climacides women in Syria who crouched on all fours and served as footstools and ladders for ladies getting into their carriages? And most free people surrender their life and their being into the power of others for very slight advantages. The wives and concubines of the Thracians argue over which of them will be chosen to be killed at her husband's tomb.[28] Have tyrants ever failed to find enough men devoted to them, some of them even adding the obligation to accompany them in death as in life? Whole armies have bound themselves in this way to their captains. The form of the oath in that harsh school of fighters to the death contained these promises: We swear to let ourselves be chained, burned, beaten and killed by the sword, and to suffer all that regular gladiators suffer from their master—pledging both body and soul most religiously to his service: *Burn my head with fire, if you will, and strike my body / with the sword, and cut my back with the twisted lash.* It was a real obligation, and yet in a given year there were ten thousand who entered into it and perished by it.[29] When the Scythians buried their king, they

28 Climacides comes from the Greek klimax, "ladder"; the custom is reported by Plutarch.

29 Tibullus, Elegies I.9.

strangled over his body the favorite among his concubines, his cupbearer, his master of the horse, his chamberlain, his usher and his cook. And on the anniversary of his death they killed fifty horses ridden by fifty pages, whom they had impaled along the spine up to the throat, and left them planted there on display around the tomb. The men who serve us do it more cheaply, and for less careful and less kindly treatment than we give our birds, horses and dogs. What trouble do we not stoop to for their comfort? It does not seem to me that the most abject servants would willingly do for their masters what princes take pride in doing for these beasts. Diogenes, seeing his relatives troubled about ransoming him from slavery, said: "They are fools; it is the man who looks after me and feeds me who serves me." And those who keep animals should be said to serve them rather than to be served by them. Besides, the animals have this more noble trait: never did a lion enslave itself to another lion, nor a horse to another horse, for lack of courage.[30]

2.12.42 Just as we go hunting beasts, so tigers and lions go hunting men; and the animals practice the same exercise on one another: dogs on hares, pike on tench, swallows on cicadas, sparrowhawks on blackbirds and larks: *The stork feeds her young*

on snakes and on lizards found in remote fields;
and the noble birds, Jupiter's servants,
hunt the hare or the roe deer in the woodland pastures. We share the fruit of our hunting with our dogs and birds, as we share the toil and the skill.[31]

And above Amphipolis in Thrace, the hunters and the wild falcons share the booty exactly half and half; just as along the Maeotian marshes, if the fisherman does not in good faith leave the wolves an equal share of his catch, they promptly go and tear his nets. And just as we have a kind of hunting conducted more by cunning than by force, such as with snares, with our

30 Diogenes was said to have been captured by pirates and sold as a slave.
31 Juvenal, Satires XIV.

lines and with the hook, similar kinds are seen among the beasts too.[32] Aristotle says that the cuttlefish throws out from its neck a gut as long as a fishing line, which it lets out to stretch far away and draws back to itself when it wishes. As soon as it sees some little fish approaching, it lets the fish bite the end of this gut, while it lies hidden in the sand or the mud, and little by little reels it in until the little fish is so close that it can catch it in one leap.

2.12.43 As for strength, there is no animal in the world exposed to so many injuries as man. We do not need a whale, an elephant or a crocodile, or other such animals, any one of which can destroy a great number of men: lice are enough to vacate Sulla's dictatorship. The heart and life of a great and triumphant emperor are breakfast for a little worm.[33]

2.12.44 Why do we say that, in man, it is science and knowledge built up by skill and reasoning to tell the things useful for his living and for the relief of his illnesses from those that are not, and to know the power of rhubarb and polypody;[34] and yet when we see the goats of Crete, if they have been struck by an arrow, go and choose dittany out of a million herbs to cure themselves; the tortoise, when it has eaten a viper, immediately look for oregano to purge itself; the serpent polish and brighten its eyes with fennel; storks give themselves enemas of seawater; elephants pull out the javelins and darts thrown at them in battle—not only from their own bodies and their companions', but from their masters' bodies too, witness the elephant of King Porus, whom Alexander defeated—and pull them out so deftly that we could not do it with so little pain: why do we not likewise say that this is knowledge and wisdom?[35] For to allege, in order to belittle them, that they know these things solely by the instruction and mastery of Nature is not to take away from them the

32 The Maeotian marshes are the Sea of Azov.
33 The Roman dictator Sulla was said to have died in 78 BC of a disease that bred lice in his flesh.
34 Polypody is a fern once used as a purgative.
35 Porus, an Indian king, was defeated by Alexander the Great at the Hydaspes in 326 BC.

title of knowledge and wisdom; it is to grant it to them with more reason than to us, in honor of so reliable a schoolmistress.

2.12.45 Chrysippus, though in all other matters as disdainful a judge of the condition of animals as any philosopher, considered the movements of a dog that comes to a crossroads where three roads meet, either in search of its master whom it has lost or in pursuit of some prey fleeing before it. The dog tries one road after another, and after making sure of two of them and finding no trace there of what it seeks, it dashes down the third without hesitation. Chrysippus is forced to admit that a reasoning such as this goes on in that dog: I have followed my master's trail to this crossroads; he must necessarily have gone by one of these three roads; it is neither this one nor that one; therefore he must infallibly have gone by this other. And, made sure by this conclusion and reasoning, the dog no longer relies on its senses on the third road, nor tests it any further, but lets itself be carried along by the force of reason. This purely dialectical move, this use of disjunctive and conjunctive propositions and of sufficient enumeration of the parts—is it not worth just as much whether the dog knows it by itself or learned it from Trebizond?[36]

2.12.46 And yet beasts are not incapable of being taught in our manner too. Blackbirds, ravens, magpies, parrots—we teach them to speak; and the readiness we see in them to lend us their voice and breath, so supple and pliable, so that we can shape it and bind it to a certain number of letters and syllables, shows that they have a reasoning within that makes them so teachable and willing to learn. Everyone, I believe, has had his fill of seeing the many kinds of monkey tricks that showmen teach their dogs: the dances in which they do not miss a single beat of the music they hear, and the many different movements and leaps they are made to perform at a word of command. But I note with more wonder something that is nevertheless common enough: the dogs that blind men use, both in the country and in towns. I have noticed how they stop at certain doors where they are used to receiving alms, and how they avoid being struck by coaches

36 George of Trebizond (1395–1486), author of a widely used textbook of logic.

and carts, even when they have room enough to pass for their own part. I have seen one, along a town moat, leave a smooth, level path and take a worse one, to keep its master away from the moat. How could anyone have made this dog understand that its duty was to look only to its master's safety and to disregard its own convenience in order to serve him? And how did it know that a path quite wide enough for itself would not be so for a blind man? Can all this be understood without ratiocination?

2.12.47 We must not forget what Plutarch says he saw of a dog in Rome, in the presence of the Emperor Vespasian, the father, at the Theater of Marcellus. This dog belonged to a showman who was performing a play with many scenes and many characters, and it had its own part in it. Among other things, it had to pretend for a while to be dead, from having eaten a certain drug. After swallowing the bread that was supposed to be this drug, it soon began to tremble and stagger as if it were dazed. Finally, stretching out and stiffening as though dead, it let itself be pulled and dragged from place to place, as the plot of the play required. Then, when it knew the time had come, it began first to stir very gently, as if it were waking from a deep sleep, and raising its head, it looked this way and that in a manner that astonished all the spectators.

2.12.48 The oxen used in the royal gardens of Susa to water them, turning certain great wheels for drawing water with buckets attached to them, like many to be seen in Languedoc, had been ordered to make up to a hundred turns each a day. They were so accustomed to this number that it was impossible by any force to make them do a single turn more, and having done their task they stopped dead. We are in adolescence before we know how to count to a hundred, and we have just discovered nations that have no knowledge of numbers.[37]

2.12.49 There is even more reasoning in teaching others than in being taught. Now, leaving aside what Democritus judged and proved—that beasts taught us most of the arts, as the spider taught us to weave and sew, the swallow to build, the swan and

37 Susa was a capital of the ancient Persian kings.

the nightingale music, and many animals, through our imitation of them, the practice of medicine—Aristotle holds that nightingales teach their young to sing and spend time and care on it. Hence those we raise in cages, which have not had the chance to go to school under their parents, lose much of the grace of their song. We can judge from this that their song improves through discipline and study. And even among the free ones it is not one and the same: each has taken from it according to its capacity. Jealous over their learning, they compete with one another in a contest so spirited that sometimes the loser dies of it, his breath failing him before his voice does. The youngest ponder thoughtfully and set themselves to imitating certain snatches of song; the pupil listens to his teacher's lesson and repeats it back with great care; they fall silent, now one, now the other; one can hear faults being corrected and detect certain reproofs from the teacher.

2.12.50 I once saw, says Arrian, an elephant with a cymbal hanging from each thigh and another tied to its trunk, at the sound of which all the others danced in a circle, rising and bowing at certain beats as the instrument guided them; and it was a pleasure to hear this harmony. At the shows in Rome, elephants were regularly seen trained to move and dance to the sound of the voice—dances with many interweavings, breaks and varied rhythms, very hard to learn. Some have been seen rehearsing their lesson in private, practicing with care and study so as not to be scolded and beaten by their masters.[38]

2.12.51 But that other story, about the magpie, for which we have Plutarch himself as guarantor, is a strange one. It lived in a barber's shop in Rome and did wonders at mimicking with its voice everything it heard. One day some trumpeters happened to stop and play for a long time in front of the shop. After that, and all the next day, there was the magpie, pensive, mute and melancholy. Everyone marveled at this, and people thought the sound of the trumpets had so dazed and stunned it that its voice had been extinguished along with its hearing. But it was found

38 Arrian, Greek historian of the 2nd century AD, in his Indica.

in the end that this was deep study and a withdrawal into itself, its mind exercising and preparing its voice to reproduce the sound of those trumpets. So its first utterance was that one: a perfect rendering of their repeats, their pauses and their changes of tone; for the sake of this new learning, it had given up and come to scorn everything it could say before.

2.12.52 I do not want to leave out this other example either, of a dog that the same Plutarch says he saw (for as to order, I am well aware that I am mixing it up, but I observe it no more in arranging these examples than in all the rest of my work). He was on a ship, and this dog, struggling to get at the oil at the bottom of a jar, which it could not reach with its tongue because of the vessel's narrow mouth, went and fetched pebbles and put them into the jar until it had raised the oil close enough to the rim to reach it. What is that, if not the work of a very subtle mind? They say that the ravens of Barbary do the same when the water they want to drink is too low.[39]

2.12.53 This action is somewhat akin to what Juba, a king of their own country, related of elephants: that when, through the cunning of their hunters, one of them is caught in one of the deep pits prepared for them and covered over with small brushwood to deceive them, its companions hurry to bring plenty of stones and pieces of wood to help it get out. But this animal resembles human ability in so many other actions that if I wanted to follow in detail what experience has taught about it, I would easily win the point I usually maintain: that there is more difference between this man and that one than between this animal and that man.[40] The keeper of an elephant in a private house in Syria stole half its ration at every meal. One day the master decided to feed it himself and poured into its manger the exact measure of barley he had prescribed for its food. The elephant, glaring at the keeper, separated half of it with its trunk and set it aside, thereby declaring the wrong being done to it. And another, whose keeper mixed stones into its fodder to increase the meas-

39 Barbary is the coast of North Africa.
40 Juba II, king of Mauretania (died AD 23), a learned writer on Africa.

ure, went up to the pot in which he was cooking his meat for dinner and filled it with ashes for him.

> These are individual incidents. But what everyone has seen and everyone knows is that in all the armies brought from the lands of the Levant, one of the greatest strengths lay in the elephants, which achieved results incomparably greater than we now get from our artillery, which roughly takes their place in a pitched battle (this is easy to judge for those who know ancient history): *Since indeed they used to serve the Tyrian Hannibal, and our generals, and the Molossian king, these beasts' ancestors, and to carry cohorts on their backs, a share of the war, and a tower going into battle.* People must surely have had complete and serious confidence in the reliability of these beasts and their reasoning, to entrust them with the front of a battle;[41]

for the slightest halt they might have made, given the size and weight of their bodies, the slightest fright that turned their heads back toward their own side, was enough to lose everything. And few cases have been seen where they turned back on their own troops, whereas we ourselves fall back on one another and break ranks. They were given not a single movement to perform but several different parts in the fighting—as the Spaniards did with their dogs in the recent conquest of the Indies, paying them wages and giving them a share of the booty. And these animals showed as much skill and judgment in pursuing and halting their victory, in charging or retreating as occasion required, in telling friends from enemies, as they did ardor and fierceness. We admire and weigh foreign things more than ordinary ones; otherwise I would not have amused myself with this long register. For in my opinion, whoever looks closely at what we commonly see in the animals that live among us will find in them actions as wonderful as those that people go collecting in foreign lands and ages. It is one and the same nature

41 Juvenal, Satires XII; the Molossian king is Pyrrhus of Epirus.

that rolls on its course. Whoever had sufficiently judged its present state could safely infer from it both the whole future and the whole past.

JUDGING WHAT WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND

As we scorn foreigners we do not understand, so we misjudge the beasts.

2.12.54 I once saw among us men brought by sea from a distant country. Because we did not understand their language at all, and because their manners, their bearing and their clothes were entirely unlike ours, which of us did not consider them uncivilized and brutish? Who did not put it down to stupidity and dullness to see them mute, ignorant of the French language, ignorant of our hand-kissings and our serpentine bows, of our carriage and our bearing—on which, of course, human nature must without fail take its model? Everything that seems strange to us, we condemn, and everything we do not understand. That is how it goes with us in the judgment we make of beasts. They have many characteristics that correspond to ours: from those, by comparison, we can draw some conjecture. But as for what is peculiar to them, what do we know of what it is? Horses, dogs, oxen, sheep, birds and most of the animals that live with us recognize our voice and let themselves be led by it. So too did Crassus's moray eel, which came to him when he called it; and so do the eels in the fountain of Arethusa; and I have seen plenty of fishponds where the fish come running to feed at a certain call from those who tend them. *They have names, and each comes when summoned / at its master's voice.* That much we can judge.[42]

2.12.55 We can also say that elephants have some share in religion, since after several ablutions and purifications they are seen raising their trunks like arms and, with their eyes fixed on the rising sun, standing still for a long time in meditation and contemplation at certain hours of the day, of their own inclina-

42 Martial, Epigrams IV.30. The fountain of Arethusa is a spring at Syracuse in Sicily.

tion, without instruction or precept. But because we see no such sign in other animals, we cannot for all that establish that they are without religion; we cannot grasp in any respect what is hidden from us.

2.12.56 So too we see something in this action that the philosopher Cleanthes noticed, because it resembles ours. He saw, he says, some ants leaving their anthill carrying the body of a dead ant toward another anthill, from which several other ants came out to meet them as if to talk with them. After being together for some time, these went back to consult—just imagine—with their fellow citizens, and made two or three trips in this way because the terms were hard to settle. At last the latter brought the former a worm from their den, as if as ransom for the dead one; the first group loaded this worm on their backs and carried it home, leaving the others the body of the deceased. That is the interpretation Cleanthes gave of it, showing thereby that creatures without voices still have dealings and communication with one another; it is our own defect that we have no share in it, and so we are foolish to meddle in giving opinions on the matter.

2.12.57 Now they produce still other effects that far surpass our capacity—so far beyond imitation that we cannot even conceive them in imagination. Many hold that in the great final naval battle that Antony lost to Augustus, his flagship was stopped in mid-course by the little fish the Latins call *remora,* because of its peculiar property of stopping every kind of vessel it attaches itself to.[43] And when the Emperor Caligula was sailing with a great fleet along the coast of Romania, his galley alone was stopped dead by this same fish. He had it taken, attached as it was to the bottom of his vessel, quite vexed that so small an animal could overpower the sea and the winds and the force of all his oars merely by being attached by its beak to his galley—for it is a shellfish. And he was astonished besides, not without good reason, that once it was brought into the boat it no longer had the strength it had outside. A citizen of Cyzicus once gained

43 The battle of Actium, 31 BC; Latin remora means “delay”.

a reputation as a good mathematician for having learned the ways of the hedgehog.[44] Its den has openings in various places, facing various winds; and foreseeing the coming wind, it goes and stops up the hole on that wind's side. Noticing this, the citizen would bring his city predictions of which wind was going to blow. The chameleon takes the color of the place where it sits; but the octopus gives itself whatever color it pleases, as occasion requires, to hide from what it fears and catch what it seeks. In the chameleon it is a change it undergoes; in the octopus it is a change it makes. We have some changes of color in fright, anger, shame and other passions that alter the complexion of our face; but that is the effect of something we undergo, as with the chameleon. Jaundice can certainly make us turn yellow, but that is not at the disposal of our will. Now these effects we recognize in other animals, greater than ours, testify to some more excellent faculty in them that is hidden from us; as are, very likely, many other characteristics and powers of theirs, no sign of which ever reaches us.

2.12.58 Of all the predictions of times past, the oldest and most certain were those drawn from the flight of birds. We have nothing like it, nothing so wonderful. That rule, that order in the beating of their wings, from which people draw inferences about things to come, must surely be guided to so noble an operation by some excellent means. For it is merely playing with words to go attributing this great effect to some natural ordering, without intelligence, consent and reasoning in whatever produces it; and it is a plainly false opinion. That this is so: the torpedo fish has this property, that it not only numbs the limbs that touch it, but also, through nets and seines, transmits a numbing heaviness to the hands of those who stir and handle it. Indeed they say further that if you pour water on it, you feel this sensation creeping upward to your hand, numbing your touch through the water. This power is marvelous; but it is not useless to the torpedo. It feels it and makes use of it, so that to catch the prey it is after, it can be seen lurking under the mud, so that the

44 Cyzicus was a Greek city on the Sea of Marmara.

other fish gliding over it, struck and numbed by this cold of its own, fall into its power.[45] Cranes, swallows and other birds of passage, changing their abode with the seasons of the year, show plainly enough that they know they have this power of divination, and they put it to use.

2.12.59 Hunters assure us that to choose, out of a litter of puppies, the one that should be kept as the best, you need only let the mother choose it herself. Thus if you carry them out of their bed, the first one she brings back will always be the best; or else, if you pretend to surround the bed with fire on all sides, it will be the one she runs to rescue first. From which it appears that they have a use of prognostication that we lack, or else some power of judging their young that is different from ours and keener.

2.12.60 Since the way beasts are born, breed, feed, act, move, live and die is so close to our own, whatever we strip away from their motive causes and add to our own condition above theirs cannot possibly arise from any reasoning of our reason.

> For the regulation of our health, doctors put before us the example of the way beasts live and their manner; for this saying has always been on the lips of the people: *Keep your feet and your head warm,*
>
> *For the rest, live like a beast.* Generation is the chief of the natural actions. We have a certain arrangement of limbs that is better suited to us for it; yet they order us to adopt the posture and position of the brutes, as more effective: *In the manner of wild beasts,*
>
> *And rather in the fashion of four-footed creatures, wives are generally thought*
>
> *To conceive: because so the seeds can reach their place,*
>
> *With breasts lowered and loins raised.* And they reject as harmful those indiscreet and immodest movements that women have added of their own invention, bringing them back to the example and practice of the beasts of their sex, which are more modest and sedate.

45 The torpedo is the electric ray.

For a woman prevents herself from conceiving and fights against it
If in her delight she thrusts back against the man with her buttocks
And stirs up waves with her whole body gone limp.
For she throws the plowshare out of the straight line and path
Of the furrow, and turns the stroke of the seed away from its place.

THE VIRTUES OF ANIMALS

Animals show justice, friendship, gratitude, fidelity and even religion.

2.12.61 If justice is giving each his due, then the beasts that serve, love and defend their benefactors, and that chase and attack strangers and those who harm them, show in this something of the look of our justice; as they also do in keeping a most fair equality in sharing out their goods among their young. As for friendship, theirs is incomparably keener and more constant than that of men. Hyrcanus, the dog of King Lysimachus, when his master died, stayed stubbornly on his bed, refusing to eat or drink; and on the day the body was burned, he took a run and threw himself into the fire, where he was burned. So too did the dog of a certain Pyrrhus. It did not stir from its master's bed from the time he died, and when he was carried out it let itself be lifted along with him, and finally leaped onto the pyre on which its master's body was being burned.

2.12.62 There are certain inclinations of affection that sometimes arise in us without the counsel of reason, coming from a chance rashness that others call sympathy: beasts are capable of them just as we are. We see horses form a kind of attachment to one another, to the point that we have trouble making them live or travel apart. We see them fix their affection on a certain coat in their companions, as on a certain face; and wherever they meet it, they join it at once with rejoicing and signs of goodwill, while taking some other form in dislike and hatred. Animals make choices as we do in their loves, and do some sorting

among their females. They are not free of our jealousies, or of extreme and irreconcilable envy.

2.12.63 Desires are either natural and necessary, like drinking and eating; or natural and not necessary, like intercourse with females; or neither natural nor necessary. Of this last kind are nearly all the desires of men: they are all superfluous and artificial. For it is a wonder how little Nature needs to be content, how little she has left us to desire. The preparations of our kitchens are no part of her ordinance. The Stoics say that a man could sustain himself on one olive a day. The delicacy of our wines is not of her teaching, nor the extra spice we add to our amorous appetites: *Nor does she / Demand private parts descended from a great consul.*

2.12.64 These foreign desires, which ignorance of the good and false opinion have slipped into us, are so numerous that they drive out almost all the natural ones. It is just as if in a city there were so many foreigners that they put out the native inhabitants, or extinguished their ancient authority and power, usurping it entirely and seizing it for themselves.

2.12.65 Animals are much better regulated than we are, and keep with more moderation within the limits that Nature has prescribed for us. But not so strictly that they do not still have something in common with our debauchery. And just as there have been furious desires that drove men to love beasts, so beasts too are sometimes smitten with love for us, and conceive monstrous affections from one species to another. Witness the elephant that was the rival of Aristophanes the grammarian for the love of a young flower girl in the city of Alexandria, and yielded to him in nothing in the attentions of an ardent suitor. Walking through the market where fruit was sold, he would take some with his trunk and bring it to her; he let her out of his sight as little as he possibly could; and sometimes he would put his trunk into her bosom under her collar and feel her breasts. They also tell of a serpent in love with a girl; of a goose enamored of a boy in the town of Asopus; and of a ram that courted

the minstrel Glaucia; and every day we see apes furiously in love with women.[46]

> We also see certain animals giving themselves to the love of males of their own sex. Oppian and others report some examples to show the respect that beasts pay to kinship in their matings; but experience very often shows us the contrary: *It is not held shameful for a heifer*
> *To bear her father on her back; the horse takes his own daughter as mate;*
> *The goat mounts the flock he has fathered; and the bird*
> *Conceives by the very one from whose seed she was conceived.*[47]

2.12.66 Of malicious cunning, is there a clearer example than that of the mule of the philosopher Thales? Crossing a river loaded with salt, it happened to stumble, so that the sacks it carried were all soaked. Noticing that the salt, melted in this way, had made its load lighter, it never failed, as soon as it came to a stream, to plunge in with its load, until its master, discovering its trick, ordered it to be loaded with wool. Finding its reckoning wrong, it gave up the trick.

2.12.67 There are many of them that show to the life the face of our avarice; for we see in them an extreme care to snatch up everything they can and hide it carefully, though they make no use of it. As for husbandry, they surpass us not only in this foresight of gathering and saving for the time to come, but they also have many parts of the knowledge it requires. Ants spread their grain and seeds outside their storehouse to air, cool and dry them, when they see them beginning to mold and smell rancid, for fear they spoil and rot. But the caution and foresight they show in gnawing the grain of wheat surpasses anything human prudence can imagine. Wheat does not always stay dry and sound, but softens, dissolves and turns as if to milk, on its way to sprouting and growing; so, for fear it may become seed

46 Aristophanes of Byzantium, Alexandrian scholar of the 3rd–2nd century BC; the story comes from Plutarch.
47 Oppian, Greek poet of the 2nd century AD, author of poems on hunting and fishing.

and lose its nature and quality as a store for their food, they gnaw off the end from which the germ usually comes out.

HUMAN WAR, ANIMAL WAR

War, the proudest human action, rises from trivial causes and can be routed by bees.

2.12.68 As for war, which is the greatest and most pompous of human actions, I should like to know whether we mean to use it as an argument for some prerogative of ours, or, on the contrary, as evidence of our feebleness and imperfection. For indeed the science of destroying and killing one another, of ruining and wrecking our own species, does not seem to have much to make it desirable to the beasts that lack it. When has a stronger lion / ever taken a lion's life?[48]

> In what forest
> did a boar ever breathe his last under the tusks of a bigger boar? *But they are not universally exempt from it, all the same: witness the furious clashes of honeybees, and the enterprises of the princes of the two opposing armies:* Often between two
> kings discord arises with great upheaval;
> and at once you may foresee from afar the passions of the crowd
> and their hearts throbbing for war. I never see this divine description without seeming to read in it a painting of human folly and vanity.

> For these warlike movements that carry us away with their horror and dread, this storm of sounds and cries: *There the flash rises to the sky, and all the earth around*
> *gleams with bronze, and beneath, by the might of men,*
> *a sound is raised by their feet, and the mountains, struck by the clamor,*
> *hurl the voices back to the stars of heaven.* this fearful array of so many thousands of armed men, so much fury, ardor and courage—it is amusing to consider by what vain occasions it is stirred up, and by what slight occasions it is put out. *For the love of Paris, so the story goes,*
> *Greece clashed with the barbarians in dire war.* All Asia was lost and consumed in wars for Paris's pandering.

The envy of a single man, a grudge, a pleasure, a domestic jealousy—causes that should not move two fishwives to scratch each other—these are the soul and the motive force of all this great turmoil. Shall we believe the very men who are its principal authors and movers? Let us hear the greatest, the most victorious and the most powerful emperor who ever lived, joking and making very amusing and very witty fun of many battles risked by sea and by land, of the blood and lives of five hundred thousand men who followed his fortune, and of the forces and riches of two parts of the world exhausted in the service of his enterprises: Because Antony is screwing Glaphyra, Fulvia has set me this penalty: / that I must screw her too.[49]

48 Juvenal, Satires XV.

49 An epigram by the emperor Augustus, preserved by Martial (XI.20); Glaphyra was Antony's mistress and Fulvia his wife.

/ I, screw Fulvia! What if Manius begged me
to sodomize him—would I do it? Not, I think, if I had any sense.
"Either screw me or let us fight," she says. What if dearer to me than life
is my prick itself? Let the trumpets sound! *I use my Latin with freedom of conscience, by the leave you have given me. Now this great body with so many faces and movements, which seem to threaten heaven and earth:* As many as the waves that roll on the Libyan sea
when fierce Orion sets in the winter waves,
or as the thick ears of corn scorched by the new sun
on the plain of Hermus or in the yellow fields of Lycia,
so the shields clang, and the earth trembles, roused by the tramp of feet: this furious monster with so many arms and so many heads is still, always, man—feeble, calamitous and wretched.[50]

It is only an anthill stirred up and heated: *The black column moves across the plains:* a gust of contrary wind, the croaking of a flight of crows, a horse's stumble, the chance passing of an eagle, a dream, a voice, a sign, a morning mist are enough to overturn it and bring it to the ground.[51] Just strike it in the face with a ray of sunlight, and there it is, melted away and vanished. Just blow a little dust in its eyes, as with the honeybees of our Poet, and there are all our standards, our legions, and even the great Pompey at their head, broken and shattered. For it was he, I think, whom Sertorius beat in Spain with those fine weapons, which also served Eumenes against Antigonus and Surena against Crassus: *These passions of the soul and these great contests / will be checked and stilled by the throwing of a little dust.* Even let some of our bees loose on it afterwards: they will have the

50 Montaigne is addressing the princess, probably Margaret of Valois, for whom this essay is said to have been written; the second quotation is Virgil, Aeneid VII.
51 Virgil, Aeneid IV, describing ants.

strength and the courage to scatter it.[52] Within recent memory, when the Portuguese were besieging the town of Tamly, in the territory of Xiatine, its inhabitants brought a quantity of beehives onto the wall, for they have plenty of them. And with fire they drove the bees so fiercely onto their enemies that the Portuguese gave up their enterprise, unable to withstand their attacks and stings. Thus the victory and the freedom of their town were owed to this new kind of help—with such good fortune that on their return from the fight not a single bee was missing. The souls of emperors and of cobblers are cast in the same mold. Considering the importance and weight of the actions of princes, we persuade ourselves that they must be produced by causes equally weighty and important.[53] We are mistaken. They are pushed this way and that in their movements by the same springs as we are in ours. The same reason that makes us quarrel with a neighbor sets off a war between princes; the same reason that makes us whip a lackey, when it falls on a king, makes him ruin a province. Their will is as light as ours, but their power is greater. The same appetites stir a mite and an elephant.

2.12.69 As for fidelity, there is no animal in the world as treacherous as man. Our histories tell of the eager pursuit that certain dogs have made to avenge their masters' deaths. King Pyrrhus, having come upon a dog guarding a dead man, and hearing that it had been doing this duty for three days, ordered the body to be buried and took the dog along with him. One day, when he was attending the general review of his army, the dog spotted its master's murderers and ran at them with loud barking and fierce anger; and by this first clue it set in motion the vengeance for the murder, which was carried out soon afterwards by way of justice. So too did the dog of the wise Hesiod, which convicted the sons of Ganyctor of Naupactus of the murder of its master.

52 Sertorius, Roman rebel general in Spain; Eumenes and Antigonus, successors of Alexander; Surena, the Parthian general who defeated Crassus in 53 BC. The quotation is from Virgil, Georgics IV.

53 Montaigne took this episode from Simon Goulart's French version of a history of the Portuguese conquests in the East.

Another dog, guarding a temple in Athens, saw a sacrilegious thief carrying off the finest jewels and began to bark at him as loud as it could. But since the wardens did not wake up for all that, it began to follow him; and when day came, it kept a little farther off, without ever losing sight of him. If he offered it food, it would not take it; but to the other passers-by it met on the way it wagged its tail and took from their hands whatever they gave it to eat. If its thief stopped to sleep, it stopped at the same spot as well. When news of this dog reached the wardens of that church, they set out to follow its track, asking for news of a dog of that color, and at last found it in the town of Cromyon, and the thief too, whom they brought back to the city of Athens, where he was punished. And the judges, in acknowledgment of this good service, ordered that a certain measure of grain be provided from public funds to feed the dog, and that the priests take care of it. Plutarch vouches for this story as a well-attested thing that happened in his own time.

ANDRODUS AND THE LION

A lion spares the slave who once pulled a splinter from its paw.

2.12.70 As for gratitude—for it seems to me we need to bring this word back into credit—this single example will suffice, which Apion reports as having witnessed himself. One day, he says, when the people in Rome were being given the pleasure of a fight among many strange beasts, chiefly lions of unusual size, there was one among them which, by its furious bearing, by the strength and size of its limbs, and by a proud and terrifying roar, drew the eyes of the whole audience. Among the other slaves brought before the people in this fight with the beasts was one Androdus, from Dacia, who belonged to a Roman lord of consular rank.[54] This lion, seeing him from afar, first stopped short as if struck with wonder, and then came up very gently, in a soft and peaceful way, as if to recognize him. That done, and

54 Apion, Greek grammarian of the 1st century AD; the story, told by Aulus Gellius, is that of the slave usually called Androclus or Androcles.

having made sure of what it was looking for, it began to wag its tail like dogs fawning on their master, and to kiss and lick the hands and thighs of this poor wretch, who was frozen with fright and beside himself. Androdus recovered his wits thanks to the lion's gentleness, and steadied his gaze enough to look at it and recognize it; and it was a singular pleasure to see the caresses and the welcome they gave each other. When the people raised cries of joy at this, the Emperor had the slave called, to learn from him how so strange an event had come about. He told him a new and wonderful story. When my master was proconsul in Africa, he said, I was forced by the cruelty and harshness with which he treated me, having me beaten every day, to steal away from him and flee. And to hide myself safely from a personage of such great authority in the province, I found it quickest to make for the solitudes and the sandy, uninhabitable regions of that country, resolved, if the means of feeding myself should fail me, to find some way of killing myself. The sun being extremely fierce around noon and the heat unbearable, I came upon a hidden, inaccessible cave and threw myself into it. Soon afterwards this lion arrived, with a bloody, wounded paw, all plaintive and moaning from the pain it was suffering. At its arrival I was very frightened; but seeing me hiding in a corner of its den, it came up to me very gently, holding out its injured paw and showing it to me as if asking for help. I then pulled out a large splinter that was in it, and having grown a little used to the lion, I pressed the wound and squeezed out the matter that had collected in it, wiped it, and cleaned it as neatly as I could. Feeling relieved of its trouble and eased of that pain, it lay down to rest and sleep, with its paw still in my hands. From then on, the lion and I lived together in that cave for three whole years on the same food; for of the beasts it killed in its hunting it brought me the best parts, which I cooked in the sun for lack of fire, and I lived on them. In the end, having grown weary of this brutish and wild life, one day when the lion had gone off on its usual hunt, I left; and on my third day's march I was caught by soldiers, who brought me from Africa to

this city, to my master, who at once condemned me to death and to be thrown to the beasts. Now, as far as I can see, this lion was also caught soon afterwards, and has now wished to repay me for the kindness and the cure it had received from me. That is the story Androdus told the Emperor, which he also had passed along from hand to hand to the people. So at everyone's request he was set free and absolved of his sentence, and by order of the people the lion was given to him as a present. Afterwards, says Apion, we saw Androdus leading this lion on a little leash, going round the taverns in Rome and receiving the money people gave him, the lion letting itself be covered with the flowers they threw at it, and everyone saying when they met them: "There is the lion, the man's host; there is the man, the lion's physician."

2.12.71 We often weep for the loss of the beasts we love; so do they for ours. *Then came his warhorse Aethon, his trappings laid aside, / walking in tears, and wetting his face with great drops.*

2.12.72 Just as some of our nations hold their women in common, and in others each man has his own, is this not also seen among beasts—and marriages better kept than ours?

2.12.73 As for the society and confederation they form among themselves, to league together and help one another, we see oxen, pigs and other animals where, at the cry of the one you are hurting, the whole herd runs to its aid and rallies to defend it. When the parrot fish has swallowed the fisherman's hook, its companions gather in a crowd around it and gnaw through the line; and if by chance one of them has got into the trap, the others hold out their tails to it from outside, and it grips them with its teeth as hard as it can: in this way they pull it out and drag it away. The fish called barbers, when one of their companions is caught, set the line against their back, raising a spine they have, toothed like a saw, with which they saw through it and cut it.

2.12.74 As for the particular services we get from one another for the needs of life, many similar examples are seen among them. They hold that the whale never moves without having in front of it a little fish like the sea gudgeon, which for that reason is called the guide. The whale follows it, letting itself be led and

turned as easily as the rudder turns the ship. And in return, whereas everything else, beast or vessel, that enters the horrible chaos of this monster's mouth is at once lost and swallowed up, this little fish takes refuge there in complete safety and sleeps there; and while it sleeps the whale does not stir. But as soon as it comes out, the whale starts following it without stopping; and if by chance it loses it, it wanders here and there, often crashing against the rocks, like a ship without a rudder. Plutarch testifies that he saw this on the island of Anticyra. There is a similar partnership between the little bird called the wren and the crocodile. The wren serves as sentinel to this great animal; and if its enemy the ichneumon approaches to fight it, this little bird, for fear it may catch the crocodile asleep, wakes it with its song and with pecks of its beak, warning it of its danger. The bird lives on this monster's leftovers; the crocodile receives it familiarly into its mouth and lets it peck about in its jaws and between its teeth, gathering the bits of flesh left there. And when it wants to close its mouth, it first warns the bird to come out by closing it little by little, without squeezing or hurting it. The shellfish called the pinna also lives in this way with the pinnotheres, a little creature of the crab kind, which serves it as usher and doorkeeper, sitting at the opening of the shell, which it keeps continually ajar and open until it sees some little fish come in that is fit for their catch. Then it goes into the pinna and pinches its living flesh, forcing it to close its shell; and then the two of them together eat the prey shut up in their fortress. In the way tuna live, one observes a singular knowledge of the three parts of mathematics. As for astronomy, they teach it to man: for they stop at the place where the winter solstice overtakes them and do not stir from it until the following equinox. That is why Aristotle himself readily grants them this science. As for geometry and arithmetic, they always form their school in a cubic figure, square in every direction, and make of it a solid battalion, closed and enclosed all around, with six equal faces. Then they swim in this square formation, as wide behind as in front, so that whoever sees and counts one rank can easily number the

whole troop, since the number in depth is equal to the breadth, and the breadth to the length.

2.12.75 As for magnanimity, it is hard to give it a more evident face than in the case of the great dog sent from the Indies to King Alexander. They first set a stag before it to fight, then a boar, then a bear: it took no notice of them and did not deign to stir from its place. But when it saw a lion, it immediately rose to its feet, showing plainly that it declared that one alone worthy to enter into combat with it.

2.12.76 Concerning repentance and the acknowledgment of faults, they tell of an elephant which, having killed its keeper in a fit of anger, mourned so deeply that it would never eat again, and let itself die.

2.12.77 As for clemency, they tell of a tiger, the most inhuman beast of all, which, having been given a kid, went hungry for two days rather than harm it, and on the third broke the cage in which it was shut up to go and look for other fodder, not wishing to attack the kid, its familiar and its guest.

2.12.78 And as for the rights of familiarity and fellow-feeling that grow up from living together, we commonly tame cats, dogs and hares together.

2.12.79 But what experience teaches those who travel by sea, and notably in the Sicilian sea, about the nature of halcyons surpasses all human thought. What species of animal has Nature ever so honored in its lying-in, birth and bringing forth? The poets do say that a single island, Delos, which had drifted until then, was made fast to serve for the delivery of Latona; but God willed that the whole sea should be stilled, made firm and smooth, without waves, without winds and without rain, while the halcyon brings forth its young, which is just about the solstice, the shortest day of the year. And by its privilege we have seven days and seven nights, in the very heart of winter, when we can sail without danger.[55] Their females acknowledge no male but their own; they stay with him all their lives without

55 Latona (Leto) gave birth to Apollo and Artemis on Delos; the halcyon's calm is the origin of "halcyon days."

ever abandoning him; if he grows weak and broken down, they carry him on their shoulders, take him everywhere, and serve him until death.

2.12.80 But no ability has yet been able to attain knowledge of the marvelous structure from which the halcyon makes the nest for its young, nor to guess its material.

2.12.81 Plutarch, who saw and handled several of them, thinks it is made of the bones of some fish, which the bird joins and binds together, interlacing some lengthwise and others crosswise, and adding curves and roundings, so that in the end it forms a round vessel ready to sail. Then, when it has finished building it, it carries it to where the waves break, and there the sea, beating on it very gently, shows it how to mend what is not well bound and how to strengthen the places where it sees the structure shifting and loosening under the blows of the sea. And, on the other hand, whatever is well joined the beating of the sea tightens and presses together so that it cannot be broken or dissolved, or damaged by blows of stone or iron, except with great difficulty. And what is most to be wondered at is the proportion and shape of the hollow inside. It is made and proportioned in such a way that it can receive or admit nothing but the bird that built it; to anything else it is impenetrable, closed and shut, so that nothing can get in, not even sea water. There is a very clear description of this building, and borrowed from a good source; and yet it seems to me that it still does not sufficiently clear up for us the difficulty of this architecture. Now, from what vanity can it come in us to rank beneath ourselves, and to interpret disdainfully, the works we can neither imitate nor understand?

2.12.82 To pursue this equality and correspondence between us and the beasts a little further: our soul glories in the privilege of bringing everything it conceives back to its own condition; of stripping everything that comes to it of mortal and bodily qualities; of compelling the things it deems worthy of its acquaintance to doff and strip off their corruptible conditions, and to leave aside, like superfluous and vile garments, thickness,

length, depth, weight, color, smell, roughness, smoothness, hardness, softness and all sensible accidents, so as to fit them to its own immortal and spiritual condition. So it is that Rome and Paris, which I have in my mind—Paris, which I imagine—I imagine and grasp without size and without place, without stone, without plaster and without wood. This same privilege, I say, seems quite evidently to belong to the beasts.

> For a horse accustomed to trumpets, to arquebus fire and to battle, which we see quivering and trembling in its sleep, stretched out on its litter as if it were in the fray—it is certain that it conceives in its soul the sound of a drum without noise, an army without weapons and without bodies. *Indeed you will see brave horses, when their limbs lie*
>
> *in sleep, sweat nonetheless, and pant again and again,*
> *and strain their utmost strength as if for the prize.* That hare which a greyhound imagines in its dream, after which we see it panting in its sleep, stretching out its tail, jerking its hocks and perfectly reproducing the movements of its run: it is a hare without fur and without bones.

And hunters' dogs, often in gentle rest,
suddenly toss their legs nonetheless, and all at once let out
cries, and draw in quick breaths through their nostrils,
as if they had found and were holding the tracks of wild beasts;
and once awake, they often chase the empty
images of stags, as if they saw them in flight,
until they shake off their delusions and come back to themselves.
The watchdogs that we often see growling in their dreams, and then barking outright and waking with a start, as if they saw some stranger arriving: that stranger whom their soul sees is a spiritual and imperceptible man, without dimension, without color and without being. *The fawning brood of puppies, used to living*
indoors, often hasten to shake light, fluttering sleep from their eyes
and to spring up from the ground,
as if they beheld unknown faces and features.

THE BEAUTY OF BODIES

Ideals of beauty vary everywhere, and many animals are more beautiful than we are.

2.12.83 As for bodily beauty, before going further I would need to know whether we agree on how to describe it. It is likely that we hardly know what beauty is in nature and in general, since we give so many different forms to our own human beauty; if there were some natural rule for it, we would all recognize it in common, like the heat of fire. We fancy its forms to suit our appetite. *A Belgian complexion is ugly on a Roman face.* The Indies paint beauty black and swarthy, with thick, swollen lips and a flat, broad nose; and they load the cartilage between the nostrils with big gold rings to make it hang down to the mouth, and likewise the lower lip with large hoops set with precious stones, so that it falls onto the chin; and it is their idea of grace to show their teeth down below the roots. In Peru the biggest ears are the most beautiful, and they stretch them artificially as far as they

can.[56] And a man of our own day says he saw in an Eastern nation this care to enlarge them, and to load them with heavy jewels, held in such esteem that he could pass his arm, sleeve and all, through the hole of an ear whenever he liked. Elsewhere there are nations that blacken their teeth with great care and scorn to see them white; elsewhere they dye them red. Not only in the Basque country do women think themselves more beautiful with shaven heads, but in plenty of other places too; and what is more, in certain icy regions, as Pliny says. Mexican women count a small forehead among the beauties; and while they remove the hair everywhere else on their bodies, on the forehead they cultivate it and thicken it by art. And they hold large breasts in such high regard that they make a point of being able to give their children the breast over their shoulder. That is how we would fashion ugliness. The Italians make beauty plump and massive; the Spanish, lean and spare; and among us, one makes it fair, another dark; one soft and delicate, another strong and vigorous; one asks for daintiness and sweetness in it, another for pride and majesty. In just the same way, the preference in beauty that Plato gives to the spherical figure the Epicureans give rather to the pyramid, or the square; and they cannot swallow a god in the shape of a ball.

2.12.84 But however that may be, Nature has no more privileged us in this than in the rest, above her common laws. And if we judge ourselves rightly, we will find that if there are some animals less favored than we are in this respect, there are others, and many of them, that are more so. *We are surpassed in beauty by many animals*: indeed even by the land animals, our compatriots. For as for the creatures of the sea, leaving aside shape, which is so different that no comparison is possible, in color, clearness, smoothness and arrangement we yield to them a good deal; and no less, in all qualities, to the creatures of the air.[57]

56 Propertius, Elegies II.18.
57 Seneca, Letters 124.

> And that prerogative the poets make so much of, our upright stature, looking toward heaven, its origin: *And while the other animals stoop and look at the earth, to man he gave an uplifted face, and bade him look at the sky and raise his eyes erect toward the stars.* it is truly poetic. For there are many little creatures whose gaze is turned entirely toward the sky; and the necks of camels and ostriches I find even higher and more upright than ours. What animals do not have their face on top and in front, and look straight ahead as we do, and do not take in, in their natural posture, as much of sky and earth as man?

And what qualities of our bodily constitution, as described in Plato and in Cicero, cannot apply to a thousand kinds of beasts? Those that resemble us most are the ugliest and most abject of the whole crew: for outward appearance and the shape of the face, it is the apes, *How like us is the ape, the ugliest of beasts!* for the inside and the vital organs, it is the pig.[58]

2.12.85 Indeed, when I picture man stark naked (yes, even in the sex that seems to have the larger share of beauty), with his blemishes, his natural subjection and his imperfections, I find that we have had more reason than any other animal to cover ourselves. We could be excused for borrowing from the creatures Nature had favored more than us in this respect, to deck ourselves out in their beauty and hide under their spoils: wool, feathers, fur, silk. Let us note, moreover, that we are the only animal whose defects offend our own companions, and the only ones who must hide from our own species in our natural actions. Truly, it is also a fact worth considering that the masters of the craft prescribe, as a remedy for the passions of love, a full and free sight of the body one desires: to cool one's affection, one need only look freely at what one loves. *That man, because he had seen the obscene parts of the body laid bare, / found his love, which had been in full course, stopped short.* And although this prescription may perhaps come from a somewhat fastidious and

58 A line of Ennius quoted by Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods I.

chilly temperament, it is still a remarkable sign of our deficiency that familiarity and acquaintance make us disgusted with one another. It is not so much modesty as skill and prudence that makes our ladies so careful to refuse us entry to their private rooms before they are painted and dressed for public display.[59]

> *Nor are our Venuses unaware of this; all the more do they take the utmost pains to hide this whole backstage of life from those they wish to keep bound fast in love.* Whereas in many animals there is nothing that we do not love and that does not please our senses. From their very excrements and discharges we draw not only delicacies to eat but our richest ornaments and perfumes. This reasoning concerns only the common run of us. I am not so sacrilegious as to try to include those divine, supernatural and extraordinary beauties that we sometimes see shining among us, like stars under a bodily and earthly veil.

2.12.86 For the rest, the very share of Nature's favors that we allot to the animals is, by our own admission, very much to their advantage. We attribute to ourselves imaginary and fanciful goods, future and absent goods, for which human capacity cannot of itself answer. Or we falsely attribute to ourselves goods through the license of our opinion, such as reason, knowledge and honor. And to them we leave as their share essential, tangible and palpable goods: peace, rest, security, innocence and health—health, I say, the finest and richest gift that Nature can give us. So much so that Philosophy, even the Stoic kind, dares to say this of Heraclitus and Pherecydes: if they could have exchanged their wisdom for health, and by that bargain rid themselves, the one of dropsy, the other of the lice disease that afflicted him, they would have done well. In this they set an even higher value on wisdom, by comparing it and weighing it against health, than they do in another proposition that is also

59 Ovid, Remedies of Love.

theirs. They say that if Circe had offered Ulysses two potions, one to make a man wise instead of foolish, the other foolish instead of wise, Ulysses ought rather to have accepted the potion of folly than consent to Circe's changing his human shape into that of a beast. And they say that wisdom herself would have spoken to him thus: "Leave me, let me go, rather than lodge me in the shape and body of an ass." What? So the philosophers abandon this great and divine wisdom for the sake of this bodily and earthly veil? Then it is no longer by reason, by reasoning and by the soul that we excel the beasts. It is by our beauty, our fair complexion and the fine arrangement of our limbs, for which we must throw away our intelligence, our prudence and all the rest. Well, I accept this natural and frank confession. Surely they recognized that those qualities we make such a fuss about are nothing but empty fancy. So even if the beasts had all the virtue, knowledge, wisdom and competence of the Stoics, they would still be beasts, and could not be compared with a wretched, wicked and senseless man. For in the end, whatever is not as we are is worth nothing. And God himself, to be esteemed, must resemble us, as we shall say presently. From which it is plain that it is not by true reasoning but by a foolish pride and obstinacy that we prefer ourselves to the other animals and set ourselves apart from their condition and company.

WHAT REASON COSTS US

Our share is passions, anxieties and vices, and learning eases none of them.

2.12.87 But to return to my subject: we have for our share inconstancy, irresolution, uncertainty, grief, superstition, anxiety about things to come, even after our life, ambition, avarice, jealousy, envy, unruly, frenzied and untamable appetites, war, lying, disloyalty, slander and curiosity. Truly, we have paid a strangely excessive price for this fine reasoning we glory in, and this capacity to judge and know, if we have bought it at the cost of this infinite number of passions that constantly have us in their grip.

Unless we also choose to make much, as Socrates indeed does, of this notable prerogative over the beasts: whereas Nature has prescribed certain seasons and limits for them in the pleasures of Venus, she has given us free rein at all hours and on all occasions. *As with wine for the sick: since it seldom helps and very often harms, it is better not to give it at all than, in the hope of a doubtful recovery, to run into certain ruin. So I do not know whether it would not have been better for the human race that this swift movement of thought, this sharpness, this ingenuity that we call reason, should not have been given at all, since it is pernicious to many and wholesome to very few, rather than given so bountifully and so lavishly.* What fruit can we suppose that their understanding of so many things brought Varro and Aristotle? Did it exempt them from human troubles?[60] Were they relieved of the mishaps that weigh on a porter? Did they draw from logic any consolation for the gout? For knowing how that humor lodges in the joints, did they feel it any less? Did they come to terms with death because they knew that some nations rejoice in it, or with cuckoldry because they knew that in some region wives are held in common? On the contrary: the one held first rank in learning among the Romans, the other among the Greeks, and at the time when learning flourished most. Yet we have not heard that they had any particular excellence in their lives; indeed the Greek has his work cut out clearing himself of certain notable stains on his.

> Has anyone found that pleasure and health taste better to the man who knows astrology and grammar? *Are the sinews of the unlettered any less stiff?* Or that shame and poverty are less troublesome? *No doubt you will be free of sickness and frailty,*
> *you will escape grief and care, and a long span of life*
> *will be granted you hereafter under a better fate.*[61]

2.12.88 In my time I have seen a hundred craftsmen, a hundred plowmen, wiser and happier than university rectors, and whom

60 Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods.
61 Horace, Epodes; then Juvenal, Satires.

I would rather resemble. Learning, in my view, ranks among the things necessary to life in the way that glory, nobility and rank do, or at most wealth, and other such qualities. They do serve life, but from a distance, and more in fancy than by nature. We need hardly more offices, rules and laws of living in our community than cranes and ants need in theirs. And yet we see that they conduct themselves in a very orderly way without any erudition. If man were wise, he would set the true value on each thing according to how useful and suited it was to his life. If we are counted by our actions and conduct, a greater number of excellent men will be found among the ignorant than among the learned—I mean in every kind of virtue. Old Rome seems to me to have produced men of far greater worth, both for peace and for war, than that learned Rome which ruined itself. Even if all the rest were equal, at least integrity and innocence would remain on the side of the old Rome, for integrity dwells singularly well with simplicity. But I leave this subject, which would draw me further than I would care to follow. I will say only this further: it is humility and submission alone that can make a good man. We must not leave the knowledge of his duty to each man's judgment. It must be prescribed to him, not left to the choice of his reasoning. Otherwise, given the weakness and infinite variety of our reasons and opinions, we would end by forging ourselves duties that would set us to eating one another, as Epicurus says.

2.12.89 The first law that God ever gave to man was a law of pure obedience. It was a bare and simple commandment, in which man had nothing to understand or to argue about, since obeying is the proper function of a rational soul that recognizes a heavenly superior and benefactor. From obeying and yielding springs every other virtue, as from presumption springs every sin. Conversely, the first temptation that came to human nature from the devil, his first poison, worked its way into us through the promises he made us of knowledge and understanding: *You shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.* And the Sirens, to trick

Ulysses in Homer and lure him into their dangerous and ruinous snares, offer him knowledge as a gift.[62]

> Man's plague is the opinion that he knows. That is why our religion so commends ignorance to us, as something suited to belief and obedience. *Beware lest any man deceive you through philosophy and vain seductions, according to the elements of the world.* On one point there is general agreement among all philosophers of all schools: the sovereign good consists in tranquillity of soul and body. But where do we find it? *In short, the wise man is inferior only to Jupiter: rich,*
> *free, honored, handsome, in a word king of kings;*
> *above all healthy—except when he is plagued by phlegm.*[63]

2.12.90 It seems indeed that Nature, to console us in our wretched and puny state, has given us nothing for our share but presumption. That is what Epictetus says: man has nothing properly his own but the use of his opinions. We have nothing but wind and smoke for our share. The gods have health in essence, says philosophy, and sickness only in understanding. Man, on the contrary, possesses his goods in fancy and his ills in essence. We have been right to make much of the powers of our imagination, for all our goods exist only in dreams.

2.12.91 Listen to this poor, calamitous animal boasting. "Nothing," says Cicero, "is so sweet as the pursuit of letters—of those letters, I mean, by means of which the infinity of things, the immense grandeur of Nature, the heavens in this very world, and the lands and the seas are revealed to us. It is they that have taught us religion, moderation, greatness of courage. They have snatched our soul from the darkness to let it see all things, high, low, first, last and in between. It is they that furnish us with the means to live well and happily, and guide us to pass our lives without displeasure and without offense." Does this man not

62 Genesis 3:5. In the Odyssey (Book XII) the Sirens promise that whoever listens to them will leave knowing more.
63 Saint Paul, Colossians 2:8; then Horace, Epistles I.1.

seem to be speaking of the condition of the ever-living and almighty God?

> And as for the result, a thousand simple village women have lived a more even, gentler and steadier life than his was. *He was a god, a god, illustrious Memmius,*
> *who first discovered that rule of life which*
> *is now called Wisdom, and who by his skill*
> *from such great storms and such great darkness*
> *set life in so calm and so clear a light.* Those are very magnificent and fine words. But a very slight accident put the understanding of this man in a worse state than that of the lowliest shepherd, for all his divine teacher and his divine wisdom. Of the same impudence is the promise in Democritus's book: "I am going to speak of all things."[64]

And that foolish title Aristotle lends us, of "mortal gods"; and that judgment of Chrysippus, that Dion was as virtuous as God. And my Seneca acknowledges, he says, that God gave him life, but that living well he has from himself. In keeping with that other one: *We rightly glory in virtue, which would not be the case if we had it as a gift from God and not from ourselves.* This too is from Seneca: the wise man has fortitude equal to God's, but in the midst of human weakness, and in that he surpasses him. There is nothing more common than to come across strokes of similar rashness. There is not one of us who is as offended at seeing himself matched with God as he is at seeing himself lowered to the rank of the other animals: so much more jealous are we of our own interest than of our creator's.

2.12.92 But we must trample this foolish vanity underfoot, and shake boldly and vigorously the ridiculous foundations on which these false opinions are built. As long as he thinks he has some means and some power of his own, man will never recognize what he owes to his master. He will always be counting his

64 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things V, praising Epicurus. Tradition held that Lucretius was driven mad by a love potion.

eggs as hens, as the saying goes. He must be stripped down to his shirt. Let us look at some notable example of the effect of his philosophy. Posidonius was gripped by an illness so painful that it made him twist his arms and grind his teeth. He thought he was thumbing his nose at the pain by crying out against it: "Do your worst, still I will not say that you are an evil." He feels the same sufferings as my lackey, but he prides himself on at least keeping his tongue within the laws of his school. *He who boasted in words ought not to have given way in deeds.* When Arcesilaus was ill with gout, Carneades, who had come to visit him, was going away much distressed. Arcesilaus called him back and, pointing to his feet and his chest, said: "Nothing has come from there to here." This one shows a little better grace, for he feels that he is in pain and would like to be rid of it; yet his heart is not cast down or weakened by that pain. The other holds to his stiffness, which is, I fear, more verbal than real. And Dionysius of Heraclea, afflicted with a violent burning in the eyes, was brought to give up those Stoic resolutions.

THE COMFORTS OF IGNORANCE

Simplicity spares pain better than philosophy, whose remedies end in ignorance and death.

2.12.93 But even if learning did in fact do what they say, blunting and dulling the sharpness of the misfortunes that dog us, what does it do but what ignorance does much more purely and more evidently? The philosopher Pyrrho, caught at sea in a great storm, offered those who were with him nothing to imitate but the composure of a pig that was traveling with them, watching the tempest without fear. Philosophy, at the end of its precepts, sends us back to the examples of an athlete and a muleteer. In them we commonly see much less feeling of death, pain and other troubles, and more firmness, than learning ever supplied to anyone who was not born to it and prepared for it of himself by natural disposition. What makes it easier to cut and carve the tender limbs of a child, or those of a horse, than ours, if not

ignorance? How many has the mere power of imagination made ill? We commonly see people having themselves bled, purged and dosed to cure ills they feel only in their reasoning. When real ills fail us, learning lends us its own: this color and this complexion portend some catarrhal discharge; this hot season threatens you with a feverish attack; this break in the life line of your left hand warns you of some notable and imminent illness. And in the end it goes straight for health itself. This liveliness and vigor of youth cannot stay settled; you must draw off some of its blood and strength, lest it turn against you. Compare the life of a man enslaved to such fancies with that of a plowman. The plowman follows his natural appetite and measures things only by present sensation, without learning and without prognosis; he suffers only when he is ill. The other often has the stone in his soul before he has it in his kidneys. As if it were not soon enough to suffer the illness when it comes, he anticipates it in fancy and runs out to meet it.

2.12.94 What I say of medicine can be extended by way of example to every kind of learning. From this came that ancient opinion of the philosophers who placed the sovereign good in recognizing the weakness of our judgment. My ignorance gives me as much reason for hope as for fear. I have no other rule for my health than the examples of others and the outcomes I see elsewhere on similar occasions; I find some of every kind, and fix on the comparisons that are most favorable to me. I welcome health with open arms, free, full and entire, and I sharpen my appetite to enjoy it, all the more because it is now less usual and rarer for me. So far am I from disturbing its rest and sweetness with the bitterness of a new and constrained way of life.

2.12.95 The beasts show us well enough how many illnesses the agitation of our mind brings us. We are told of the people of Brazil that they died only of old age, and this is attributed to the serenity and calm of their air. I attribute it rather to the calm and serenity of their souls, free of any passion and of any tense or unpleasant thought or occupation, as people who spent their

lives in an admirable simplicity and ignorance, without letters, without law, without king, without any religion whatever.

2.12.96 And how else do we explain what experience shows, that the coarsest and dullest men are firmer and more desirable in the performance of love, and that a muleteer's love is often more welcome than a gentleman's? Is it not that in the gentleman the agitation of the soul disturbs his bodily strength, breaks it and wearies it, just as it also commonly wearies and disturbs itself? What unhinges the soul, what more often throws it into madness, than its own quickness, its keenness, its agility, in short its own strength? What is the subtlest folly made of, if not the subtlest wisdom? Just as great enmities are born of great friendships, and mortal illnesses of vigorous health, so from the rare and vivid agitations of our souls come the most remarkable and most deranged manias: it takes only half a turn of the peg to pass from the one to the other. In the actions of madmen we see how neatly folly fits in with the most vigorous operations of our soul. Who does not know how imperceptible is the borderline between folly and the lively flights of a free mind, and the effects of a supreme and extraordinary virtue? Plato says that melancholics are the most teachable and the most excellent; and indeed there are none so prone to madness. Countless minds are found ruined by their own strength and suppleness. What a fall, through his own agitation and liveliness, has just been taken by one of the most judicious and ingenious of poets, more deeply formed in the manner of that ancient and pure poetry than any other Italian poet has been for a long time! Has he not good reason to be grateful to that murderous liveliness of his? to that brightness which has blinded him? to that exact and intense grasp of reason which has left him without reason? to that curious and laborious quest for knowledge which has led him to stupidity? to that rare aptitude for the exercises of the mind, which has left him with no exercise and no mind?[65] I felt even more vexation than pity at seeing him in Ferrara in so pitiful a state,

65 Torquato Tasso, confined as insane in the hospital of Sant'Anna at Ferrara from 1579 to 1586; Montaigne passed through Ferrara in 1580.

outliving himself, not knowing himself or his works. Without his knowledge and yet before his eyes, they have been published uncorrected and unshaped.

2.12.97 Do you want a man healthy? Do you want him orderly, in a firm and steady posture? Wrap him in the darkness of idleness and dullness. We must be stupefied to be made wise, and blinded to be guided.

> Someone may tell me that the advantage of having a cold and blunted sensibility to pains and ills brings with it a disadvantage: it also makes us, in consequence, less keen and eager in the enjoyment of goods and pleasures. That is true. But the wretchedness of our condition is such that we have less to enjoy than to flee, and the greatest pleasure does not touch us as much as a slight pain. *Men feel good things less keenly than bad.* We do not feel perfect health as we feel the least of illnesses: We feel the sting
> when the body is hurt by a little wound that barely grazes the skin,
> while being well moves no one at all.[66]
>
> This alone delights me:
> that my side or my foot does not torment me; beyond that, one
> could hardly tell oneself to be sound or feel oneself to be well. *Our well-being is nothing but the absence of being ill. That is why the school of philosophy that made the most of pleasure still reduced it to mere freedom from pain. To have no pain is to have the most good that man can hope for, as Ennius said:* He has good aplenty who has nothing bad.

2.12.98 Consider the tickling and sharpening found in certain pleasures, which seems to lift us above simple health and freedom from pain. That active, moving pleasure, somehow burning and biting—even that aims only at freedom from pain as its goal. The appetite that carries us away into intimacy with women

66 Livy; then Latin verses by Étienne de La Boétie, Montaigne's friend.

seeks only to drive out the torment brought on by ardent and furious desire. It asks only to satisfy it and come to rest, freed from that fever. And so with the others. I say, then, that if simplicity leads us to having no pain, it leads us to a very happy state, given our condition. Yet we must not imagine it so leaden as to be wholly without feeling. Crantor was quite right to attack Epicurus's freedom from pain, if it were built so deep that even the approach and onset of ills were missing. I do not praise that freedom from pain which is neither possible nor desirable. I am content not to be ill; but if I am, I want to know that I am, and if I am cauterized or cut, I want to feel it. In truth, whoever rooted out the knowledge of pain would at the same time extirpate the knowledge of pleasure, and in the end annihilate man. *This freedom from all pain is not achieved without a great price: inhumanity in the mind, insensibility in the body.* Pain, in its turn, is good for man. Neither is pain always to be fled, nor pleasure always to be pursued.

2.12.99 It is a very great point in ignorance's honor that learning itself throws us back into its arms when it finds itself at a loss to stiffen us against the weight of our ills. Learning is forced to come to this compromise: to give us free rein, to allow us to take refuge in ignorance's lap and to shelter, under its protection, from the blows and injuries of Fortune. For what else does it mean when it preaches that we should withdraw our thoughts from the ills that grip us and occupy them with lost pleasures? Or that we should use the memory of past goods as consolation for present ills, and call to our aid a vanished contentment to set against what is pressing us? *He places the relief of distress in calling the mind away from thinking of its trouble and back to the contemplation of pleasures*—unless it is that, where strength fails it, learning wants to use cunning, and to try a nimble trick and a trip of the leg where the vigor of body and arms fails it. Take not just a philosopher but simply a level-headed man, when he actually feels the burning disturbance of a high fever: what sort of coin is it to pay him with the memory of the sweetness of Greek

wine? It would rather make his bargain worse: *For remembering good doubles the pain.*[67]

2.12.100 Of the same kind is that other counsel Philosophy gives: to keep in memory only past happiness and erase from it the displeasures we have suffered—as if we had the art of forgetting in our power; and a counsel that leaves us worse off yet again. *The memory of past toils is sweet.* What? Philosophy ought to put weapons in my hand to fight Fortune; it ought to stiffen my courage to trample underfoot all human adversities. Does it sink to such softness as to make me dodge like a rabbit through these cowardly and ridiculous byways? For memory presents to us not what we choose, but what it pleases. Indeed, nothing imprints something so vividly on our memory as the desire to forget it. A good way to entrust something to our soul's keeping and stamp it there is to urge the soul to lose it. And this is false: *It is in our power to bury adversity in an almost perpetual oblivion, and to remember prosperity pleasantly and sweetly.* And this is true: *I remember even what I would rather not; I cannot forget what I would.* And whose counsel is this? His *who alone dared to proclaim himself wise*: *Who surpassed the human race in genius, and outshone / all the stars, as the sun risen in the sky.* Is not emptying and stripping the memory the true and proper road to ignorance?[68] *Ignorance is a sluggish remedy for ills.* We see several similar precepts by which we are allowed to borrow frivolous appearances from the common people where lively, strong reason does not suffice, provided they serve us for contentment and consolation. Where they cannot heal the wound, they are content to numb it and dress it over. I believe they will not deny me this: if they could add order and constancy to a state of life kept in pleasure and tranquillity through some weakness and sickness of judgment, they would accept it. *I shall begin to drink and scatter flowers, / and even put up with being thought reckless.* There would

67 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations, on Epicurus.
68 Epicurus, as described by Cicero and by Lucretius.

be many philosophers of Lycas's opinion.[69] This man was otherwise well-regulated in his ways, living gently and peaceably in his household, failing in no duty toward his own people or toward strangers, and guarding himself very well against harmful things. Yet through some disorder of the senses he had got a delusion fixed in his brain: he thought he was perpetually at the theater watching entertainments, spectacles and the finest comedies in the world. When the doctors had cured him of this morbid humor, he very nearly sued them to be restored to the sweetness of those fancies. Good heavens!

> you have killed me, my friends,
> not saved me, he said; you have wrenched my pleasure from me
> and taken away by force my mind's most delightful illusion.
>
> His was a delusion like that of Thrasylaus, son of Pythodorus, who made himself believe that all the ships that put out from the port of Piraeus and came into it were working only for his service. He rejoiced in the good fortune of their voyages and welcomed them with joy. When his brother Crito had him restored to his better senses, he missed that condition in which he had lived in gladness, free of all displeasure.

That is what this ancient Greek line says, that there is great advantage in not being so wise: *For life is sweetest when one knows nothing.* And Ecclesiastes: "In much wisdom is much grief"; and "He who acquires knowledge acquires toil and torment."[70]

2.12.101 That very thing to which Philosophy generally consents, the last remedy it prescribes for every kind of necessity, which is to put an end to the life we cannot bear: *Does it please you? Bear it. Does it not? Leave by whatever way you like. Does pain sting you? Or even pierce you through? If you are naked, offer your throat; but if you are covered by the arms of Vulcan, that is, by fortitude, resist.* And that saying of the Greek drinking companions which they

69 Seneca, Oedipus; then Horace, Epistles I.5. Horace tells the story that follows in Epistles II.2.
70 Sophocles, Ajax; Ecclesiastes 1:18.

apply to it, *Let him drink or let him leave*—which sounds more apt on a Gascon's tongue than on Cicero's, since a Gascon readily changes B into V: If you do not know how to live rightly, make way for those who do.[71]

> / You have played enough, eaten enough and drunk enough: it is time for you to leave, lest, having drunk more than your share, you be laughed at and jostled by an age to which wantonness is more becoming. What is all this but a confession of Philosophy's impotence, and a referral not only to ignorance, to be sheltered there, but to stupidity itself, to not feeling and to not being?[72]

> *When ripe old age had warned Democritus*
> *that the motions of his mind were growing feeble,*
> *he went of his own accord to meet death and offered it his head.*
> That is what Antisthenes said: one must lay in a supply either of sense to understand or of a halter to hang oneself. And Chrysippus cited on this subject the poet Tyrtaeus: *Either to virtue or to death draw near.* And Crates said that love was cured by hunger, or else by time, and for those who liked neither of these remedies, by the rope. That Sextius of whom Seneca and Plutarch speak with such high praise had left everything else and thrown himself into the study of philosophy. Seeing the progress of his studies too slow and too long, he resolved to throw himself into the sea.

He was running to death for lack of knowledge. Here are the words of the law on this subject: "If by chance some great trouble befalls that cannot be remedied, the harbor is near, and one may save oneself by swimming out of the body as out of a leaking skiff; for it is the fear of dying, not the desire to live, that keeps the fool attached to the body."

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71 Gascons confused b and v, so bibat ("let him drink") could become vivat ("let him live"): "let him live or let him leave."
72 Horace, Epistles II.2.

2.12.102 As life becomes pleasanter through simplicity, so it also becomes more innocent and better, as I was beginning to say a while ago. The simple and the ignorant, says Saint Paul, rise up and take hold of heaven; and we, with all our learning, plunge into the abysses of hell.[73] I do not dwell on Valentinian, a declared enemy of learning and letters, nor on Licinius, both Roman emperors, who called them the poison and plague of every body politic; nor on Muhammad, who, as I have heard, forbade learning to his followers. But the example and authority of the great Lycurgus must certainly carry great weight. So must the reverence due to that divine Spartan government, so great, so admirable, and flourishing so long in virtue and happiness without any teaching or practice of letters.

2.12.103 Those who come back from that new world discovered by the Spaniards in our fathers' time can testify to us how much more lawfully and orderly those nations live, without magistrate and without law, than ours. Here there are more officers and laws than there are other men, and than there are actions. *With summonses and with writs,*

with examinations and papers and proxies
their hands and bosoms are full, and great bundles
of glosses, counsels and readings,
through which the goods of poor folk
are never safe in the cities;
behind them, before them and on either side they have
notaries, attorneys and advocates.[74]

2.12.104 That is what a Roman senator of the later centuries said: their forebears had breath stinking of garlic and stomachs perfumed with the musk of a good conscience; those of his own time, on the contrary, smelled outwardly only of perfume, while within they stank of every kind of vice. That is to say, I think, that they had much learning and ability and a great lack of

73 The words are in fact Saint Augustine's (Confessions VIII.8).
74 Ariosto, Orlando Furioso XIV.

integrity. Want of polish, ignorance, simplicity and roughness readily keep company with innocence. Curiosity, subtlety and learning bring malice in their train. Humility, fear, obedience and gentleness, which are the chief elements for preserving human society, require a soul that is empty, docile and presuming little of itself.

2.12.105 Christians have a special knowledge of how natural and original an evil curiosity is in man. The urge to increase in wisdom and knowledge was the first ruin of the human race; it is the road by which it hurled itself into eternal damnation. Pride is its downfall and corruption. It is pride that drives man off the common roads and makes him embrace novelties. It makes him prefer to be the leader of a wandering band gone astray on the path of perdition, prefer to be master and teacher of error and falsehood, rather than a pupil in the school of truth, letting himself be led and guided by another's hand along the beaten and righteous road. That is perhaps what the ancient Greek saying means, that superstition follows pride and obeys it as its father: *Superstition obeys pride as a father.* O presumption, how you hamper us! When Socrates was told that the god of wisdom had given him the name of Wise, he was stunned. Searching and shaking himself through and through, he could find no ground for this divine pronouncement. He knew men as just, temperate, valiant and learned as he, and more eloquent, handsomer and more useful to the country. At last he concluded that he was distinguished from others, and was wise, only because he did not consider himself so; that his god regarded the opinion of knowledge and wisdom as a singular stupidity in man; and that his best teaching was the teaching of ignorance, and simplicity his best wisdom. Holy Scripture declares wretched those of us who think highly of themselves: "Mire and ashes," it says to them, "what have you to glory in?" And elsewhere: "God has made man like the shadow"—and who will judge of the shadow when, the light having gone, it has vanished? We are nothing at all.

2.12.106 Our powers are so far from conceiving the divine loftiness that, of our creator's works, those that bear his mark best

and are most his own are the ones we understand least. For Christians, coming upon something incredible is a reason to believe. It is all the more in accordance with reason for being against human reason. If it were in accordance with reason, it would no longer be a miracle; and if it followed some precedent, it would no longer be singular. *God is better known by not knowing*, says Saint Augustine. And Tacitus: *It is holier and more reverent to believe in the deeds of the gods than to know them.* And Plato holds that there is some taint of impiety in inquiring too curiously into God, the world and the first causes of things. *To find the father of this universe is difficult; and when you have found him, to reveal him to the multitude is a sin*, says Cicero. We do say power, truth, justice: these are words that signify something great; but that thing we do not see at all, nor conceive. We say that God fears, that God grows angry, that God loves. *Marking immortal things with mortal words.* These are all agitations and emotions that cannot dwell in God in our form, nor can we imagine him in his. It is for God alone to know himself and interpret his works. He does it in our language, improperly, to lower himself and come down to us, who lie prostrate on the ground. How can prudence suit him, prudence being the choice between good and evil, seeing that no evil touches him? What of reason and intelligence, which we use to arrive at what is plain by way of what is obscure, seeing that nothing is obscure to God? Justice, which gives each his due and was born for the society and community of men—how is it in God? And temperance, how? It is the moderation of bodily pleasures, which have no place in the divinity. Fortitude in bearing pain, toil and dangers belongs to him just as little, since those three things have no access to him. That is why Aristotle holds him equally exempt from virtue and from vice. *He can be held by neither favor nor anger, for all such things would be marks of weakness.*[75]

2.12.107 Whatever share we have in the knowledge of truth, it is not by our own strength that we have acquired it. God has taught us this plainly enough through the witnesses he chose

75 Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods.

from among the common people, simple and ignorant men, to instruct us in his wonderful secrets. Our faith is not something we have earned; it is a pure gift from another's generosity. It is not by reasoning or by our own understanding that we have received our religion; it is by outside authority and command. The weakness of our judgment helps us to it more than its strength, and our blindness more than our clear sight. It is through the agency of our ignorance, more than of our knowledge, that we are learned in divine learning. It is no wonder if our natural, earthly means cannot grasp that supernatural, heavenly knowledge. Let us bring to it only what is ours: obedience and submission. For, as it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring down the prudence of the prudent. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased him to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching."[76]

WHAT THE PHILOSOPHERS FOUND

After long inquiry the wisest learned only their own ignorance.

2.12.108 Still, I must see at last whether it is in man's power to find what he is looking for, and whether this quest, on which he has spent so many centuries, has enriched him with some new strength and some solid truth. I think he will admit to me, if he speaks in good conscience, that all the gain he has drawn from so long a pursuit is to have learned to recognize his own weakness. The ignorance that was naturally in us we have, by long study, confirmed and verified. What has happened to the truly learned is what happens to ears of wheat: they keep rising and lifting their heads, straight and proud, as long as they are empty; but when they are full and swollen with grain at their ripeness, they begin to humble themselves and lower their horns. In the same way men, having tried everything and soun-

76 Saint Paul, 1 Corinthians 1:19–21, quoting Isaiah 29:14.

ded everything, and having found in that heap of knowledge and store of so many different things nothing solid and firm, nothing but vanity, have given up their presumption and recognized their natural condition. That is what Velleius reproaches Cotta and Cicero with: that they had learned from Philo that they had learned nothing.[77] Pherecydes, one of the seven sages, writing to Thales as he was dying, said: "I have ordered my people, after they have buried me, to bring you my writings. If they satisfy you and the other sages, publish them; if not, suppress them. They contain no certainty that satisfies even me. Nor do I profess to know the truth, or to reach it. I open things up more than I uncover them." The wisest man who ever lived, when asked what he knew, answered that he knew this much: that he knew nothing.[78] He was bearing out the saying that the greatest part of what we know is the least of the parts we do not know; that is to say, the very thing we think we know is a piece, and a very small one, of our ignorance.

2.12.109 We know things in a dream, says Plato, and are ignorant of them in reality. *Almost all the ancients said that nothing can be known, nothing perceived, nothing understood; that the senses are narrow, minds weak, and the course of life short.* As for Cicero himself, who owed all his worth to learning, Valerius says that in his old age he began to think little of letters. And while he was engaged with them, it was without allegiance to any party: he followed what seemed probable to him, now in one school, now in another, always keeping within the doubt of the Academy. *I must speak, but in such a way as to affirm nothing; I will inquire into everything, mostly doubting and distrusting myself.*

2.12.110 I would have too easy a game if I chose to consider man in his ordinary state and in the mass; and yet I could do it by his own rule, which judges truth not by the weight of the votes but by their number. Let us leave aside the people, *Who snores while*

77 Velleius and Cotta are speakers in Cicero's On the Nature of the Gods; Philo of Larissa, head of the Academy, was Cicero's teacher.

78 Pherecydes of Syros, Greek thinker of the 6th century BC. The wisest man is Socrates.

awake, / Whose life is all but dead while he still lives and sees, who does not feel himself, does not judge himself, and leaves most of his natural faculties idle. I want to take man at his highest station. Let us consider him in that small number of excellent, select men who, endowed with a fine and singular natural power, have further stiffened and sharpened it by care, study and skill, and raised it to the highest point of wisdom it can reach. They have handled their minds in every direction and from every angle; they have propped and shored them up with every outside aid that suited them, and enriched and adorned them with all they could borrow for their benefit, from within the world and outside it. It is in them that the utmost height of human nature resides. They have regulated the world with governments and laws. They have instructed it with arts and sciences, and instructed it further by the example of their admirable conduct. I shall take into account only these men, their testimony and their experience. Let us see how far they have gone and where they have stopped. Whatever ailments and defects we find in that company, the world may boldly own as its own.

THREE ANSWERS: FOUND, UNFINDABLE, STILL SEEKING

Dogmatists, Academics and Pyrrhonists; the Pyrrhonists suspend judgment and live by appearances.

2.12.111 Whoever is looking for something comes to this point: either he says he has found it, or that it cannot be found, or that he is still searching for it. All philosophy is divided into these three kinds. Its aim is to seek truth, knowledge and certainty. The Peripatetics, Epicureans, Stoics and others thought they had found it. These established the sciences we have and treated them as certain knowledge. Clitomachus, Carneades and the Academics despaired of their quest and judged that truth could not be grasped by our means. The end these men reach is weakness and human ignorance. This party had the largest following

and the noblest adherents.[79] Pyrrho and the other Skeptics or Ephectics—whose doctrines several ancients held to be drawn from Homer, the seven sages, Archilochus and Euripides, and to whom they attach Zeno, Democritus and Xenophanes—say that they are still searching for the truth. They judge that those who think they have found it are infinitely mistaken, and that there is also too bold a vanity in the second degree, which asserts that human powers are not capable of reaching it. For that—establishing the measure of our power, knowing and judging the difficulty of things—is a great and supreme knowledge, of which they doubt that man is capable. *Whoever thinks nothing can be known does not know this either: / Whether it can be known, since he admits he knows nothing.*[80]

2.12.112 Ignorance that knows itself, judges itself and condemns itself is not complete ignorance. To be complete, it must be ignorant of itself. So the profession of the Pyrrhonists is to waver, doubt and inquire, to be sure of nothing, to vouch for nothing. Of the three actions of the soul—imagining, desiring and assenting—they accept the first two; the last they hold in suspense and keep ambiguous, without inclination or approval one way or the other, however slight. Zeno used to depict by gesture his notion of this division of the faculties of the soul. The hand spread flat and open was appearance; the hand half closed, with the fingers a little curled, assent; the closed fist, comprehension; and when he went on to clench that fist still tighter with his left hand, knowledge. Now this stance of their judgment, straight and inflexible, receiving all objects without applying itself or assenting to them, leads them to their Ataraxy, which is a condition of life that is peaceful, settled and free from the agitations we receive from the impression of the opinion and knowledge we think we have of things. From these arise fear, avarice, envy, immoderate desires, ambition, pride, super-

79 Carneades (2nd century BC) led the skeptical New Academy; Clitomachus was his pupil and successor.

80 Ephectics: "those who suspend judgment," from the Greek epechein, to hold back.

stition, love of novelty, rebellion, disobedience, obstinacy, and most bodily ills.[81]

2.12.113 Indeed they thereby spare themselves any jealousy on behalf of their own school. For they argue in a very easygoing way. They do not fear retaliation in debate. When they say that heavy things go downward, they would be very sorry to be believed; they want to be contradicted, so as to produce the doubt and suspension of judgment that is their goal. They put forward their propositions only to fight those they think we hold in our belief. If you take theirs, they will just as willingly take up the opposite to defend: it is all one to them; they have no preference. If you lay it down that snow is black, they argue on the contrary that it is white. If you say it is neither one nor the other, it is up to them to maintain that it is both. If you hold, by a definite judgment, that you know nothing about it, they will maintain that you do know. Yes, and if by an affirmative axiom you assert that you doubt it, they will go on arguing that you do not doubt it, or that you cannot judge and establish that you doubt it.

2.12.114 And by this extreme of doubt, which shakes even itself, they separate and divide themselves from many opinions, even from those that have upheld doubt and ignorance in various ways. Why should they not be allowed, they say, to doubt as well —just as among the dogmatists one may say green and another yellow? Is there anything that can be put to you for you to accept or reject which it is not permissible to consider ambiguous? Others are carried—by the custom of their country, or by their upbringing at their parents' hands, or by chance, as if by a storm, without judgment or choice, indeed most often before the age of discretion—to this or that opinion, to the Stoic or the Epicurean school, to which they find themselves mortgaged, enslaved and stuck fast, as to a prey they cannot let go of: *to whatever doctrine they have been carried, as by a storm, they cling to it as to a rock.* Why, then, should these men not likewise be granted the right to keep their freedom and to consider things

81 Ataraxy: Greek ataraxia, "freedom from disturbance."

without obligation and servitude? *Freer and less bound in this, that their power of judging is intact.* Is it not some advantage to find oneself released from the necessity that curbs others? Is it not better to remain in suspense than to entangle oneself in all the errors human fancy has produced? Is it not better to suspend one's conviction than to get mixed up in these seditious and quarrelsome divisions? What shall I choose? "Whatever you like, as long as you choose." That is a foolish answer; and yet it seems that all dogmatism comes to it, since dogmatism does not allow us to be ignorant of what we are ignorant of. Take the most famous party: it will never be so secure that, to defend it, you will not have to attack and fight hundreds upon hundreds of opposing parties. Is it not better to stay out of this fray? You are allowed to embrace, as you would your honor and your life, Aristotle's belief about the eternity of the soul, and to contradict and refute Plato on that point; and they are to be forbidden to doubt it? If Panaetius may withhold his judgment about haruspices, dreams, oracles and prophecies, things the Stoics do not doubt in the least, why should a wise man not dare in all things what this man dares in those he learned from his masters, established by the common consent of the school of which he is a follower and teacher? If it is a child who judges, he does not know what it is about; if it is a learned man, he is prejudiced.[82]

2.12.115 They have kept a marvelous advantage for themselves in combat, having relieved themselves of the trouble of guarding. It does not matter to them if they are struck, so long as they strike; and they turn everything to account. If they win, your proposition limps; if you win, theirs does. If they fail, they confirm ignorance; if you fail, you confirm it. If they prove that nothing is known, well and good; if they cannot prove it, that is just as good. *So that, when equal weights are found on opposite sides of the same question, it is easier to withhold assertion on both sides.* And they claim to find far more easily why a thing is false than

82 Panaetius of Rhodes, Stoic philosopher of the 2nd century BC. Haruspices were diviners who read the entrails of sacrificed animals.

that it is true; what is not than what is; and what they do not believe than what they believe. Their ways of speaking are: "I establish nothing." "It is no more so than so, or than neither." "I do not grasp it." "Appearances are equal everywhere; the law of speaking for and against is the same." "Nothing seems true that cannot seem false." Their sacramental word is *epechō,* that is to say, "I hold back, I do not budge." Those are their refrains, and others of like substance. Their result is a pure, complete and most perfect deferral and suspension of judgment. They use their reason to inquire and debate, but not to settle and choose. Whoever imagines a perpetual confession of ignorance, a judgment without slant or inclination on any occasion whatever, conceives Pyrrhonism. I express this notion as well as I can, because many find it hard to conceive, and the authors themselves present it somewhat obscurely and in different ways.

2.12.116 As for the actions of life, in these they follow the common way. They lend and adapt themselves to natural inclinations, to the impulse and constraint of the passions, to the ordinances of laws and customs, and to the tradition of the arts. *For God did not want us to know these things, but only to use them.* They let these things guide their ordinary actions, without any opinion or judgment. That is why I cannot quite reconcile with this account what is said of Pyrrho. They portray him as stupid and immobile, adopting a wild, unsociable way of life, waiting for carts to run into him, walking up to precipices, refusing to conform to the laws. That is going beyond his doctrine. He did not try to make himself a stone or a stump; he tried to make himself a living man, thinking and reasoning, enjoying all natural pleasures and comforts, employing and using all his bodily and mental parts in due order and rightness. The fantastic, imaginary and false privileges man has usurped—of ruling, ordering, establishing—he renounced and gave up in good faith. And yet there is no school that is not forced to allow its wise man to follow many things not grasped, nor perceived, nor assented to, if he wants to live. And when he goes to sea, he follows that plan without knowing whether it will be useful to him, and relies on

the ship being sound, the pilot experienced, the season favorable—probable circumstances only. He is bound to go by them and let himself be moved by appearances, provided they show no express contradiction. He has a body, he has a soul; the senses push him, the mind stirs him. Although he does not find in himself that proper and distinctive mark for judging, and realizes that he must not commit his assent, since there may be some falsehood resembling this truth, he still carries out the duties of his life fully and conveniently. How many arts are there that profess to consist in conjecture more than in knowledge, that do not decide between true and false but merely follow what seems to be so? There is, they say, both true and false, and there is in us the means to seek it, but not to try it on the touchstone. We are much the better for letting ourselves be handled by the order of the world without inquiring. A soul kept free of prejudice has come a marvelous way toward tranquility. People who judge and check up on their judges never submit to them as they should.

2.12.117 How much more docile and easy to lead, under the laws both of religion and of the state, are simple and incurious minds than those minds that keep watch over causes divine and human and lecture on them? There is nothing in human invention that has so much likelihood and usefulness. This one presents man naked and empty, acknowledging his natural weakness, fit to receive some outside strength from on high; stripped of human knowledge, and all the more apt to lodge divine knowledge within him; annihilating his judgment to make more room for faith; neither disbelieving nor establishing any dogma against common laws and observances; humble, obedient, teachable, eager to learn; a sworn enemy of heresy, and consequently free of the vain and irreligious opinions introduced by false sects. It is a blank page, prepared to take from the finger of God whatever forms he pleases to engrave on it. The more we refer and commit ourselves to God and renounce ourselves, the better off we are. “Accept in good part,” says Ecclesiastes, “things in the aspect and taste with which they

present themselves to you, from day to day; the rest is beyond your knowledge." *The Lord knows the thoughts of men, that they are vain.*[83]

DOGMATISTS WHO DOUBT

Even the dogmatists, Plato and Aristotle among them, wrote in a spirit of inquiry.

2.12.118 So it is that, of the three general schools of philosophy, two make express profession of doubt and ignorance; and in that of the dogmatists, which is the third, it is easy to discover that most of them put on a face of assurance only to look better. They did not so much think to establish some certainty for us as to show us how far they had gone in this hunt for truth, *which the learned imagine rather than know*. Timaeus, having to instruct Socrates in what he knows of the gods, the world and men, proposes to speak of it as a man to a man, and says it is enough if his reasons are probable, like another man's; for exact reasons are not in his hands, nor in any mortal hands.[84] One of his followers imitated this as follows: *I will explain as best I can; yet not like Pythian Apollo, so that what I say is certain and fixed, but like a mere man, following probabilities by conjecture.* And that on the subject of contempt for death, a natural and popular subject. Elsewhere he translated it, on the very words of Plato: If perhaps, in discussing the nature of the gods and the origin of the world, we do not attain what we have in mind, it will be no wonder.[85] For it is right to remember that both I who discuss and you who judge are men; so that, if probable things are said, you should ask for nothing further. Aristotle usually heaps up for us a great number of other opinions and other beliefs, to compare his own with them and show us how much further he has gone and how much closer he comes to likelihood. For truth is not

83 Psalm 94:11, quoted by Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:20.
84 Timaeus is the main speaker in Plato's dialogue of that name.
85 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations I.9; the second passage is from his Latin translation of Plato's Timaeus.

judged by the authority and testimony of others. And that is why Epicurus scrupulously avoided citing any in his writings.

2.12.119 Aristotle is the prince of the dogmatists; and yet we learn from him that knowing much brings occasion for doubting more. He can be seen deliberately wrapping himself, often, in a darkness so thick and inextricable that one cannot make out his opinion in it. It is in effect Pyrrhonism in an affirmative form. Hear the declaration of Cicero, who explains another's notion to us by his own: Those who ask what we ourselves think about each thing show more curiosity than is necessary. This method in philosophy, of arguing against everything and judging nothing openly, begun by Socrates, taken up again by Arcesilaus, confirmed by Carneades, flourishes down to our own time. We are those who say that some falsehoods are joined to all truths, with such a likeness that there is no sure mark in them for judging and assenting. Why have not only Aristotle but most philosophers affected difficulty, if not to enhance the worth of the vanity of the subject and to keep our mind's curiosity busy, giving it something to feed on by gnawing at this hollow, fleshless bone? Clitomachus asserted that he had never been able to understand from Carneades' writings what his opinion was. Why did Epicurus avoid ease in his writings, and why was Heraclitus nicknamed "the Obscure"?

> Difficulty is a coin that the learned use, like conjurers, so as not to reveal the vanity of their art, and one with which human stupidity is easily paid. *Famous for his obscure speech, especially among the empty-headed:*
> *For fools admire and love above all*
> *What they see hidden beneath twisted words.*[86]

2.12.120 Cicero rebukes some of his friends for habitually spending more time on astrology, law, dialectic and geometry than these arts deserved, saying that this diverted them from the duties of life, which are more useful and honorable. The Cyrenaic philosophers despised physics and dialectic alike.

86 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things, speaking of Heraclitus.

Zeno, at the very beginning of his books on the Republic, declared all the liberal disciplines useless. Chrysippus said that what Plato and Aristotle had written on logic they had written in play and as an exercise, and he could not believe they had spoken in earnest about so vain a subject.

2.12.121 Plutarch says this of metaphysics; Epicurus would have said it also of rhetoric, grammar, poetry, mathematics and, apart from physics, of all the other sciences; and Socrates of all of them except the science of morals and of life. Whatever anyone asked him about, he always first brought the questioner back to giving an account of the conditions of his life, present and past, which he examined and judged, considering all other learning subordinate to that and superfluous. *I would care little for those letters that did their teachers no good toward virtue.* Most of the arts have thus been despised by learning itself. But they did not think it out of place to exercise their minds even on things in which there was no profitable solidity.

2.12.122 For the rest, some have considered Plato a dogmatist, others a doubter, others one in certain things and the other in others. The leader of his dialogues, Socrates, is always asking questions and stirring up the debate, never settling it, never satisfying; and he says he has no other knowledge than the knowledge of how to oppose. Homer, their author, laid the foundations equally for all the schools of philosophy, to show how little it mattered which way we went. From Plato sprang ten different schools, they say. And indeed, to my mind, no teaching was ever wavering and noncommittal if his is not.

2.12.123 Socrates used to say that midwives, in taking up the trade of making others give birth, give up the trade of giving birth themselves; that he, by the title of wise man that the gods had conferred on him, had likewise rid himself, in his manly and mental love, of the faculty of bearing children, content to help and favor with his aid those who were begetting: to open their nature, grease their passages, ease the issue of their delivery, judge it, baptize it, feed it, strengthen it, swaddle it and cir-

cumcise it—exercising and handling his wits at the risks and fortunes of others.[87]

2.12.124 So it is with most authors of this third kind, as the ancients noted of the writings of Anaxagoras, Democritus, Parmenides, Xenophanes and others. They have a way of writing that is doubtful in substance and intent, inquiring rather than teaching, even though they sprinkle their style with dogmatic cadences. Is this not seen just as clearly in Seneca and Plutarch? How much do they say now with one face, now with another, for those who look closely? And the reconcilers of the jurists ought first to reconcile each of them with himself. Plato seems to me to have liked this form of philosophizing in dialogues deliberately, so as to lodge more fittingly in different mouths the diversity and variation of his own notions. To treat subjects in different ways is just as much treating them as to treat them uniformly, and better: that is, more abundantly and usefully. Let us take an example from ourselves. Court rulings are the extreme point of dogmatic and decisive speech; and yet the most exemplary ones that our parlements present to the people, those fit to nourish in them the reverence they owe to that dignity, chiefly through the ability of the persons who hold it, draw their beauty not so much from the conclusion, which is their daily business and common to every judge, as from the debate and agitation of the various and contrary reasonings that the matter of law admits. And the widest field for the criticisms of some philosophers against others comes from the contradictions and inconsistencies in which each of them finds himself entangled—either by design, to show how the human mind wavers about every subject, or forced to it unwittingly by the fluidity and incomprehensibility of every subject. What is the meaning of this refrain: "In a slippery and flowing place, let us suspend our belief"? For, as Euripides says, *The works of God in diverse / Ways keep thwarting us.* It is like the refrain Empedocles often scattered through his books, as if stirred by a divine frenzy and compelled by the

87 The French sage-femme, midwife, means literally "wise woman," hence Montaigne's play on sage homme, "wise man."

truth. No, no, we feel nothing, we see nothing; all things are hidden from us; there is not one of which we can establish what it is. This comes back to that divine saying: *The thoughts of mortals are timid, and our devices and our foresight uncertain.*[88]

2.12.125 We should not find it strange if people who despaired of the catch have not stopped enjoying the hunt, study being in itself a pleasant occupation—so pleasant that among the pleasures the Stoics forbid also the one that comes from exercising the mind; they want it bridled, and find intemperance in knowing too much. Democritus, having eaten at his table some figs that tasted of honey, at once began to search his mind for the source of this unusual sweetness; and to clear the matter up he was getting up from the table to go and see the lie of the place where the figs had been picked. His maidservant, having learned the reason for this stir, told him with a laugh not to trouble himself any more about it, for it was because she had put them in a vessel that had held honey. He was annoyed that she had taken away the occasion for this research and robbed his curiosity of its material. "Go," he said, "you have displeased me; I shall look for the cause all the same, as if it were natural." And he would very likely have found some true reason for a false and supposed effect. This story of a famous and great philosopher shows us very clearly that studious passion which keeps us busy pursuing things we despair of acquiring. Plutarch tells a similar example of someone who did not want to be enlightened about what he was in doubt of, so as not to lose the pleasure of looking for it; like the other man who did not want his doctor to take away the thirst of his fever, so as not to lose the pleasure of quenching it by drinking. *It is better to learn superfluous things than nothing.* Just as in all eating there is often pleasure alone, and not everything pleasant that we take is always nourishing or healthy, so what our mind draws from knowledge does not cease to be pleasurable even though it is neither nourishing nor wholesome.

2.12.126 This is how they put it: the contemplation of nature is food suited to our minds; it lifts us up and swells us, and makes us disdain low and earthly things by comparison with the higher and heavenly ones; the very search for hidden and great things is most pleasant, even to one who gains from it only reverence and fear of judging them. These are the words of their profession. The vain image of this sickly curiosity is seen more expressly still in this other example, which they cite so often and with honor. Eudoxus wished and prayed to the gods that he might once see the sun up close and grasp its form, its size and its beauty, even at the cost of being burned up by it at once.[89] He wants, at the price of his life, to acquire a knowledge whose use and possession would be taken from him at the same instant; and for this sudden and fleeting knowledge, to lose all the other knowledge he has and could acquire afterward.

2.12.127 I am not easily persuaded that Epicurus, Plato and Pythagoras handed us their Atoms, their Ideas and their Numbers as ready cash. They were too wise to make their articles of faith out of something so uncertain and so debatable. But in this darkness and ignorance of the world, each of these great figures strove to bring some sort of image of light, and they walked their minds through inventions that would at least have a pleasing and subtle appearance, provided that, false as it was, it could hold up against opposing objections. *These things are imagined by each according to his wit, not by the power of knowledge.* An ancient, who was reproached for professing philosophy when in his own judgment he took no great account of it, replied that this was truly philosophizing.

2.12.128 They wanted to consider everything and weigh everything, and found this occupation suited to the natural curiosity that is in us. Some things they wrote for the needs of public society, such as their religions; and it was reasonable, for that consideration, that they did not want to strip common opinions

88 Wisdom of Solomon 9:14.

89 Eudoxus of Cnidus, Greek astronomer and mathematician of the 4th century BC.

to the quick, so as not to breed trouble in the obedience owed to the laws and customs of their country.

2.12.129 Plato handles this mystery with a fairly open hand. For where he writes on his own account, he prescribes nothing in earnest. When he plays the legislator, he borrows a domineering and assertive style, and boldly mixes into it the most fantastic of his inventions, as useful for persuading the common people as they are ridiculous for persuading himself, knowing how apt we are to receive any impression, and above all the wildest and most monstrous. And so in his Laws he takes great care that nothing be sung in public but poems whose fabulous fictions tend to some useful end; it being so easy to imprint any phantoms on the human mind that it is unjust not to feed it on profitable lies rather than on lies that are useless or harmful. He says quite bluntly in his Republic that for men's benefit it is often necessary to deceive them. It is easy to see that some schools have followed truth more, others usefulness, and that the latter have gained credit by it. It is the misery of our condition that often what presents itself to our imagination as truest does not present itself as most useful to our life. The boldest schools—Epicurean, Pyrrhonian, New Academic—are still compelled, when all is said and done, to bow to civil law.

2.12.130 There are other subjects they have sifted, some to the left, some to the right, each striving to give it some face, rightly or wrongly. For since they found nothing so hidden that they did not want to speak of it, they are often forced to forge weak and foolish conjectures—not that they themselves took them as a foundation, or to establish some truth, but as an exercise for their study. *They seem not so much to have believed what they said as to have wished to exercise their wits on the difficulty of the subject.* And if we did not take it so, how would we cover up so great an inconstancy, variety and vanity of opinions as we see produced by those excellent and admirable minds?

MEASURING GOD BY OURSELVES

Human opinions about God, from the philosophers to the myths, show only our own image.

2.12.131 For example, what is more vain than trying to divine God by our analogies and conjectures, to regulate him and the world to our capacity and our laws? And to use, at the expense of the divinity, that little sample of ability that it has pleased him to dispense to our natural condition? And, because we cannot extend our sight as far as his glorious throne, to have brought him down here to our corruption and our miseries?

2.12.132 Of all the human and ancient opinions concerning religion, the one that seems to me to have had the most likelihood and the most excuse is the one that recognized God as an incomprehensible power, origin and preserver of all things, all goodness, all perfection, receiving and taking in good part the honor and reverence that humans paid him under whatever face, whatever name and in whatever manner it might be. *Almighty Jupiter, of things, of kings and of gods / The father and the mother.* This zeal has everywhere been looked on with favor by heaven. All states have reaped fruit from their devotion. Impious men and impious actions have everywhere met with fitting outcomes.[90] Pagan histories recognize dignity, order and justice in their fabulous religions, and prodigies and oracles employed for their benefit and instruction: God in his mercy perhaps deigning to foster, by these temporal benefits, the tender beginnings of the crude sort of knowledge of him that natural reason gave them through the false images of their dreams. Not only false, but impious and insulting too, are those that man has forged by his own invention. And of all the religions that Saint Paul found in favor at Athens, the one they had dedicated to a hidden and unknown divinity seemed to him the most excusable.[91]

2.12.133 Pythagoras outlined the truth more closely, judging that the knowledge of this first cause and being of beings must be

90 Lines of Valerius Soranus, quoted by Saint Augustine, City of God VII.9.

undefined, without prescription, without declaration; that it was nothing else than the utmost effort of our imagination toward perfection, each man enlarging the idea according to his capacity.

2.12.134 But if Numa undertook to shape the devotion of his people to this plan—to attach it to a purely mental religion, with no set object and no material admixture—he undertook something of no use. The human mind cannot keep itself wandering in this infinity of formless thoughts; it must compile them into some image on its own model. Thus the divine majesty has in some measure let itself be confined for us within bodily limits. Its supernatural and heavenly sacraments bear signs of our earthly condition. Its worship is expressed in rites and words perceptible to the senses, for it is man who believes and prays. I leave aside the other arguments used on this subject.[92] But it would be hard to make me believe that the sight of our crucifixes and the painting of that piteous torment, that the ornaments and ceremonial movements of our churches, that the voices attuned to the devotion of our thought, and this stirring of the senses do not warm the souls of the people with a religious passion of very useful effect.

91 Acts 17:23, the altar "to an unknown god."

92 Numa Pompilius, the legendary second king of Rome, credited with founding its religious institutions.

2.12.135 Of those religions to which a body has been given, as necessity required, amid this universal blindness, I would, it seems to me, have more willingly attached myself to those who worshiped the sun, The common light,

The eye of the world; and if God has eyes in his head,
The rays of the sun are his radiant eyes,
Which give life to all, maintain and guard us,
And watch over the deeds of humans in this world:
This fine, this great sun, which makes the seasons for us,
As it enters or leaves its twelve houses:
Which fills the universe with its known powers:[93]

/ Which with one glance of its eyes scatters the clouds for us:
The spirit, the soul of the world, burning and blazing,
In the course of one day circling the whole sky,
Full of immense greatness, round, wandering and fixed:
Which holds the whole world beneath it as its bound:
At rest without rest, idle, and never pausing,
Eldest son of nature, and the father of day. For besides its grandeur and beauty, it is the part of this machine that we find farthest from us, and therefore so little known that they were pardonable for falling into admiration and reverence of it.

2.12.136 Thales, who was the first to inquire into such matters, considered God a mind that made all things out of water. Anaximander held that the gods were dying and being born at different seasons, and that they were worlds infinite in number. Anaximenes, that air was God, that it was produced and immense, always moving. Anaxagoras was the first to hold that the design and manner of all things was directed by the power and reason of an infinite mind. Alcmaeon gave divinity to the sun, the moon, the stars and the soul. Pythagoras made God a

93 Pierre de Ronsard, Remonstrance to the People of France (1563). The twelve houses are the signs of the zodiac.

mind spread through the nature of all things, from which our souls are detached. Parmenides, a circle encircling the sky and sustaining the world by the heat of its light.[94] Empedocles said that the gods were the four natures of which all things are made. Protagoras, that he had nothing to say about whether they exist or not, or what they are. Democritus said sometimes that images and their revolutions are gods; sometimes that the nature which sends forth these images is; and then, that our knowledge and understanding are. Plato scatters his belief among various guises. In the Timaeus he says that the father of the world cannot be named; in the Laws, that we must not inquire into his being. And elsewhere in these same books he makes the world, the sky, the stars, the earth and our souls gods, and accepts besides those that have been accepted by ancient custom in each state. Xenophon reports a similar confusion in the teaching of Socrates. Sometimes he says we must not inquire into the form of God; and then Xenophon has him lay down that the sun is God, and the soul is God; that there is only one, and then that there are several. Speusippus, Plato's nephew, makes God a certain force that governs things, and says that it is a living being. Aristotle says now that it is mind, now the world; now he gives this world another master, and now he makes God the fire of the heavens. Xenocrates makes eight: the five that are named among the planets; the sixth composed of all the fixed stars, as its members; the seventh and eighth, the sun and the moon. Heraclides Ponticus does nothing but wander among his opinions, and in the end deprives God of feeling, and makes him shift from one form to another, and then says that he is the sky and the earth. Theophrastus strolls with the same irresolution among all his notions, attributing the governance of the world now to the understanding, now to the sky, now to the stars. Strato, that it is Nature, having the power to beget, increase and diminish, without form or feeling. Zeno, that it is natural law, commanding good and forbidding evil, which law is a living being; and he

94 This catalogue of opinions on the gods is drawn largely from Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods, Book I.

does away with the customary gods, Jupiter, Juno, Vesta. Diogenes of Apollonia, that it is age. Xenophanes makes God round, seeing, hearing, not breathing, having nothing in common with human nature.[95] Aristo considers the form of God incomprehensible, deprives him of the senses, and does not know whether he is a living being or something else. Cleanthes says sometimes reason, sometimes the world, sometimes the soul of Nature, sometimes the supreme heat that surrounds and envelops everything. Perseus, a pupil of Zeno, held that the name of gods was given to those who had brought some notable benefit to human life, and to the useful things themselves. Chrysippus made a confused heap of all the foregoing views, and among the thousand forms of gods he creates he counts also men who have been immortalized. Diagoras and Theodorus flatly denied that there were any gods. Epicurus makes the gods shining, transparent and open to the passage of air, lodged, as between two forts, between two worlds, sheltered from blows; clothed in human shape and with our limbs, which limbs are of no use to them. *I have always said, and will say, that there is a race of heavenly gods, / But I do not think they care what the human race does.*[96]

2.12.137 Trust in your philosophy! Boast that you have found the bean in the cake, when you see this din from so many philosophical brains! The confusion of worldly forms has won this much from me: that customs and notions different from mine do not so much displease me as instruct me, and do not so much make me proud as humble me when I compare them. And any choice other than the one that comes from the express hand of God seems to me a choice with little claim to preference. The governments of the world are no less at odds on this subject than the schools; from which we can learn that Fortune herself is no more diverse and changeable than our reason, nor more blind and heedless.[97] The things we know least are the fittest to

95 Cicero, Montaigne's source, has Diogenes say that God is air.
96 Ennius, quoted by Cicero in On Divination.
97 Whoever found the bean baked into the Twelfth Night cake was crowned king of the feast.

be deified. Therefore to make gods of ourselves, as antiquity did, goes beyond the utmost feebleness of reasoning. I would sooner have followed those who worshipped the serpent, the dog and the ox, since their nature and their being are less known to us, and we have more license to imagine what we please about those beasts and to attribute extraordinary faculties to them. But to have made gods of our own condition, whose imperfection we ought to know; to have attributed to them desire, anger, vengeance, marriages, procreation and kinship, love and jealousy, our limbs and our bones, our fevers and our pleasures, our deaths and burials—that must have come from an astonishing drunkenness of the human understanding. Things so very far removed from the divine power, / And unworthy to be seen among the number of the gods. Their forms, ages, clothing and ornaments are known; their lineages, marriages, kinships, and everything else has been made to resemble human weakness; for they are even portrayed with troubled minds: we hear of the lusts, the sorrows, the rages of the gods. *It is like having attributed divinity not only to faith, virtue, honor, concord, liberty, victory and piety, but also to pleasure, fraud, death, envy, old age and misery; to fear, to fever and to ill fortune, and to the other injuries of our frail and perishable life.* What good is it to bring our ways into the temples? / O souls bent down to earth and empty of heavenly things![98]

2.12.138 The Egyptians, with shameless prudence, forbade on pain of hanging that anyone should say that Serapis and Isis, their gods, had once been human; and no one was unaware that they had been. And their image, shown with a finger to the lips, signified, says Varro, this mysterious command to their priests to keep silent about their mortal origin, since by necessary reason that would annul all veneration for them. Since man so desired to make himself God's equal, he would have done better, says Cicero, to bring the divine qualities down to himself and draw them here below, than to send his corruption and misery

98 The prose is from Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods; the verse is from Persius, Satires II.

up there. But rightly considered, he has done both, in several ways, with equal vanity of opinion.

2.12.139 When philosophers pick apart the hierarchy of their gods and bustle about distinguishing their alliances, their offices and their power, I cannot believe they are speaking in earnest. When Plato deciphers for us Pluto's orchard, and the bodily comforts or pains that still await us after the ruin and annihilation of our bodies, and fits them to the feelings we have in this life: *Hidden paths conceal them, and a myrtle wood / Surrounds them; their cares do not leave them even in death.* When Muhammad promises his followers a paradise hung with tapestries, adorned with gold and precious stones, peopled with girls of surpassing beauty, with wines and choice foods, I see clearly that these are mockers who bend to our stupidity, to sweeten us with honey and lure us with these notions and hopes suited to our mortal appetite.[99] Indeed some of our own have fallen into the same error, promising themselves after the resurrection an earthly and temporal life, accompanied by every kind of worldly pleasure and comfort. Do we believe that Plato—he whose conceptions were so heavenly, and whose acquaintance with divinity was so close that the surname has stayed with him—thought that man, that poor creature, had anything in him applicable to that incomprehensible power? And that he believed our feeble grasp capable, or the strength of our senses robust enough, to share in eternal bliss or eternal pain?[100]

2.12.140 One would have to tell him, on behalf of human reason: If the pleasures you promise us in the other life are of the kind I have felt here below, that has nothing in common with infinity. Even if all five of my natural senses were filled to the brim with joy, and this soul seized with all the contentment it can desire and hope for—and we know what it is capable of—that would still be nothing. If there is anything of mine in it, there is nothing divine in it; if it is nothing other than what can belong to this present condition of ours, it cannot be taken into account. All

99 Virgil, Aeneid VI, on the lovers in the underworld.
100 Plato was traditionally called "the divine Plato."

the contentment of mortals is mortal. If recognizing our parents, our children and our friends can touch and tickle us in the other world, if we still cling to such a pleasure, then we are among earthly and finite comforts. We cannot worthily conceive the greatness of those lofty and divine promises, if we can conceive them at all. To imagine them worthily, we must imagine them unimaginable, unspeakable and incomprehensible, and wholly different from those of our wretched experience. Eye cannot see, says Saint Paul, nor can it enter into the heart of man, the happiness that God prepares for his own.[101]

> And if, to make us capable of them, our being is reshaped and changed, as you say, Plato, by your purifications, it must be by so extreme and so universal a change that, by the teaching of physics, it will no longer be us: *Hector he was while he fought in war; but the one*
> *Dragged behind the Thessalian horses was not Hector;* it will be something else that receives those rewards. *What is changed is dissolved, and therefore perishes;*
> *For its parts are shifted and move out of their order.*[102]

2.12.141 For in the metempsychosis of Pythagoras, the change of dwelling he imagined for souls, do we think that the lion in which Caesar's soul dwells takes on the passions that moved Caesar, or that it is he? If it were still he, those would be right who, attacking this opinion in Plato, reproach him that a son might find himself riding his mother, clothed in the body of a mule, and similar absurdities. And do we think that in the changes made from the bodies of animals into others of the same species, the newcomers are no different from their predecessors? From the ashes of a phoenix, they say, is born a worm, and then another phoenix: who can imagine that this second phoenix is no other than the first?

101 1 Corinthians 2:9.
102 The first quotation is from Ovid, Tristia III; the second from Lucretius.

The worms that make our silk—we see them, as it were, die and dry up, and from that same body a moth come forth, and from that another worm, which it would be ridiculous to think is still the first. What has once ceased to be is no more: *Nor, if time should gather up our matter after death*

And put it back again as it is now arranged,
And the light of life were given to us once more,
Would that event concern us in the least,
Once the thread of our memory had been broken. And when you say elsewhere, Plato, that it will be the spiritual part of man that is to enjoy the rewards of the other life, you tell us something just as improbable.

Just as the eye, torn out by its roots,
Cannot see anything when separated from the whole body. For on that reckoning it will no longer be the man, nor consequently us, to whom that enjoyment will fall. For we are built of two principal, essential parts, whose separation is the death and ruin of our being. *For a break in life has been thrust between, and all the motions*
Have wandered off, scattered far and wide, away from the senses. We do not say that the man suffers when the worms gnaw the limbs he lived by, and the earth consumes them: *And this is nothing to us, who exist as one whole*
Formed by the union and marriage of body and soul.

2.12.142 Moreover, on what foundation of their justice can the gods recognize and reward man after his death for his good and virtuous actions, since it was they themselves who set them going and produced them in him? And why are they offended by his vicious actions and why do they avenge them on him, since they themselves produced him in this faulty condition, and with a single wink of their will they could keep him from going wrong? Would not Epicurus set this against Plato, with great plausibility in human reason, if he did not often shelter behind this maxim: that it is impossible to establish anything certain

about immortal nature by means of mortal nature? Mortal nature does nothing but go astray everywhere, but especially when it meddles with divine things. Who feels this more plainly than we do? For although we have given it certain and infallible principles, although we light its steps with the holy lamp of truth that it has pleased God to impart to us, we nevertheless see every day that as soon as it strays ever so little from the ordinary path, and turns aside or wanders from the road traced and trodden by the Church, at once it loses itself, entangles and fetters itself, whirling and drifting on this vast, troubled and billowing sea of human opinions, without bridle and without goal. As soon as it loses that great common highway, it goes dividing and scattering into a thousand different routes.

2.12.143 Man can be only what he is, and imagine only according to his reach. It is greater presumption, says Plutarch, for those who are only men to undertake to speak and reason about gods and demigods than it is for a man ignorant of music to try to judge singers, or for a man who was never in an army camp to try to argue about arms and war, presuming to understand by some slight conjecture the workings of a skill that lies outside his knowledge.

2.12.144 Antiquity thought, I believe, that it was doing something for the divine greatness by likening it to man, clothing it with his faculties, and presenting it with his fine moods and his most shameful necessities: offering it our foods to eat, our dances, mummeries and farces to amuse it, our clothes to cover itself and our houses to live in; caressing it with the scent of incense and the sound of music, with garlands and nosegays; and, to fit it to our vicious passions, flattering its justice with an inhuman vengeance, delighting it with the ruin and destruction of the things it had created and preserved.

> Like Tiberius Sempronius, who had the rich spoils and arms he had won from the enemy in Sardinia burned as a sacrifice to Vulcan; and Paulus Aemilius those of Macedonia, to Mars and Minerva. And Alexander, having reached the Indian Ocean, threw several great golden vessels into the sea in honor of Thetis, filling his altars besides with a slaughter not only of innocent beasts but of men too—as several nations, and among others our own, commonly practiced. And I believe there is none that has not tried it. *Four young men born at Sulmo,*
> *And as many reared by the Ufens, he seizes here*
> *Alive, to sacrifice them as offerings to the shades.* The Getae consider themselves immortal, and for them dying is merely setting out toward their god Zamolxis.[103]

Every five years they dispatch one of their number to him, to ask him for the things they need. This envoy is chosen by lot. And the manner of dispatching him, after he has been told his errand by word of mouth, is this: of those attending him, three hold up as many javelins, onto which the others hurl him with all the strength of their arms. If he happens to be pierced in a mortal spot and dies at once, that is a sure sign to them of divine favor; if he survives, they consider him wicked and accursed, and send off yet another in the same way. Amestris, mother of Xerxes, having grown old, once had fourteen young men from the best families of Persia buried alive at one time, following the religion of the country, to gratify some underground god. Even today the idols of Temixtitan are cemented with the blood of little children, and they like no sacrifice but these young and pure souls: a justice starved for the blood of innocence. *So many evils could religion prompt!* The Carthaginians sacrificed their own children to Saturn, and anyone who had none bought some;

103 The verse is Virgil, Aeneid X, on Aeneas taking captives to sacrifice at Pallas's funeral; the Getae, a Thracian people, are described by Herodotus.

the father and mother, meanwhile, were obliged to attend this rite with a cheerful and contented face.[104]

2.12.145 It was a strange notion, to want to pay divine goodness with our affliction. Like the Lacedaemonians, who pampered their Diana by tormenting young boys, whom they had whipped in her honor, often to death. It was a ferocious notion, to want to gratify the architect by overthrowing his building; and to want to spare the guilty their due penalty by punishing the guiltless; and that poor Iphigenia, at the port of Aulis, should by her death and sacrifice absolve the Greek army before God of the offenses they had committed: *And that, a chaste victim, at the very time of her marriage, she should fall unchastely, / A sorrowing sacrifice, slain by her father's stroke;* and that those two fine and noble souls, the two Decii, father and son, to win the gods' favor for Roman affairs, should go and hurl themselves headlong into the thickest of the enemy. *What great injustice was it in the gods that they could not be appeased toward the Roman people unless such men had died?*[105]

2.12.146 Besides, it is not for the criminal to have himself whipped by his own measure and at his own time; it is for the judge, who counts as chastisement only the penalty he orders, and cannot regard as punishment what is welcome to the one who suffers it. Divine vengeance presupposes our complete unwillingness, for its justice and for our penalty. And ridiculous was the whim of Polycrates, tyrant of Samos, who, to interrupt the course of his continual good fortune and make up for it, went and threw into the sea the dearest and most precious jewel he had, thinking that by this staged misfortune he was paying his due to the turns and vicissitudes of Fortune. And she, to mock his foolishness, made that same jewel come back into his hands, found in the belly of a fish. And then, what is the use of the tearings and dismemberings of the Corybantes, of the Maen-

104 Temixtitan is Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital (now Mexico City); the Latin line is Lucretius, On the Nature of Things I.

105 Publius Decius Mus, father and son, each vowed himself to death in battle (340 and 295 BC) to win victory for Rome; the prose quotation is from Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods III.

ads, and in our own times of the Muslims who slash their faces, chests and limbs to gratify their prophet—seeing that the offense lies in the will, not in the breast, the eyes, the genitals, the fleshiness, the shoulders or the throat?[106] *Such is the frenzy of the mind when it is disturbed and driven from its seat that the gods are appeased in ways in which not even men rage.* This natural fabric of ours, by its use, concerns not only ourselves but also the service of God and of other men; it is injustice to damage it knowingly, as it is to kill ourselves on any pretext whatever. It seems great cowardice and treachery to maul and corrupt the functions of the body, dull and servile as they are, in order to spare the soul the trouble of directing them according to reason. *Where do they fear the gods' anger, who think they earn their favor in this way? Some men have been castrated for the pleasure of a king's lust; but no one, at a master's command, has laid hands on himself so as not to be a man.* Thus they filled their religion with many evil effects.[107] *All too often in the past / Religion has given birth to criminal and impious deeds.*

SETTING BOUNDS TO GOD

We tie God to our laws of nature and our grammar, though nothing of ours fits him.

2.12.147 Now nothing of ours can be likened or related in any way whatsoever to the divine nature without staining and marking it with just so much imperfection. How can that infinite beauty, power and goodness admit any correspondence and likeness to so abject a thing as we are, without extreme injury and loss to its divine greatness? *The weakness of God is stronger than men, and the foolishness of God is wiser than men.* Stilpo the philosopher, asked whether the gods rejoice in our honors and sacrifices, replied: "You are indiscreet; let us step aside if you want to talk about

106 The Corybantes were the frenzied priests of Cybele; the Maenads, the ecstatic women followers of Bacchus.

107 Both Latin passages are from Saint Augustine, City of God VI, quoting Seneca.

that."[108] Yet we prescribe limits to him, we hold his power besieged by our reasons (I call reason our ravings and our dreams, with the dispensation of philosophy, which says that even the fool and the wicked man rave by reason, but that it is a reason of a particular kind); we want to subject him to the vain and feeble appearances of our understanding—him who made both us and our knowledge. Because nothing is made from nothing, God will not have been able to build the world without matter. What! Has God put into our hands the keys and the ultimate springs of his power? Has he bound himself not to go beyond the limits of our knowledge? Suppose, O man, that you have been able to make out a few traces of his works here: do you think he has spent on this work all that he could, and put into it all his forms and all his ideas? You see only the order and government of this little cell in which you are lodged—at least if you see that much; his divinity has an infinite jurisdiction beyond it; this piece is nothing compared to the whole: *All things, with sky and earth and sea, / Are nothing beside the total sum of the whole sum.* It is a local bylaw that you cite; you do not know what the universal law is. Bind yourself to what you are subject to, but do not bind him: he is not your colleague, or fellow citizen, or companion. If he has revealed himself to you in some degree, it is not to lower himself to your littleness, nor to give you oversight of his power. The human body cannot fly to the clouds: that is for you. The sun moves ceaselessly on its ordinary course; the boundaries of sea and land cannot be confounded; water is unstable and without firmness; a wall without a breach is impenetrable to a solid body; man cannot preserve his life in flames; he cannot be bodily in heaven and on earth and in a thousand places at once. It is for you that he made these rules; it is you they bind. He has shown Christians that he has overstepped them all whenever it pleased him. Indeed, why, all-powerful as he is, would he have restricted his strength to a certain measure? In whose favor would he have renounced his privilege?

2.12.148 There is nothing in which your reason has more probability and foundation than when it persuades you of the plurality of worlds: *That the earth and the sun, the moon, the sea, and all the rest that exist,*

Are not unique, but rather numberless in number. The most famous minds of the past believed it, and even some of our own, compelled by the appearance of human reason. For in this structure that we see there is nothing single and alone, *Since in the sum of things there is no one thing*

That is born unique and grows unique and alone, and all species are multiplied in some number. From which it seems improbable that God made this one work without a companion?

and that the matter of this form has been entirely used up in this single individual. *Wherefore you must admit again and again*

That there are elsewhere other gatherings of matter

Like this one, which the ether holds in its greedy embrace.

Especially if it is a living being, as its movements make so credible that Plato affirms it, and many of our own either confirm it or dare not deny it; no more than they deny that ancient opinion that the sky, the stars and the other members of the world are creatures composed of body and soul: mortal by reason of their composition, but immortal by the decree of the creator.

Now if there are several worlds, as Democritus, Epicurus and almost all philosophy have thought, how do we know whether the principles and rules of this one apply likewise to the others? Perhaps they have a different face and a different order. Epicurus imagines them either similar or dissimilar. We see in this world an infinite difference and variety merely from distance of place. Neither wheat nor wine is to be seen, nor any of our animals, in that new corner of the world which our fathers dis-

108 1 Corinthians 1:25.

covered; everything there is different. And in times past, see in how many parts of the world people had no knowledge of either Bacchus or Ceres. If you will believe Pliny and Herodotus, there are species of men in certain places that bear very little resemblance to ours. And there are mixed and ambiguous forms between human nature and that of beasts. There are regions where men are born without heads, with their eyes and mouth in their chests; where they are all androgynous; where they walk on all fours; where they have only one eye, in the forehead, and a head more like a dog's than ours; where they are half fish from the waist down and live in the water; where the women give birth at five years old and live only to eight; where their heads and the skin of their foreheads are so hard that iron cannot bite into them but is blunted against them; where the men are beardless; nations without the use of fire; others that emit black sperm. What about those who naturally change into wolves, into mares, and then back into men? And if it is true, as Plutarch says, that in some part of the Indies there are men without mouths who feed on the smell of certain scents, how many of our descriptions are false? Man is no longer capable of laughter, nor perhaps of reason and society. The arrangement and purpose of our inner structure would for the most part be beside the point.[109]

2.12.149 Moreover, how many things are there within our knowledge that run counter to these fine rules we have cut out and prescribed for Nature? And we will undertake to tie God himself to them! How many things do we call miraculous and contrary to Nature? Every man and every nation does so according to the measure of its ignorance. How many occult properties and quintessences do we find? For to go according to Nature, for us, is only to go according to our understanding, as far as it can follow and as far as we can see; whatever lies beyond is monstrous and disordered. Now on that reckoning, to the most perceptive and the ablest, everything will be monstrous; for human reason has persuaded them that it had no footing or foundation whatso-

109 The schools defined man as the animal capable of laughter, reason and society.

ever—not even to determine whether snow is white (and Anaxagoras said it was black); whether there is something or nothing; whether there is knowledge or ignorance, which Metrodorus of Chios denied man could say; or whether we are alive—as Euripides is in doubt whether the life we live is life, or whether it is what we call death that is life: *Who knows whether living is what is called dying, / And dying is living?* And not without plausibility. For why do we claim the title of being on the strength of this instant, which is but a flash of lightning in the infinite course of an eternal night, and so brief an interruption of our perpetual and natural condition—death occupying all that comes before and all that comes after this moment, and a good part of the moment as well? Others swear that there is no movement, that nothing stirs, like the followers of Melissus. For if there is only One, neither spherical motion can serve it, nor movement from one place to another, as Plato proves. Others, that there is neither generation nor corruption in Nature. Protagoras says there is nothing in Nature but doubt. That one can argue equally about everything, and about that very point, whether one can argue equally about everything. Nausiphanes, that of the things that seem to be, none is any more than it is not; that nothing is certain but uncertainty. Parmenides, that of what seems to be, nothing exists in general; that there is only One. Zeno, that not even One exists, and that there is nothing. If One existed, it would be either in another or in itself. If it is in another, there are two. If it is in itself, there are still two, the container and the contained. According to these doctrines, the nature of things is nothing but a shadow, either false or empty.[110]

2.12.150 It has always seemed to me that for a Christian this way of speaking is full of indiscretion and irreverence: God cannot die, God cannot go back on his word, God cannot do this or that. I do not think it right to confine the divine power in this way under the laws of our speech. And the appearance that presents

110 The French has "Mansiphanes," a slip for Nausiphanes, a teacher of Epicurus; these views come from Seneca, Letters 88.

itself to us in these propositions ought to be expressed more reverently and more religiously.

2.12.151 Our speech has its weaknesses and its defects, like everything else. Most of the occasions of the world's troubles are grammatical. Our lawsuits arise only from debate over the interpretation of laws, and most wars from the inability to express clearly the conventions and treaties of agreement between princes. How many quarrels, and how momentous, have been produced in the world by doubt about the meaning of that one syllable, *Hoc*? Let us take the clause that logic itself will present to us as the clearest. If you say, "The weather is fine," and you are telling the truth, then the weather is fine. Is that not a sure form of speech? Yet even it will deceive us.[111] To show that this is so, let us follow the example: if you say, "I am lying," and you are telling the truth, then you are lying. The method, the reasoning and the force of the conclusion are the same in this one as in the other; and yet here we are stuck in the mud. I see that the Pyrrhonist philosophers cannot express their general conception in any manner of speech, for they would need a new language. Ours is made up entirely of affirmative propositions, which are wholly hostile to them. So that when they say "I doubt," they are at once seized by the throat and made to admit that at least they affirm and know this: that they doubt. Thus they have been forced to take refuge in this comparison from medicine, without which their attitude would be inexplicable. When they pronounce "I do not know" or "I doubt," they say that this proposition carries itself away along with the rest, no more and no less than rhubarb, which expels the bad humors and carries itself out along with them. This notion is more surely grasped in the form of a question: "What do I know?"—as I bear it as my motto, with a pair of scales.[112]

2.12.152 See how people take advantage of this irreverent way of speaking. In the disputes now going on in our religion, if you

111 Hoc ("this") opens the words of consecration, "This is my body," whose meaning Catholics and Protestants disputed.

press your opponents too hard, they will tell you point-blank that it is not in God's power to make his body be in paradise and on earth and in several places at once. And see how that ancient mocker makes use of it.[113] At least, he says, it is no slight consolation to man to see that God cannot do everything: for he cannot kill himself when he wishes, which is the greatest favor we have in our condition; he cannot make mortals immortal, nor bring the dead back to life, nor make one who has lived not to have lived, nor one who has had honors not to have had them, having no other power over the past than forgetfulness. And so that this fellowship between man and God may be coupled further by amusing examples, he cannot make twice ten not be twenty. That is what he says, and what a Christian ought to avoid letting pass his lips.

> Whereas, on the contrary, it seems that men seek out this mad arrogance of language to bring God down to their measure. *Tomorrow let the Father fill the sky*
> *With black cloud,*
> *Or with pure sunlight; yet he will not make void*
> *Whatever lies behind us, nor*
> *Reshape and render undone*
> *What the fleeting hour has once carried off.* When we say that the infinity of ages, past as well as to come, is but an instant to God; that his goodness, wisdom and power are one and the same thing as his essence—our speech says it, but our understanding does not grasp it.[114]

2.12.153 And yet our presumption insists on passing the divinity through our sieve. And from this arise all the ravings and errors that have taken hold of the world, as it brings down and weighs on its own scales a thing so far removed from its weight. *It is wonderful how far the wickedness of the human heart will go, when*

112 In 1576 Montaigne had a medal struck showing a balance with the motto "Que sais-je?"
113 The Protestants denied Christ's bodily presence in the Eucharist; the "ancient mocker" is Pliny the Elder, Natural History II.
114 Horace, Odes III.29.

lured on by the slightest success. How insolently the Stoics rebuke Epicurus for holding that being truly good and happy belongs only to God, and that the wise man has only a shadow and likeness of it? How rashly they have bound God to destiny! (Would to God that some who bear the name of Christians did not still do so.) And Thales, Plato and Pythagoras have enslaved him to necessity.[115] This arrogance of wanting to discover God with our eyes led a great man of our faith to attribute a bodily form to the divinity. And it is the cause of what happens to us every day: attributing important events to God by special assignment. Because they weigh on us, it seems they weigh on him too, and that he watches them more fully and attentively than events that are light to us or follow an ordinary course. *The gods attend to great things and neglect small ones.* Listen to his example; it will make his reasoning clear to you: *Nor indeed do kings attend to all the smallest matters in their kingdoms.*[116] As if, to that King, moving an empire or moving the leaf of a tree were more or less of a task; and as if his providence worked differently in tipping the outcome of a battle than in the leap of a flea. The hand of his government lends itself to all things with the same tenor, the same force and the same order; our interest adds nothing to it; our motions and our measures do not touch it. *God is so great an artificer in great things that he is no lesser one in small.* Our arrogance always brings this blasphemous comparison back to the fore. Because our occupations burden us, Strato granted the gods complete exemption from duties, as their priests have.[117] He has Nature produce and maintain all things, and constructs the parts of the world out of its weights and motions, relieving human nature of the fear of divine judgments. *What is blessed and eternal neither has any trouble itself nor causes any to another.* Nature wills that in like things there should be like proportion. The infinite number of mortals therefore implies an equal num-

115 Pliny the Elder, Natural History II.
116 The "great man" is Tertullian; the Latin is from Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods II.
117 Saint Augustine, City of God XI.

ber of immortals; the infinite things that kill and destroy presuppose as many that preserve and benefit. Just as the souls of the gods, without tongues, without eyes, without ears, each feel among themselves what the other feels, and judge our thoughts, so the souls of men, when they are free and released from the body by sleep or by some trance, divine, foretell and see things they could not see when mingled with bodies. Men, says Saint Paul, have become fools thinking themselves wise, and have changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the image of corruptible man.[118]

2.12.154 Just look at the trickery of the ancient deifications. After the grand and splendid pomp of the funeral, as the fire began to catch the top of the pyramid and seize the bier of the deceased, they released at that same moment an eagle, which, flying upward, signified that the soul was going to paradise. We have a thousand medals, notably of that respectable woman Faustina, on which this eagle is shown carrying these deified souls up to heaven piggyback. It is a pity that we fool ourselves with our own monkey tricks and inventions, *They fear what they have invented,* like children who are frightened by the very face they have daubed and blackened on their playmate.[119] *As if anything could be more wretched than man, ruled by his own fictions.* Honoring the one we have made is a far cry from honoring the one who made us. Augustus had more temples than Jupiter, served with as much devotion and belief in miracles. The Thasians, in return for the benefits they had received from Agesilaus, came to tell him that they had canonized him. "Has your nation," he said to them, "the power to make a god of whomever it pleases? Make one of one of yourselves, by way of trial, and then, when I have seen how he fares, I will thank you heartily for your offer." Man is truly out of his mind: he could not make a mite, and he makes gods by the dozen.[120] Hear Trismegistus praising our abil-

118 Romans 1:22–23.
119 Faustina, wife of Marcus Aurelius, was reputed to be unfaithful; the Latin is from Lucan, Pharsalia I.
120 Pliny the Elder, Natural History II.

ity: Of all wonderful things, the one that has surpassed all wonder is that man should have been able to find the divine nature and to make it.[121]

2.12.155 Here are some arguments from the school of philosophy itself. *To whom alone it is given to know the gods and the powers of heaven, / or alone not to know them.* If God exists, he is a living being; if he is a living being, he has senses; and if he has senses, he is subject to corruption. If he is without a body, he is without a soul, and therefore without action; and if he has a body, he is perishable. Isn't that a triumph? We are incapable of having made the world; so there is some more excellent nature that put its hand to it. It would be foolish arrogance to think ourselves the most perfect thing in this universe. So there is something better. That is God. When you see a rich and magnificent dwelling, even if you do not know who its master is, you will still not say that it was built for rats. And this divine structure that we see of the celestial palace—must we not believe that it is the home of some master greater than we are? Is the highest not always the most worthy? And we are placed at the very bottom. Nothing without soul and reason can produce a living being capable of reason. The world produces us; so it has soul and reason. Each part of us is less than we are. We are part of the world. So the world is endowed with wisdom and reason, and more abundantly than we are. It is a fine thing to hold great power of government. So the government of the world belongs to some blessed nature. The stars do us no harm; so they are full of goodness. We need nourishment; so the gods need it too, and they feed on the vapors from down here. Worldly goods are not goods to God; so they are not goods to us. To offend and to be offended are equally signs of weakness; so it is folly to fear God. God is good by his nature, man by his own effort, which is more. Divine wisdom and human wisdom differ in nothing except that the former is eternal. Now duration adds nothing to wisdom. So there we are, partners. We have life, reason and liberty, and we

121 Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary author of the Hermetic writings; the passage is from the Asclepius.

value goodness, charity and justice; so these qualities are in him. In short, the building up and the pulling down of divinity, its very conditions, are forged by man according to their relation to himself. What a pattern, what a model! Let us stretch, raise and swell human qualities as much as we please. Puff yourself up, poor man, and more, and more, and more: *"Not even if you burst," he said. Surely it is not God, whom they cannot conceive, but themselves, conceiving themselves in his place; it is not him but themselves that they compare, and not with him but with themselves.*[122]

2.12.156 In natural things, effects only half reflect their causes. What about this cause? It is above the order of Nature; its condition is too lofty, too remote and too sovereign to allow our conclusions to bind and fetter it. It is not through ourselves that we reach it; that road runs too low. We are no nearer to heaven on Mont Cenis than at the bottom of the sea: just check it with your astrolabe.[123]

2.12.157 They bring God down even to carnal intercourse with women—how many times over, how many generations of offspring! Paulina, wife of Saturninus, a matron of high repute in Rome, thinking she was sleeping with the god Serapis, found herself in the arms of one of her admirers, through the pandering of the priests of that temple. Varro, the subtlest and most learned of Latin authors, writes in his books on theology that the sacristan of Hercules, casting lots with one hand for himself and with the other for Hercules, played the god for a supper and a girl: if he won, at the expense of the offerings; if he lost, at his own. He lost, and paid for his supper and his girl.[124] Her name was Larentia, and at night she saw this god in her arms; he told her besides that the first man she met the next day would pay her wages on heaven's behalf. It was Taruncius, a rich young man, who took her home with him and in time left her his heir.

122 The first words echo Horace's fable of the frog who puffed herself up to rival an ox (Satires II.3); the rest is from Augustine, City of God XII.15.
123 Mont Cenis: a high Alpine pass between Savoy and Italy.
124 The story of Paulina is told by the Jewish historian Josephus (Jewish Antiquities XVIII).

She in turn, hoping to do something pleasing to the god, left the Roman people her heir. For which she was granted divine honors. As if it were not enough that Plato was descended from the gods on both sides of his family, and had Neptune as the common founder of his line, it was held for certain in Athens that Ariston, wanting to enjoy the beautiful Perictione, had been unable to.[125] And he was warned in a dream by the god Apollo to leave her unsullied and untouched until she had given birth. These were Plato's father and mother. How many such cuckoldings are there in the histories, contrived by the gods against poor human beings? And how many husbands insultingly disparaged to glorify the children? In the religion of Muhammad, according to the belief of that people, there are plenty of Merlins: that is, children without fathers, spiritual, born divinely in the wombs of virgins; and they bear a name that means this in their language.[126]

2.12.158 We must note that to each thing nothing is dearer or more estimable than its own being (the lion, the eagle, the dolphin prize nothing above their own species), and that each relates the qualities of all other things to its own qualities. These we can certainly stretch or shorten, but that is all; for outside this relation and this principle our imagination cannot go, cannot divine anything else, and it is impossible for it to get out of there and pass beyond. Hence these ancient conclusions. Of all forms, the most beautiful is that of man; so God has this form. No one can be happy without virtue, nor can virtue exist without reason, and no reason can lodge anywhere but in human shape; so God is clothed in human shape. *So firmly is it shaped and fixed beforehand in our minds that when a man thinks of God, a human form comes to him.* That is why Xenophanes said wittily that if animals forge gods for themselves, as it is likely they do, they surely forge them in their own image, and glorify

125 Acca Larentia, honored at the Roman festival of the Larentalia; Montaigne follows Augustine's account (City of God VI.7).

126 Merlin, the enchanter of Arthurian romance, was said to have been fathered by a spirit on a mortal woman.

themselves as we do.[127] For why should a gosling not say this: "All the parts of the universe look to me; the earth serves me to walk on, the sun to light my way, the stars to breathe their influences into me; I get such-and-such a benefit from the winds, such-and-such from the waters; there is nothing this vault looks on so favorably as me; I am Nature's darling. Is it not man who tends me, houses me, serves me? It is for me that he has the sowing and the milling done. If he eats me, so too does man eat his fellow man; and so do I eat the worms that kill and eat him"? A crane would say as much, and still more grandly, because of the freedom of its flight and its possession of that fine high region. *So flattering a go-between, and so much her own procuress, is nature herself.*

2.12.159 Well then, by this same line of reasoning, the fates are for us, the world is for us; it shines, it thunders for us; creator and creatures alike, everything is for us. That is the goal and the target at which the whole universe of things aims. Look at the record of heavenly affairs that philosophy has kept for two thousand years and more: the gods have acted, have spoken, only for man; philosophy gives them no other deliberation and no other occupation. Here they are at war against us.

127 Xenophanes: Greek poet and philosopher of the 6th century BC, a critic of gods made in human likeness.

And the sons of Earth tamed
by Hercules' hand, a peril at which
the shining house of old Saturn
trembled. Here they are taking sides in our troubles, to pay us back for the many times we have taken sides in theirs:
Neptune shakes the walls and the foundations loosened
by his great trident, and tears the whole city from its seat
and overturns it; here Juno, most cruel, is first to seize
the Scaean gates. The Caunians, jealous for the dominion of their own gods, put on their armor on their feast day and go running all over their surrounding district, striking the air here and there with their swords, thus hunting the foreign gods down to the last and driving them out of their territory. The gods' powers are cut down to suit our needs.[128]

One heals horses, another men, one the plague, one ringworm, one the cough, one one kind of itch, another another: *so far does perverse religion thrust gods even into the smallest things*; one makes grapes grow, another garlic; one is in charge of lechery, another of trade; for each kind of craftsman a god; one has his province and his authority in the East, another in the West: Here were her arms,
here her chariot.
O holy Apollo, who hold the sure navel of the earth!

128 The Caunians lived at Caunus in Caria, in Asia Minor; the custom is reported by Herodotus (I.172).

/ The sons of Cecrops worship Pallas, Minoan Crete Diana,
the land of Hypsipyle Vulcan,
Sparta and Pelops' Mycenae Juno;
the land of Maenalus the pine-crowned head of Faunus;
Mars is to be revered in Latium. *One has only a village or a family in his possession; one lives alone, another in company, by choice or by necessity.* And the grandson's temple is joined to his great-grandfather's. Some are so puny and plebeian (for their number rises to thirty-six thousand) that five or six of them have to be heaped together to produce one ear of wheat, and they take their various names from it. Three for a door: the god of the panel, the god of the hinge, the god of the threshold. Four for a child: protectors of its swaddling clothes, its drinking, its eating, its suckling.

Some certain, some uncertain and doubtful. Some who are not yet admitted to paradise: *Since we do not yet deem them worthy of the honor of heaven, / let us at least allow them to dwell in the lands we have given them.* There are gods of the natural philosophers, gods of the poets, gods of the state. Some are midway between divine and human nature, mediators, go-betweens between us and God, worshiped with a certain secondary, lesser order of worship. Endless in titles and offices: some good, others bad. There are old, broken-down ones, and there are mortal ones. For Chrysippus held that in the final conflagration of the world all the gods would come to an end except Jupiter. Man forges a thousand amusing partnerships between God and himself. Is God not his fellow countryman? *Crete, the cradle of Jove.*

2.12.160 Here is the excuse given us, on reflecting about this subject, by Scaevola, the high pontiff, and Varro, the great theologian of their day: that the people must be ignorant of many true things and believe many false ones. *Since he seeks the truth that would set him free, let us believe it is good for him to be deceived.* Human eyes can perceive things only through the forms of their own knowledge. And we do not remember what a fall wretched Phaethon took for trying to handle the reins of his father's

horses with a mortal hand. Our mind falls back into a like abyss, and is scattered and shattered in the same way, by its rashness.[129] If you ask philosophy what the sun is made of, what will it answer, if not iron and stone, or some other stuff it is used to? Ask Zeno what Nature is: "A fire," he says, "artful, fit for generating, proceeding methodically." Archimedes, master of that science which claims precedence over all others in truth and certainty, says: "The sun is a god of red-hot iron." Isn't that a fine notion, produced by the inescapable necessity of geometrical demonstrations? Not so inescapable and useful, however, that Socrates did not think it enough to know as much of it as would let one survey the land one gave and received; or that Polyaenus, who had been a famous and illustrious teacher of it, did not come to scorn these demonstrations as full of falsity and obvious vanity, once he had tasted the sweet fruits of Epicurus' idle gardens. Socrates, in Xenophon, speaking of Anaxagoras, whom antiquity considered more expert than anyone else in heavenly and divine matters, says that he went wrong in the head, as do all men who pry immoderately into kinds of knowledge that are not their business.[130] When he made the sun a burning stone, he did not notice that a stone does not shine in fire and, what is worse, is consumed by it. When he made the sun and fire one and the same, he did not notice that fire does not blacken those it looks upon; that we can stare at fire; that fire kills plants and grasses. In the opinion of Socrates, and in mine too, the wisest judgment about heaven is to make none. Plato, having to speak of daimons in the Timaeus, says: "It is an undertaking beyond our reach; we must believe those ancients who said they were begotten by them. It is against reason to refuse belief to the children of the gods, even though what they say is not established by necessary or even probable reasons, since they assure us they are speaking of domestic, family matters."

129 Quintus Mucius Scaevola, Roman jurist and chief pontiff; Montaigne takes both opinions from Augustine, City of God IV.

130 Polyaenus: a mathematician who became a disciple and friend of Epicurus.

THE HEAVENS AND THE BODY

Our sciences of the stars and of man are poetic fictions built on guesses.

2.12.161 Let us see whether we have a little more clarity in our knowledge of human and natural things. Is it not a ridiculous undertaking, for things that by our own admission our knowledge cannot reach, to go forging them another body and lending them a false form of our own invention? We see this in the movement of the planets: since our mind cannot reach it or imagine how it naturally proceeds, we lend them something of our own—material springs, heavy and corporeal: *Golden was the pole, golden the curve / of the wheel's rim, silver the row of spokes.* You would think we had had coachmen, carpenters and painters who went up there to set up machines with various motions, and to arrange the wheelwork and interlacings of the heavenly bodies, painted in many colors, around the spindle of Necessity, as Plato has it.

> *The world is the greatest house of all things,*
> *which five high-thundering zones in their segments*
> *gird, and through which a band painted with twice six*
> *star-glittering signs, high in the slanting ether,*
> *receives the moon's two-horse chariot.* These are all dreams and frenzied follies. Why will Nature not be pleased one day to open her bosom to us, show us exactly the means and workings of her movements, and prepare our eyes for it? O God, what errors, what miscalculations we would find in our poor science! I am much mistaken if it holds a single thing exactly right; and I shall leave this place more ignorant of everything else than of my ignorance.[131]

2.12.162 Did I not see in Plato that divine saying, that Nature is nothing but an enigmatic poem? As one might say, perhaps, a

131 Lines attributed to Varro.

veiled and shadowy painting, glimmering with an infinite variety of false lights to exercise our conjectures. *All these things lie hidden, concealed and wrapped in thick darkness, so that no human intellect is keen enough to penetrate heaven or to enter the earth.* And certainly philosophy is nothing but adulterated poetry. Where do those ancient authors get all their authorities, if not from the poets? And the first philosophers were poets themselves, and treated philosophy in their art. Plato is nothing but a rambling poet. All the superhuman sciences dress themselves up in the poetic style. Women use ivory teeth where their natural ones are missing, and instead of their true complexion forge one out of some foreign material; they make thighs of cloth and felt, and plumpness out of cotton, and in full view and knowledge of everyone embellish themselves with a false and borrowed beauty. Science does just the same. (Even our law, they say, has legitimate fictions on which it founds the truth of its justice.) Science hands us, as payment and as premises, the very things it tells us are invented. For those epicycles, eccentrics and concentrics with which astronomy helps itself to steer the motion of its stars—it gives them to us as the best it has been able to invent on that subject; just as, for the rest, philosophy presents us not with what is, or with what it believes, but with what it forges as having the most plausibility and charm. Plato, discussing the state of our body and that of beasts, says: "That what we have said is true, we would affirm if we had confirmation of it from an oracle. We affirm only that it is the most probable thing we have been able to say."

2.12.163 It is not only to the heavens that philosophy sends its ropes, its machines and its wheels; let us consider a little what it says about ourselves and our makeup. There is no more retrogradation, trepidation, accession, recession and rapture in the stars and heavenly bodies than they have forged in this poor little human body. Truly they had good reason to call it the little world, so many pieces and facets did they use to build and put it together. To account for the movements they see in man, and the various functions and faculties we feel in ourselves, into

how many parts have they divided our soul? In how many seats have they lodged it? Into how many orders and stories have they divided up this poor man, beyond the natural and perceptible ones? And into how many offices and occupations? They make him an imaginary commonwealth. He is a subject they hold and handle; they are given full power to unstitch him, arrange him, reassemble him and stuff him, each according to his fancy; and still they do not master him. Not only in reality but even in dreams, they cannot regulate him without some cadence or some sound escaping their architecture, enormous as it is, and patched together from a thousand false and fantastic scraps. And it is not right to excuse them. For with painters, when they paint the sky, the earth, the seas, the mountains, the distant islands, we let them off with giving us only some slight indication; and since these things are unknown to us, we are content with any sort of shadowy, imagined rendering. But when they draw us from life, or some other subject that is familiar and known to us, we demand of them a perfect and exact representation of the lines and colors, and we despise them if they fail.

2.12.164 I am grateful to the Milesian girl who, seeing the philosopher Thales constantly absorbed in contemplating the vault of heaven, his eyes always raised upward, put something in his path to make him stumble, to warn him that it would be time to occupy his thoughts with things in the clouds once he had seen to those at his feet. She certainly gave him good advice: to look at himself rather than at the sky. For, as Democritus says through the mouth of Cicero, *No one looks at what lies before his feet; they scan the regions of the sky.* But our condition is such that the knowledge of what we have in our hands is as far from us, and as high above the clouds, as that of the stars. As Socrates says in Plato, anyone who meddles with philosophy may be reproached as that woman reproached Thales: he sees nothing of what is in front of him. For every philosopher is ignorant of what his neighbor is doing—yes, and of what he himself is doing—and is ignorant of what they both are, beasts or men.

2.12.165 These people who find Sebond's arguments too weak, who are ignorant of nothing, who govern the world, who know everything—*What causes restrain the sea, what governs the year,*
whether the stars wander and stray of their own will or by command,
what darkens the moon's orb, what brings it forth,
what the discordant concord of things intends and can do—have they never, among their books, sounded the difficulties that arise in knowing their own being?

We see well enough that the finger moves and the foot moves; that some parts stir by themselves without our leave, while others we move at our command; that a certain apprehension makes us blush, another turn pale; one notion acts only on the spleen, another on the brain; one makes us laugh, another weep; another chills and stuns all our senses and stops the movement of our limbs; at one sight the stomach heaves, at another some lower part. But how a spiritual impression can make such a breach in a massive and solid substance, and what is the nature of the linkage and stitching of these wonderful springs, no man has ever known. *All things uncertain to reason and hidden in the majesty of nature,* says Pliny; and Saint Augustine: *The manner in which spirits cling to bodies is altogether marvelous and cannot be comprehended by man; and this is man himself.* And yet no one calls it into question; for men's opinions are accepted in the wake of ancient beliefs, on authority and on credit, as if they were religion and law. What is commonly held about it is taken in like a jargon; this truth is accepted, with its whole structure and apparatus of arguments and proofs, as a firm and solid body that is no longer shaken, no longer judged. On the contrary, everyone vies with everyone else in plastering and propping up this accepted belief with all that his reason can do—and reason is a pliant tool, bendable and adaptable to any shape. Thus the world is filled with, and steeped in, nonsense and lies.

2.12.166 What makes us doubt so few things is that we never test common impressions; we do not probe their footing, where the

fault and weakness lie; we argue only about the branches. We do not ask whether a thing is true, but whether it was understood this way or that. We do not ask whether Galen said anything worthwhile, but whether he said it this way or otherwise. Truly it was very reasonable that this curb and constraint on the freedom of our judgments, and this tyranny over our beliefs, should extend even to the schools and the arts. The god of scholastic learning is Aristotle; it is a religious offense to debate his decrees, as it was those of Lycurgus at Sparta. His doctrine serves us as magisterial law, though it may well be as false as any other. I do not see why I should not accept just as readily the Ideas of Plato, or the atoms of Epicurus, or the plenum and void of Leucippus and Democritus, or the water of Thales, or Anaximander's infinity of Nature, or the air of Diogenes, or the numbers and proportion of Pythagoras, or the infinite of Parmenides, or the One of Musaeus, or the water and fire of Apollodorus, or the like parts of Anaxagoras, or the discord and friendship of Empedocles, or the fire of Heraclitus, or any other opinion (out of that infinite confusion of views and pronouncements that this fine human reason produces, through its certainty and clear-sightedness, in everything it meddles with)—as readily as I would the opinion of Aristotle on this subject of the principles of natural things. These principles he builds out of three pieces: matter, form and privation. And what is more vain than to make emptiness itself the cause of the production of things? Privation is a negative: what notion could have led him to make it the cause and origin of things that exist? Yet no one would dare to shake that, except as an exercise in logic. Nothing is debated there in order to cast doubt on it, but to defend the founder of the school against outside objections; his authority is the goal, beyond which no inquiry is permitted.

2.12.167 It is very easy to build whatever you like on agreed foundations; for in keeping with the law and ordering of this beginning, the remaining parts of the building go up easily without contradicting one another. By this route we find our reason well founded, and we reason away blindly. For our mas-

ters occupy and win in advance as much ground in our belief as they need in order to conclude afterward whatever they like, in the manner of geometers with their granted postulates: the consent and approval we lend them gives them the means to drag us left and right and spin us around at their will. Whoever is believed in his presuppositions is our master and our God: he will lay out the ground plan of his foundations so broad and easy that by them he can lift us, if he wishes, up to the clouds. In this practice and business of knowledge we have taken at face value Pythagoras' saying that every expert should be believed in his own field. The logician refers to the grammarian for the meaning of words; the rhetorician borrows the topics of argument from the logician; the poet borrows his meters from the musician; the geometer his proportions from the arithmetician; the metaphysicians take the conjectures of physics as their foundation. For each science has its presupposed principles, by which human judgment is reined in on every side. If you happen to run into this barrier, where the principal error lies, they immediately have this maxim on their lips: that one must not argue with those who deny first principles. Now there can be no principles for men unless the divinity has revealed them; all the rest—beginning, middle and end—is nothing but dream and smoke. Against those who fight by presupposition, we must presuppose the contrary of the very axiom under dispute. For every human presupposition, and every proposition, has as much authority as any other, unless reason makes the difference. So they must all be put on the scales—and first the general ones, and those that tyrannize over us. The conviction of certainty is a certain sign of folly and of extreme uncertainty. And there are no people more foolish, or less philosophical, than Plato's philodoxes. We need to know whether fire is hot, whether snow is white, whether there is anything hard or soft within our knowledge.[132]

2.12.168 As for those retorts told in old stories—as to the man who doubted heat, who was told to throw himself into the fire,

or to the man who denied that ice was cold, who was told to put some in his bosom—they are thoroughly unworthy of the philosophical profession. If they had left us in our natural state, receiving outward appearances as they present themselves to us through our senses, and had let us follow our simple appetites, regulated by the condition of our birth, they would be right to talk like that. But it is from them that we have learned to set ourselves up as judges of the world; it is from them that we get this notion that human reason is controller-general of all that is outside and inside the vault of heaven, that it embraces everything, can do everything, and that through it everything is known and understood. That retort would do well among the Cannibals, who enjoy the happiness of a long, tranquil and peaceful life without the precepts of Aristotle and without even knowing the name of physics. That retort would perhaps be worth more, and have more firmness, than all those they will borrow from their reason and their invention.[133] All animals would be capable of this retort along with us, and everything in which the command of natural law is still pure and simple; but these men have renounced it. They must not tell me, "It is true, for you see it and feel it so"; they must tell me whether what I think I feel I actually do feel; and if I feel it, let them then tell me why I feel it, and how, and what; let them tell me the name, the origin, the bounds and boundaries of heat and cold, the qualities of what acts and of what is acted upon; or else let them give up their profession, which is to accept or approve nothing except by way of reason. That is their touchstone for every kind of trial. But truly it is a touchstone full of falsity, error, weakness and failure.

2.12.169 How better can we test it than by itself? If it is not to be believed when speaking of itself, it will hardly be fit to judge of things outside it; if it knows anything, it must at least be its own being and dwelling. It is in the soul, and is a part or an effect of

132 Philodoxes: Plato's term (Republic V) for "lovers of opinion," as opposed to philosophers, lovers of wisdom.

133 The Cannibals: the Brazilian peoples described in "Of Cannibals" (I.31).

it; for true and essential reason, whose name we steal under false colors, lodges in the bosom of God. That is its home and its retreat; it is from there that it sets out when God is pleased to show us some ray of it, as Pallas sprang from her father's head to communicate herself to the world.

WHAT IS THE SOUL?

The philosophers disagree about the soul's nature, seat, origin and survival.

2.12.170 Now let us see what human reason has taught us about itself and about the soul: not the soul in general, in which nearly all philosophy makes the heavenly bodies and the primary bodies share; nor the soul that Thales attributed even to things considered inanimate, prompted by thinking about the magnet; but the soul that belongs to us, which we ought to know better. *For no one knows what the nature of the soul is:*

whether it is born, or on the contrary slips into us at birth,
and whether it perishes together with us, torn apart by death,
or visits the darkness of Orcus and its vast pools,
or by divine will slips into other creatures.

2.12.171 According to Crates and Dicaearchus, there was no soul at all, but the body moved thus by a natural motion; to Plato, it was a substance moving of itself; to Thales, a nature without rest; to Asclepiades, an exercise of the senses; to Hesiod and Anaximander, a thing composed of earth and water; to Parmenides, of earth and fire; to Empedocles, of blood: *He vomits forth his blood-red soul*; to Posidonius, Cleanthes and Galen, a heat or a hot constitution: *Fiery is their vigor, and heavenly their origin*; to Hippocrates, a spirit spread through the body; to Varro, an air taken in through the mouth, warmed in the lungs, tempered in the heart and spread throughout the body; to Zeno, the quintessence of the four elements; to Heraclides Ponticus, light; to Xenocrates and the Egyptians, a moving number; to the Chaldeans, a power without determinate form. *That it is a certain*

vital disposition of the body, / which the Greeks call harmony. Let us not forget Aristotle: the soul is what naturally makes the body move, which he calls entelechy—an invention as frigid as any other; for he speaks neither of the essence, nor of the origin, nor of the nature of the soul, but merely notes its effect. Lactantius, Seneca and most of the dogmatists have confessed that it was something they did not understand. And after this whole roll call of opinions: *Which of these opinions is true, some god must see*, says Cicero. "I know from myself," says Saint Bernard, "how incomprehensible God is, since I cannot comprehend the parts of my own being."[134] Heraclitus, who held that everything was full of souls and daimons, nevertheless maintained that one could not go far enough toward knowledge of the soul to reach it, so deep was its essence.

2.12.172 There is no less dissension and debate about where to lodge it. Hippocrates and Herophilus put it in the ventricle of the brain; Democritus and Aristotle throughout the body: *As health is often said to belong*

to the body, and yet it is no part of the healthy man. Epicurus in the stomach: *For here dread and fear leap up; around these parts*

joys soothe us. The Stoics around and within the heart; Erasistratus next to the membrane of the epicranium; Empedocles in the blood, as did Moses too, which was why he forbade eating the blood of beasts, to which their soul is joined. Galen thought that each part of the body has its own soul. Strato lodged it between the two eyebrows. *What form the mind may have, or where it dwells, should not even be asked*, says Cicero.

I gladly leave this man his own words. Should I go altering the speech of eloquence itself? Besides, there is little to gain by stealing the substance of his ideas: they are neither frequent, nor forceful, nor unknown. But the reason why Chrysippus

134 Entelechy: Aristotle's term for the realized form of a thing; he defined the soul as the first entelechy of a natural body.

argues that the soul is around the heart, like the others of his sect, deserves not to be forgotten. It is because, he says, when we want to affirm something we put our hand on our chest; and when we want to pronounce εγω, which means "I," we drop our lower jaw toward the chest. This passage must not be passed over without remarking the vanity of so great a man: for besides the fact that these considerations are in themselves infinitely trivial, the last one proves only for the Greeks that they have their soul in that spot. There is no human judgment so taut that it does not doze at times. Why are we afraid to say it? There are the Stoics, fathers of human wisdom, who find that the soul of a man crushed under a collapsed building drags and labors a long time to get out, unable to free itself from the weight, like a mouse caught in a trap. Some hold that the world was made to give bodies, as punishment, to spirits that had fallen by their own fault from the purity in which they had been created—the first creation having been only incorporeal—and that according as they have strayed more or less from their spirituality, they are embodied more or less lightly or heavily. Hence the variety of so much created matter. But the spirit that was clothed, as its penalty, with the body of the sun must have undergone a very rare and peculiar degree of alteration.[135]

2.12.173 The outer limits of our inquiry all end in dazzlement. As Plutarch says of the earliest parts of histories, it is as on maps, where the edges of the known lands are taken up by marshes, deep forests, deserts and uninhabitable places. That is why the crudest and most childish ravings are found most in those who treat the highest matters and go furthest, sinking into the abyss of their curiosity and presumption. The end and the beginning of knowledge are equally stupid. Watch Plato take flight upward into his poetic clouds; see in his works the jargon of the gods. But what was he dreaming of when he defined man as a two-footed animal without feathers, giving those who wanted to

135 This is the view of Origen (3rd century AD), as reported by Augustine, City of God XI.23.

make fun of him an amusing opportunity?[136] for, having plucked a live capon, they went about calling it "Plato's man."

2.12.174 And what of the Epicureans? How simple-minded they were, first to imagine that their atoms, which they said were bodies having some weight and a natural downward motion, had built the world—until their opponents pointed out to them that by this description the atoms could not possibly join and cling to one another, since their fall was straight and perpendicular and produced parallel lines everywhere. So they were forced to add afterward a chance sideways motion, and to furnish their atoms besides with curved and hooked tails, to make them fit to attach and stitch themselves together. And even then, do not those who press them with this other consideration put them in difficulty? If the atoms have by chance formed so many kinds of shapes, why have they never happened to come together to make a house or a shoe? Why, by the same token, do we not believe that an infinite number of Greek letters poured out in the middle of the marketplace might arrive at the text of the Iliad?

2.12.175 "That which is capable of reason," says Zeno, "is better than that which is not capable of it; there is nothing better than the world; therefore it is capable of reason." Cotta, by this same argument, makes the world a mathematician; and he makes it a musician and organ player by this other argument, also Zeno's: "The whole is more than the part; we are capable of wisdom, and we are parts of the world; therefore it is wise." There are countless similar examples—of arguments not just false but inept, that do not hold together and accuse their authors not so much of ignorance as of imprudence—in the reproaches philosophers throw at one another over the disagreements between their opinions and their sects.

2.12.176 Anyone who bundled together a good heap of the follies of human wisdom would have wonders to tell. I gladly collect some of them, as a sample, from an angle that is no less useful than more measured teachings. Let us judge from this what we

136 Plutarch makes this comparison at the opening of his Life of Theseus.

are to think of man, of his sense and his reason, since these great figures, who carried human ability so high, show such obvious and gross defects. For my part, I would rather believe that they treated knowledge casually, as a toy for any hand to play with. They amused themselves with reason as with an idle and frivolous instrument, putting forward all sorts of inventions and notions, some more taut, some more slack. This same Plato, who defines man as if he were a hen, says elsewhere, following Socrates, that he truly does not know what man is, and that man is one of the parts of the world hardest to know. By this variety and instability of opinions they lead us silently, as if by the hand, to this resolution of their irresolution. They make a point of not always presenting their views openly, with their faces uncovered. They have hidden them sometimes under the fabulous shadows of poetry, sometimes under some other mask. For our imperfection also means that raw food does not always suit our stomach: it has to be dried, altered and corrupted. They do the same: they sometimes obscure their natural opinions and judgments, and falsify them to suit public usage. They do not want to make an express profession of ignorance and of the feebleness of human reason, so as not to frighten the children; but they reveal it to us clearly enough under the appearance of a muddled and inconstant knowledge.

2.12.177 When I was in Italy, I advised someone who was struggling to speak Italian that, provided he sought only to make himself understood and had no wish to excel at it, he should simply use the first words that came to his mouth, Latin, French, Spanish or Gascon. By adding the Italian ending he would never fail to hit upon some dialect of the country, Tuscan, Roman, Venetian, Piedmontese or Neapolitan, and to fall in with one of its many forms. I say the same of philosophy: it has so many faces and so much variety, and has said so much, that all our dreams and ravings are to be found in it. Human fancy can conceive nothing, good or bad, that is not in it: *Nothing can be said so absurd that it has not been said by some philosopher.* And so I let my whims go out in public all the more freely. Although they were

born at home and without a model, I know they will find some link with an ancient temperament, and someone will not fail to say: "That is where he took it from." My ways are natural: I have not called on the help of any discipline to build them.[137] But feeble as they are, when the desire took me to set them down, and when, to send them out in public a little more decently, I undertook to support them with both reasonings and examples, it was a marvel even to me to find them, quite by chance, in conformity with so many philosophical examples and reasonings. Which rule my life was governed by I learned only after it had been lived and spent. A new figure: an unpremeditated and accidental philosopher.

2.12.178 To return to our soul: when Plato placed reason in the brain, anger in the heart and appetite in the liver, it is likely that this was an interpretation of the movements of the soul rather than a division and separation he meant to make of it, as of a body into several limbs. And the most likely of their opinions is that it is always one soul which, by its faculty, reasons, remembers, understands, judges, desires and performs all its other operations through various instruments of the body. So a helmsman steers his ship according to his experience of it, now tightening or slackening a rope, now raising the yard, now plying the oar, bringing about different effects by a single power. And it lodges in the brain: this is evident from the fact that wounds and injuries affecting that part immediately impair the faculties of the soul. From there it is not inconsistent that it should flow through the rest of the body: *Phoebus never leaves the middle / course of the sky, yet with his rays he lights up all things*, as the sun spreads its light and its powers outward from the sky and fills the world with them.[138] *The rest of the soul, spread throughout the body, / obeys, and moves at the will and impulse of the mind.*

137 Cicero, On Divination.
138 Claudian, On the Sixth Consulship of Honorius.

2.12.179 Some have said that there was a universal soul, like a great body, from which all individual souls were drawn and to which they returned, always mingling again with that universal matter: *For God, they say, pervades all*
lands, the stretches of the sea and the depths of the sky;
from him flocks, herds, men, every kind of wild beast,
each at its birth, draws its slender life;
to him, surely, all things are afterwards returned and, dissolved, carried
back; and there is no room for death. Others, that they merely rejoined and reattached themselves to it; others, that they were produced from the divine substance; others, that they were made by the angels, out of fire and air. Some say they have existed from all antiquity; some, that they are made at the very hour of need. Some make them come down from the circle of the moon and return there.[139]

The common view of the ancients was that they are begotten from father to son, in the same way and by the same process as all other natural things. They argued this from the likeness of children to their fathers: *Your father's virtue was instilled in you;*
the brave are born of the brave and good. They argued it also from the fact that we see passing from fathers to children not only bodily marks but also a resemblance of temperaments, constitutions and inclinations of the soul: Why, then, does fierce violence go with the grim breed of lions? Why are cunning to foxes and flight to deer handed down by their fathers, and why does inherited fear quicken their limbs?[140]

/ Is it not because a fixed power of mind, from its own seed and breed, / grows along with the whole body? They held that

139 Virgil, Georgics.
140 The second line is from Horace, Odes; the poems that follow are Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.

divine justice is founded on this, punishing in the children the fault of the fathers, inasmuch as the contagion of the fathers' vices is in some measure imprinted on the children's souls, and the disorder of their fathers' will affects them.

2.12.180 Moreover, they held that if souls came from anywhere other than natural succession, and had been something else outside the body, they would remember their first existence, given the natural faculties proper to it of reasoning, arguing and remembering: *If the soul is slipped into us at birth,*

why can we not remember the time gone by,
nor keep any traces of things done? For to give our souls the standing we want them to have, we must suppose them all-knowing when they are in their natural simplicity and purity. So they would have been such, being free of the bodily prison, before entering it, just as we hope they will be after they have left it.

And they would have to remember this knowledge while still in the body, as Plato said, claiming that what we learned was only a remembering of what we had known—a thing that anyone can maintain from experience to be false. In the first place, because we remember precisely only what we are taught; and if memory performed its office purely, it would at least prompt us with some item beyond what we had learned. Secondly, what the soul knew when it was in its purity was true knowledge, knowing things as they are by its divine intelligence; whereas here it is made to receive falsehood and vice, if it is taught them. In this it cannot use its reminiscence, since that image and conception never lodged in it.

2.12.181 To say that the bodily prison so stifles its natural faculties that they are all extinguished there: this is, first, contrary to that other belief, which recognizes its powers as so great, and the operations men feel of them in this life as so admirable, that it has concluded from them that the soul possesses that past divinity and eternity, and the immortality to come. *For if the power of the mind has been so changed*

that all memory of things done has slipped away,
that, I think, is not far from death.

2.12.182 Besides, it is here, at home with us, and nowhere else, that the powers and effects of the soul must be considered; all the rest of its perfections are vain and useless to it. It is from its present state that its whole immortality must be paid for and acknowledged, and it is to the life of man alone that it is accountable. It would be unjust to have cut off its means and powers, to have disarmed it, and then, from the time of its captivity and imprisonment, of its weakness and sickness, the time when it had been forced and constrained, to draw a judgment and a condemnation of infinite and perpetual duration. It would be unjust to dwell on so short a time—perhaps an hour or two, or at worst a century, which bear no more proportion to infinity than an instant—in order to ordain and settle definitively its whole being on the strength of that moment's interval. It would be an unfair disproportion to draw an eternal reward as the consequence of so short a life. Plato, to escape this difficulty, would have future payments limited to a hundred years, in proportion to the human span; and many of our own writers have given them limits in time.

2.12.183 Thus they judged that its generation followed the common condition of human things; and so did its life, according to the opinion of Epicurus and Democritus, which has been the most widely received, following these fine appearances: that it was seen to be born as soon as the body was capable of it; its powers were seen to grow like the bodily ones; one recognized in it the weakness of its childhood, and in time its vigor and

maturity; and then its decline and old age, and at last its decrepitude:

We feel that the mind is born together with the body,
grows along with it, and with it grows old. They perceived it to be capable of various passions and stirred by many painful movements, from which it fell into weariness and pain; capable of alteration and change, of cheerfulness, torpor and languor; subject to its own diseases and injuries, like the stomach or the foot: *We see that the mind is healed, just like a sick body,*
and see that it can be swayed by medicine. They saw it dazzled and disturbed by the strength of wine; dislodged from its seat by the vapors of a burning fever; put to sleep by the application of certain drugs, and woken by others.

The nature of the mind must be bodily,
since it suffers from bodily weapons and blows. It was seen to have all its faculties stunned and overthrown by the mere bite of a sick dog. No firmness of reasoning was so great, no ability, no virtue, no philosophical resolution, no straining of its powers, that could exempt it from subjection to these accidents. The saliva of a wretched cur dropped on Socrates' hand could shake all his wisdom and all his great and well-ordered thoughts, and annihilate them so that no trace of his former knowledge remained: The power . . . . . of the soul
is thrown into confusion and . . . . .

split apart,
is scattered, torn asunder by that same poison. *And this venom would meet no more resistance in that soul than in the soul of a child of four: a venom capable of making all philosophy, if it were made flesh, raving and mad. So Cato, who wrung the neck of death itself and of Fortune, could not have borne the sight of a mirror or of water, overwhelmed with terror and dread, had he fallen, through the contagion of a mad dog, into the disease that physicians call hydrophobia.* The force of the disease, spread through the limbs,
drives the soul and throws it into turmoil, as on the salt sea
the waves foam and seethe under the mighty force of the winds.

2.12.184 Now on this point, philosophy has indeed armed man to endure all other accidents, either with patience or, if that costs too much to find, with an infallible way out, by escaping feeling altogether. But these are means that serve a soul that is its own master and in full possession of its powers, capable of reasoning and deliberation. They do not serve in this misfortune, where in a philosopher a soul becomes the soul of a fool, disturbed, overturned and lost.

This can be produced by many causes: by too violent an agitation, which the soul can generate within itself through some strong passion; or by a wound in a certain part of the person; or by an exhalation from the stomach, throwing us into dizziness and a spinning of the head: *In diseases of the body the mind often wanders astray;*
for it loses its reason and speaks wild words,
and sometimes, under a heavy lethargy, is carried off into a deep and endless sleep, with drooping eyes and nodding head.

2.12.185 Philosophers have hardly touched this string, it seems to me, any more than another of equal importance. They always have this dilemma in their mouths to console our mortal condi-

tion: either the soul is mortal or immortal; if mortal, it will be free of suffering; if immortal, it will go on improving. They never touch the other branch: what if it goes on getting worse? And they leave the threats of future punishment to the poets. But in this way they give themselves an easy game. These are two omissions that often strike me in their discourses. I return to the first.

2.12.186 This soul loses the use of the Stoic sovereign good, so constant and so firm. Our fine wisdom must surrender at this point and lay down its arms. For the rest, they also considered, through the vanity of human reason, that the mixture and partnership of two pieces as different as the mortal and the immortal is unimaginable: *For to join the mortal to the eternal, and to think*

that they can agree together and serve each other in turn,
is madness. For what can be thought more unlike,
or more disjoined and at odds with itself,
than that a mortal thing, joined to the immortal and everlasting,
should endure fierce storms in union?

2.12.187 Moreover, they felt that the soul was drawn into death, like the body: *Worn out by age, it gives way along with it.* This, according to Zeno, the image of sleep shows us clearly enough; for he holds that sleep is a fainting and falling of the soul as well as of the body. *He thinks the mind contracts, and as it were slips and falls.* And when the soul's strength and vigor were seen in some people to hold up at the end of life, they attributed this to the diversity of diseases. So we see men in that extremity keep one sense or another unimpaired, one hearing, another smell; and no weakening is so universal that some parts do not remain whole and vigorous: *Just as when a sick man's foot hurts, / his head meanwhile may happen to feel no pain.*

2.12.188 The sight of our judgment relates to truth as the owl's eye does to the brightness of the sun, as Aristotle says. How could we better convict it than by such gross blindness in so evident a light? For the contrary opinion, the immortality of the

soul, is the part of human knowledge treated with the most reserve and doubt. Cicero says it was first introduced, at least on the testimony of books, by Pherecydes of Syros in the time of King Tullus (others attribute its invention to Thales, and others to others). The firmest dogmatists are forced, at this point above all, to fall back on the shelter of the shades of the Academy.[141] No one knows what Aristotle laid down on this subject, any more than the ancients in general, who handle it with wavering belief: *promising a most welcome thing rather than proving it.* He hid behind a cloud of difficult and unintelligible words and meanings, and left his followers as much to debate about his judgment as about the matter itself.[142]

2.12.189 Two things made this opinion plausible to them. One was that without the immortality of souls there would no longer be anything on which to rest the vain hopes of glory, a consideration that carries wonderful weight in the world. The other was that it is a very useful impression, as Plato says, that vices, when they slip out of the sight and knowledge of human justice, always remain a target for divine justice, which will pursue them even after the death of the guilty. Man is gripped by an extreme concern to prolong his being; he has provided for it with every means he has. For the preservation of the body there are tombs; for the preservation of the name, glory. Impatient of his lot, he has spent all his imagination on rebuilding himself and propping himself up with his inventions. The soul, unable to stand on its own feet because of its turmoil and weakness, goes searching on every side for consolations, hopes and foundations, and for outside circumstances to which it can cling and in which it can take root. And however flimsy and fantastic the things its invention forges for it, it rests on them more securely than on itself, and more willingly. But as for those most obstinately attached to this just and clear persuasion of the immortality of our spirits, it is a wonder how short and powerless they have found themselves when trying to establish it by their

141 Tullus Hostilius, legendary third king of Rome.
142 Seneca, Letters.

human powers. *These are the dreams not of one who teaches, but of one who wishes*, said an ancient.[143] Man can recognize from this testimony that he owes to fortune and chance any truth he discovers on his own, since even when it has fallen into his hands he lacks the means to grasp it and hold on to it, and his reason lacks the strength to make use of it. All things produced by our own reasoning and ability, the true as well as the false, are subject to uncertainty and debate. It was to punish our pride and to teach us our misery and incapacity that God produced the turmoil and confusion of the ancient tower of Babel. All that we undertake without his help, all that we see without the lamp of his grace, is nothing but vanity and folly. The very essence of truth, which is uniform and constant, we corrupt and debase by our weakness when fortune grants us possession of it. Whatever course man takes on his own, God allows him always to arrive at that same confusion. He shows us its image so vividly in the just punishment with which he struck down the presumption of Nimrod and brought to nothing the vain enterprise of building his pyramid. *I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and reject the understanding of the prudent.* The diversity of idioms and tongues with which he confounded that work—what else is it but this infinite and perpetual wrangling and discord of opinions and reasons that accompanies and entangles the vain edifice of human knowledge? And entangles it usefully.[144] Who could hold us back if we had a grain of knowledge? This saint has given me great pleasure: *The very concealment of what is useful serves either to exercise humility or to wear down pride.* To what pitch of presumption and insolence do we not carry our blindness and our stupidity?[145]

2.12.190 But to take up my subject again: it was truly most reasonable that we should be beholden to God alone, and to the gift of his grace, for the truth of so noble a belief, since it is from his

143 Cicero, Academica.
144 The quotation is from Saint Paul, 1 Corinthians 1:19; tradition made Nimrod the builder of the tower of Babel.
145 Saint Augustine, The City of God.

liberality alone that we receive the fruit of immortality, which consists in the enjoyment of eternal bliss. Let us frankly confess that God alone has told us so, and faith; for this is no lesson of Nature or of our reason. Whoever re-examines man's being and powers, within and without, apart from this divine privilege, whoever looks at man without flattering him, will see in him no efficacy or faculty that smells of anything but death and earth. The more we give, and owe, and render to God, the more Christianly we act. What that Stoic philosopher says he takes from the chance agreement of popular opinion—would it not have been better for him to take it from God? *When we discuss the eternity of souls, the consensus of men who either fear or worship the powers of the underworld carries no slight weight with us. I make use of this general persuasion.*[146]

2.12.191 Now the weakness of human arguments on this subject shows most clearly in the fabulous details they have added in the wake of this opinion, in trying to find out what kind of condition this immortality of ours was. Let us leave aside the Stoics —*They grant us a long lease of life, like crows: they say our souls will last a long time, but deny that they will last forever*—who give souls a life beyond this one, but a finite one.[147] The most universal and most widely received fancy, which has lasted down to our time, was the one attributed to Pythagoras—not that he invented it, but because it gained much weight and credit from the authority of his approval. It is that souls, on leaving us, merely rolled from one body to another, from a lion to a horse, from a horse to a king, wandering thus endlessly from house to house. And he himself said that he remembered having been Aethalides, then Euphorbus, after that Hermotimus, and finally that he had passed from Pyrrhus into Pythagoras, so that his memory of himself went back two hundred and six years.

146 Seneca, Letters.
147 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations; crows were proverbially long-lived.

> Some added that these same souls sometimes go back up to heaven and come down again: *O father, must we think that some souls go up from here to the sky,*
> *on high, and come back again to sluggish*
> *bodies? What dreadful longing for the light do these wretches have?*[148]

2.12.192 Origen makes them come and go eternally between a good and a bad state. The opinion Varro reports is that after a cycle of four hundred and forty years they rejoin their first body; Chrysippus, that this must happen after a certain space of time, unknown and unlimited. Plato says he takes this belief from Pindar and the ancient poets. From the infinite vicissitudes of change to which the soul is destined—since in the other world its punishments and rewards are only temporary, as its life in this one is only temporary—he concludes that it has a singular knowledge of the affairs of heaven, of hell and of this world, through which it has passed, passed again, and sojourned on many journeys: matter for its reminiscence.

2.12.193 Here is its progress as he describes it elsewhere: whoever has lived well rejoins the star to which he is assigned; whoever has lived badly passes into a woman. And if even then he does not mend his ways, he changes again into a beast whose nature suits his vicious habits, and he will see no end to his punishments until he has returned to his natural constitution, having rid himself by the force of reason of the gross, stupid and elemental qualities that were in him. But I do not want to forget the objection the Epicureans raise to this transmigration from one body to another. It is amusing. They ask what order there would be if the crowd of the dying happened to be greater than that of the newborn.[149] For the souls turned out of their lodging would be jostling one another over who should take the first place in this new case. They also ask how the souls would pass their time while waiting for a lodging to be got ready for them.

148 Virgil, Aeneid.
149 Plato, Timaeus.

Or, conversely, if more animals were born than died, they say the bodies would be in a bad way waiting for their soul to be poured in, and it would happen that some of them would die before they had ever been alive.

> *Lastly, it seems ridiculous that souls should stand ready*
> *at the matings of Venus and the births of beasts,*
> *and that immortal souls should wait for mortal limbs*
> *in numberless numbers, and compete in headlong haste*
> *among themselves as to which shall be the first and chief to slip in.* Others have kept the soul in the bodies of the dead, to animate the snakes, worms and other creatures said to be generated from the decay of our limbs, and even from our ashes. Others divide it into a mortal part and an immortal part. Others make it bodily and yet immortal. Some make it immortal but without knowledge or understanding. There are even some of our own who have thought that devils were made from the souls of the damned, just as Plutarch thinks that gods are made from the souls of the saved.

For there are few things that this author asserts in as decided a manner as he does this one; everywhere else he keeps to a doubtful and ambiguous manner. We must judge, he says, and firmly believe, that the souls of virtuous men, according to nature and divine justice, become saints after being men, and demigods after being saints. And from demigods, once they have been perfectly cleansed and purified, as in sacrifices of purification, and delivered from all liability to suffering and all mortality, they become, not by any civil decree but in truth and according to probable reason, whole and perfect gods, receiving a most happy and most glorious end.[150] But whoever wants to see him—though he is one of the most restrained and moderate of the band—skirmishing more boldly and telling us his marvels on this subject, I refer to his discourse on the moon and on the daemon of Socrates. There, as evidently as anywhere, it can be

150 Plutarch, Life of Romulus.

verified that the mysteries of philosophy have many oddities in common with those of poetry: the human understanding loses itself in trying to sound and scrutinize all things to the very end. Just so, weary and worn out by the long course of our life, we fall back into childishness. Those are the fine and certain teachings we draw from human knowledge on the subject of our soul.[151]

DOCTORS AND GENERATION

Even about our own bodies, physicians and philosophers contradict one another.

2.12.194 There is no less rashness in what it teaches us about the parts of the body. Let us pick one or two examples, for otherwise we would lose ourselves in this vast and murky sea of medical errors. Let us find out whether there is agreement at least on this: from what matter men produce one another. For as to their first production, it is no wonder if, in a matter so lofty and so ancient, the human understanding is confused and scattered. Archelaus the natural philosopher, whose disciple and favorite Socrates was, according to Aristoxenus, said that both men and animals had been made from a milky slime squeezed out by the heat of the earth. Pythagoras says our seed is the foam of our best blood; Plato, that it is the outflow of the marrow of the spine, which he argues from the fact that this place is the first to feel the fatigue of the work; Alcmaeon, that it is part of the substance of the brain—and to show that this is so, he says, the eyes of those who exert themselves beyond measure at this exercise grow dim. Democritus says it is a substance extracted from the whole mass of the body; Epicurus, extracted from the soul and the body; Aristotle, a residue drawn from the final nourishment of the blood, the last to spread through our limbs. Others say it comes from the blood, cooked and digested by the heat of the genitals, which they judge from the fact that in extreme efforts drops of pure blood are emitted. This seems the most likely, if

151 Plutarch's dialogues On the Face in the Moon and On the Sign of Socrates.

any likelihood can be drawn from so infinite a confusion. Now as for bringing this seed to fruition, how many contrary opinions do they hold! Aristotle and Democritus hold that women have no sperm, and that it is only a sweat they emit through the heat of pleasure and movement, which plays no part in generation. Galen, on the contrary, and his followers hold that generation cannot take place without the meeting of the two seeds. There you have the physicians, the philosophers, the jurists and the theologians grappling pell-mell with our women over the question of the term for which women carry their fruit. And I, for my part, come to the aid, with my own example, of those among them who uphold the eleven-month pregnancy. The world is built on this experience; there is no woman so simple that she cannot give her opinion on all these disputes; and yet we cannot agree about them.

2.12.195 That is enough to show that man is no better instructed in knowledge of himself in his bodily part than in his spiritual part. We have set him before himself, and his reason before his reason, to see what it would tell us about it. I think I have shown well enough how little it understands itself. And he who does not understand himself, what can he understand? *As if indeed one could take the measure of anything who does not know his own.* Truly, Protagoras told us fine tales when he made man, who never even knew his own measure, the measure of all things. If it is not man, his dignity will not allow any other creature to have this advantage.[152] Now since man is so self-contradictory, one judgment ceaselessly overturning another, this flattering proposition was only a joke, which forced us to conclude the nothingness of both the measure and the measurer. When Thales holds that knowledge of man is very difficult for man, he teaches him that knowledge of everything else is impossible for him.

152 Pliny the Elder, Natural History.

A WARNING TO HIS READER

This desperate argument is for extreme need; keep to the common road and bridle the mind.

2.12.196 You, for whom I have taken the trouble to stretch out so long a body, contrary to my habit, will not shrink from defending your Sebond by the ordinary form of argument in which you are instructed every day, and you will exercise your mind and your study in that. For this last fencing trick should be used only as an extreme remedy. It is a desperate thrust, in which you must abandon your own weapons to make your adversary lose his; and a secret trick, to be used rarely and with reserve. It is great rashness to destroy yourself in order to destroy another. One must not wish to die to take revenge, as Gobryas did.[153] For he was locked in a close struggle with a Persian lord when Darius came up sword in hand and was afraid to strike for fear of hitting Gobryas; and Gobryas shouted to him to strike boldly, even if he ran them both through. I have seen weapons and conditions of single combat condemned as unjust because they were desperate, and because the man who proposed them put himself and his opponent in a position where an end for both was inevitable.[154] The Portuguese captured some Turks in the Indian Ocean. These prisoners, impatient of their captivity, resolved to set fire to themselves, their masters and the ship and burn them all to ashes—and they succeeded—by rubbing ship's nails against one another and letting a spark fall into the kegs of powder in the place where they were kept. We are shaking here the limits and last enclosures of the sciences, in which extremity is a vice, as it is in virtue. Keep to the common road; it is no good at all being so subtle and so clever. Remember what the Tuscan proverb says: *Whoever makes himself too fine breaks.* I

153 The unnamed lady addressed here is traditionally identified as Margaret of Valois, Queen of Navarre.

154 Gobryas was one of the Persian nobles who helped Darius overthrow the usurper known as the false Smerdis, in 522 BC.

recommend to you, in your opinions and your reasonings as much as in your conduct and in everything else, moderation and temperance, and the avoidance of novelty and strangeness. All roads that stray off the beaten track annoy me. You who, by the authority your greatness brings you, and still more by the advantages that the qualities more truly your own give you, can command anyone you please with a wink, should have given this task to someone who made a profession of letters; he would have supported and enriched this notion for you quite differently. However, here is enough for what you need of it.

2.12.197 Epicurus said of laws that even the worst were so necessary to us that without them men would eat one another. And Plato confirms that without laws we would live like beasts. Our mind is a wandering, dangerous and reckless tool; it is hard to join order and measure to it. In my time, those who have some rare excellence above the rest, and some extraordinary liveliness, we see almost all of them overflowing into license of opinions and of morals. It is a miracle if one of them turns out settled and sociable. There is good reason to set the tightest barriers we can around the human mind. In study, as in everything else, its steps must be counted and regulated for it; the limits of its hunting ground must be marked out for it by art. It is bridled and bound with religions, laws, customs, knowledge, precepts, and punishments and rewards both mortal and immortal; and still we see that by its volatility and looseness it escapes all these bonds. It is an empty body with nothing by which it can be seized or struck; a varied and shapeless body on which no knot or hold can be fastened. Certainly there are few souls so well ordered, so strong and so well born that they can be trusted to their own guidance, and that can sail with moderation and without rashness in the freedom of their judgments beyond common opinions. It is more expedient to put them under guardianship. The mind is a dangerous sword, even to its owner, for anyone who does not know how to arm himself with it in an orderly and discreet way. And there is no beast that more rightly needs blinkers, to keep its gaze subject and confined to what is

in front of its feet, and to keep it from straying here or there out of the ruts that usage and the laws trace for it. Therefore it will suit you better to keep within the accustomed track, whatever it may be, than to launch your flight into this unbridled license. But if one of these new doctors undertakes to play the clever man in your presence, at the expense of his salvation and of yours, then, to rid yourself of this dangerous plague that is spreading every day in your courts, this preservative, used in extreme necessity, will prevent the contagion of this venom from harming either you or your company.

2.12.198 So the freedom and boldness of those ancient minds produced in philosophy and the human sciences many sects of differing opinions, each man undertaking to judge and choose in order to take sides. But now men all go the same way: *they are bound and dedicated to certain fixed and settled opinions, so that they are forced to defend even what they do not approve.* We receive the arts by civil authority and decree, so that the schools have only one pattern and a like, circumscribed education and discipline. Now people no longer look at what the coins weigh and are worth; each in turn accepts them at the value that common approval and currency give them. People argue not about the alloy but about the use. And so all things pass on equal terms.[155] Medicine is accepted like geometry; and conjuring tricks, enchantments, binding spells, dealings with the spirits of the dead, prognostications, the casting of astrological houses, and even that ridiculous quest for the philosopher's stone—everything passes without contradiction. You need only know that the place of Mars lies in the middle of the triangle of the hand, that of Venus at the thumb, and that of Mercury at the little finger. When the table line cuts the mount of the forefinger, it is a sign of cruelty; when it stops short below the middle finger, and the natural middle line makes an angle with the life line at the same spot, it is a sign of a wretched death; if in a woman the natural line is open and does not close the angle with the life line, this shows that she will not be very chaste. I call you your-

155 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations.

self to witness whether, with this science, a man cannot pass with reputation and favor in any company.

WHERE KNOWLEDGE STOPS

Neither the Academics' probability nor any rule can fix the limits of what we know.

2.12.199 Theophrastus said that human knowledge, guided by the senses, could judge the causes of things up to a certain point, but that on reaching the ultimate and first causes it had to stop and be blunted, either because of its weakness or because of the difficulty of things. It is a moderate and gentle opinion: that our ability can lead us to the knowledge of some things, and that its power has certain limits, beyond which it is rash to use it. This opinion is plausible and was put forward by people of a conciliatory disposition. But it is hard to set bounds to our mind: it is curious and greedy, and has no reason to stop at a thousand paces rather than at fifty. I have found by experience that where one man failed, another has succeeded; that what was unknown to one century, the following century has made clear; and that the sciences and the arts are not cast in a mold, but are formed and shaped little by little, by being handled and polished many times over, as bears shape their cubs by licking them at leisure. So what my strength cannot discover, I still keep probing and trying out;

> and by handling and kneading this new matter again, stirring and warming it, I give the one who comes after me some ease in enjoying it more comfortably, and make it more supple and more manageable for him: *As Hymettian wax softens in the sun,*
> *and, worked by the thumb, turns into many*
> *shapes, and is made useful by use itself.* The second will do as much for the third. That is why difficulty must not make me despair, nor my powerlessness either, for it is only mine.[156]

156 Ovid, Metamorphoses.

2.12.200 Man is capable of all things just as much as of some. And if he admits, as Theophrastus says, that he is ignorant of first causes and principles, let him boldly hand over to me all the rest of his knowledge. If the foundation fails him, his reasoning lies flat on the ground. Disputing and inquiring have no other goal or stopping point than principles; if that end does not halt his course, he plunges into endless irresolution. *One thing cannot be grasped more or less than another, since there is one single definition of grasping for all things.* Now it is likely that if the soul knew anything, it would first of all know itself; and if it knew anything outside itself, that would be its body and its case, before anything else.[157] If we see the gods of medicine still quarreling to this day over our anatomy, *Mulciber was against Troy, Apollo stood for Troy*: when can we expect them to agree? We are nearer to ourselves than the whiteness of snow or the weight of stone is to us. If man does not know himself, how can he know his functions and his powers? It is not impossible, perhaps, that some true notion lodges in us; but if so, it is by chance. And since errors are received into our soul by the same road, in the same manner and by the same conduct, the soul has nothing by which to tell them apart, nor to choose truth over falsehood.[158]

2.12.201 The Academics allowed some inclination of judgment. They found it too crude to say that it was no more likely that snow was white than black, and that we were no more certain of the motion of a stone leaving our hand than of that of the eighth sphere. To avoid this difficulty and strangeness, which in truth can find room in our imagination only with great difficulty, they did lay it down that we were in no way capable of knowing, and that truth is swallowed up in deep abysses where human sight cannot penetrate. Yet they admitted that some things are more likely than others, and granted their judgment the faculty of inclining toward one appearance rather than another.[159] They allowed it this leaning, while forbidding it any decision. The

157 Cicero, Academica.
158 Ovid, Tristia; Mulciber is Vulcan, who sided with the Greeks against Troy.
159 In ancient astronomy the eighth sphere was the sphere of the fixed stars.

view of the Pyrrhonists is bolder, and at the same time more likely. For this Academic inclination, this leaning toward one proposition rather than another—what else is it but the recognition of some more apparent truth in this one than in that? If our understanding were capable of grasping the form, the features, the bearing and the face of truth, it would see it whole just as well as half, nascent and imperfect. That appearance of likelihood which makes them turn left rather than right: increase it. That ounce of likelihood which tips the scale: multiply it by a hundred, by a thousand ounces. In the end the scale will come down wholly on one side and settle on one choice and one whole truth. But how do they let themselves be bent toward what is like the truth, if they do not know the true? How do they know the likeness of something whose essence they do not know? Either we can judge absolutely, or absolutely we cannot. If our intellectual and sensory faculties have no foundation and no footing, if all they do is float and drift with the wind, then it is pointless to let our judgment be carried along by any part of their operation, whatever appearance it may seem to present to us. The surest and happiest position for our understanding would be one in which it kept itself settled, upright, unbending, without wavering and without agitation. *Between true and false appearances there is no difference as far as the mind's assent is concerned.* That things do not lodge in us in their own form and essence, and do not make their entry by their own force and authority, we see clearly enough. For if that were so, we would all receive them in the same way: wine would taste the same in the mouth of a sick man as in the mouth of a healthy one. A man with chapped or numb fingers would find the wood or iron he handles just as hard as another man does. Outside objects therefore surrender to our mercy; they lodge in us as we please. Now if for our part we received anything without altering it, if the human grip were capable and firm enough to seize truth by our own means, then, since those means are common to all men, this truth would be passed from hand to hand, from one man to another. And there would be at least one thing in the world, out

of all there are, that men would believe by universal consent. But the fact that no proposition can be found that is not debated and disputed among us, or could not be, shows clearly that our natural judgment does not grasp very clearly what it grasps. For my judgment cannot make my companion's judgment accept it—which is a sign that I have grasped it by some other means than a natural power that is in me and in all men.

2.12.202 Let us leave aside the infinite confusion of opinions that is seen even among the philosophers, and this perpetual and universal debate about the knowledge of things. For it is taken for granted, and very truly, that men—I mean the learned, the best-born, the most able—agree about nothing: not even that the sky is over our heads. For those who doubt everything doubt that too; and those who deny that we can comprehend anything say that we have not comprehended that the sky is over our heads. And these two opinions are, in numbers, incomparably the strongest.

A JUDGMENT THAT SHIFTS WITH THE BODY

Health, mood, passion and argument change what we hold true from hour to hour.

2.12.203 Besides this infinite diversity and division, it is easy to see, from the confusion our judgment throws us into and the uncertainty each man feels within himself, that its footing is very insecure. How variously we judge things! How often we change our notions! What I hold today and what I believe, I hold and believe with all my belief; all my tools and all my springs seize on this opinion and vouch for it as far as they can. I could not embrace any truth, or keep hold of it, with more assurance than I do this one. I am wholly in it; I am truly in it. But has it not happened to me—not once, but a hundred times, a thousand times, every day—that I embraced some other thing with these same instruments, in this same condition, which I have since judged to be false? At least one ought to grow wise at one's own expense. If I have often found myself betrayed under this guise,

if my touchstone usually proves false and my scale uneven and unjust, what assurance can I take from it this time, more than the others? Isn't it foolish to let myself be cheated so many times by the same guide? And yet let Fortune move us five hundred times from our place, let her do nothing but empty and refill our belief endlessly, as she might a vessel, with one opinion after another: always the present and latest one is the certain, the infallible one. For this one we must give up goods, honor, life, salvation, everything. *The thing found later spoils the old, / And turns our feelings against all that came before.* Whatever we are preached, whatever we learn, we should always remember that it is man who gives and man who receives; it is a mortal hand that offers it to us; it is a mortal hand that accepts it.[160] Only the things that come to us from heaven have the right and authority to persuade; only they bear the mark of truth. And that truth, too, we do not see with our own eyes, nor receive by our own means: that great and holy image could not dwell in so wretched a lodging unless God prepares it for that use, unless God reforms and strengthens it by his particular and supernatural grace and favor. At the least, our faulty condition ought to make us behave with more moderation and restraint in our changes. We ought to remember, whatever we take into our understanding, that we often take in false things, and that we do so by these same tools, which often contradict themselves and are often deceived.

2.12.204 Now it is no wonder if they contradict themselves, since they are so easily bent and twisted by very slight occurrences. It is certain that our apprehension, our judgment and the faculties of our soul in general are affected by the movements and alterations of the body, and those alterations are continual. Is our mind not more alert, our memory quicker, our reasoning livelier, in health than in sickness? Do joy and gaiety not make us receive whatever presents itself to our soul with quite another face than gloom and melancholy do? Do you think the verses of Catullus or Sappho smile on a miserly, crabbed old man as they do on a vigorous and ardent young one? When Cleomenes, son

160 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.

of Anaxandridas, was ill, his friends reproached him for having new and unaccustomed moods and fancies. "I can well believe it," he said; "I am not the same man I am when I am well. Being someone else, my opinions and fancies are something else too." In the wrangling of our law courts a phrase is in use, said of criminals who find the judges in a good temper, mild and kindly: *let him rejoice in his good fortune*. For it is certain that judgments are at times more bent on condemnation, thornier and harsher, and at other times more lenient, easygoing and inclined to excuse. When a man brings back from home the pain of gout, or jealousy, or a theft by his servant, and his whole soul is tinged and soaked with anger, there is no doubt that his judgment is altered in that direction. That venerable senate of the Areopagus judged by night, for fear that the sight of the petitioners might corrupt its justice. Even the air and the clearness of the sky bring about some change in us, as that Greek verse in Cicero says: *Men's minds are such as the light with which Father Jupiter himself / Has lit the lands with his fruitful torch.* It is not only fevers, drinks and great accidents that overturn our judgment: the slightest things in the world spin it around.[161] And there is no doubt, though we do not feel it, that if a continuous fever can lay our soul low, a tertian fever brings it some alteration in due measure and proportion. If apoplexy puts the sight of our intelligence to sleep and puts it out altogether, there is no doubt that a chill dims it. And consequently there can hardly be found a single hour in life when our judgment is in its proper seat, our body being subject to so many continual changes, and furnished with so many kinds of springs, that—I take the physicians' word for it—it is hard for there not always to be one of them pulling askew.

2.12.205 Moreover, this sickness is not easily detected unless it is utterly extreme and past remedy, since reason always goes crooked, lame and out of joint, and with falsehood as readily as with truth. So it is hard to discover its miscalculations and dis-

161 The Areopagus was the ancient council and court of Athens; the verse is Cicero's rendering of Homer, Odyssey XVIII.

orders. I always call reason that semblance of reasoning that each man forges within himself: that reason of which, by its very nature, there can be a hundred contrary versions about one and the same subject. It is an instrument of lead and of wax, stretchable, bendable, adaptable to every bias and every measure; all that is needed is the skill to know how to shape it. However good a judge's intentions, if he does not listen closely to himself—which few people bother to do—then the pull of friendship, of kinship, of beauty and of revenge can imperceptibly slip into his judgment a bias for or against a case, and tip the scale. And not only such weighty things: so can that random instinct which makes us favor one thing over another, and which gives us, without reason's leave, the choice between two like objects, or some shadow of a similar vanity.

2.12.206 I who spy on myself more closely, who keep my eyes constantly fixed on myself, like a man who has not much business elsewhere—*What king of the frozen shore*
Beneath the Bear is feared,
What alarms Tiridates—wholly
Unconcerned—I would hardly dare tell the vanity and weakness I find in myself. My footing is so unsteady and so poorly set, I find it so quick to give way and so ready to wobble, and my sight so unruly, that fasting I feel myself a different man from what I am after a meal. If my health smiles on me, and the brightness of a fine day, I am a perfectly decent fellow; if I have a corn pinching my toe, I am sullen, disagreeable and unapproachable.[162]

The same pace of my horse seems to me now rough, now easy; the same road now shorter, another time longer; the same shape now more, now less pleasing. One moment I am ready to do anything, the next to do nothing; what is a pleasure to me now will at some other time be a burden. A thousand heedless, haphazard stirrings go on inside me. Either the melancholy humor has hold of me, or the choleric; and on its own private

162 Horace, Odes I.26; Tiridates was a pretender to the Parthian throne.

authority, now gloom prevails in me, now cheerfulness. When I take up books, I may have seen in some passage excellent graces that struck my soul; let me come back to it another time, and turn it and twist it as I may, bend it and handle it as I may, it is an unknown and shapeless lump to me. Even in my own writings I do not always recover the drift of my first conception: I do not know what I meant to say. And I often burn my fingers correcting it and putting in a new meaning, because I have lost the first one, which was better. I do nothing but come and go. My judgment does not always move forward; it floats, it wanders, *Like a tiny boat caught on the great sea / In a raging wind.* Many times—as I often like to do—I have taken it up as an exercise and a pastime to defend an opinion contrary to my own, and my mind, applying itself and turning that way, ties me to it so firmly that I can no longer find the reason for my first view, and I give it up. I am carried almost wherever I lean, whatever the case, and swept away by my own weight.[163]

2.12.207 Almost anyone would say as much of himself if he looked at himself as I do. Preachers know that the emotion that comes over them as they speak quickens them toward belief, and that in anger we throw ourselves harder into the defense of our proposition, stamp it on ourselves and embrace it with more vehemence and approval than we do in our cool and calm senses. You lay out your case plainly to a lawyer: he answers you hesitant and doubtful; you feel that it makes no difference to him whether he takes up one side or the other. Have you paid him well to get his teeth into it and take it to heart? Does he begin to have a stake in it, has his will warmed to it? his reason and his learning warm to it at the same time. Here is an evident and indubitable truth presenting itself to his understanding; he discovers an entirely new light in it, believes it in earnest, and so persuades himself. Indeed, I do not know whether the ardor born of spite and obstinacy against the pressure and violence of the magistrate and of danger, or concern for reputation, has not sent many a man to uphold, all the way to the stake, an opinion

163 Catullus.

for which, among his friends and at liberty, he would not have been willing to burn the tip of his finger.

2.12.208 The jolts and shocks our soul receives from bodily passions can do much to it; but its own passions can do still more. It is so firmly in their grip that it is perhaps arguable that it has no other gait or motion than what comes from the breath of their winds, and that without their stirring it would lie inactive, like a ship on the open sea that the winds have deserted. And anyone who maintained this, following the party of the Peripatetics, would do us no great wrong, since it is known that most of the finest actions of the soul proceed from this impulse of the passions and need it. Valor, they say, cannot be perfected without the help of anger. *Ajax was always brave, but bravest in his fury.* Nor do we fall upon the wicked and our enemies vigorously enough unless we are angry. And they would have the advocate stir up anger in the judges, to get justice out of them.[164]

2.12.209 Desires moved Themistocles, moved Demosthenes, and have driven philosophers to labors, sleepless nights and travels; they lead us to honor, to learning, to health—useful ends. And that weakness of soul in bearing grief and vexation serves to nourish penance and repentance in the conscience, and to make us feel the scourges of God for our chastisement, and the scourges of public punishment. Compassion serves as a spur to clemency; and the prudence to preserve and govern ourselves is awakened by our fear. And how many fine actions come from ambition? How many from presumption? In short, no eminent and spirited virtue is without some unruly agitation. Might this not be one of the reasons that moved the Epicureans to relieve God of all care and concern for our affairs? For even the effects of his goodness could not be exercised toward us without disturbing his repose, by means of the passions, which are like goads and promptings that lead the soul to virtuous actions. Or did they think otherwise, and take the passions for storms that shamefully lure the soul away from its tranquillity? *As the calm of the sea is understood when not even the slightest breeze stirs the*

164 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations.

waves, so the quiet and peaceful state of the soul is discerned when there is no disturbance that can move it.

2.12.210 What differences of sense and reason, what contrary imaginings the diversity of our passions presents to us! What assurance, then, can we take from a thing so unstable and so changeable, by its very condition subject to the mastery of disturbance, never moving except at a forced and borrowed pace? If our judgment is in the hands of sickness itself and of disturbance, if it is from folly and rashness that it must receive the impression of things, what security can we expect from it?

2.12.211 Is it not rather bold of philosophy to hold that men produce their greatest effects, those closest to divinity, when they are beside themselves, frenzied and out of their minds? We improve through the loss of our reason and its slumber. The two natural ways of entering the cabinet of the gods and foreseeing there the course of destiny are frenzy and sleep. This is amusing to consider. By the dislocation the passions bring to our reason, we become virtuous; by its uprooting, which frenzy or the image of death brings, we become prophets and soothsayers. Never have I been more glad to take philosophy's word for it. It is a pure enthusiasm, breathed by holy truth into the philosophical mind, that wrings from it, against its own thesis, the admission that the tranquil state of our soul—the settled state, the healthiest state that philosophy can win for it—is not its best state. Our waking is more asleep than sleep; our wisdom less wise than folly; our dreams are worth more than our reasonings; the worst place we can take is in ourselves.[165] But does philosophy not think we have the wit to notice that the voice which makes the spirit so clear-sighted, so great, so perfect when it is detached from man, and so earthly, ignorant and dark while it is in man, is a voice coming from the spirit that is in earthly, ignorant and dark man—and for that very reason a voice not to be trusted or believed?

2.12.212 I have no great experience of these violent agitations, being of a soft and sluggish constitution; most of them seize our

165 "Enthusiasm" in its Greek sense: possession or inspiration by a god.

soul suddenly, without giving it time to collect itself. But that passion which is said to be bred by idleness in the hearts of young men, although it advances at leisure and at a measured pace, shows very plainly, to those who have tried to resist its force, the power of the conversion and alteration our judgment undergoes. I once undertook to keep myself braced to withstand it and beat it back; for I am so far from being one of those who invite vices that I do not even follow them unless they drag me along. I felt it being born, growing and increasing in spite of my resistance, and at last, fully seeing and alive as I was, seizing and possessing me, so that, as in drunkenness, the image of things began to look different to me than usual: I clearly saw the attractions of the object I was pursuing swell and grow, enlarged and puffed up by the wind of my imagination; the difficulties of my enterprise ease and level out; my reason and my conscience draw back. But once that fire had burned off, all in an instant, as with a flash of lightning, my soul took on another kind of sight, another state and another judgment: the difficulties of retreat seemed to me great and insurmountable, and the same things had quite another taste and face than the heat of desire had shown me. Which of the two views is the truer? Pyrrho knows nothing about it. We are never free of sickness. Fevers have their hot and their cold: from the effects of a burning passion we fall back into the effects of a shivering one.

2.12.213 As far as I had thrown myself forward, I throw myself back just as far. *As when the sea, surging on in alternating flood,*
Now rushes upon the land and flings its foaming wave over the rocks,
And floods the farthest sand with its curve;
Now runs swiftly back, sucking in the stones rolled by the surge,
And flees, leaving the shore as the shallows slip away.[166]

166 Virgil, Aeneid XI.

HOLDING TO THE OLD BELIEFS

Knowing his own fickleness, he keeps his first opinions; Copernicus shows how doctrines rise and fall.

2.12.214 Now from knowing this changeableness of mine I have, by accident, bred in myself a certain constancy of opinion, and I have scarcely altered my first and natural opinions. For however attractive novelty may look, I do not change easily, for fear of losing in the exchange. And since I am not capable of choosing, I take the choice of others, and stay in the position where God has put me. Otherwise I could not keep myself from rolling about endlessly. In this way, by the grace of God, I have kept myself whole, without agitation or trouble of conscience, in the ancient beliefs of our religion, through all the sects and divisions our age has produced. The writings of the ancients—I mean the good writings, full and solid—tempt me and move me almost wherever they please. The one I am listening to always seems to me the strongest; I find each of them right in turn, though they contradict one another. This ease that good minds have in making whatever they like seem probable, and the fact that there is nothing so strange that they will not undertake to give it enough color to deceive a simplicity like mine, show plainly the weakness of their proof. The heavens and the stars had been moving for three thousand years; everyone had believed so, until Cleanthes of Samos or, according to Theophrastus, Nicetas of Syracuse took it into his head to maintain that it was the earth that moved, turning about its axis along the oblique circle of the zodiac. And in our time Copernicus has grounded this doctrine so well that he uses it quite systematically for all astronomical deductions. What are we to conclude from this, except that we need not care which of the two it is? And who knows whether, a thousand years from now, a third opinion will not overturn the two before it?[167]

167 The Samian astronomer who moved the earth was in fact Aristarchus, whom Cleanthes attacked; Copernicus (1473–1543) published On the Revolutions in 1543.

Thus rolling time changes the seasons of things:
What was prized falls at last into no esteem;
Then something else takes its place and rises out of contempt,
And is sought more every day, and once found it flourishes
With praise, and is held in wondrous honor among mortals.[168]

2.12.215 So when some new doctrine presents itself to us, we have good reason to distrust it, and to consider that before it was put forward its opposite was in vogue; and that, just as that one was overturned by this one, a third invention may arise in the future that will knock down the second in the same way. Before the principles Aristotle introduced were accepted, other principles satisfied human reason, as these satisfy us now. What letters patent do these hold, what special privilege, that the course of our invention should stop at them, and that possession of our belief should belong to them for all time to come? They are no more exempt from eviction than their predecessors were. When someone presses me with a new argument, it is up to me to reckon that what I cannot answer, someone else will. For to believe every appearance we cannot shake off is great simple-mindedness. It would follow that all the common people—and we are all common people—would have a belief that turned like a weathervane; for their soul, being soft and without resistance, would be forced to receive impression after impression endlessly, the last always wiping out the trace of the one before. A man who finds himself weak should answer, as they do in legal practice, that he will speak to his counsel about it, or else refer the matter to the wisest, from whom he received his training. How long has medicine been in the world? They say that a newcomer called Paracelsus is changing and overturning the whole order of the ancient rules, and maintains that until now medicine has served only to kill people. I believe he will easily prove that. But to stake my life on the test of his new experiments would not, I think, be great wisdom. We must not believe every-

168 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.

one, says the precept, because everyone can say anything.[169] A man who made a profession of novelties and reforms in natural science told me not long ago that all the ancients had plainly been wrong about the nature and movements of the winds, and that he would make me touch it with my own hand, most evidently, if I would listen to him. After I had patiently heard his arguments, which were full of plausibility, I said to him: "How then did those who sailed under the laws of Theophrastus go west when they were heading east? Did they go sideways, or backward?" "It was chance," he answered; "in any case, they were mistaken." I replied then that I would rather follow the results than the reasoning. Now these are things that often clash. I have been told that in geometry, which thinks it has reached the highest point of certainty among the sciences, there are irrefutable demonstrations that subvert the truth of experience. Jacques Peletier, for instance, told me in my own house that he had found two lines moving toward each other to meet, which he nevertheless proved could never, even to infinity, come to touch. And the Pyrrhonists use their arguments and their reason only to ruin the evidence of experience; and it is a marvel how far the suppleness of our reason has followed them in this design of fighting against the evidence of facts.[170] For they prove that we do not move, that we do not speak, that nothing is heavy or hot, with the same force of argument with which we prove the most probable things. Ptolemy, who was a great man, had set the bounds of our world; all the ancient philosophers thought they had its measure, except for a few remote islands that might escape their knowledge. A thousand years ago it would have been Pyrrhonizing to cast doubt on the science of cosmography and the opinions everyone had accepted from it; it was heresy to admit the Antipodes. And now, in our own century, an infinite expanse of mainland—not an island or a particular region, but a part roughly equal in size to the one we knew—

169 Paracelsus (1493–1541), Swiss physician and alchemist who attacked the medicine of Galen.
170 Peletier is describing an asymptote.

has just been discovered.[171] The geographers of our time do not fail to assure us that by now everything has been found and everything seen; *For what is at hand pleases us, and seems the best.* The question is whether, since Ptolemy was once mistaken on the foundations of his reasoning, it would not be foolish of me to trust now what these men say about it; and whether it is not more likely that this great body we call the world is something quite other than we judge.

2.12.216 Plato says that it changes its face in every respect; that the heavens, the stars and the sun sometimes reverse the motion we see in them, changing east into west. The Egyptian priests told Herodotus that since their first king, eleven thousand and some years earlier (and they showed him the likenesses of all their kings in statues taken from life), the sun had changed its course four times; that sea and land turn alternately into each other; that the birth of the world cannot be determined. Aristotle and Cicero say the same. And one of our own writers says that the world has existed from all eternity, dying and being reborn through many vicissitudes, calling Solomon and Isaiah as witnesses, so as to avoid these objections: that God was once a creator without a creature; that he was idle; that he went back on his idleness by setting his hand to this work; and that he is consequently subject to change. In the most famous of the Greek schools, the world is held to be a god, made by another, greater god. It is composed of a body and a soul, which dwells at its center and spreads out in musical numbers to its circumference: divine, most happy, most great, most wise, eternal.[172] Within it are other gods—the sea, the earth, the stars—which keep one another company in a harmonious and perpetual motion, a divine dance: now meeting, now moving apart; hiding and showing themselves, changing rank, now in front, now behind. Heraclitus held that the world was made of fire and that, by the order of the fates, it was bound one day to burst into

171 Claudius Ptolemy (2nd century AD), astronomer and geographer of Alexandria.

172 The school is Plato's Academy; the description follows Plato's Timaeus.

flame and dissolve into fire, and one day to be born again. And of men Apuleius says: *mortal one by one, everlasting all together*. Alexander wrote to his mother the account of an Egyptian priest, drawn from their records, attesting the boundless antiquity of that nation and giving the true birth and progress of other countries. Cicero and Diodorus say that in their time the Chaldeans kept records going back four hundred thousand and some years. Aristotle, Pliny and others say that Zoroaster lived six thousand years before Plato's time. Plato says that the people of the city of Saïs have written records going back eight thousand years, and that the city of Athens was built a thousand years before the said city of Saïs. Epicurus says that at the same time as things are here as we see them, they are exactly alike, and in the same fashion, in many other worlds. He would have said so with more confidence if he had seen the similarities and correspondences between this new world of the West Indies and ours, present and past, in such strange examples.[173]

2.12.217 Truly, considering what has come to our knowledge of the course of human affairs on this earth, I have often marveled to see, across very great distances of place and time, the agreement of so great a number of wild popular opinions, and of wild customs and beliefs, which by no route seem to derive from our natural reasoning. The human mind is a great worker of miracles. But this correspondence has something still more extraordinary about it: it is found in names as well, and in a thousand other things. For nations were found there that had never, as far as we know, heard any news of us, where circumcision was held in honor; where there were states and great governments maintained by women, without men; where our fasts and our Lent were reproduced, with abstinence from women added; where our crosses were held in honor in various ways: here graves were honored with them, there they were used—and in particular that of Saint Andrew—to protect people from visions in the night, and were placed on children's beds against enchantments; elsewhere they came upon a very tall wooden

173 Saïs was an ancient city in the Nile delta; Plato reports this in the Timaeus.

one, worshipped as the god of rain, and that one far inland. There they found a very clear likeness of our confessors; the use of miters, the celibacy of priests, the art of divining by the entrails of sacrificed animals; abstinence from every kind of meat and fish in their diet; the practice of priests using a special language in their services, not the common tongue; and this notion, that the first god was driven out by a second, his younger brother; that they were created with every comfort, which has since been cut off from them for their sin; that their territory was changed and their natural condition made worse; that they were once submerged by a flood of waters from the sky, and only a few families were saved, who took refuge in the high caves of the mountains and stopped up those caves so that the water did not get in, having shut up several kinds of animals inside with them; that when they felt the rain stop, they let out some dogs, and when these came back clean and wet, they judged that the water had not yet gone down much; later, having let out others and seeing them come back muddy, they went out to repeople the world, which they found full of nothing but serpents. In one place they came upon belief in the day of judgment, so that the people were wonderfully offended at the Spaniards who scattered the bones of the dead while rifling the riches of the graves, saying that these scattered bones could not easily be put back together; trade by barter and no other kind, with fairs and markets for the purpose; dwarfs and deformed persons kept to adorn princes' tables; the practice of falconry suited to the nature of their birds; tyrannical taxes; refinements of gardening; dances and acrobats' leaps; instrumental music; coats of arms; ball games; games of dice and chance, in which they often get so heated that they stake themselves and their liberty; medicine consisting of nothing but charms; writing by means of pictures; belief in a single first man, father of all peoples; the worship of a god who once lived as a man in perfect virginity, fasting and penance, preaching the law of nature and the ceremonies of religion, and who vanished from the world without a natural death; the belief in giants; the habit of getting

drunk on their drinks and drinking deep; religious ornaments painted with bones and skulls, surplices, holy water, sprinklers; wives and servants vying with one another to offer themselves to be burned and buried with their dead husband or master; a law that the eldest inherits all the property, and nothing is left to the younger but obedience; a custom that on promotion to a certain office of great authority the man promoted takes a new name and gives up his own; the custom of pouring lime on the knee of a newborn child, saying to him, "You came from dust, and to dust you shall return"; the art of augury. These empty shadows of our religion that can be seen in some of these examples bear witness to its dignity and divinity. Not only has it in some way worked its way, by a kind of imitation, into all the infidel nations on this side of the world, but into these barbarous peoples too, as if by a common and supernatural inspiration. For they also found there a belief in purgatory, but in a new form: what we assign to fire, they assign to cold, and they imagine souls both purged and punished by the rigor of extreme cold. And this example reminds me of another amusing diversity. Just as some peoples were found there who liked to uncover the end of their member, and cut off the skin in the Muslim and Jewish fashion, others were found who had such scruples about uncovering it that they wore the skin very carefully stretched over it and tied on top with little cords, for fear that the end should see the air. And this diversity too: just as we honor kings and festivals by dressing in the finest clothes we have, in some regions, to show their complete inequality and submission to their king, subjects presented themselves to him in their meanest clothes, and on entering the palace they put some old torn robe over their good one, so that all the luster and ornament should belong to the master. But let us go on.

CLIMATE, DESIRE AND THE SOVEREIGN GOOD

Our minds vary with the soil, and we cannot even agree on what to wish for.

2.12.218 If Nature encloses men's beliefs, judgments and opinions within the bounds of her ordinary progress, as she does all other things; if they have their cycle, their season, their birth and their death, like cabbages; if the heavens stir them and roll them about as they please, what masterly and permanent authority are we going to attribute to them? Experience lets us touch with our own hands that the form of our being depends on the air, the climate and the soil where we are born. This holds not only for our complexion, our build, our constitution and our bearing, but also for the faculties of the soul: *And the climate contributes not only to the strength of the body but also to that of the mind*, says Vegetius. The goddess who founded the city of Athens chose for its site a climate that would make men wise, as the priests of Egypt taught Solon: *At Athens the air is thin, which is also why the Athenians are thought sharper; at Thebes it is thick, and so the Thebans are dull and sturdy*. So, just as fruits and animals are born different, men too are born more or less warlike, just, temperate and docile:[174] here given to wine, elsewhere to theft or lechery; here inclined to superstition, elsewhere to unbelief; here to liberty, here to servitude; capable of one science or one art; dull or clever; obedient or rebellious; good or bad, according to the inclination of the place where they are set; and they take on a new constitution if they are moved, like trees. That was why Cyrus would not allow the Persians to leave their harsh and hilly country for another that was gentle and flat. Rich, soft lands, he said, make soft men, and fertile lands make infertile minds. We see one art or one belief flourish now, another later, through some influence of the heavens. We see one age produce one kind of nature and bend the human race this way or that,

174 Vegetius was a Roman writer on military matters (late 4th century AD); the second quotation is from Cicero, On Fate.

and men's minds grow now lush, now lean, like our fields. If so, what becomes of all those fine prerogatives we keep flattering ourselves with? One wise man can be mistaken, and so can a hundred men and many nations. Indeed, by our own account, human nature itself has been mistaken for many centuries about this or that. So what assurance have we that at some point it stops being mistaken, and that it is not in error in this century?

2.12.219 Among the other proofs of our feebleness, it seems to me that this one deserves not to be forgotten: that even in desire man cannot find what he needs; that not in enjoyment, but in imagination and in wishing, we cannot agree on what we need to content us. Let our thought cut and sew as it pleases: it will not even be able to desire what is right for it, and satisfy itself. *For what do we fear*

Or desire with reason? What do you plan so auspiciously that you

Do not regret the attempt and the wish fulfilled? That is why Socrates asked the gods only to give him what they knew to be good for him.[175]

And the prayer of the Spartans, public and private, simply asked that good and beautiful things be granted them, leaving the selection and choice of them to the discretion of the supreme power. *We ask for a wife and for children by her; but he alone knows / What the children will be, and what kind of wife.* And the Christian prays God that his will be done, so as not to fall into the trouble that the poets invent about King Midas. He asked the gods that everything he touched should turn to gold. His prayer was granted: his wine was gold, his bread gold, and the feathers of his bed, and gold his shirt and his clothes. He found himself crushed under the fulfillment of his desire, presented with an unbearable convenience, and he had to

175 Juvenal, Satires X; the Latin quotations in the next chunks up to "Man is dearer to them" come from the same satire.

unpray his prayers: *Stunned by the strangeness of the evil, both rich and wretched, / He longs to escape his wealth, and hates what he had just prayed for.* Let me speak of myself. When I was young I asked Fortune for the Order of Saint Michael as much as for anything else, for it was then the highest mark of honor of the French nobility, and very rare. She granted it to me, in an amusing way.[176] Instead of raising me and lifting me from my place to reach it, she treated me far more graciously: she lowered it and brought it down to my shoulders, and below. Cleobis and Biton asked their goddess, and Trophonius and Agamedes their god, for a reward worthy of their piety, and they received death as their gift: so different are the opinions of heaven about what we need from our own.[177] God could grant us riches, honors, life and even health, sometimes to our harm, for not everything that pleases us is always good for us. If instead of healing he sends us death, or a worsening of our ills—*Your rod and your staff, they have comforted me*—he does it for reasons of his providence, which sees far more surely than we can what is due to us. We must take it in good part, as coming from a most wise and most loving hand.[178]

> *If you want advice,*
> *You will leave it to the gods themselves to weigh what*
> *Suits us and what is useful for our affairs:*
> *Man is dearer to them than he is to himself.* For to ask them for honors and offices is to ask them to throw you into a battle, or a game of dice, or some such thing whose outcome is unknown to you and whose fruit is doubtful.

176 Ovid, Metamorphoses XI.

177 Cleobis and Biton, sons of a priestess of Hera, and Trophonius and Agamedes, builders of Apollo's temple at Delphi, each died peacefully after asking for the best gift the gods could give.

178 Psalm 23 (22 in the Latin Bible).

2.12.220 There is no combat among philosophers so violent and so bitter as the one that arises over the question of man's sovereign good, from which, by Varro's reckoning, two hundred and eighty sects were born. *But whoever disagrees about the supreme good disagrees about the whole system of philosophy. Three guests seem to me almost at odds,*

Calling for very different things with their different palates:
What should I give? What not give? You refuse what the other orders;
What you ask for is surely odious and sour to the other two. This is how Nature ought to answer their disputes and their debates.[179]

Some say our good lies in virtue; others, in pleasure; others, in consenting to Nature; one says in knowledge, one in having no pain, one in not letting oneself be carried away by appearances. And this notion seems to resemble that other one of ancient Pythagoras: *To marvel at nothing is almost the one and only thing, Numicius, / That can make a man happy and keep him so,* which is the goal of the Pyrrhonist sect. Aristotle ascribes marveling at nothing to magnanimity. And Arcesilaus said that suspensions of judgment, and its upright and unbending state, were goods, while assents and adherences were vices and evils. True, by establishing this as a certain axiom he departed from Pyrrhonism.[180] When the Pyrrhonists say that the sovereign good is Ataraxia, which is the immobility of judgment, they do not mean to say it in an affirmative way. The same motion of their soul that makes them flee precipices and take shelter from the evening damp presents this notion to them and makes them reject another.

2.12.221 How I wish that, while I am alive, someone—or Justus Lipsius, the most learned man we have left, with a most polished and judicious mind, a true brother to my Turnebus—had the will, the health and enough leisure to gather into a register,

179 Varro (116–27 BC) was the most learned Roman scholar of his day. The quotations are from Cicero, On Ends, and Horace, Epistles II.2.
180 Horace, Epistles I.6.

according to their divisions and classes, sincerely and carefully, as far as we can see into it, the opinions of ancient philosophy on the subject of our being and our conduct! It would set out their controversies, the standing and following of each party, and how the lives of the authors and their followers matched their precepts in memorable and exemplary circumstances. What a fine and useful work that would be![181]

LAWS AND NATURAL LAW

Laws change from country to country; no natural law is accepted everywhere.

2.12.222 For the rest, if it is from ourselves that we draw the rule of our conduct, into what confusion do we cast ourselves? For the most probable advice our reason gives us on this is, in general, that each man should obey the laws of his country, as was the opinion of Socrates, inspired, he says, by divine counsel. And what does reason mean by that, except that our duty has no rule but a fortuitous one? Truth must have a face that is the same everywhere and universal. If man knew any rectitude and justice that had body and true essence, he would not tie it to the condition of the customs of this region or that; virtue would not take its shape from the notions of the Persians or the Indians. Nothing is subject to more continual agitation than laws. Since I was born I have seen the laws of the English, our neighbors, change three and four times. This happened not only in political matters, which is the area people like to excuse from constancy, but in the most important matter there can be, namely religion. It makes me ashamed and vexed, all the more because the people of my region once had so close an acquaintance with that nation that some traces of our old kinship still remain in my house.[182] And here at home I have seen something that was a

181 Justus Lipsius (1547–1606), Flemish humanist who corresponded with Montaigne.

182 Guyenne, Montaigne's region, was ruled by the English crown from 1152 until 1453.

capital crime for us become lawful; and we who hold to other things are liable, depending on the uncertain fortunes of war, to be one day guilty of high treason against human and divine majesty, our justice falling to the mercy of injustice and, after a few years of possession, taking on a contrary essence. How could that ancient god more clearly expose human knowledge's ignorance of the divine being, and teach men that their religion was only a piece of their own invention, fit to bind their society together, than by declaring, as he did, to those who sought instruction about it from his tripod, that the true worship for each man was the one he found observed by the practice of the place where he was?[183] O God, what an obligation we owe to the kindness of our sovereign Creator for having cured our belief of those wandering and arbitrary devotions and set it on the eternal foundation of his holy word! What then will philosophy tell us in this necessity? That we should follow the laws of our country? That is, that drifting sea of the opinions of a people or a prince, which will paint justice for me in as many colors, and reshape it into as many faces, as there are changes of passion in them? I cannot have so flexible a judgment. What kind of goodness is it that I saw esteemed yesterday and will see discredited tomorrow, and that crossing a river turns into a crime? What kind of truth is it that these mountains bound, and that becomes a lie in the world beyond them?

2.12.223 But they are amusing when, to give some certainty to the laws, they say that there are some laws that are firm, perpetual and immutable, which they call natural, imprinted on the human race by the condition of its very essence. Of these, one man makes the number three, another four, one more, one less—a sign that this mark is as doubtful as the rest. Now they are so unlucky (for what can I call it but bad luck, that out of so infinite a number of laws there should not be found even one that the fortune and rashness of chance has allowed to be universally accepted by the consent of all nations?) they are, I say,

183 Apollo, whose oracle at Delphi spoke through a priestess seated on a tripod; Xenophon reports this answer.

so wretched that of these three or four chosen laws there is not a single one that is not contradicted and disavowed, not by one nation but by several. Now the only plausible sign by which they could argue for any natural laws is universal approval. For what Nature had truly ordained for us we would undoubtedly follow by common consent; and not only every nation but every individual would feel the force and violence done to him by anyone who tried to push him against that law. Let them show me one of that kind, just so I can see it. Protagoras and Ariston gave the justice of laws no other essence than the authority and opinion of the legislator. Set that aside, they said, and the good and the honorable lost their qualities and remained empty names for indifferent things. Thrasymachus, in Plato, holds that there is no other right than the advantage of the stronger. There is nothing in which the world is so diverse as in customs and laws. A thing that is abominable here wins commendation elsewhere, as skill in stealing did in Sparta.

> Marriages between close relatives are forbidden among us on pain of death; elsewhere they are held in honor. *There are said to be peoples*
> *Among whom mother is joined to son, and daughter to father,*
> *And their devotion grows with doubled love.* The murder of children, the murder of fathers, the sharing of wives, the trade in stolen goods, license for every kind of pleasure: in short, there is nothing so extreme that it is not found accepted by the practice of some nation.[184]

2.12.224 It is credible that there are natural laws, as can be seen in other creatures; but in us they are lost, because that fine human reason meddles everywhere to master and command, muddling and confusing the face of things according to its vanity and inconstancy. *So nothing is ours any longer; what I call ours is the product of art.* Subjects have different lights and different aspects, and it is chiefly from this that diversity of opinions

184 Ovid, Metamorphoses X.

arises. One nation looks at a subject from one side and stops there; another from another side.

2.12.225 There is nothing so horrible to imagine as eating one's father. Yet the peoples who had this custom in ancient times took it as a mark of piety and good affection. By it they sought to give their forebears the worthiest and most honorable burial, lodging the bodies and remains of their fathers in themselves, as if in their very marrow. In some way they brought them back to life and regenerated them by transforming them into their own living flesh through digestion and nourishment. It is easy to see what a cruelty and abomination it would have been for men steeped and imbued in this superstition to throw their parents' remains to rot in the earth and feed the beasts and the worms.

2.12.226 Lycurgus considered, in theft, the quickness, diligence, boldness and skill it takes to snatch something from one's neighbor. He also weighed the benefit to the public, since everyone then looks more carefully to the keeping of what is his. He judged that this double training, in attack and in defense, brought benefits to military discipline (which was the principal science and virtue in which he wanted to train that nation) of greater consequence than the disorder and injustice of seizing another's property.

2.12.227 Dionysius the tyrant offered Plato a robe in the Persian fashion, long, damasked and perfumed. Plato refused it, saying that, having been born a man, he would not willingly wear a woman's robe; but Aristippus accepted it, replying that no attire could corrupt a chaste heart. His friends reproached him for his spinelessness in taking so lightly the fact that Dionysius had spat in his face. "Fishermen," he said, "put up with being drenched by the sea waves from head to foot to catch a gudgeon." Diogenes was washing his cabbages and, seeing him pass by, said: "If you knew how to live on cabbages, you would not pay court to a tyrant."

To which Aristippus replied: "If you knew how to live among men, you would not be washing cabbages." That is how reason lends plausibility to different courses. It is a pot with two handles, which can be grabbed by the left or by the right. *It is war you bring us, O land that receives us:*

Horses are armed for war; war is what these herds threaten.
But still, these same beasts were once used to drawing the chariot,
And to bearing the bridle in harmony under the yoke:
There is hope of peace.[185]

2.12.228 Solon was urged not to shed powerless and useless tears for the death of his son. "That is exactly why I am right to shed them," he said, "because they are useless and powerless." Socrates' wife was aggravating her grief with this circumstance: "Oh, how unjustly these wicked judges are putting him to death!" "Would you rather it were justly, then?" he replied. We wear pierced ears; the Greeks considered that a mark of slavery. We hide to enjoy our wives; the Indians do it in public. The Scythians sacrificed foreigners in their temples; elsewhere temples serve as sanctuaries. *Hence the fury of the crowd: each place hates*

The gods of its neighbors, believing that the only gods to be held
As gods are those it worships itself.[186]

2.12.229 I have heard of a judge who, wherever he came across a sharp conflict between Bartolus and Baldus, or some matter tossed about by many contradictions, would write in the margin of his book: "Question for a friend." That is to say, the truth was so tangled and disputed that in a similar case he could favor whichever party he pleased. It was only for lack of wit and ability that he did not write "Question for a friend" everywhere. The lawyers and judges of our time find in every case enough angles

185 Virgil, Aeneid III.
186 Juvenal, Satires XV.

to bend it wherever they please. In a science so infinite, depending on the authority of so many opinions, and in so arbitrary a subject, an extreme confusion of judgments cannot fail to arise.[187] So there is hardly a lawsuit so clear that opinions do not differ on it: what one court has judged, another judges the opposite way, and the same court judges the opposite way another time. We see ordinary examples of this in that license—which marvelously stains the ceremonious authority and luster of our justice—of not resting content with rulings, and of running from one set of judges to another to decide the same case.

2.12.230 As for the freedom of philosophical opinions on vice and virtue, I need not enlarge on it; there are many views on it that are better kept quiet than published to weak minds. Arcesilaus said that in lechery it was of no importance from which side, or by which way, one was taken. *And as for obscene pleasures, if nature requires them, Epicurus thinks they should be measured not by birth, place or rank, but by beauty, age and figure. Nor do they think holy loves are foreign to the wise man. Let us inquire up to what age young men may be loved.* These last two Stoic passages, and on this subject the reproach of Dicaearchus to Plato himself, show how much excessive license, far removed from common practice, even the soundest philosophy allows.[188]

2.12.231 Laws take their authority from possession and usage; it is dangerous to trace them back to their birth. They swell and grow nobler as they roll along, like our rivers: follow them upstream to their source, and it is only a little trickle of water, barely recognizable, that grows proud in this way and gathers strength as it ages. Look at the ancient considerations that gave the first push to this famous torrent, full of dignity, awe and reverence: you will find them so light and so flimsy that it is no wonder these people here, who weigh everything and bring it back to reason, and accept nothing on authority and on trust,

187 Bartolus of Sassoferrato and his pupil Baldus de Ubaldis, 14th-century Italian jurists whose commentaries on Roman law were standard authorities.

188 The Latin passages are from Cicero and Seneca. Dicaearchus was a pupil of Aristotle.

often hold judgments very far from public ones. People who take as their model the original image of Nature—it is no wonder if in most of their opinions they swerve from the common path. For example, few of them would have approved of the constrained conditions of our marriages, and most of them wanted women to be held in common and without obligation. They rejected our ceremonies. Chrysippus said that a philosopher will turn a dozen somersaults in public, even without breeches, for a dozen olives. He would hardly have advised Cleisthenes to refuse his beautiful daughter Agariste to Hippocleides for having seen him stand on his head on a table.[189] Metrocles, while disputing in front of his school, rather indiscreetly let out a fart, and kept himself hidden at home for shame until Crates came to visit him. Crates added to his consolations and arguments the example of his own freedom, starting to fart in competition with him. In this way he rid Metrocles of his scruple, and moreover drew him over to his own Stoic sect, which was freer, from the Peripatetic sect, more polite, which he had followed until then. What we call decency—not daring to do openly what it is decent for us to do in private—they called foolishness. And to play the sly one by concealing and disowning what nature, custom and our desire publish and proclaim of our actions, they considered a vice.[190] And it seemed to them that it was spoiling the mysteries of Venus to take them out of the secluded sanctuary of her temple and expose them to the people's view, and that to bring her games out from behind the curtain was to ruin them. Shame is a weighty thing; concealment, reserve and limits are part of what gives a thing its value. It also seemed to them that pleasure, very cleverly, under the mask of virtue, pleaded not to be prostituted in the middle of the crossroads and trampled by the feet and eyes of the common people, since it missed the dignity and comfort of its usual private rooms.

189 Herodotus tells how Hippocleides, the favored suitor, lost Agariste by dancing on his head on a table at the wedding feast.

> Hence some say that abolishing public brothels not only spreads everywhere the lechery that was confined to those places, but also goads idle, wandering men into this vice by the very difficulty. *You are Aufidia's lover, Corvinus, you who were her husband;*
> *The man who was your rival is now her husband.*
> *Why does another man's wife please you, when as your own she did not?*
> *Is it that you cannot get an erection when you feel safe?* This experience varies in a thousand examples. There was no one in the whole city willing to touch
> Your wife, Caecilianus, even for free,
> As long as it was allowed; but now that you have set guards, a huge
> Crowd of men is eager to bed her.[191]

You are a clever man. A philosopher who was caught in the act was asked what he was doing. He answered quite coolly, "I am planting a man," blushing no more at being found at it than if he had been caught planting garlic.

2.12.232 It is, I believe, out of a tender and respectful opinion that a great and religious author holds this act to be so necessarily bound to concealment and shame that he cannot persuade himself that, in the license of the Cynics' embraces, the business ever came to its end. He believes instead that it stopped at merely representing lascivious movements, to keep up the impudence their school professed, and that to release what shame had constrained and held back, they still needed afterwards to seek the shade. He had not looked far enough into their debauchery. For Diogenes, masturbating in public, expressed the wish, in front of the people standing around, that he could satisfy his belly in the same way by rubbing it.[192] To those who asked him why he did not look for a more convenient place to eat than the middle of the street, he replied: "Because I am

190 The story is told by Diogenes Laertius; Crates was in fact a Cynic.
191 Martial, Epigrams III.70 and I.73.
192 Saint Augustine, City of God XIV.20.

hungry in the middle of the street." The women philosophers who mingled with their sect also mingled with their persons, anywhere, without discretion; and Hipparchia was admitted into Crates' company only on condition that she follow the usages and customs of his rule in all things. These philosophers set extreme value on virtue and rejected all disciplines other than ethics. Yet in all actions they gave sovereign authority to the choice of their wise man, even above the laws, and put no other bridle on pleasures than moderation and respect for the freedom of others.[193]

INTERPRETING TEXTS

Any meaning can be drawn from a text, as Homer and Plato show.

2.12.233 Heraclitus and Protagoras observed that wine seems bitter to the sick man and pleasant to the healthy one, that an oar looks bent in the water and straight to those who see it out of the water, and that similar contrary appearances are found in objects. From this they argued that all objects contained in themselves the causes of these appearances: that there was some bitterness in the wine that answered to the sick man's taste, and in the oar a certain bent quality that answered to the person looking at it in the water. And so with all the rest. Which is to say that everything is in all things, and consequently nothing is in any; for nothing is where everything is.

2.12.234 This opinion reminds me of what experience shows us: there is no sense or aspect, straight or bitter or sweet or bent, that the human mind does not find in the writings it sets out to dig into. In the clearest, purest and most perfect word there can be, how much falsehood and lying have people made to spring up? What heresy has not found in it foundations and testimonies enough to launch itself and keep itself going? That is why the authors of such errors never want to give up this proof by the testimony of the interpretation of words. A person of rank,

193 Hipparchia of Maroneia (4th century BC), Cynic philosopher and wife of Crates.

wanting to justify to me by authority this quest for the philosopher's stone in which he is completely immersed, recently cited five or six passages of the Bible on which, he said, he had first based himself to clear his conscience (for he is a churchman by profession). And to tell the truth, the idea was not only amusing but also very aptly suited to the defense of that fine science.

2.12.235 This is how prophetic fables win credit. Take any prognosticator with enough authority that people deign to leaf through him and search carefully through all the folds and glints of his words: he can be made to say anything one likes, as with the Sibyls. There are so many ways of interpreting that it is hard for an ingenious mind not to find, on any subject, obliquely or straight on, some air that serves its purpose. That is why a cloudy and ambiguous style has been in such frequent and ancient use. Let the author only manage to attract posterity and keep it busy with him—something that not only ability but as much, or more, the fortuitous favor of the subject matter can achieve. For the rest, whether he presents himself somewhat obscurely and ambiguously out of stupidity or out of cunning, let him not care. Many minds sifting and shaking him will squeeze out a quantity of forms, in line with his own, or beside it, or contrary to it, and all of them will do him honor. He will find himself enriched by his disciples' means, like the schoolmasters at the Lendit fair. This is what has given value to many worthless things, what has brought many writings into credit and loaded them with every kind of matter one wanted: one and the same thing receiving thousands upon thousands of different images and interpretations, as many as we please.[194]

2.12.236 Is it possible that Homer meant to say everything he is made to say, and that he lent himself to so many and such different shapes? Theologians, legislators, captains, philosophers, every sort of people who deal with the sciences, however differently and contrarily they treat them, lean on him and appeal to

194 The Lendit fair at Saint-Denis, near Paris, was the occasion on which students brought their masters their yearly fees.

him: General Master of all offices, works and craftsmen; General Counselor in all undertakings. Whoever has needed oracles and predictions has found in him what suited his case. A learned man, a friend of mine—it is a wonder what coincidences, and how admirable, he brings out of Homer in favor of our religion. He cannot easily be shaken from the opinion that this was Homer's design (and yet he knows this author as well as any man of our century). And what he finds in favor of our religion, many in ancient times had found in favor of theirs.

2.12.237 See how Plato is tossed and turned about: everyone, honoring himself by applying Plato to himself, lays him on whatever side he wants. He is paraded about and inserted into all the new opinions the world takes up, and made to differ from himself according to the different course of things. His meaning is made to disavow morals that were lawful in his century, because they are unlawful in ours. All this is done vividly and powerfully, as powerfully and vividly as the interpreter's mind allows. From the same foundation as Heraclitus, and from that maxim of his that all things had in them the aspects people found in them, Democritus drew an entirely contrary conclusion: that objects had absolutely nothing of what we found in them. Because honey was sweet to one person and bitter to another, he argued that it was neither sweet nor bitter. The Pyrrhonists would say that they do not know whether it is sweet or bitter, or neither, or both; for they always reach the highest point of doubt. The Cyrenaics held that nothing was perceptible from outside, and that only what touched us by internal contact was perceptible, such as pain and pleasure. They recognized neither sound nor color, but only certain affections that came to us from them, and they held that man had no other seat for his judgment. Protagoras thought that whatever seems true to each man is true for him. The Epicureans place all judgment in the senses, both in the knowledge of things and in pleasure. Plato wanted the judgment of truth, and truth itself, withdrawn from opinions and from the senses, to belong to the mind and to thought.

THE SENSES

All knowledge comes through the senses, which may be too few and are easily deceived.

2.12.238 This discussion has brought me to consider the senses, in which lies the greatest foundation and proof of our ignorance. Whatever is known is undoubtedly known through the faculty of the knower. For since judgment comes from the operation of the one who judges, it stands to reason that he carries out this operation by his own means and will, not under constraint from something else—as would happen if we knew things by the force and according to the law of their essence. Now all knowledge makes its way into us through the senses; they are our masters: *The paved road by which belief / Most directly enters the human heart and the temples of the mind.* Knowledge begins with them and is resolved into them.[195] After all, we would know no more than a stone if we did not know that there are sound, smell, light, taste, measure, weight, softness, hardness, roughness, color, smoothness, breadth and depth. There you have the ground plan and the principles of the whole edifice of our knowledge. And according to some, knowledge is nothing but sensation. Whoever can push me into contradicting the senses has me by the throat; he could not drive me back any farther. The senses are the beginning and the end of human knowledge. You will find that the notion of truth was first created / By the senses, and that the senses cannot be refuted. / What, then, should be held more worthy of belief / Than the senses? However little we may grant them, we must always grant them this: all our learning makes its way through their channel and mediation. Cicero says that Chrysippus, having tried to reduce the force and power of the senses, put to himself arguments to the contrary and objections so vehement that he could not answer them. Whereupon Carneades, who maintained the opposite side, boasted of using Chrysippus' very weapons and words to fight him, and so cried

195 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things V.

out against him: "Wretch, your own strength has undone you." There is no absurdity, in our view, more extreme than to maintain that fire does not heat, that light does not illuminate, that there is no weight or solidity in iron—notions the senses bring us; nor is there any belief or knowledge in man that can compare with these in certainty.

2.12.239 My first consideration on the subject of the senses is that I doubt whether man is provided with all the natural senses. I see many animals that live a complete and perfect life, some without sight, others without hearing. Who knows whether we too may not still lack one, two, three or many other senses? For if we lack one, our reason cannot discover the lack. It is the privilege of the senses to be the outermost limit of our perception. There is nothing beyond them that can help us discover them; indeed, not even one sense can discover another.

> *Can the ears correct the eyes, or touch*
> *Correct the ears? Or will the taste of the mouth refute this touch,*
> *Or will the nose confute it, or the eyes overturn it?* Every one of them marks the outermost line of our faculty. *Each has its own separate power,*
> *Each its own force.* It is impossible to make a man born blind conceive that he does not see; impossible to make him desire sight and regret its absence. Therefore we should take no assurance from the fact that our soul is content and satisfied with the senses we have, since it has no means of feeling its sickness and imperfection in this respect, if there is any.

It is impossible to tell this blind man anything, by reasoning, argument or comparison, that will lodge in his imagination any apprehension of light, color or sight. There is nothing further back that can bring the sense into evidence. As for those born blind whom we see wishing they could see, it is not because they understand what they are asking for. They have learned from us that they lack something, that there is something in us for them to desire. They name it well enough, along with its

effects and consequences; but they still do not know what it is, and do not grasp it, either closely or from afar.

2.12.240 I have seen a gentleman of good family who was born blind, or at least blind from such an early age that he does not know what sight is. He understands so little what he lacks that he uses words that belong to seeing just as we do, and applies them in a way entirely his own. When they presented him with a child to whom he was godfather, he took it in his arms and said: "My God, what a beautiful child! How lovely it is to see! What a cheerful face he has!" He will say, like any one of us: "This room has a fine view"; "It is bright"; "The sun is shining beautifully." There is more. Because hunting, tennis and target shooting are our pastimes, and he has heard about them, he grows fond of them and takes part in them, and believes he has the same share in them that we have. He gets keen and takes pleasure in them, and yet he receives them only through his ears. Someone shouts to him that there is a hare, when they are on some fine open ground where he can spur his horse on; and then they tell him that the hare has been caught, and there he is, as proud of his catch as he hears others say they are. He takes the ball in his left hand and strikes it with his racket; he fires the arquebus at random, and is satisfied when his people tell him he has shot high or wide.

2.12.241 How do we know that the human race is not committing a similar folly for lack of some sense, and that through this defect most of the face of things is not hidden from us? How do we know whether the difficulties we find in many works of Nature come from this? Or whether many feats of animals that exceed our capacity are produced by the faculty of some sense we lack? Or whether some of them have, by this means, a fuller and more complete life than ours? We grasp the apple with almost all our senses: we find in it redness, smoothness, smell and sweetness. Beyond that, it may have other properties, such as drying or binding, to which no sense we have can correspond. As for the properties we call occult in many things, such as the magnet's power to attract iron, is it not likely that there

are sensory faculties in Nature suited to judge and perceive them, and that our lack of such faculties leaves us ignorant of the true essence of such things? Perhaps it is some particular sense that reveals to roosters the hour of morning and of midnight and moves them to crow. Perhaps such a sense teaches hens, before any practice or experience, to fear a sparrowhawk and not a goose or a peacock, which are larger creatures. It may warn chicks of the hostility the cat bears them, and teach them not to distrust the dog—to arm themselves against the mewing, a rather flattering voice, and not against the barking, a harsh and quarrelsome one. It may teach hornets, ants and rats always to choose the best cheese and the best pear before having tasted them, and lead the stag, the elephant and the snake to know a certain herb fit to heal them.

2.12.242 There is no sense that does not hold great sway, and that does not bring us, by its means, an infinite number of pieces of knowledge. If we lacked the understanding of sounds, of harmony and of the voice, it would bring unimaginable confusion into all the rest of our knowledge. For besides what is bound up with the proper effect of each sense, how many arguments, inferences and conclusions do we draw about other things by comparing one sense with another? Let an intelligent man imagine human nature produced originally without sight. Let him work out how much ignorance and confusion such a lack would bring it, how much darkness and blindness in our soul. From that we shall see how much it matters to our knowledge of the truth to be deprived of another such sense, or of two, or of three, if we are. We have formed a truth by the consultation and concurrence of our five senses. But perhaps it would take the agreement and contribution of eight or ten senses to perceive it with certainty and in its essence.

2.12.243 The sects that attack human knowledge attack it chiefly through the uncertainty and weakness of our senses. For all knowledge comes into us by their agency and means. So if they fail in the report they give us, if they corrupt or alter what they carry in to us from outside, if the light that flows through them

into our soul is darkened on the way, we have nothing left to hold on to.

From this extreme difficulty have arisen all these notions: that each object has in itself everything we find in it; that it has nothing of what we think we find in it; and the notion of the Epicureans, that the sun is no bigger than our sight judges it to be: *Whatever it is, it moves with no greater shape*

Than it seems to have to our eyes that see it: that the appearances that show a body as large to someone near it, and as smaller to someone far from it, are both true: *Yet we do not grant that the eyes are deceived one whit;*

So do not pin this fault of the mind on the eyes: and, resolutely, that there is no deception at all in the senses; that we must put ourselves at their mercy, and look elsewhere for reasons to excuse the difference and contradiction we find in them.

2.12.244 Indeed, they would invent any other lie or fantasy whatever (they go that far) rather than accuse the senses. Timagoras swore that, however he pressed or twisted his eye, he had never seen the candle's light double, and that this appearance came from a fault of opinion, not of the instrument. Of all absurdities, the most absurd for the Epicureans is to deny the force and effect of the senses. Therefore whatever is seen by them at any time is true.[196]

/ And if reason cannot unravel the cause
Why things that were square close at hand
Seem round from afar, still it is better, for want of reason,
To give faulty causes for each of the two shapes
Than to let slip from our hands things plain to see,
And violate our first trust, and tear up all
The foundations on which life and safety rest.

196 Timagoras: an Epicurean philosopher mentioned by Cicero in the Academica.

/ For not only would all reason collapse; life itself
Would fall at once, unless you dared to trust the senses
And shun steep places and the other things
Of this kind that must be avoided. This desperate and so unphilosophical advice amounts to nothing but this: that human knowledge can only maintain itself by unreasonable, mad and frenzied reason. But even so, it is better for man, in order to make himself count for something, to use that reason, and any other remedy however fantastic, than to admit his necessary stupidity —a truth so much to his disadvantage. He cannot escape the fact that the senses are the sovereign masters of his knowledge; but they are uncertain and open to falsification in every circumstance.

That is the point where we must strike with all our might, and, if legitimate strength fails us, as it does, bring in stubbornness, rashness and impudence. Suppose what the Epicureans say is true, namely that we have no knowledge if the appearances of the senses are false; and suppose what the Stoics say is also true, that the appearances of the senses are so false that they cannot produce any knowledge for us. Then we shall conclude, at the expense of these two great dogmatist sects, that there is no knowledge.

2.12.245 As for the error and uncertainty in the working of the senses, anyone can furnish himself with as many examples as he likes, so common are the faults and deceptions they practice on us. When a valley echoes, the sound of a trumpet seems to come from in front of us when it comes from a league behind. And mountains rising far off from the middle of the sea
Appear as one, though they are far apart.
And the hills and plains seem to flee toward the stern
As we drive our ship past them.

/ When our spirited horse has stuck fast in midstream,
A force seems to carry the horse's body sideways
And to thrust it swiftly upstream. If you handle an arquebus ball under your forefinger, with the middle finger crossed over it, you have to strain yourself extremely to admit that there is only one, so strongly does the sense show us two. For that the senses are often masters of our reasoning, and force it to receive impressions it knows and judges to be false, is seen at every turn.

I leave aside the sense of touch, whose functions are closer, more lively and substantial. By the effect of the pain it brings the body it so often overturns all those fine Stoic resolutions. It forces a man to cry out over his belly—a man who has established in his soul, with all resolution, the dogma that colic, like every other illness and pain, is a matter of indifference, having no power to diminish in any way the sovereign happiness and felicity in which the wise man is lodged by his virtue. There is no heart so soft that the sound of our drums and trumpets does not fire it, nor so hard that the sweetness of music does not rouse and tickle it. There is no soul so crabbed that it does not feel touched by some reverence as it considers the dark vastness of our churches, the variety of ornaments and the order of our ceremonies, and hears the devout sound of our organs and the so composed and religious harmony of our voices. Even those who enter with contempt feel a certain shiver in the heart, and a certain awe, which makes them distrust their own opinion. As for me, I do not reckon myself strong enough to hear verses of Horace and Catullus sung in an accomplished voice by a lovely young mouth and keep a level head. And Zeno was right to say that the voice was the flower of beauty. Someone once tried to make me believe that a man whom all of us French know had taken me in by reciting to me verses he had written; that they were not the same on paper as in the air; and that my eyes would judge them otherwise than my ears had. So much credit has delivery in giving value and shape to the works that pass into its hands. On which point Philoxenus was not being unreas-

onable when, hearing someone give a bad tone to one of his compositions, he began trampling and breaking some bricks that belonged to the man, saying: "I am breaking what is yours, as you are spoiling what is mine." Why did even those who put themselves to death with firm resolution turn their faces away so as not to see the blow they were having dealt them? And why can those who for their health desire and order that they be cut and cauterized not bear the sight of the surgeon's preparations, instruments and operation, given that sight is to have no share in that pain?[197] Are these not apt examples to prove the authority the senses have over reasoning? It is no use our knowing that these tresses were borrowed from a page or a lackey, that this rosiness came from Spain, and this whiteness and smoothness from the Ocean sea: our sight still forces us to find their owner more lovable and more pleasing, against all reason. For in all this there is nothing of her own. We are carried away by finery; gems and gold cover / Faults; the girl herself is the smallest part of herself.

> / Often you must search, amid so much, for where the thing you love is:
> With this aegis rich Love deceives the eyes. *How much the poets grant to the power of the senses when they make Narcissus distraught with love for his reflection:* He admires everything for which he himself is admired;
> Unwittingly he desires himself; he who approves is himself approved;
> While he seeks, he is sought; he kindles and burns at once: *and Pygmalion's understanding so disturbed by the impression the sight of his ivory statue makes on him that he loves it and serves it as if it were alive:* He gives it kisses and thinks they are returned; he pursues it and holds it,
> And believes his fingers sink into the limbs he touches,
> And fears a bruise may appear on the limbs he presses.

2.12.246 Put a philosopher in a cage made of thin, widely spaced iron bars, and hang it from the top of the towers of Notre-Dame

in Paris. He will see by evident reason that it is impossible for him to fall out of it; and yet, unless he is used to the roofer's trade, he could not keep the sight of that extreme height from terrifying and paralyzing him. For we have quite enough trouble feeling safe in the galleries of our bell towers if they are of openwork, even though they are made of stone. There are some who cannot even bear the thought of it. Lay a beam between those two towers, as wide as we need to walk on it: there is no philosophical wisdom so firm that it could give us the courage to walk along it as we would if it were on the ground. I have often tried this in our mountains hereabouts. And yet, though I am one of those who are only moderately frightened by such things, I could not bear the sight of that infinite depth without horror and trembling in my hams and thighs—even though I was a good full body's length from the very edge, and could not have fallen unless I had deliberately put myself in danger. I also noticed there that, however great the height, provided some tree or jutting rock appeared on the slope to support the eye a little and break up the view, this relieves us and gives us confidence, as if it were something that could help us when we fell. But sheer, smooth precipices we cannot even look at without our heads spinning: *so that one cannot look down without dizziness of eyes and mind alike*: which is an evident imposture of sight. That was why that fine philosopher put out his eyes: to free his soul of the debauchery it received from them, and to be able to philosophize more freely.[198] But by that reckoning he should also have had his ears stopped, which Theophrastus says are the most dangerous instrument we have for receiving violent impressions that disturb and change us; and in the end he should have deprived himself of all the other senses too—that is to say, of his being and his life. For they all have this power of commanding our reasoning and our soul. *It also often happens that minds are stirred more powerfully by some sight, often by the gravity of voices and by*

197 Philoxenus: Greek dithyrambic poet (c. 435–380 BC).
198 The Latin is from Livy. The philosopher is Democritus, who according to legend blinded himself to think more freely.

songs; often too by care and fear. Physicians hold that there are certain constitutions which are agitated to the point of frenzy by certain sounds and instruments.[199] I have seen people who could not hear a bone being gnawed under their table without losing patience. And there is hardly a man who is not upset by that sharp, piercing noise files make when they scrape iron; just as, on hearing someone chew near us, or hearing someone talk whose throat or nose is blocked, many people are moved to anger and hatred. That flute-player who prompted Gracchus, who softened, stiffened and modulated his master's voice when he was haranguing in Rome—what was he for, if the movement and quality of sound had no power to move and alter the judgment of the listeners?[200] Truly, there is good reason to make such a fuss about the firmness of this fine piece of work, which lets itself be handled and changed by the motion and chance gusts of so light a wind.

WAKING AND DREAMING

Passions alter what we perceive, and our waking may be another kind of sleep.

2.12.247 This same cheating that the senses bring to our understanding, they receive in their turn. Our soul sometimes takes its revenge in the same way: they vie with each other in lying and deceiving. What we see and hear when stirred by anger, we do not hear as it is. *And the sun appears double, and Thebes twofold.* The object we love seems to us more beautiful than it is: *So we see women misshapen and ugly in many ways / Being adored and flourishing in the highest honor:* and the one we dislike seems uglier. To a man in grief and affliction, the light of day seems dimmed and dark. Our senses are not only altered but often utterly dulled by the passions of the soul.[201]

199 Theophrastus (c. 371–287 BC), Aristotle's successor as head of his school. The Latin is from Cicero, On Divination.
200 Gaius Gracchus, Roman tribune (2nd century BC), kept a flute-player behind him to give him the pitch while he spoke, as Plutarch reports.
201 The first Latin line is from Virgil, Aeneid, describing the madness of Pentheus.

How many things do we see that we do not notice, if our mind is busy elsewhere? *Even in things plainly in view you can perceive*
That, if you do not turn your mind to them, it is as if
They had been all the time apart and far removed. It seems that the soul draws the powers of the senses inward and keeps them occupied. Thus both the inside and the outside of man are full of weakness and falsehood.

2.12.248 Those who have likened our life to a dream were right—perhaps more than they thought. When we dream, our soul lives, acts and exercises all its faculties neither more nor less than when it is awake. If it does so more softly and dimly, it is certainly not by so much that the difference is like that between night and bright daylight—rather, like that between night and shade. There it sleeps, here it dozes: more and less; it is always darkness, and Cimmerian darkness. We wake sleeping, and waking sleep. I do not see so clearly in sleep; but as for waking, I never find it pure and cloudless enough.[202] Sleep, in its depths, even puts dreams to sleep at times; but our waking is never so wide awake that it properly purges and dispels the reveries, which are the dreams of the waking, and worse than dreams. Our reason and our soul accept the notions and opinions that arise in them while sleeping, and authorize the actions of our dreams with the same approval they give to those of the day. Why, then, do we not call in doubt whether our thinking and our acting are not another kind of dreaming, and our waking some kind of sleep?

ANIMALS AND THE SENSES

Beasts perceive differently from us, so we cannot know which perception is true.

2.12.249 If the senses are our first judges, it is not ours alone that we must call into council; for in this faculty animals have as much

right as we have, or more. It is certain that some have keener hearing than man, others keener sight, others keener smell, others keener touch or taste. Democritus said that the gods and the beasts had far more perfect sensory faculties than man. Now between the effects of their senses and ours the difference is extreme. Our saliva cleans and dries our wounds; it kills the snake. And so great is the distance and difference in these things / That what is food for some is bitter poison for others. / For often a snake, touched by human saliva, / Perishes and destroys itself by biting itself. What quality shall we assign to saliva —the one it has for us, or the one it has for the snake? By which of the two senses shall we verify the true essence we are looking for? Pliny says that in the Indies there are certain sea hares that are poison to us, and we to them, so that we kill them by a mere touch. Which will truly be poison, the man or the fish? Whom shall we believe, the fish about the man, or the man about the fish? Some quality of the air infects man that does no harm to the ox; some other infects the ox that does no harm to man. Which of the two will be, in truth and in nature, a pestilent quality? Those who have jaundice see everything as yellowish and paler than we do: *Besides, whatever the jaundiced look at / Turns sallow.* Those who have the illness physicians call hyposphragma, which is an effusion of blood under the skin, see everything as red and bloody. These humors that thus change the workings of our sight—how do we know whether they predominate in animals and are normal for them? For we see some that have yellow eyes, like our jaundice patients, and others that have them bloodshot with redness. To these it is likely that the color of objects appears different from what it is to us. Which of the two judgments will be the true one? For it is nowhere laid down that the essence of things relates to man alone. Hardness, whiteness, depth and sourness concern the use and knowledge of animals as they do ours: Nature has given them the use of these as she has given it to us. When we press on the eye, we per-

202 In Homer's Odyssey the Cimmerians live in perpetual mist and darkness at the edge of the world.

ceive the bodies we look at as longer and stretched out. Many beasts have their eyes pressed like that; so this length is perhaps the true form of that body, not the one our eyes give it in their ordinary position. If we squeeze the eye from below, things seem double to us: *The lamps' flowering lights with twin flames, / And men's faces double, and bodies twofold.* If our ears are blocked by something, or the passage of hearing is narrowed, we receive sound differently from usual. Animals that have hairy ears, or have only a tiny hole instead of an ear, consequently do not hear what we hear, and receive sound differently.

> We see at festivals and in theaters that when a pane of glass tinted some color is placed before the light of the torches, everything in the place appears to us green, or yellow, or violet: *And yellow, red and dark purple awnings commonly do this,*
> *When, stretched over great theaters,*
> *Spread across masts and beams, they hang quivering:*
> *For there they stain the seated crowd below in the tiers,*
> *And the whole show of the stage, the senators, the matrons, the gods,*
> *And make them flutter in their own color.* It is likely that the eyes of animals, which we see to be of various colors, produce for them appearances of bodies in the same color as their eyes.

2.12.250 To judge the working of the senses, then, we would first have to agree about it with the beasts, and second among ourselves. This we do not do at all. We fall into dispute every time one person hears, sees or tastes something differently from another, and we argue about the diversity of the images the senses bring us as much as about anything else. By the ordinary rule of nature a child hears, sees and tastes otherwise than a man of thirty, and he otherwise than a man of sixty. In some people the senses are duller and darker, in others more open and keener. We receive things differently, and differently again, according to what we are and how they seem to us. Now since our seeming is so uncertain and disputed, it is no longer a won-

der if we are told that we may admit that snow appears white to us, but that as to establishing whether it is so in its essence and in truth, we could not vouch for it. And with this starting point shaken, all the knowledge in the world is necessarily swept away downstream. What of the fact that our senses themselves get in each other's way? A painting seems raised to the eye; to the touch it seems flat. Shall we say that musk is pleasant or not, when it delights our smell and offends our taste? There are herbs and ointments good for one part of the body that injure another. Honey is pleasant to the taste, unpleasant to the sight. Those rings carved in the form of feathers, which in the language of devices are called "endless feathers": there is no eye that can make out their width, and that could defend itself against the illusion that the ring widens on one side and narrows to a point on the other, even when you turn it around your finger. Yet to the touch it seems to you of even width and the same all around.[203] Those people who in ancient times, to aid their pleasure, used mirrors designed to swell and enlarge the object they reflected, so that the members they had to put to work might please them more through this increase to the eye: to which of the two senses did they award the victory? To sight, which showed them those members as big and large as they could wish, or to touch, which presented them as small and contemptible? Is it our senses that lend the object these various conditions, while the objects nevertheless have only one?[204] It is as we see with the bread we eat: it is only bread, but our use of it makes it into bones, blood, flesh, hair and nails: *As food, when distributed into all the limbs and members, / Perishes and supplies from itself another nature.* The sap that the root of a tree sucks up becomes trunk, leaf and fruit; and air, though it is one, becomes, when applied to a trumpet, varied into a thousand kinds of sounds. Is it, I say, our senses that likewise fashion these objects

203 A lover's emblem punning on pennes (feathers) and peines (pains): "endless pains."

204 Montaigne has in mind Hostius Quadra, whose mirrors Seneca describes in his Natural Questions.

with various qualities, or do the objects really have them? And in this doubt, what can we decide about their true essence? Moreover, the accidents of illness, of delirium or of sleep make things appear to us otherwise than they appear to the healthy, the wise and the waking. Is it not likely, then, that our upright condition and our natural humors also have the means to give things a being that corresponds to their own condition, and to adapt them to themselves, as disordered humors do; and that our health is as capable of lending them its own face as illness is? Why should the temperate man not have some form of objects relative to himself, as the intemperate man has, and why should he not likewise stamp them with his own character? The man with no appetite blames the wine for being flat; the healthy man credits it with flavor; the thirsty man with deliciousness. Now since our condition adapts things to itself and transforms them according to itself, we no longer know what things are in truth; for nothing comes to us except falsified and altered by our senses. Where the compass, the square and the rule are crooked, all the proportions drawn from them, all the buildings put up to their measure, are also necessarily faulty and defective. The uncertainty of our senses makes uncertain everything they produce.

> *Finally, as in a building, if the first rule is warped,*
> *And if the square is false and departs from straight lines,*
> *And if the level is off in any part the least bit,*
> *Everything must be made faulty and askew,*
> *The roofs warped, leaning, tilting forward and back, out of all proportion,*
> *So that some parts seem about to fall, and do fall,*
> *All betrayed by those first false judgments:*
> *So too your reasoning about things must be warped*
> *And false, whatever springs from false senses.* For the rest, who will be fit to judge these differences?

We say in religious disputes that we need a judge attached to neither party, free of preference and affection—which is not possible among Christians. It is the same in this matter. For if he is

old, he cannot judge of the perception of old age, being himself a party to the dispute; if he is young, the same; healthy, the same; and the same if he is sick, sleeping or waking. We would need someone free of all these qualities, so that, without prejudgment, he might judge these propositions as matters indifferent to him. And by that reckoning we would need a judge who did not exist.

NO FIRM GROUND

Neither senses nor reason can settle the dispute; everything flows and changes.

2.12.251 To judge the appearances we receive from objects, we would need a judging instrument; to verify that instrument, we need demonstration; to verify the demonstration, an instrument: there we are, going around in a circle. Since the senses cannot settle our dispute, being full of uncertainty themselves, it must be reason. But no reason can be established without another reason: there we are, going backward to infinity. Our notion is not applied to external things; rather, it is conceived through the medium of the senses. And the senses do not grasp the external object, but only their own affections. So the notion and appearance is not of the object, but only of the affection and impression received by the sense; and that affection and the object are different things. Therefore whoever judges by appearances judges by something other than the object. And as for saying that the affections of the senses convey to the soul the quality of external objects by resemblance: how can the soul and the understanding be sure of that resemblance, having of themselves no dealings with external objects? Just so, someone who does not know Socrates cannot, on seeing his portrait, say that it resembles him. Now suppose someone wanted to judge by appearances nevertheless. If by all of them, it is impossible, for they get in each other's way by their contradictions and discrepancies, as we see by experience. Shall it be that some selected appearances govern the others? This selected one will have to be

verified by another selected one, the second by a third, and so it will never be done. Finally, there is no constant existence, either of our being or of that of objects. And we, and our judgment, and all mortal things, go flowing and rolling ceaselessly. Thus nothing certain can be established from one to the other, both the judging and the judged being in continual change and motion.

BEING AND PASSING

Only God truly is; man can rise above himself only by God's grace.

2.12.252 We have no communication with being, because all human nature is always midway between birth and death, offering of itself only a dim appearance and shadow, and an uncertain and feeble opinion. And if by chance you fix your thought on trying to grasp its being, it will be neither more nor less than if someone tried to grip water: for the more he squeezes and presses what by its nature flows everywhere, the more he will lose what he wanted to hold and grip.[205] Thus, since all things are subject to pass from one change to another, reason, seeking a real substance in them, finds itself disappointed, being unable to apprehend anything subsistent and permanent; because everything is either coming into being and does not yet entirely exist, or is beginning to die before it is born. Plato said that bodies never had existence, but only birth, believing that Homer had made Ocean the father of the gods and Thetis the mother in order to show us that all things are in perpetual flux, change and variation. This, as he says, was an opinion common to all the philosophers before his time—except Parmenides alone, who denied motion to things, and whose force he makes much of.[206] Pythagoras said that all matter is flowing and unstable; the Stoics, that there is no present time, and that what we call present is only the joint and junction of future and past; Herac-

205 From here to the end of the essay's argument Montaigne follows, almost word for word, Amyot's French translation of Plutarch's essay On the E at Delphi.
206 Homer (Iliad, Book XIV) actually names Tethys, the wife of Ocean, as the mother of the gods.

litus, that no man had ever stepped twice into the same river; Epicharmus, that he who borrowed money long ago does not owe it now, and that he who was invited last night to come to dinner this morning comes today uninvited, since they are no longer themselves: they have become others. And he said that a mortal substance could not be found twice in the same state: for by the suddenness and lightness of its change, now it scatters, now it gathers again; it comes, and then it goes; so that what begins to be born never reaches the perfection of being. For this birth is never completed and never stops, as if it had reached its end; rather, from the seed onward it is always changing and shifting from one thing to another. Thus from human seed there is first made, in the mother's womb, a formless fruit; then a formed child; then, once out of the womb, a nursing infant; after that he becomes a boy; then in turn a youth; after that a grown man; then a man of years; and at last a decrepit old man. So that each later age and generation is always undoing and spoiling the one before.

> *For time changes the nature of the whole world,*
> *And one state must succeed another in all things,*
> *Nor does anything remain like itself: all things move on,*
> *Nature alters all things and compels them to turn.* And then we foolishly fear one kind of death, when we have already passed through so many others, and are passing through them still. For not only, as Heraclitus said, is the death of fire the birth of air, and the death of air the birth of water; we can see it even more plainly in ourselves.

The prime of life dies and passes when old age comes on; youth ends in the prime of the grown man; childhood in youth; infancy dies in childhood; yesterday dies in today, and today will die in tomorrow; and there is nothing that remains or is always one. For that this is so: if we remain always the same and one, how is it that we take delight now in one thing and now in another? How is it that we love contrary things, or hate them, praise them or blame them? How do we have different affections, no longer retaining the same feeling in the same thought?

For it is not likely that we take on different passions without changing; and what undergoes change does not remain one and the same; and if it is not one and the same, then it also is not. Rather, together with its being one and the same, its being outright changes too, as it becomes ever other from another. And consequently our natural senses deceive and lie, taking what appears for what is, for want of really knowing what it is that is.

2.12.253 But what, then, truly is? What is eternal: that is to say, what has never had birth and will never have an end, and to which time never brings any change. For time is a mobile thing, which appears as if in shadow, along with matter that is forever flowing and running, never stable or permanent. To time belong these words, before and after, and has been, or will be. These show plainly at first sight that it is not a thing that is; for it would be great folly and manifest falsehood to say that something is which is not yet in being, or which has already ceased to be. And as for these words, present, instant, now, on which it seems we chiefly support and ground our understanding of time: reason, discovering what it is, destroys it on the spot. For it immediately splits it and divides it into future and past, as if wishing to see it necessarily parted in two. The same happens to nature, which is measured, as to time, which measures it: for there is nothing in nature either that remains or that subsists; rather, all things in it are either born, or being born, or dying. For which reason it would be a sin to say of God, who is the only one who is, that he was or he will be: for those terms are declensions, passages or vicissitudes of what cannot endure or remain in being. Therefore we must conclude that God alone is—not according to any measure of time, but according to an eternity immutable and immobile, not measured by time nor subject to any declension; before whom nothing is, nor will be after, nor is anything newer or more recent; but one who really is, who with a single now fills the always; and there is nothing that truly is but he alone—without our being able to say he has been, or he will be—without beginning and without end.

2.12.254 To this so religious conclusion of a pagan I want only to add this saying of a witness of the same condition, to bring to an end this long and tiresome discourse, which could supply me with endless matter. "Oh, what a vile and abject thing man is," he says, "if he does not raise himself above humanity!" That is a good saying and a useful desire, but equally absurd. For to make the handful bigger than the hand, the armful bigger than the arm, and to hope to stride farther than our legs can reach, is impossible and monstrous; nor can man mount above himself and humanity. For he can see only with his own eyes, and seize only with his own grip.[207] He will rise if God, by special favor, lends him a hand. He will rise by abandoning and renouncing his own means, and letting himself be raised and lifted up by purely heavenly ones. It is for our Christian faith, not for his Stoic virtue, to aspire to that divine and miraculous metamorphosis.

207 The saying is Seneca's, from the preface to his Natural Questions.

II.13 Of Judging Another's Death

De iuger de la mort d'autruy
A good death is hard to judge, since few believe their end has come; Montaigne weighs Cato's suicide and other deliberate deaths.

2.13.1 When we judge another man's assurance in death, which is without doubt the most noteworthy action of human life, we must beware of one thing: that people find it hard to believe they have reached that point. Few men die convinced that it is their last hour, and there is no situation in which the deception of hope beguiles us more. It never stops trumpeting in our ears: "Others have been much sicker than this without dying; the case is not as hopeless as people think; and at worst, God has worked other miracles." And this comes about because we make too much of ourselves. It seems that the universe somehow suffers from our annihilation, and that it takes pity on our condition.

> For our altered sight pictures things in the same way, and we suppose that they are failing it as fast as it fails them —like those who travel by sea, for whom the mountains, the fields, the towns, the sky and the earth move with the same motion, and along with them: *We sail out from harbor, and lands and cities recede.* Who ever saw old age that did not praise times past and blame the present, charging the world and the manners of men with its own misery and sullenness? *And now the old plowman shakes his head and sighs,*
> *And when he compares the present times with times*
> *Past, he often praises his father's fortunes,*
> *And harps on how the old race was full of piety.*[1]

2.13.2 We drag everything along with us. From this it follows that we regard our death as a great thing, one that does not pass so easily, nor without solemn consultation of the stars: *so many gods in an uproar over one head*. And we think so all the more, the more highly we prize ourselves. What! Should so much learning be lost, with so much harm, without the special concern of the Fates? Does so rare and exemplary a soul cost no more to kill than a common, useless one? This life, which shelters so many others, on which so many other lives depend, which keeps so many people busy in its service and fills so much space—is it dislodged like one that hangs by its own single knot? None of us thinks enough that he is only one.[2]

1 The first quotation is from Virgil, Aeneid; the second from Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.
2 Seneca the Elder, Suasoriae.

From this come those words of Caesar to his pilot, more swollen than the sea that threatened him: *If you refuse Italy with heaven as your guide,*
Make for it with me as guide: the only just cause of fear for you
Is not knowing whom you carry; break through the storms,
Secure in my protection: and these: *Caesar now believes these dangers worthy*
Of his destiny: "Is it so great a labor," he said,
"For the gods above to overthrow me, that they assail me, sitting in a little boat,
With so vast a sea?" And that public fancy that the sun wore mourning for his death on its brow for a whole year: *He too took pity on Rome when Caesar was extinguished,*
And covered his shining head in dark rust. And a thousand like ones, by which the world lets itself be so easily fooled, thinking that our interests disturb heaven, and that its infinity takes offense at our petty actions.[3]

Heaven has no such fellowship with us that the brightness of the stars should be mortal through our fate as well.[4]

2.13.3 Now it is not reasonable to judge resolution and constancy in a man who does not yet firmly believe he is in danger, even though he is. Nor is it enough that he died in that situation, unless he had put himself there precisely for that purpose. Most men stiffen their bearing and their words to win a reputation that they still hope to enjoy while alive. Of those I have seen die, it was Fortune that arranged their bearing, not their own design. And even among those who took their own lives in ancient times, there is a great difference between a sudden death and a death that takes its time.

3 The first two quotations are from Lucan, Pharsalia; the third from Virgil, Georgics.
4 Pliny the Elder, Natural History.

> That cruel Roman emperor said of his prisoners that he wanted to make them feel death; and if one of them did away with himself in prison, "That one has escaped me," he would say. He wanted to stretch death out and make it felt through torments. *We have seen, though the whole body was slashed,*
> *No fatal blow dealt to the life, and the harsh custom*
> *Of unspeakable cruelty: to withhold death from the dying.* In truth, it is no great thing to decide to kill yourself while you are perfectly healthy and perfectly calm. It is very easy to act tough before coming to grips.[5]

So it was that Heliogabalus, the softest man in the world, amid his most dissolute pleasures, fully intended to put himself to death delicately should occasion force him to. So that his death should not belie the rest of his life, he had a sumptuous tower built on purpose to throw himself from, its base and front floored with boards inlaid with gold and precious stones. He also had cords of gold and crimson silk made to strangle himself, and a sword of gold forged to run himself through. And he kept poison in vessels of emerald and topaz to poison himself, depending on which of all these ways of dying he might feel like choosing.[6] *Vigorous and brave with a courage forced upon him.* Still, as for this one, the softness of his preparations makes it more likely that he would have lost his nerve had it come to the point. But even among those who were more vigorous and resolved to carry the deed through, we must see, I say, whether it was done at a single stroke, which left no leisure to feel its effect. For it is anyone's guess whether, watching life drain away little by little, with the feeling of the body mingling with that of the soul and the chance to repent presenting itself, they would have shown constancy and obstinacy in so dangerous a resolve. In Caesar's civil wars, Lucius Domitius, captured in Prussia, poisoned him-

5 Montaigne combines sayings that Suetonius gives to Caligula and to Tiberius; the verses are from Lucan's Pharsalia.
6 The story comes from the Augustan History.

self and then repented of it.[7] It has happened in our time that a man resolved to die did not strike deep enough at his first attempt, the shrinking of his flesh pushing back his arm. He wounded himself again quite badly two or three times afterward, but could never bring himself to drive the blow home. While Plautius Silvanus was on trial, his grandmother Urgulania sent him a dagger; unable to finish himself off with it, he had his servants cut his veins. Albucilla, in the time of Tiberius, struck herself too feebly in trying to kill herself, and so gave her enemies the chance to imprison her and put her to death in their own way. The general Demosthenes did the same after his rout in Sicily. And C.[8] Fimbria, having struck himself too weakly, begged his servant to finish him off. Ostorius, on the contrary, being unable to use his own arm, disdained to use his servant's for anything but holding the dagger straight and firm; and, launching himself, he drove his throat onto it himself and pierced it through.[9]

2.13.4 Death, in truth, is a dish that must be swallowed without chewing, unless your throat is lined with iron. And so the Emperor Hadrian had his physician mark and circle on his breast, just by the nipple, the exact mortal spot at which the man he charged with killing him was to aim. That is why Caesar, when asked what death he thought most desirable, answered: "The least premeditated, and the shortest." If Caesar dared to say it, it is no longer cowardice in me to believe it. "A short death," says Pliny, "is the supreme good fortune of human life." People hate to look it over closely. No one can be called resolved to die who is afraid to haggle with death, who cannot endure it with open eyes. Those we see at executions running to their end, hurrying the execution and pressing it on, do not do so out of resolution: they want to deprive themselves of the time to con-

7 "Prussia" is Montaigne's slip; in Plutarch, Domitius was taken at Corfinium in Italy in 49 BC.

8 Plautius Silvanus and Albucilla are from Tacitus' Annals; Demosthenes was the Athenian general defeated at Syracuse in 413 BC.

9 Gaius Fimbria, a Marian general, died in 85 BC; Ostorius Scapula was condemned under Nero in AD 66 (Tacitus).

sider it. Being dead does not trouble them, but dying certainly does. *I do not want to die, but being dead I count as nothing.* This is a degree of firmness that I have found by experience I could reach—like those who throw themselves into danger as into the sea, with their eyes shut.[10]

DEATHS THAT TAKE THEIR TIME

Socrates spent thirty days with his sentence; Atticus, Cleanthes and Marcellinus chose to die slowly and calmly.

2.13.5 Nothing in Socrates' life, in my opinion, is more illustrious than his having had thirty whole days to ruminate on the sentence of his death; than his having digested it all that time, in most certain expectation, without anxiety, without change; and with a course of actions and words that was lowered and easy-going rather than strained and heightened by the weight of such a thought.

2.13.6 That Pomponius Atticus to whom Cicero writes, being ill, sent for Agrippa, his son-in-law, and two or three other friends. He told them that he had found by trial that he gained nothing by trying to get well, and that everything he did to lengthen his life also lengthened and increased his pain; so he was determined to put an end to both. He begged them to approve his decision and, at worst, not to waste their efforts trying to dissuade him. Now, having chosen to kill himself by fasting, lo and behold, his illness was cured by chance: the remedy he had used to do away with himself restored him to health.[11] The physicians and his friends, celebrating so happy an outcome and rejoicing with him, found themselves sorely disappointed. For all that, they could not make him change his mind: he said that one way or another he would have to take that step someday, and that, being so far along, he wanted to spare himself the trouble of starting over another time. This man, having surveyed death at

10 A line of Epicharmus, in Cicero's Latin (Tusculan Disputations).

11 Titus Pomponius Atticus (d. 32 BC), Cicero's friend and correspondent; the story is told by Cornelius Nepos.

full leisure, not only is not discouraged on coming to grips with it, but presses on relentlessly; for, having got what he entered the fight for, he makes it a point of bravado to see it through to the end. It is far beyond not fearing death to want to taste and savor it.

2.13.7 The story of the philosopher Cleanthes is very similar. His gums were swollen and rotting; the physicians advised him to fast strictly. After fasting two days he was so much better that they declared him cured and allowed him to return to his usual way of life. He, on the contrary, already tasting some sweetness in this faintness, resolved not to draw back again but to take the step toward which he had already come so far.[12]

2.13.8 Tullius Marcellinus, a young Roman, wished to anticipate the hour of his destiny so as to rid himself of an illness that was tormenting him more than he was willing to endure, even though the physicians promised him a sure cure, if not a quick one. He called his friends to deliberate about it. Some, says Seneca, gave him the advice that they themselves would have taken out of cowardice; others, out of flattery, the advice they thought he would like best. But a Stoic spoke to him thus: "Do not trouble yourself, Marcellinus, as if you were deliberating about something important. It is no great thing to live; your servants and the beasts live. But it is a great thing to die honorably, wisely, and steadfastly."[13] "Think how long you have been doing the same thing: eating, drinking, sleeping; drinking, sleeping, and eating. We go round and round endlessly in this circle. Not only bad and unbearable misfortunes, but even being sated with living, make one long for death." Marcellinus did not need a man to advise him but a man to help him. His servants were afraid to get involved; but this philosopher made them understand that members of a household are suspected only when there is doubt whether the master's death was voluntary. Otherwise, he said, it would set as bad an example to prevent him as to kill him, since *he who saves a man against his will does the same*

12 The story is in Diogenes Laertius.
13 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius 77.

as one who kills him. Then he advised Marcellinus that it would not be unseemly, just as the dessert is given to those standing by when our meal is over, so too, at the end of life, to distribute something to those who had served it. Now Marcellinus was of a frank and generous heart: he had a sum divided among his servants and comforted them.[14] For the rest, there was no need of steel or blood. He set out to depart from this life, not to flee from it; not to escape death but to try it out. And to give himself leisure to haggle with it, he gave up all food; on the third day after, having had himself sprinkled with warm water, he faded away little by little, and not without some pleasure, as he said. Indeed, those who have had these faintings of the heart that come from weakness say they feel no pain in them, but rather a kind of pleasure, as of a passage into sleep and rest. Those are deaths studied and digested.

2.13.9 But so that Cato alone might furnish every example of virtue, it seems his good destiny gave him a sore hand—the one he struck himself with—so that he had leisure to confront death and grapple with it, his courage growing stronger in the danger instead of softer. And if it had been up to me to portray him in his proudest posture, I would have shown him all bloodied, tearing out his entrails, rather than sword in hand, as the sculptors of his time did. For that second killing was far more furious than the first.[15]

14 Horace, The Art of Poetry.

15 When his first wound was bandaged, Cato tore it open with his own hands (46 BC).

II.14 How Our Mind Hinders Itself

Comme nostre esprit s'empesche soy-mesmes
A brief puzzle about a mind poised between two equal desires, which Montaigne turns into a reflection on reason's limits.

2.14.1 It is an amusing notion to imagine a mind balanced exactly between two equal desires. For it is beyond doubt that it will never make up its mind, since leaning toward one and choosing it imply that they are unequal in value. If we were placed between the bottle and the ham, with an equal appetite for drinking and eating, there would doubtless be no remedy but to die of thirst and hunger. To get round this difficulty, the Stoics, when asked where our soul gets its choice between two indifferent things (and what makes us take one coin rather than another from a large pile of crowns, when there is no reason to incline us to prefer one), answer that this movement of the soul is extraordinary and irregular, coming into us from an external, accidental, and fortuitous impulse. It might rather be said, it seems to me, that nothing presents itself to us in which there is not some difference, however slight; and that, either to the sight or to the touch, there is always something to choose that tempts and attracts us, even if imperceptibly. Likewise, if you suppose a cord equally strong throughout, it is utterly and absolutely impossible for it to break; for where would you have the break begin? And to break everywhere at once is not in nature. Suppose someone added to this the geometrical propositions that conclude, with all the certainty of their demonstrations, that the contents are greater than the container and the center as large as its circumference; and that find two lines forever approach-

ing each other and never able to meet; and the philosophers' stone, and the squaring of the circle, where reason and result are so opposed. He might perhaps draw from them some argument in support of that bold saying of Pliny: *the only certainty is that nothing is certain, and nothing is more wretched or more arrogant than man.*

II.15 That Our Desire Is Increased by Difficulty

Que nostre desir s'accroist par la malaisance
Montaigne shows how opposition and difficulty sharpen desire, in love and in everything else, and why he leaves his house unguarded.

2.15.1 There is no reason that does not have its contrary, says the wisest school of philosophers. I was just now chewing over that fine saying which an ancient cites in contempt of life: no good can bring us pleasure except the one we are prepared to lose. *The pain of losing a thing and the fear of losing it are equal.* He means to show by this that the enjoyment of life cannot be truly pleasant to us if we are afraid of losing it. Yet it might be said, on the contrary, that we clasp and embrace this good all the more tightly and fondly the less secure we see it to be, and the more we fear it may be taken from us.[1] For it is plainly felt that, just as fire is quickened by the presence of cold, our will too is sharpened by opposition: *If the bronze tower had never held Danaë, / Danaë would never have been made a mother by Jupiter;* and that nothing is naturally so contrary to our taste as the satiety that comes from ease, nor anything that sharpens it so much as rarity and difficulty. *In all things, pleasure grows with the very danger that ought to make us shun it. Galla, say no: love is soon sated unless its joys are torture.*[2]

2.15.2 To keep love on its toes, Lycurgus decreed that married couples in Sparta could have relations only by stealth, and that

1 The wisest school is the Pyrrhonists; the ancient is Seneca (Letters to Lucilius).

it would be as shameful to find them in bed together as with others. The difficulty of assignations, the danger of being caught, the shame of the next morning, *And languor, and silence, / And sighs drawn from deep within*—that is what gives the sauce its spice. How many very lasciviously amusing games arise from the decent and bashful way of speaking about the works of Love? Pleasure itself seeks to be stimulated by pain. It is much sweeter when it smarts and when it chafes the skin. The courtesan Flora said she had never slept with Pompey without making him carry the marks of her bites.[3]

> *What they have sought they squeeze tight, and cause pain*
> *To the body, and often drive their teeth into the lips;*
> *And there are goads beneath that drive them to hurt that very thing,*
> *Whatever it is, from which those seeds of frenzy spring.*[4]

2.15.3 It is the same everywhere: difficulty gives things their value. People from the March of Ancona would rather make their vows to Saint James, and people from Galicia to Our Lady of Loreto. In Liège they make a great fuss over the baths of Lucca, and in Tuscany over those of Spa. Hardly any Romans are to be seen in the fencing school at Rome, which is full of Frenchmen. The great Cato, too, just like us, was tired of his wife as long as she was his, and desired her when she belonged to another. I have put out to stud an old horse that could not be controlled at the scent of mares.[5] Ease soon sated him with his own mares; but with strange ones, and the first that passes along his pasture, he goes back to his tiresome neighing and his furious heats as before. Our appetite scorns and passes over what it has in hand, to run after what it does not have. *He flies past what lies in reach and chases what runs away.* To forbid us something is to make us want it. *Unless you begin to guard your*

2 Ovid, Amores; then Seneca, On Benefits, and Martial, Epigrams.
3 Horace, Epodes.
4 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.
5 Saint James's shrine is at Compostela in Galicia; Loreto is near Ancona. Cato gave his wife Marcia to Hortensius and remarried her after his death.

girl, / She will begin to stop being mine. To hand it over to us entirely is to breed contempt for it in us. Lack and abundance come to the same trouble: *You suffer from what you have too much of, I from what I lack.* Desire and enjoyment torment us equally.[6]

> The harshness of mistresses is painful; but ease and compliance are, to tell the truth, even more so. For discontent and anger arise from the high value we set on the thing desired; they sharpen love and rekindle it. Satiety, by contrast, breeds distaste: it is a blunt passion, dulled, weary, and asleep. *If a woman wants to reign long, let her scorn her lover.*
>
> *Scorn your lovers,*
> *And she who refused yesterday will come today.*[7]

2.15.4 Why did Poppaea think of masking the beauties of her face, if not to make them dearer to her lovers? Why have those beauties that everyone wishes to show, that everyone wishes to see, been veiled right down below the heels? Why do women cover with so many obstacles, one on top of another, the parts where our desire and theirs chiefly dwell? And what are those great bastions with which our women have lately taken to arming their hips for, if not to lure our appetite and draw us to them by keeping us at a distance? *And she flees to the willows, and hopes first to be seen. / Sometimes, kept covered by her tunic, she has made me wait.* What is the use of the art of this maidenly shame?[8] this sedate coldness, this severe countenance, this professed ignorance of things they know better than we who instruct them—what is all this ceremony, and all these obstacles, for, if not to increase our desire to conquer, master, and trample them under our appetite? For there is not only pleasure but glory as well in maddening and corrupting that soft sweetness and that childlike modesty, and in bringing a cold and magisterial gravity to the mercy of our ardor. It is a glory, they say, to triumph over

6 Horace, Satires; Ovid, Amores; Terence, Phormio.
7 Ovid, Amores, and Propertius.
8 Poppaea Sabina, wife of Nero (Tacitus). The verses are from Virgil's Eclogues and Propertius.

modesty, chastity, and temperance; and whoever advises ladies against those qualities betrays both them and himself. We must believe that their hearts tremble with fright, that the sound of our words wounds the purity of their ears, that they hate us for it and yield to our importunity only under duress. Beauty, all-powerful as it is, cannot make itself relished without this go-between. Look at Italy, where there is more beauty for sale, and of the finest, and see how it has to seek other outside means and other arts to make itself attractive. And yet, in truth, whatever it does, being for sale and public, it remains feeble and languid. In just the same way, even in virtue, of two equal deeds we nevertheless consider the finer and worthier the one that faced more obstacles and risk.

DIFFICULTY IN FAITH AND MARRIAGE

Persecution wakes the Church; Roman marriages lasted because divorce was allowed; punishment sharpens vice.

2.15.5 It is an effect of divine providence to allow its holy Church to be shaken, as we see it, by so many troubles and storms, in order to awaken pious souls by this opposition and rouse them from the idleness and sleep into which so long a tranquillity had plunged them. If we weigh the loss we have suffered, in the number of those who have gone astray, against the gain that comes to us from having been put back on our mettle, with our zeal and strength revived by this combat, I do not know whether the benefit does not outweigh the harm.

2.15.6 We thought we were tying the knot of our marriages more firmly by removing every means of dissolving them. But the knot of will and affection has loosened and slackened as much as the knot of constraint has been tightened. On the contrary, what kept marriages at Rome so long in honor and security was the freedom of anyone who wished to break them off. The Romans took better care of their wives because they could lose them; and with full license to divorce, five hundred years and

more went by before anyone made use of it. *What is allowed has no charm; what is not allowed burns more fiercely.*[9]

2.15.7 To this point might be added the opinion of an ancient: that punishments sharpen vices rather than deaden them; that they do not produce the concern to do well—that is the work of reason and discipline—but only the concern not to be caught doing ill. *The contagion of a plague that has been cut out spreads more widely.* I do not know that this opinion is true; but this I do know by experience, that no government was ever reformed by that means. The order and regulation of morals depend on some other means.[10]

2.15.8 The Greek histories mention the Argippaeans, neighbors of Scythia, who live without rod or stick to strike with. Not only does no one undertake to attack them, but whoever can take refuge among them is in sanctuary, because of their virtue and holiness of life, and no one is bold enough to touch him. People turn to them to settle the disputes that arise among men elsewhere. There is a nation where the gardens and fields people want to protect are enclosed with a cotton thread, and this proves much safer and firmer than our ditches and hedges. *Things under seal tempt the thief. The burglar passes by what is open.*[11]

AN UNGUARDED HOUSE

Montaigne keeps his house open and unfortified through the civil wars, trusting its safety to heaven.

2.15.9 Perhaps, among other things, its very openness helps to shield my house from the violence of our civil wars. Defense invites attack, and distrust invites offense. I have weakened the soldiers' purpose by taking from their exploit all risk and all matter for military glory, which usually serves them as title and

9 Ovid, Amores.
10 The ancient is Seneca (On Clemency); the verse is from Rutilius Namatianus, On His Return.
11 Herodotus, Histories IV; the Latin is from Seneca's Letters to Lucilius.

excuse. Whatever is done courageously is always done honorably, in times when justice is dead. I make the conquest of my house a cowardly and treacherous act for them. It is closed to no one who knocks. For all its defenses there is only a porter, kept by ancient usage and ceremony, who serves not so much to defend my door as to offer it more decently and graciously. I have no guard or sentinel but the one the stars keep for me. A gentleman is wrong to make a show of being in a state of defense unless he is fully so. Whoever is open on one side is open everywhere. Our fathers did not think of building frontier fortresses. The means of assaulting and surprising our houses—I mean without artillery and without an army—are growing every day beyond the means of guarding them. Men's wits are generally being sharpened in that direction. Invasion concerns everyone; defense, only the rich. My house was strong for the time when it was built. I have added nothing to it in that respect, and I would fear that its strength might be turned against me myself. Besides, peaceful times will require such houses to be dismantled. It is dangerous to be unable to win them back, and it is hard to be sure of them. For in civil wars your own servant may belong to the party you fear. And where religion serves as a pretext, even kinsmen become untrustworthy under cover of justice. Public funds will not maintain our household garrisons; they would be drained by it. We do not have the means to do it without ruining ourselves—or, more harmfully and unjustly still, without ruining the people. Losing my house would leave me hardly worse off. Moreover, if you do come to grief, even your friends are busier blaming your lack of vigilance and foresight, and your ignorance or carelessness in the duties of your profession, than pitying you. That so many guarded houses have been lost while this one survives makes me suspect that they were lost because they were guarded. That gives the attacker both the desire and the justification. Every guard wears the face of war. Anyone may hurl himself into my house, if God so wills; but at any rate I shall not invite him. It is my retreat, where I rest from the wars. I try to keep this corner out of the

public storm, as I do another corner in my soul. Our war may change its forms as it likes, multiply and split into new factions: as for me, I do not budge. Among so many armed houses, I alone of my rank, as far as I know, have entrusted the protection of mine purely to heaven. And I have never removed from it either silver plate, or title deeds, or tapestry. I want neither to be afraid for myself nor to save myself by halves. If full gratitude wins divine favor, it will last me to the end; if not, I have still lasted long enough to make my lasting remarkable and worth recording. How long? A good thirty years.

II.16 Of Glory

De la gloire

Glory belongs to God alone, Montaigne argues; human fame is fickle and accidental, and virtue should be pursued for conscience, not reputation.

2.16.1 There is the name and there is the thing. The name is a sound that marks and signifies the thing. The name is not a part of the thing, nor of its substance; it is a foreign piece attached to the thing, and outside it.

2.16.2 God, who is in himself all fullness and the summit of all perfection, cannot increase or grow within. But his name can increase and grow through the blessing and praise we give to his outward works. Since we cannot incorporate this praise in him, inasmuch as no good can be added to him, we attribute it to his name, which is the part outside him that is nearest to him. That is how glory and honor belong to God alone. And nothing is so contrary to reason as for us to go in quest of glory for ourselves. For since we are needy and destitute within, and our essence is imperfect and continually in need of improvement, that is what we ought to be working at. We are all hollow and empty. It is not with wind and sound that we have to fill ourselves; we need more solid substance to restore us. A starving man would be very foolish to try to provide himself with a fine garment rather than a good meal: we must run to what is most urgent. As our daily prayers say, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men.*[1] We are short of beauty, health, wisdom, virtue, and such

1 Luke 2:14, sung in the Gloria of the Mass.

essential qualities. Outward ornaments can be sought once we have provided for necessary things. Theology treats this subject at length and more pertinently, but I am hardly versed in it.

2.16.3 Chrysippus and Diogenes were the first and firmest advocates of contempt for glory. And among all pleasures, they said, there was none more dangerous or more to be avoided than the one that comes to us from others' approval. Indeed, experience makes us feel many very harmful betrayals from it. Nothing poisons princes so much as flattery, nor is there anything by which the wicked more easily gain credit around them. Nor is there any pandering so apt and so common for corrupting women's chastity as feeding and entertaining them with their own praises.[2] The first enchantment the Sirens use to beguile Ulysses is of this kind: *Come this way, come to us, O most praiseworthy Ulysses, / The greatest honor that makes Greece flourish.* Those philosophers said that all the glory in the world did not deserve that a man of understanding should so much as stretch out a finger to acquire it: *Glory, however great, what will it be, if it is only glory?* I mean for itself alone; for it often draws in its train many advantages for which it may become desirable: it wins us goodwill; it makes us less exposed to the insults and injuries of others; and the like.[3]

2.16.4 This was also one of Epicurus' chief doctrines. For that precept of his school, "Hide your life," which forbids men to burden themselves with public offices and business, also necessarily presupposes contempt for glory, which is the world's approval of the actions we bring into view. He who orders us to hide ourselves and to care only for ourselves, and who does not want us to be known by others, wants still less that we be honored and glorified by them. So he advises Idomeneus not to regulate his actions in any way by common opinion or reputa-

2 Diogenes of Babylon, a Stoic of the 2nd century BC; Montaigne follows Cicero, On Ends.

3 Homer, Odyssey XII, in Montaigne's own French verse; the Latin is from Juvenal, Satires.

tion, except to avoid the other incidental inconveniences that men's contempt might bring him.[4]

2.16.5 Those arguments are infinitely true, in my opinion, and reasonable. But we are, I know not how, double within ourselves, so that what we believe we do not believe, and we cannot rid ourselves of what we condemn. Let us look at Epicurus' last words, what he said as he was dying. They are great and worthy of such a philosopher; and yet they bear some mark of concern for the renown of his name, and of that disposition he had decried in his precepts. Here is a letter he dictated a little before his last breath. Epicurus to Hermarchus, greeting.[5]

2.16.6 While I was passing the happy day of my life, which is also the last, I wrote this, though accompanied by such pain in the bladder and intestines that nothing could be added to its intensity. But it was offset by the pleasure my soul took in remembering my discoveries and my reasonings. Now you, as the affection you have shown since childhood toward me and toward philosophy requires, take upon yourself the protection of the children of Metrodorus.[6]

2.16.7 That is his letter. And what makes me interpret this pleasure he says he felt in his soul from his discoveries as having something to do with the reputation he hoped to gain from them after his death is a provision of his will. By it he directs that Amynomachus and Timocrates, his heirs, should furnish, for the celebration of his birthday every January, whatever expenses Hermarchus might prescribe; and also the cost, on the twentieth day of each moon, of entertaining the philosophers of his circle who would gather in honor of his memory and that of Metrodorus.

4 The advice is reported by Seneca.
5 Hermarchus succeeded Epicurus as head of his school; Montaigne takes the letter from Cicero, On Ends.
6 Metrodorus died before Epicurus.

GLORY FOR ITS OWN SAKE

Carneades and Aristotle defend glory, but virtue that works only for show is no virtue.

2.16.8 Carneades was the leader of the opposite opinion. He maintained that glory was desirable for its own sake, just as we cherish those who will come after our death for their own sake, though we shall have no knowledge or enjoyment of them. This opinion has not failed to be more commonly followed, as those that best suit our inclinations readily are. Aristotle gives glory first rank among external goods. He shuns, as two vicious extremes, immoderation both in seeking it and in fleeing it. I believe that if we had the books Cicero wrote on this subject, he would tell us some fine things. For that man was so frantic with this passion that, had he dared, he would, I believe, readily have fallen into the excess others fell into: that virtue itself was desirable only for the honor that always followed in its train. *Hidden virtue differs little / From buried sloth.* This is an opinion so false that I am vexed it could ever have entered the understanding of a man who had the honor of bearing the name of philosopher.[7]

2.16.9 If that were true, we would need to be virtuous only in public; and the workings of the soul, where the true seat of virtue lies, we would need to keep in rule and order only insofar as they were going to come to others' knowledge. Is it, then, only a matter of doing wrong cleverly and subtly? If you know, says Carneades, of a snake hidden in a place where, without a thought, a man is about to sit whose death you hope to profit from, you act wickedly if you do not warn him—and all the more so since your action can be known by no one but you. If we do not take the law of doing good from ourselves, if impunity counts as justice for us, to how many kinds of wickedness must we abandon ourselves every day? What S. Peducaeus did, in faithfully returning that part of his wealth which C. Plotius had entrusted to him alone without anyone's knowledge—and I have

7 Cicero's treatise On Glory is lost; the verses are from Horace, Odes.

often done the same—I do not find so praiseworthy as I would find it execrable to have failed to do it. And I find it good and useful to recall in our day the example of P. Sextilius Rufus, whom Cicero accuses of having taken up an inheritance against his conscience—not merely not against the laws, but by the laws themselves. And M. Crassus and Q.[8] Hortensius, who, because of their authority and power, were named by a foreigner as heirs for certain shares of a forged will, so that he might secure his own share by this means. They were content not to be party to the forgery, and did not refuse to reap its fruit—well enough covered, they thought, if they kept sheltered from accusations, from witnesses, and from the laws. *Let them remember that they have God as their witness, that is, as I take it, their own mind.*[9]

2.16.10 Virtue is a very vain and frivolous thing if it draws its worth from glory. In vain would we try to give it a rank of its own and separate it from Fortune; for what is more fortuitous than reputation? *Truly, Fortune rules in all things: she makes everything famous or obscure according to her whim rather than the truth.* Making actions known and seen is purely the work of Fortune. It is chance that bestows glory on us, as blindly as it pleases. I have very often seen glory walk ahead of merit, and often outstrip merit by a long way. The man who first noticed the resemblance between shadow and glory did better than he meant to. They are supremely vain things.[10] A shadow, too, sometimes goes ahead of its body, and sometimes far exceeds it in length. Those who teach the nobility to seek nothing in valor but honor—*as if nothing were honorable that is not famous*—what do they gain by it, except to teach them never to take a risk unless they are seen, and to take good care that there are witnesses who can carry back news of their valor, when a thousand occasions present themselves for doing well without anyone being able to notice? How many fine individual deeds are buried

8 These Roman examples come from Cicero, On Ends II and On Duties III.
9 Cicero, On Duties.
10 Sallust, The War with Catiline.

in the crush of a battle?[11] Whoever amuses himself checking up on others in the middle of such a melee is hardly busy fighting himself; the testimony he gives of his comrades' conduct is evidence against himself. *True and wise greatness of soul judges that the honorable, which most closely follows nature, lies in deeds, not in glory.* All the glory I aspire to from my life is to have lived it in tranquillity—tranquillity not according to Metrodorus, or Arcesilaus, or Aristippus, but according to me. Since philosophy has not been able to find any road to tranquillity that would be good for everyone in common, let each man seek it for himself.[12]

FORTUNE MAKES REPUTATIONS

Countless brave deeds die without witnesses; only Fortune decides whose name survives.

2.16.11 To whom do Caesar and Alexander owe the infinite greatness of their renown, if not to Fortune? How many men has she snuffed out at the very start of their progress, men of whom we know nothing, who brought to it the same courage as theirs, had not the misfortune of their lot stopped them short at the very birth of their enterprises? Through so many and such extreme dangers, I do not remember reading that Caesar was ever wounded. A thousand men have died from perils smaller than the least of those he came through. Countless fine deeds must be lost without witness before one of them yields any profit. You are not always at the top of a breach or at the head of an army, in sight of your general, as if on a stage. You are caught between hedge and ditch; you have to try your luck against a henhouse; you have to dislodge four wretched arquebusiers from a barn; you have to break away from the troop and act alone, as necessity arises. And if you pay attention, you will find, in my opinion, that experience shows the least brilliant occasions to be the most dangerous; and that in the wars of our time more good

11 Cicero, On Duties.
12 Cicero, On Duties.

men have been lost on slight and unimportant occasions, and in the struggle over some petty shack of a fort, than in worthy and honorable places.

2.16.12 The man who considers his death ill spent unless it comes on some signal occasion is apt, instead of making his death illustrious, to obscure his life, letting slip meanwhile many just occasions for risking himself. And all just occasions are illustrious enough, since each man's conscience trumpets them loudly enough to him. *Our glory is the testimony of our conscience.* The man who is good only because people will know it, and because they will think better of him once they know it; who will do good only on condition that his virtue comes to men's knowledge—that is not a person from whom much service can be expected.[13]

I believe that for the rest of that winter he did
Things worthy of being recorded;
But up to that time they were so hidden
That it is not my fault if I do not tell them now:
For Orlando was always readier
To do valiant deeds than to tell of them afterward,
Nor was any of his deeds ever made known
Except when he had witnesses at hand. We must go to war out of duty and expect from it the reward that cannot fail any fine deed, however hidden, nor even virtuous thoughts: the contentment that a well-ordered conscience feels within itself at doing well.[14]

13 Saint Paul, 2 Corinthians 1:12.

> We must be valiant for our own sake, and for the advantage of having our courage lodged in a firm and secure position against the assaults of Fortune. *Virtue, knowing nothing of shameful defeat,*
> *Shines with untarnished honors,*
> *And neither takes up nor lays down the axes*
> *At the whim of the popular breeze.* It is not for show that our soul must play its part; it is at home, within, where no eyes reach but our own. There it shields us from the fear of death, of pain, and even of shame; there it steadies us against the loss of our children, our friends, and our fortunes; and when the opportunity arises, it also leads us into the hazards of war.[15]

Not for any gain, but for the beauty of honor itself. This profit is far greater, and far more worth wishing and hoping for, than honor and glory, which is nothing but a favorable judgment others make of us.[16]

2.16.13 To judge an acre of land, a dozen men are picked out of a whole nation. Yet the judgment of our inclinations and our actions, the most difficult and the most important matter there is, we leave to the voice of the common people and the mob, mother of ignorance, injustice and inconstancy. Is it reasonable to make a wise man's life depend on the judgment of fools? *Is anything more foolish than to think that those whom you despise one by one amount to something all together?* Whoever aims to please them will never be done: it is a target with neither shape nor hold.[17] *Nothing is so incalculable as the minds of the multitude.* Demetrius said wittily of the voice of the people that he set no more store by the sound it let out from above than by the sound it let out from below. Another goes further still: *My judgment is this: even if a thing is not shameful, it cannot help being shameful when it is praised by the multitude.* No skill, no suppleness of mind

14 Ariosto, Orlando Furioso.
15 Horace, Odes; the axes are the fasces carried before Roman magistrates.
16 Cicero, On Ends.
17 The Latin is Cicero, Tusculan Disputations 5.

could guide our steps in the wake of so wayward and disorderly a guide. In this windy confusion of rumors, reports and common opinions that push us about, no route worth anything can be laid down.[18] Let us not set ourselves so floating and fickle an end. Let us follow reason steadily, and let public approval follow us along that path if it will. And since it depends entirely on Fortune, we have no ground to hope for it by any other road than that one.

2.16.14 Even if I did not follow the straight road because it is straight, I would follow it because I have found by experience that in the end it is usually the happiest and the most useful. *Providence has granted men this gift: that honorable things should be the most profitable.* The sailor of old spoke thus to Neptune in a great storm: "O God, you will save me if you will; if you will, you will destroy me; but still I shall always hold my tiller straight."[19] In my time I have seen a thousand men, supple, two-faced, ambiguous, whom no one doubted to be more worldly-wise than I, come to ruin where I came through safe: *I laughed to see that cunning can fail of success.* Paulus Aemilius, setting out on his glorious expedition to Macedonia, warned the people of Rome above all to hold their tongues about his actions while he was away. What a great hindrance the license of judgments is to great affairs! For not everyone has the firmness of Fabius against the common voices, hostile and abusive: he preferred to let his authority be torn to pieces by men's idle notions rather than do his task less well with a favorable reputation and popular consent.[20]

18 The first Latin is Livy, History of Rome 31; Demetrius is the Cynic philosopher whose saying Seneca reports. The second Latin is Cicero, On Ends 2.

19 The Latin is Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory 1. The sailor's prayer is reported by Seneca in his Letters.

20 The Latin is Ovid, Heroides 1. Fabius Maximus, called the Delayer, held to his cautious strategy against Hannibal although he was mocked for it at Rome.

2.16.15 There is some natural sweetness in feeling oneself praised, but we lend it far too much. *I would not fear praise, for my heart is not made of horn;*

But I refuse to take your "Bravo!" and your "Well done!"

As the end and the limit of what is right. I do not care so much what I am in other people's eyes as I care what I am in myself. I want to be rich through myself, not by borrowing. Outsiders see only outcomes and outward appearances; anyone can put a good face on things outside while full of fever and terror inside. They do not see my heart; they see only my bearing.[21]

People are right to decry the hypocrisy found in war. For what is easier for a practiced man than to dodge dangers and play the fierce fighter while his heart is full of softness? There are so many ways of avoiding occasions to risk ourselves individually that we will have deceived the world a thousand times before committing ourselves to a dangerous pass. And even then, finding ourselves caught in it, we will know well enough how to cover our game for the moment with a bold face and a confident word, though our soul trembles within. And if anyone had the use of Plato's ring, which made its wearer invisible when it was turned toward the palm of the hand, plenty of people would often hide just where they most ought to show themselves, and would regret being placed in so honorable a post, where it is necessity that makes them steady. *False honor delights, and lying slander frightens / Whom but the faulty and the liar?* See how wonderfully uncertain and doubtful all these judgments made from outward appearances are; and there is no witness so sure as each man to himself. In those appearances, how many camp servants do we have as partners in our glory?[22]

21 Persius, Satires 1.

22 The ring of Gyges, told in Plato's Republic, Book 2. The Latin is Horace, Epistles 1.16.

> The man who stands firm in an open trench—what does he do there that fifty poor sappers have not done before him, who open the way for him and cover him with their bodies for five sous' pay a day? *If muddled Rome makes light of something,*
> *Do not side with it, nor try to set right the faulty needle*
> *On that scale; do not look for yourself outside yourself.*

TO BE TALKED ABOUT

Men want to be talked about at any price, though fame cannot reach us after death.

2.16.16 We call it enlarging our name to spread it and sow it in many mouths. We want it to be well received there, and we want this growth of it to bring it profit: that is what may be most excusable in this design. But the excess of this malady goes so far that many seek to get themselves talked about in any way whatever. Trogus Pompeius says of Herostratus, and Livy of Manlius Capitolinus, that they were more eager for a great reputation than for a good one. This vice is common. We care more that people talk about us than how they talk about us; and it is enough for us that our name runs in men's mouths, in whatever condition it runs.[23] It seems that to be known is in some way to have one's life and its duration in other people's keeping.

2.16.17 For my part, I hold that I exist only within myself. As for that other life of mine that lodges in my friends' knowledge, considered bare and simply in itself, I know well that I get no fruit or enjoyment from it except through the vanity of a fanciful opinion. And when I am dead I shall feel it much less still. Besides, I shall lose outright the use of the real benefits that sometimes follow it by accident: I shall no longer have any handle by which to seize reputation, nor any by which it can touch me or reach me. For if I expect my name to receive it—first

23 Herostratus burned the temple of Artemis at Ephesus in 356 BC to make himself famous; Manlius Capitolinus, who saved the Capitol from the Gauls, was later put to death for aiming at kingship.

of all, I have no name that is sufficiently my own. Of the two I have, one is common to my whole line, and indeed to others as well. There is a family in Paris and Montpellier called Montaigne, another in Brittany and Saintonge called de la Montaigne. Shifting a single syllable will tangle our skeins, so that I shall have a share in their glory, and they perhaps in my shame. What is more, my people were once surnamed Eyquem, a surname that also belongs to a well-known house in England. As for my other name, it belongs to anyone who cares to take it. So I may perhaps be honoring a porter in my place.[24]

> And then, even if I had a mark of my own, what can it mark when I am no longer there? Can it designate and favor emptiness? *Does the gravestone not press more lightly on his bones now?*
>
> *Posterity praises him: do not violets now spring*
> *From those remains, from that tomb*
> *And those blessed ashes?* But I have spoken of this elsewhere.

2.16.18 For the rest, in a whole battle where ten thousand men are maimed or killed, there are not fifteen who get talked about. It must be some very eminent greatness, or some important consequence that Fortune has attached to it, that gives value to a private action—not only of an arquebusier, but of a captain. For to kill a man, or two, or ten, to face death bravely, is indeed something to each of us, since everything is at stake; but for the world these are such ordinary things, so many of them are seen every day, and it takes so many like them to produce a notable effect, that we cannot expect any special recognition from them. *A case known to many, already / Worn threadbare, drawn from the middle of Fortune's heap.*[25]

2.16.19 Of the many thousands upon thousands of valiant men who have died in France over the last fifteen hundred years with arms in their hands, not a hundred have come to our knowledge. The memory not only of the leaders but of battles and vic-

24 Eyquem was the surname of Montaigne's merchant ancestors; his "other name" is his Christian name, Michel.
25 Juvenal, Satires 13.

tories is buried. The fortunes of more than half the world, for lack of a record, never stir from their place and vanish without lasting. If I had the unknown events in my possession, I think I could very easily supplant the known ones with them, in every kind of example. What! Even of the Romans and the Greeks, with so many writers and witnesses and so many rare and noble exploits, so few have come down to us? *Barely a faint breath of their fame drifts down to us.* It will be a great deal if, a hundred years from now, people remember in a general way that in our time there were civil wars in France. The Spartans sacrificed to the Muses as they went into battle, so that their deeds might be well and worthily written, considering it a divine and uncommon favor that fine actions should find witnesses able to give them life and memory.[26]

2.16.20 Do we think that at every arquebus shot that hits us, and every risk we run, there is suddenly a clerk on hand to enter it in the rolls? And besides, a hundred clerks may write it down, and their accounts will last only three days and come before no one's eyes. We do not have a thousandth part of ancient writings; it is Fortune who gives them life, shorter or longer according to her favor. And as for what we do have, we may well doubt whether it is the worst, since we have not seen the rest. Histories are not written about such trifles. One must have been the leader in conquering an empire or a kingdom; one must have won fifty-two pitched battles, always outnumbered, like Caesar. Ten thousand good comrades and many great captains died valiantly and courageously in his service, and their names lasted only as long as their wives and children lived: *Whom an obscure fame hides away.* Even of those we see do well, three months or three years after they have fallen, there is no more talk than if they had never existed. Whoever considers, with fair measure and proportion, what kind of people and what kind of deeds glory keeps alive in the memory of books will find that in our age there are very few actions and very few persons that can claim any right to it. How many virtuous men have we seen out-

26 Virgil, Aeneid 7.

live their own reputation, who have seen and endured the extinction, before their very eyes, of the honor and glory they very justly earned in their youth? And for three years of this fanciful and imaginary life, are we to go and lose our true and essential life, and commit ourselves to a perpetual death? The wise set themselves a finer and juster end for so important an undertaking. *The reward of a good deed is to have done it. The fruit of duty is duty itself.* It might perhaps be excusable for a painter or some other craftsman, or even for a rhetorician or grammarian, to labor to win a name through his works. But the actions of virtue are too noble in themselves to seek any other wage than their own worth—and above all to seek it in the vanity of human judgments.[27]

A USEFUL FALSEHOOD

If the love of glory keeps men dutiful, lawgivers may feed it, as they fed people religious fables.

2.16.21 If, however, this false opinion serves the public by keeping men to their duty; if the people are roused by it to virtue; if princes are moved to see the world bless the memory of Trajan and abhor that of Nero; if it stirs them to see the name of that great scoundrel, once so frightful and so dreaded, cursed and reviled so freely by the first schoolboy who takes it on—then let it grow boldly, and let us nourish it among us as much as we can. And Plato, using every means to make his citizens virtuous, also advises them not to despise the good esteem of the people. And he says that by some divine inspiration it happens that even the wicked often know how to distinguish the good from the bad rightly, both in word and in opinion. This man and his teacher are wonderful and bold workmen at bringing in divine operations and revelations wherever human strength falls short. And that is perhaps why Timon, insulting him, called him the great

27 Seneca, Letters 81, and Cicero, On Ends 2.

forger of miracles. *As tragic poets take refuge in a god when they cannot work out the ending of their plot.*[28]

2.16.22 Since men, through their inadequacy, cannot be paid well enough in good coin, let counterfeit be used as well. This method has been practiced by all lawgivers, and there is no government without some admixture either of ceremonial vanity or of lying opinion, to serve as a bridle to keep the people to their duty. That is why most of them have fabulous origins and beginnings, enriched with supernatural mysteries. That is what has given credit to spurious religions and made men of understanding favor them. That is also why Numa and Sertorius, to make their men more believing, fed them this nonsense: the one that the nymph Egeria, the other that his white doe, brought him from the gods all the counsel he followed. And the authority that Numa gave his laws under the title of this goddess's patronage, Zoroaster, lawgiver of the Bactrians and the Persians, gave to his under the name of the god Oromazes; Trismegistus of the Egyptians, under that of Mercury; Zamolxis of the Scythians, of Vesta; Charondas of the Chalcidians, of Saturn; Minos of the Cretans, of Jupiter; Lycurgus of the Spartans, of Apollo; Draco and Solon of the Athenians, of Minerva.[29] And every state has a god at its head: falsely, all the others; truly, the one that Moses set up for the people of Judea when they came out of Egypt. The religion of the Bedouins, as the Sire de Joinville says, held among other things that the soul of any one of them who died for his prince went into another body, happier, more beautiful and stronger than the first; and for that reason they risked their lives much more willingly: *Men's minds are eager for the sword, their souls able to face / Death, and it is cowardly to spare a life that will return.* There is a very salutary belief, empty as it may be. Every nation has many such examples at home; but this subject would deserve a discussion of its own.[30]

28 His teacher is Socrates; Timon of Phlius was a skeptic poet who mocked the philosophers. The Latin is Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods 1.
29 Oromazes is Ahura Mazda, the supreme god of the Persians.
30 The Latin is Lucan, Pharsalia 1.

2.16.23 To say one more word on my first subject: no more do I advise ladies to call their duty honor—*for, as common usage has it, only that is called honorable which is glorious in popular repute*. Their duty is the pith; their honor is only the bark. Nor do I advise them to give us this excuse in payment for their refusal. For I presuppose that their intentions, their desire and their will —parts honor has nothing to do with, since nothing of them shows outwardly—are even better regulated than their deeds. *She who does not do it because she may not, does it.* The offense, both toward God and in conscience, would be as great in desiring it as in doing it.[31] And then these are actions hidden and secret in themselves. It would be easy for women to steal some of them from the knowledge of others, on which honor depends, if they had no other regard for their duty and for the love they bear chastity for its own sake. Every person of honor chooses to lose his honor rather than to lose his conscience.

31 The first Latin is Cicero, On Ends 2; the verse is Ovid, Amores 3.

II.17 Of Presumption

De la presumption
Montaigne examines the opposite fault of underrating oneself, then sketches a candid, often unflattering self-portrait of his body, mind and talents.

2.17.1 There is another kind of glory, which is an overgood opinion we form of our own worth. It is an ill-considered affection with which we cherish ourselves, which represents us to ourselves as other than we are. It is like the passion of love, which lends beauties and graces to the object it embraces, and makes those smitten with it find what they love, with troubled and altered judgment, other and more perfect than it is.

2.17.2 I do not want a man, for fear of erring on that side, to fail to know himself on that account, or to think he is less than he is: judgment must maintain its rights everywhere. It is right that he should see in this matter, as elsewhere, what truth shows him. If he is Caesar, let him boldly find himself the greatest captain in the world. We are nothing but ceremony; ceremony carries us away, and we leave the substance of things. We cling to the branches and abandon the trunk and the body. We have taught ladies to blush at merely hearing named what they are not in the least afraid to do. We dare not call our members by their right names, and we are not afraid to use them in every kind of debauchery.

2.17.3 Ceremony forbids us to express in words things that are lawful and natural, and we believe it; reason forbids us to do things that are unlawful and wicked, and no one believes it. I find myself entangled here in the laws of ceremony, for it allows

us neither to speak well of ourselves nor to speak ill. We shall leave it aside for this once. Those whose lives Fortune—whether we should call it good or bad—has made pass in some eminent rank can show by their public actions what they are.

> But those whom she has employed only in the crowd, and of whom no one will speak unless they speak themselves, are excusable if they make bold to speak of themselves to those who have an interest in knowing them, following the example of Lucilius: *He used to confide his secrets to his books as to faithful friends,*
> *Never turning elsewhere, whether things had gone badly*
> *Or well; so that the old man's whole life*
> *Lies open to view, as if painted*
> *On a votive tablet.* That man entrusted his actions and his thoughts to his paper, and portrayed himself there as he felt himself to be. *Nor did Rutilius and Scaurus lose credit or meet with disparagement for doing so.*[1]

GESTURES OF PRIDE

Montaigne asks whether his bearing betrayed pride, and notes the unconscious mannerisms of great men.

2.17.4 I remember, then, that from my earliest childhood people noticed in me a certain bearing of the body, and gestures that betrayed some vain and foolish pride. First I want to say this about it: it is quite possible to have qualities and propensities so much our own and so built into us that we have no means of sensing and recognizing them. And the body readily keeps some crease from such natural inclinations, without our knowledge or consent. It was an affectation conscious of his beauty that made Alexander tilt his head a little to one side, and that made Alcibiades' speech soft and lisping. Julius Caesar scratched his head with one finger, which is the gesture of a man full of painful thoughts; and Cicero, it seems to me, had the habit of wrinkling

1 Horace, Satires 2.1, on the satirist Lucilius (2nd century BC). The last Latin is Tacitus, Agricola 1, on Romans who wrote their own lives.

his nose, which signifies a mocking nature. Such movements can arise in us imperceptibly. There are others, artificial ones, which I am not talking about, such as salutations and bows, by which people most often win, undeservedly, the honor of being very humble and courteous: one can be humble out of vainglory. I am rather lavish with raising my hat, especially in summer, and I never receive such a greeting without returning it, whatever the rank of the man, unless he is in my pay. I could wish that some princes I know were more sparing with them and fairer in dispensing them; for, scattered so indiscriminately, they no longer carry any weight. If they are given without regard, they are without effect. Among unruly bearings, let us not forget the haughtiness of the Emperor Constantius, who in public always held his head straight, without turning or bending it this way or that, not even to look at those who greeted him from the side; he kept his body planted motionless, not letting himself sway with the motion of his coach, not daring to spit, or blow his nose, or wipe his face in front of people. I do not know whether those gestures people noticed in me were of that first kind, and whether in truth I had some hidden propensity to this vice, as may well be; and I cannot answer for the movements of the body. But as for the movements of the soul, I want to confess here what I feel about them.[2]

VALUING WHAT IS NOT MINE

He rates his own things below others' and embraces the opinions that most humble mankind.

2.17.5 There are two parts to this glory: namely, to esteem oneself too highly, and not to esteem others highly enough. As to the first, it seems to me that these considerations should be taken into account first. I feel myself burdened by an error of the soul that displeases me, both as unjust and still more as troublesome. I try to correct it, but I cannot root it out. It is that I lower the

2 Constantius II, Roman emperor (AD 337–361), as described by the historian Ammianus Marcellinus.

just value of the things I possess, and raise the value of things because they are foreign, absent and not mine. This temperament spreads very far. Just as the prerogative of authority makes husbands look upon their own wives with a vicious disdain, and many fathers their children, so do I; and between two equal works I would always weigh against my own. Not so much because jealousy for my progress and improvement troubles my judgment and keeps me from being satisfied with myself, as because mastery in itself breeds contempt for what one holds and governs. Distant governments and manners appeal to me, and so do distant languages. And I notice that Latin beguiles me, through the favor of its dignity, beyond what is its due, as it does children and the common people. My neighbor's management, his house, his horse, though of equal value, are better than mine because they are not mine. Moreover, I am very ignorant about my own affairs. I admire the assurance and confidence that everyone has in himself, whereas there is hardly anything that I know I know, or that I dare promise myself I can do. I do not have my capacities set out and itemized in advance; I learn of them only after the event, as doubtful of my own strength as of anyone else's. Hence, if I succeed creditably in some task, I put it down more to my luck than to my skill, since I plan every task at random and in fear.

2.17.6 Likewise I have this in general: of all the opinions antiquity has held of man as a whole, those I embrace most willingly and cling to most are those that most despise, debase and annihilate us. Philosophy never seems to me to have so fine a game as when it combats our presumption and vanity, when it acknowledges in good faith its irresolution, its weakness and its ignorance. It seems to me that the nursing mother of the falsest opinions, both public and private, is man's overgood opinion of himself. Those people who perch astride the epicycle of Mercury, who see so far into the heavens, set my teeth on edge. For in the study I pursue, whose subject is man, I find so extreme a variety of judgments, so deep a labyrinth of difficulties piled one upon another, so much diversity and uncertainty in the very

school of wisdom. You can imagine, then: since those people have not been able to settle the knowledge of themselves and of their own condition, which is continually before their eyes and within them; since they do not know how that moves which they themselves set moving, nor how to portray and decipher for us the springs they themselves hold and handle—how could I believe them about the cause of the rise and fall of the river Nile?[3] The curiosity to know things was given to men as a scourge, says Holy Scripture.[4]

2.17.7 But to come to my own case, it is very hard, it seems to me, for anyone else to esteem himself less—or indeed for anyone else to esteem me less—than I esteem myself. I hold myself to be of the common sort, except in holding myself so; guilty of the lowest and most commonplace defects, but not disowning them, not excusing them. And I value myself only in that I know my value. If there is any glory in me, it is infused superficially, by the treachery of my constitution, and has no body that appears before the eye of my judgment. I am sprinkled with it, but not dyed in it. For in truth, as regards the products of the mind, of whatever kind, nothing has ever come from me that satisfied me. And other people's approval does not repay me. My judgment is tender and hard to please, especially about myself. I feel myself wavering and bending with weakness. I have nothing of my own with which to satisfy my judgment. My sight is clear and orderly enough, but when I set to work it grows blurred, as I find most plainly in poetry. I love it infinitely; I am a fair judge of other people's work; but in truth I act like a child when I try to set my own hand to it; I cannot bear myself. One may play the fool anywhere else, but not in poetry.

3 In Ptolemaic astronomy an epicycle was the small circle on which a planet was thought to move while that circle itself circled the earth.
4 Ecclesiastes 1:13.

Neither gods, nor men, nor booksellers' columns
Have allowed poets to be mediocre. Would to God this maxim were posted over the doors of all our printers' shops, to bar the way to so many versifiers! *But*
Nothing is more self-assured than a bad poet.[5]

2.17.8 Why do we not have peoples like that? Dionysius the Elder valued nothing in himself so much as his poetry. At the season of the Olympic Games, along with chariots surpassing all others in magnificence, he also sent poets and musicians to present his verses, with tents and pavilions gilded and royally hung with tapestries. When they came to put his verses forward, the charm and excellence of the delivery at first caught the people's attention. But when afterward the people came to weigh the ineptitude of the work, they first turned to contempt; and as their judgment grew ever more sour, they soon flew into a fury and rushed to pull down and tear up all those pavilions in spite. And since those chariots likewise did nothing worthwhile in the race, and the ship bringing his people home missed Sicily and was driven by the storm and smashed against the coast of Taranto, the people held it for certain that this was the wrath of the gods, angered as they were against that bad poem. And the very sailors who escaped the shipwreck went about seconding the people's opinion, to which the oracle that foretold his death also seemed in some way to subscribe. It declared that Dionysius would be near his end when he had defeated those who were better than he. This he took to mean the Carthaginians, who surpassed him in power. And in dealing with them he often sidestepped victory and tempered it, so as not to incur the meaning of this prediction. But he misunderstood it: for the god was marking the moment of the advantage he won at Athens, by favor and injustice, over tragic poets better than himself, when he had his tragedy, entitled *The Lenaeans*, performed in the com-

5 Horace, Art of Poetry; the columns were pillars on which booksellers posted their wares. The second Latin is Martial, Epigrams 12.

petition. Immediately after this victory he died—and partly from the excessive joy it gave him.[6]

2.17.9 What I find excusable in my own work is not excusable in itself and in truth, but only in comparison with other, worse things that I see given credit. I envy the good fortune of those who know how to rejoice in their work and take pleasure in it, for it is an easy way to give oneself pleasure, since one draws it from oneself—especially if there is a little firmness in their stubbornness. I know a poet to whom strong and weak, in public and in private, heaven and earth, all cry out that he knows little about it. For all that, he takes nothing off the measure he has cut himself to. He is always starting again, always reconsidering, and always persisting, all the more stubborn in his opinion because it is up to him alone to uphold it.

NEVER PLEASED WITH MY WORK

His writings never satisfy him; he describes his rough, unruly style and his Gascon and Latin.

2.17.10 As for my works, they are so far from smiling on me that every time I go over them again, I am vexed with them. *When I reread, I am ashamed to have written, for I see much / That even I, who wrote it, judge worth erasing.* I always have an idea in my soul that presents me with a better form than the one I have put to work, but I cannot grasp it or make use of it. And that very idea is only of the middling sort. I conclude from this that the productions of those rich and great souls of times past lie far beyond the farthest reach of my imagination and my wishes. Their writings not only satisfy and fill me; they stun me and transfix me with admiration.[7]

6 His play won at the Athenian festival of the Lenaea in 367 BC; Montaigne's source takes the festival's name for the play's title.

7 Ovid, Letters from the Black Sea 1.

> I judge their beauty; I see it, if not to the very end, at least so far that it is impossible for me to aspire to it. Whatever I undertake, I owe a sacrifice to the Graces, as Plutarch says of someone, to win their favor. *For if anything pleases,*
> *If anything sweet flows into men's senses,*
> *All of it is owed to the charming Graces.* They forsake me everywhere. Everything is coarse with me; there is a lack of polish and beauty. I do not know how to make things worth more than they are worth. My manner adds nothing to the matter. That is why I need matter that is strong, that has plenty of grip, and that shines of itself.[8]

When I seize on popular and lighter subjects, it is to follow my own bent—I do not love a ceremonious and gloomy wisdom, as the world does—and to cheer myself, not to cheer my style, which would rather have them grave and severe. At least, if I should call style a formless, unruled way of talking, a popular jargon, a way of proceeding without definition, without division, without conclusion, muddled, after the fashion of Amafanius and Rabirius. I do not know how to please, or delight, or tickle. The best story in the world dries up in my hands and goes dull. I know how to speak only in earnest.[9] And I am wholly lacking in that facility I see in many of my companions, of entertaining all comers, holding a whole company in suspense, or tirelessly amusing a prince's ear with all sorts of talk. Matter never fails them, thanks to the gift they have of knowing how to use the first that comes to hand and suit it to the temperament and capacity of the people they are dealing with. Princes do not much like solid discourse, nor do I like telling stories. The first and easiest reasons, which are usually the best received, I do not know how to use. A poor preacher for the common crowd. On

8 Plutarch tells how Plato urged the austere Xenocrates to sacrifice to the Graces. The author of the Latin verses is unknown.

9 Amafanius and Rabirius were early Latin writers on Epicurean philosophy whom Cicero faulted for their artless style.

any subject I am inclined to say the most extreme things I know about it. Cicero holds that in philosophical treatises the hardest part is the opening. If so, I am wise to take hold of the conclusion. Yet one must know how to tune the string to every kind of pitch; and the highest is the one that comes into play least often. There is at least as much perfection in raising up an empty thing as in holding up a weighty one. Sometimes one must handle things on the surface, sometimes go deep into them. I know well that most men stay on this low level, grasping things only by that outer bark. But I also know that the greatest masters, Xenophon and Plato, are often seen relaxing into this low and popular way of speaking about things and treating them, sustaining it with graces that never fail them.

2.17.11 For the rest, my language has nothing easy or fluent about it; it is rough, with its free and unruly arrangements. And I like it so—if not by my judgment, then by my inclination. But I clearly feel that I sometimes let myself go too far that way, and that by dint of trying to avoid art and affectation I fall back into them from another side: *I strive to be brief, / I become obscure.* Plato says that length or brevity are not qualities that take away or give value to language. Even if I undertook to follow that other style, even, smooth and orderly, I could not attain it. And although the clipped phrases and cadences of Sallust suit my temperament better, still I find Caesar both greater and harder to imitate. And though my inclination leads me more to imitate Seneca's way of speaking, I nonetheless esteem Plutarch's more highly. As in keeping silent, so in speaking, I simply follow my natural form. That is perhaps why I am better at speaking than at writing. Movement and action bring words to life, especially in those who move about briskly, as I do, and grow heated. Bearing, face, voice, dress, posture can give some value to things that have little of their own, such as chatter. Messala complains in Tacitus of certain tight garments of his day, and of the arrangement of the benches from which orators had to speak, which weakened their eloquence.[10]

10 Tacitus, Dialogue on Orators.

2.17.12 My French is corrupted, both in pronunciation and otherwise, by the barbarism of my native soil. I never saw a man from these parts who did not quite plainly smack of his local warble, and who did not grate on purely French ears. Yet this is not because I am well versed in my Périgord dialect, for I have no more use of it than of German, and I hardly care. It is a language—like those around me on every side, Poitevin, Saintongeais, Angoumois, Limousin, Auvergnat—limp, drawling, flabby. Above us, toward the mountains, there is indeed a Gascon that I find singularly beautiful: dry, brief, expressive, and in truth a manly and military language, more than any other I understand; as sinewy, powerful and to the point as French is graceful, delicate and abundant. As for Latin, which was given me as my mother tongue, I have lost through disuse the readiness to use it in speaking—yes, and in writing, in which I once got myself called Master John. That shows how little I am worth on that side.[11]

BEAUTY AND THE BODY

Body and soul must not be separated; Montaigne regrets his short stature and describes his build.

2.17.13 Beauty is a quality of great recommendation in human dealings. It is the first means by which people are won over to one another, and there is no man so barbarous and so surly as not to feel himself somewhat struck by its sweetness. The body has a great share in our being; it holds a high rank there; so its structure and composition deserve very careful consideration. Those who want to detach our two principal parts and sequester them from each other are wrong. On the contrary, they must be coupled and joined together again. We must order the soul not to withdraw to one side, not to keep its own company apart, not to despise and abandon the body (nor could it do so except by some counterfeit aping), but to rally to it, embrace it, cherish it,

11 Montaigne's father had him taught Latin from infancy as his first language. "Master John" was a nickname for a schoolmaster or learned clerk.

assist it, supervise it, counsel it, set it right and bring it back when it goes astray—in short, to marry it and serve it as a husband, so that their actions may not appear different and contrary, but harmonious and uniform. Christians have special instruction about this bond, for they know that divine justice embraces this union and joining of body and soul, even to making the body capable of eternal rewards; and that God watches the whole man act, and wills that he receive punishment or reward whole, according to his deserts.

> The Peripatetic school, the most sociable of all schools, assigns to wisdom this one care: to provide for and procure in common the good of these two associated parts. And it shows that the other schools, through not having attached themselves enough to the consideration of this mixture, have taken sides, this one for the body, that one for the soul, with equal error, and have lost sight of their subject, which is man, and of their guide, which they generally acknowledge to be Nature. The first distinction there ever was among men, and the first consideration that gave some preeminence over others, was probably the advantage of beauty. *They divided the fields and gave them out*
>
> *According to each man's looks and strength and wit;*
> *For looks counted for much, and strength was prized.*[12]

2.17.14 Now, I am a little below average height. This defect is not only ugly but also inconvenient, especially for those who hold commands and offices, for they lack the authority that a fine presence and bodily majesty confer. Gaius Marius was reluctant to accept soldiers who were not six feet tall. The Courtier is quite right to want, for the gentleman he is shaping, an ordinary stature rather than any other, and to reject for him any oddity that would make people point at him. But if he must miss that middle measure, to choose that he fall short of it rather than go

12 The Peripatetics were the school of Aristotle. The Latin is Lucretius, On the Nature of Things 5.

beyond it—that I would not do, for a military man.[13] Little men, says Aristotle, are pretty but not handsome; and a great soul shows itself in greatness, as beauty does in a large, tall body. The Ethiopians and the Indians, he says, when electing their kings and magistrates, paid attention to people's beauty and tallness. They were right. For it inspires respect in those who follow him, and terror in the enemy, to see a leader of fine, ample stature marching at the head of a troop: *Turnus himself, of surpassing frame, moves among the foremost, / Weapons in hand, and towers a whole head above the rest.* Our great King, divine and heavenly, every circumstance of whose life should be noted with care, devotion and reverence, did not reject bodily commendation: *fairer than the children of men*. And Plato, along with temperance and fortitude, wants beauty in the guardians of his republic.[14] It is very galling when someone comes up to you among your own people to ask where the master is, and you get only the leftovers of the hat-doffing they make to your barber or your secretary. That is what happened to poor Philopoemen. Having arrived first of his party at a lodging where he was expected, his hostess, who did not know him and thought him rather unprepossessing, set him to go and help her women draw water or stoke the fire, to serve Philopoemen.[15] When the gentlemen of his retinue arrived and caught him busy at this fine task—for he had not failed to obey the order he had been given—they asked him what he was doing there. "I am paying," he answered, "the penalty for my ugliness." Other kinds of beauty are for women; beauty of stature is the only beauty of men. Where there is smallness, neither a broad, rounded forehead, nor clear, gentle eyes, nor a well-proportioned nose, nor a small ear and mouth, nor even, white teeth, nor a thick, smooth beard brown as chestnut bark, nor hair that curls up, nor a well-proportioned head, nor a fresh complexion, nor a pleasing face, nor a body free of odor, nor well-proportioned limbs, can make a handsome man.

13 Gaius Marius (157–86 BC) was a Roman general.
14 Virgil, Aeneid VII; then Psalm 45 (44 in the Vulgate), applied to Christ.
15 The story is from Plutarch's Life of Philopoemen.

2.17.15 For the rest, I have a strong, compact build; a face not fat but full; a temperament between the jovial and the melancholic, moderately sanguine and warm, *Whence my legs bristle with hairs, and my chest with shaggy fleece*; health strong and lively until well on in years, rarely troubled by illness. I was like that—for I am not considering myself as I am now, when I have entered the approaches of old age, having long since passed forty. *Little by little age breaks down our strength and full-grown vigor, / And melts away into a worse condition.* What I shall be from now on will be no more than half a being; it will no longer be me. Every day I escape and steal away from myself: *One by one the passing years rob us of what is ours.*[16]

CLUMSY HANDS, A FREE SOUL

He has no bodily skills and will work only of his own free will, never under constraint.

2.17.16 Of dexterity and agility I have had none; and yet I am the son of a very agile father, whose liveliness lasted him into extreme old age. He scarcely found a man of his rank who could equal him in any bodily exercise, just as I have found scarcely any who did not surpass me—except at running, at which I was middling. In music, no one has ever managed to teach me anything, either in singing, for which my voice is very unapt, or in playing instruments. At dancing, tennis and wrestling, I have been able to acquire only a very slight and ordinary competence; at swimming, fencing, vaulting and jumping, none at all.[17] My hands are so clumsy that I cannot even write legibly for myself, so that what I have scrawled I would rather write over again than take the trouble to make it out; and I read aloud hardly any better: I feel I weigh on my listeners. Otherwise, a good scholar. I do not know how to fold and close a letter properly, and I could never cut a pen, or carve at table to any pur-

16 The quotations are from Martial, Lucretius (On the Nature of Things) and Horace (Epistles).

17 The "tennis" is real tennis, the old indoor game (jeu de paume).

pose, or saddle and harness a horse, or carry a hawk properly and fly it, or speak to dogs, birds or horses. In short, my bodily qualities are very much in keeping with those of my soul. There is nothing lively about them; there is only a full, firm vigor. I endure hard work well, but only if I go to it of my own accord, and as far as my desire leads me: *Eagerness gently beguiling the harshness of the toil.* Otherwise, if I am not lured to it by some pleasure, and if I have any other guide than my own pure and free will, I am good for nothing. For I have come to this: except for health and life, there is nothing for which I am willing to bite my nails, nothing I am willing to buy at the price of torment of mind and constraint: *Not at such a price would I have all the sands of shady Tagus / And the gold it rolls down to the sea.* Extremely idle, extremely free, both by nature and by art. I would as soon lend my blood as my care.[18] I have a free soul, entirely its own, used to conducting itself in its own way. Having had until now neither commander nor master forced on me, I have gone as far as I pleased, and at the pace I pleased. That has made me soft and useless in the service of others, and good for no one but myself.

18 Horace, Satires; then Juvenal, Satires. The Tagus, in Spain and Portugal, was famed for its gold-bearing sands.

2.17.17 And for my part, there has been no need to force this heavy, lazy, do-nothing nature of mine. For having found myself from birth at such a level of fortune that I had reason to stop there (a reason, however, which a thousand others I know would rather have taken as a plank to cross over to seeking, agitation and restlessness), I have sought nothing, and have also taken nothing: *We are not borne along with swelling sails by a favoring north wind,*

Nor yet do we pass our lives against contrary winds from the south:

In strength, wit, looks, virtue, rank and wealth,

Last of the first, but still ahead of the last. I have needed only the ability to be content.[19]

Which is, however, rightly understood, a discipline of the soul equally difficult in every kind of condition, and one that experience shows us is found more easily still in want than in plenty. Perhaps because, following the course of our other passions, the hunger for riches is sharpened more by having them than by needing them, and the virtue of moderation is rarer than that of patience. And I have needed only to enjoy quietly the goods that God in his bounty had put into my hands. I have never tasted any kind of irksome toil. I have had scarcely anything to manage except my own affairs; or if I have had others, it has been on condition of managing them in my own time and my own way, entrusted to me by people who relied on me, who did not press me, and who knew me. For experts can still get some service out of a restive, broken-winded horse.

2.17.18 Even my childhood was conducted in a gentle, free way, and even then exempt from strict subjection. All this has given me a delicate temperament, incapable of worry—so much so that I like my losses, and the disorders that concern me, to be kept from me. Under the heading of my expenses I enter what my carelessness costs me to feed and maintain: *That, surely, is*

19 Horace, Epistles.

what is left over: / What escapes the master's notice and benefits the thieves. I like not knowing the count of what I have, so as to feel my loss less exactly. I beg those who live with me, where they lack affection and good deeds, to cheat me and pay me in good appearances.[20] For want of firmness enough to bear the vexation of the adverse accidents we are subject to, and because I cannot keep myself keyed up to regulating and ordering my affairs, I nurture in myself, as much as I can, this attitude: abandoning myself wholly to Fortune, I expect the worst in everything, and resolve to bear that worst gently and patiently. That is the only thing I work at, and the goal toward which I direct all my reasoning. In a danger, I do not think so much about how I shall escape it as about how little it matters whether I escape it. Suppose I were to stay there for good—what of it? Being unable to rule events, I rule myself, and I adapt myself to them if they do not adapt to me. I have hardly any skill at dodging Fortune and escaping her, or at forcing her, or at arranging and steering things my way by prudence. I have even less patience to bear the harsh and painful care that this requires. And the most painful position for me is to be in suspense about pressing matters, tossed between fear and hope.

2.17.19 Deliberating, even about the slightest things, bothers me. And I feel my mind more hampered in enduring the swaying and the various jolts of doubt and consultation than in settling down and resolving on any course whatever, once the die is cast. Few passions have disturbed my sleep; but of deliberations, the least disturbs it. Just as with roads, I gladly avoid the sloping and slippery edges and throw myself into the beaten track, however muddy and boggy, where I cannot sink any lower, and there I look for safety. So too I like misfortunes that are pure and simple, which no longer try and harass me with uncertainty about whether they can be mended, and which at the first leap push me straight into suffering. *Uncertain evils torment us more.*[21]

2.17.20 In the face of events I bear myself manfully; in the handling of them, childishly. The dread of the fall gives me more

20 Horace, Epistles.

fever than the blow. The game is not worth the candle. The miser has a worse time of it from his passion than the poor man, and the jealous man than the cuckold. And there is often less harm in losing your vineyard than in going to law over it. The lowest step is the firmest: it is the seat of constancy. There you need no one but yourself. Constancy is founded there and rests wholly on itself. This example of a gentleman whom many people knew—does it not have something of the philosopher about it? He married well on in years, having spent his youth as a jolly fellow, a great talker, a great joker. Remembering how much the subject of cuckoldry had given him to talk about and to mock others for, he took cover by marrying a woman he found in the place where anyone can get one for his money, and with her he set up the terms of their alliance: "Good day, hussy; good day, cuckold." And there was nothing he talked about more often and more openly with visitors to his house than this plan of his. In this way he curbed the mockers' secret gossip and blunted the point of that reproach.

WITHOUT AMBITION

Content with his inheritance, Montaigne never sought advancement; his frank virtues would be useless at court anyway.

2.17.21 As for ambition, which is a neighbor of presumption, or rather its daughter, Fortune would have had to come and take me by the hand to advance me. For to put myself to trouble for an uncertain hope, and to submit to all the difficulties that beset those who are trying to push their way into favor at the start of their career—that I could never have done: *I do not pay cash for hope.* I cling to what I see and hold, and I hardly stray from port: *Let one oar sweep the water, and the other the sand.* And besides, one seldom attains such advancement except by first risking what one has.[22] And I am of the opinion that if what you have is enough to maintain the condition in which you were born and

21 Seneca, Agamemnon.
22 Terence, The Brothers; then Propertius, Elegies.

brought up, it is folly to let go of it on the uncertain chance of increasing it. The man to whom Fortune refuses a place to set his foot and establish a quiet, settled existence is pardonable if he gambles what he has, since one way or another necessity sends him out on the quest. *In bad times one must take the headlong road.* And I would sooner excuse a younger son for throwing his portion to the winds than the man charged with the honor of the house, who cannot be seen in want except through his own fault.[23] I did indeed find it the shorter and easier way, with the advice of my good friends of times past, to rid myself of this desire and keep still: *Whose happy lot is the palm without the dust.* Judging also, quite soundly, that my powers were not capable of great things. And remembering that saying of the late Chancellor Olivier, that the French are like monkeys that go climbing up a tree from branch to branch and never stop until they have reached the highest branch—and there, once they are up, they show their backside. *It is shameful to load on your head a weight you cannot bear, / And soon, buckling at the knee, to turn your back and give way.*[24]

2.17.22 Even those qualities in me that are not blameworthy I found useless in this age. The easiness of my manners would have been called cowardice and weakness; good faith and conscience would have been thought scrupulous and superstitious; frankness and freedom, tiresome, thoughtless and rash. Misfortune is good for something. It is a fine thing to be born in a thoroughly depraved age, for by comparison with others you are reckoned virtuous at a bargain price.

23 Seneca, Agamemnon.

> Anyone who in our day is no worse than a parricide and a desecrator of churches is a good and honorable man: *Now, if a friend does not deny a deposit,*
> *If he returns an old purse with all its rust,*
> *That is prodigious honesty, worthy of the Etruscan books,*
> *And calls for purification with a garlanded lamb.* And there was never a time or place where a surer and greater reward was offered to princes for goodness and justice. The first who takes it into his head to push his way into favor and credit by that road, I am much mistaken if he does not easily outstrip his fellows. Force and violence can do something, but not always everything.[25]

Merchants, village judges, artisans—we see them matching the nobility in valor and military science. They fight honorable combats, both public and private; they batter and defend towns in our present wars. A prince's distinction is smothered in this throng. Let him shine with humanity, truthfulness, loyalty, temperance, and above all justice: rare marks, unknown and exiled. It is solely through the goodwill of the peoples that he can get his business done, and no other qualities can win their goodwill like those, since they are the most useful to them. *Nothing is so popular as goodness.*[26]

2.17.23 By that measure I would have found myself great and rare, just as I find myself a pygmy and commonplace by the measure of certain past ages, in which it was ordinary—unless other, stronger qualities went with it—to see a man moderate in his revenge, slow to resent offenses, scrupulous in keeping his word, neither double nor pliant, nor fitting his faith to the will of others and to circumstances. I would rather let affairs break their necks than bend my faith to serve them.

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24 Horace, Epistles; then Propertius. François Olivier (1497–1560) was Chancellor of France.

25 Juvenal, Satires. The "Etruscan books" recorded prodigies and the rites for expiating them.

26 Cicero, For Ligarius.

AGAINST DISSIMULATION

Montaigne hates the new art of feigning and holds that a prince who breaks his word ruins himself.

2.17.24 For as for this new virtue of feigning and dissimulation, which is now so highly in favor, I hate it mortally; and of all the vices, I find none that shows so much cowardice and baseness of heart. It is a cowardly and servile disposition to go disguising oneself and hiding behind a mask, not daring to let oneself be seen as one is. That is how our men train themselves for treachery. Being practiced at uttering false words, they have no qualms about breaking them. A generous heart should not belie its thoughts; it wants to be seen right to its depths. Everything there is good, or at least everything is human. Aristotle considers it the part of magnanimity to hate and love openly, to judge and speak with complete frankness, and, compared with the truth, to set no store by the approval or disapproval of others. Apollonius used to say that lying was for slaves and telling the truth for free men. Truthfulness is the first and fundamental part of virtue. We must love it for its own sake. The man who tells the truth because he is obliged to for some other reason, and because it serves him, and who is not afraid to tell a lie when it matters to nobody, is not truthful enough. My soul by its very nature shrinks from lying and hates even to think of it. I feel an inward shame and a stinging remorse if a lie sometimes slips out of me—as sometimes it does, when occasions take me by surprise and stir me before I can think. We need not always say everything, for that would be foolish. But what we do say must be what we think; otherwise it is wickedness.

2.17.25 I do not know what advantage they expect from constantly feigning and dissembling, unless it is not to be believed even when they tell the truth. That may deceive people once or twice. But to make a profession of keeping oneself covered, and to boast, as some of our princes have done, that they would throw their shirt into the fire if it were privy to their true inten-

tions (a saying of the ancient Metellus Macedonicus), and that he who does not know how to dissemble does not know how to reign—this is to give fair warning to those who have to deal with them that everything they say is nothing but trickery and lies.[27] *The craftier and more cunning a man is, the more he is hated and suspected, once his reputation for honesty is gone.* It would be great simplicity in anyone to let himself be taken in by either the face or the words of a man who makes a point of always being different outside from what he is within, as Tiberius did. And I do not know what part such people can have in human dealings, since they produce nothing that is accepted as ready money. Whoever is disloyal to truth is disloyal to falsehood too.[28]

2.17.26 Those in our time who, in establishing a prince's duty, have considered only the good of his affairs, and have put it ahead of care for his good faith and conscience, would have something to say to a prince whose affairs Fortune had so arranged that he could settle them forever by a single breach and failure of his word. But that is not how things go. You often fall back into the same kind of bargain; you make more than one peace, more than one treaty, in your life.[29] The gain that tempts them to the first breach of faith—and some gain almost always presents itself, as with every other kind of wickedness: sacrilege, murder, rebellion and treason are all undertaken for some sort of profit—this first gain brings countless losses after it, shutting that prince out of all dealings and every means of negotiation because of the example of this faithlessness. Suleiman, of the Ottoman race—a race not very careful about keeping promises and pacts—when in my childhood he landed his army at Otranto, learned that Mercurino de Gattinara and the inhabitants of Castro were being held prisoner after surrendering the place, contrary to the terms his men had agreed with them. He sent orders that they be released, saying that since he had other

27 Quintus Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus was a Roman general of the 2nd century BC. The maxim about dissembling and reigning was attributed to Louis XI.
28 Cicero, On Duties.
29 Montaigne is probably thinking of Machiavelli's The Prince (1532) and its followers.

great enterprises in hand in that region, this breach of faith, though it looked advantageous for the moment, would bring him in future a discredit and a distrust that would do him infinite harm.[30]

2.17.27 As for me, I would rather be tiresome and indiscreet than a flatterer and a dissembler. I admit that some touch of pride and stubbornness may be mixed in with keeping myself as whole and open as I do, without regard for others. And it seems to me that I become a little freer where I ought to be less so, and that the respect I am expected to show provokes me by contrast. It may also be that, for lack of art, I let myself follow my nature. Bringing to the great the same freedom of tongue and bearing that I bring from my own house, I feel how much it tends toward indiscretion and incivility. But besides the fact that I am made this way, I do not have a mind supple enough to sidestep a sudden question and slip out of it by some detour, nor to make up a truth, nor memory enough to retain it once made up, nor, certainly, assurance enough to keep it up; and I play the bold man out of weakness. So I give myself up to naturalness and to always saying what I think, both by temperament and by design, leaving it to Fortune to manage the outcome. Aristippus used to say that the chief fruit he had drawn from philosophy was that he spoke freely and openly to everyone.

A MEMORY FULL OF HOLES

His memory fails him constantly, along with a slow wit and ignorance of everyday household matters.

2.17.28 Memory is a tool of wonderful service, without which judgment can barely do its job; and I lack it entirely. Whatever anyone wants to put to me must come in small pieces, for answering a proposal with several different heads is beyond my power. I could not take on a commission without notebooks. And when I have a speech of some consequence to make, if it is a long one,

30 Suleiman the Magnificent (reigned 1520–1566); his forces raided the coast near Otranto, in southern Italy, in 1537. Castro is a small town nearby.

I am reduced to the vile and wretched necessity of learning by heart, word for word, what I have to say; otherwise I would have neither poise nor assurance, being afraid that my memory might play me a nasty trick. But this method is no less difficult for me. To learn three lines of verse takes me three hours. And then, in one's own work, the freedom and authority to shift the order and change a word, constantly varying the material, make it harder for the author to fix in his memory. Now, the more I distrust my memory, the more confused it gets. It serves me better when I happen upon things; I have to court it casually, for if I press it, it is stunned; and once it has begun to falter, the more I sound it, the more it tangles and muddles itself. It serves me in its own time, not in mine.

2.17.29 What I feel in my memory I feel in several other parts. I flee command, obligation and constraint. What I do easily and naturally, if I order myself to do it by an express and prescribed order, I can no longer do. Even in the body, those members that have some freedom and a more particular jurisdiction of their own sometimes refuse to obey me when I assign and tie them to a fixed time and place of required service. This forced and tyrannical prearrangement puts them off; they shrink back in fright or spite, and go numb. Once, when I was in a place where it is barbarous discourtesy not to respond to those who invite you to drink, I tried, although I was treated there with every freedom, to play the good fellow, to please the ladies who were of the party, according to the custom of the country. But it was quite comical: for this threat and preparation, the prospect of having to force myself beyond my habit and my nature, so stopped up my throat that I could not swallow a single drop, and I was deprived of drinking even what I needed with my meal. I found myself sated and my thirst quenched by all the drink my imagination had swallowed in advance. This effect is more apparent in those whose imagination is more vehement and powerful; but it is natural nonetheless, and there is no one who does not feel it to some degree. An excellent archer condemned to death was offered his life if he would give some notable proof of his

skill. He refused to try, fearing that the excessive strain of his will would make his hand go astray, and that instead of saving his life he would lose, besides, the reputation he had won in archery. A man whose mind is elsewhere will never fail, within an inch, to repeat the same number and length of steps in the place where he walks up and down; but if he sets about it with the intention of measuring and counting them, he will find that what he did by nature and by chance he will not do so exactly by design.

2.17.30 My library, which is one of the fine ones among village libraries, is set in a corner of my house. If something comes into my head that I want to go and look up or write down there, I have to entrust it to someone else for safekeeping, for fear it may escape me just in crossing my courtyard. If, while speaking, I make bold to stray ever so little from my thread, I never fail to lose it; which is why I keep my talk constrained, dry and terse. The people who serve me I have to call by the names of their jobs or of their home regions, for I find it very hard to retain names.[31] I can tell you that a name has three syllables, that it sounds harsh, that it begins or ends with such-and-such a letter. And if I were to live long, I do not doubt that I would forget my own name, as others have done. Messala Corvinus spent two years without a trace of memory. The same is said of George of Trebizond. And on my own account I often ponder what sort of life theirs was, and whether, without this faculty, I shall have enough left to keep me going with some ease. And looking at it closely, I fear that this defect, if it becomes complete, ruins all the functions of the soul.[32] *I am full of cracks; I leak out on every side.* More than once I have forgotten the password I had given or received three hours before, and forgotten where I had hidden my purse, whatever Cicero may say. I help myself lose what I put away with special care. *Memory, surely, is the one faculty that holds not only philosophy but the whole conduct of life and all the*

31 Montaigne's library was in the tower of his château, across the courtyard from the main house.

32 Marcus Valerius Messala Corvinus (64 BC–AD 8), Roman orator and statesman.

arts. Memory is the receptacle and casket of knowledge; having one so defective, I have no great cause to complain if I know little. I know the names of the arts in general, and what they deal with, but nothing beyond that. I leaf through books; I do not study them.[33] What stays with me from them is something I no longer recognize as belonging to anyone else. It is only what my judgment has profited from: the reasonings and ideas it has soaked up. The author, the place, the words and the other circumstances I forget at once. And I am so excellent at forgetting that I forget my own writings and compositions no less than everything else. People are always quoting me to myself without my noticing. Anyone who wanted to know where the verses and examples I have heaped up here come from would put me hard to it to tell him. And yet I have begged them only at well-known and famous doors, not content that they should be rich unless they also came from a rich and honorable hand: authority goes along with reason there. It is no great wonder if my book shares the fate of other books, and if my memory lets go of what I write as well as what I read, of what I give as well as what I receive.

2.17.31 Besides the defect of memory, I have others that contribute a good deal to my ignorance. My mind is slow and blunt; the slightest cloud stops its point, so that, for example, I never set it a riddle so easy that it could unravel it. There is no subtlety so empty that it does not baffle me. In games where the mind plays a part—chess, cards, checkers and the like—I grasp only the crudest features. My understanding is slow and muddled; but what it once grasps it holds well, and embraces quite fully, closely and deeply, for as long as it holds it. My sight is long, sound and perfect, but it tires easily with work and grows heavy. For this reason I cannot have long dealings with books except with the help of others. The younger Pliny will teach those who have not experienced it how much this hindrance matters to those who devote themselves to this occupation.[34]

33 Terence, The Eunuch; then Cicero, Academica. In On Old Age Cicero says no old man forgets where he has hidden his treasure.

34 Pliny the Younger's letters mention his trouble with his eyes.

2.17.32 There is no soul so wretched and brutish that some particular faculty is not seen shining in it; there is none so buried that it does not break out at some point. And how it comes about that a soul blind and asleep to everything else is found lively, clear and excellent in some particular activity—we must ask the masters. But the fine souls are the universal souls, open and ready for everything: if not taught, at least teachable. I say this to accuse my own. For whether through weakness or carelessness (and to disregard what lies at our feet, what we have in our hands, what most closely concerns the business of living, is something very far from my doctrine), there is no soul so inept and ignorant as mine about many such ordinary things, which one cannot be ignorant of without shame. I must give a few examples.

2.17.33 I was born and brought up in the country, among farming; I have had business and the management of a household in my hands ever since those who preceded me in possession of the property I enjoy gave up their place to me. Now, I cannot reckon either with counters or with a pen; most of our coins I do not know; nor do I know the difference between one grain and another, either in the field or in the granary, unless it is too obvious; nor, scarcely, the difference between the cabbages and the lettuces in my garden. I do not even understand the names of the most basic farm tools, or the crudest principles of agriculture, which children know; still less the mechanical arts, trade, and knowledge of goods, of the variety and nature of fruits, wines and foods; nor how to train a bird or doctor a horse or a dog. And since I must make my shame complete, not a month ago I was caught not knowing what yeast was used for in making bread, and what it meant to let wine ferment in the vat. In Athens long ago they guessed at an aptitude for mathematics in a man they saw cleverly arranging and tying up a load of brushwood. Truly, one would draw quite the opposite conclusion from me: for give me the whole equipment of a kitchen and there I am, starving. From these features of my confession one can imagine others at my expense. But whatever I make myself known

as, provided I make myself known as I am, I achieve my purpose. And yet I make no apology for daring to put into writing such low and frivolous remarks as these. The lowness of my subject forces me to it. Let them blame my project if they like, but not the way I carry it out. Be that as it may, without anyone's telling me, I see well enough how little all this is worth and weighs, and the folly of my design.

> It is enough that my judgment does not come apart, for it is my judgment that these essays put to the test. *Be as sharp-nosed as you like, be all nose,*
> *Such a nose as Atlas, if asked, would refuse to carry;*
> *And you could even mock Latinus himself:*
> *You cannot say more against my trifles*
> *Than I have said myself. What good will it do to gnaw tooth against tooth?*
> *You need meat if you want to be filled.*
> *Don't waste your effort: against those who admire themselves*
> *Keep your venom; I know these things are nothing.* I am not obliged not to say foolish things, provided I am not deceived in recognizing them. And to go wrong knowingly is so ordinary with me that I hardly ever go wrong in any other way; I hardly ever go wrong by chance.[35]

It is a small matter to let the rashness of my temperament have its way in foolish actions, since I cannot help letting it have its way, as a rule, in wicked ones.

IRRESOLUTION

He cannot choose between opinions and prefers to follow, holding that old institutions are better than change.

2.17.34 I once saw at Bar-le-Duc a portrait being presented to King Francis II, in remembrance of René, King of Sicily, which René had made of himself. Why is it not equally permissible for

35 Martial, Epigrams. Latinus was a famous comic actor in Rome.

everyone to portray himself with the pen, as he portrayed himself with a crayon? So I do not want to leave out this scar either, though it is hardly fit to be shown in public. It is irresolution: a very awkward defect in negotiating the affairs of the world. I do not know how to take sides in doubtful undertakings: *Neither yes nor no rings clear in my heart.* I can hold up an opinion well enough, but not choose it.[36] Because in human affairs, whichever side one leans to, plenty of appearances present themselves to confirm us in it. And the philosopher Chrysippus said that he wanted to learn from his masters Zeno and Cleanthes only their doctrines, pure and simple; as for proofs and reasons, he would supply enough of them himself. Whichever way I turn, I always supply myself with enough cause and plausibility to hold to it. So I keep doubt and freedom of choice at home until the occasion presses me. And then, to tell the truth, I most often throw the feather to the wind, as they say, and abandon myself to the mercy of Fortune. A very slight inclination or circumstance carries me away. *While the mind is in doubt, the slightest impulse drives it this way / And that.* The uncertainty of my judgment is so evenly balanced in most situations that I would willingly leave the decision to lot and dice. And I note, reflecting deeply on our human weakness, the examples that even sacred history has left us of this practice of leaving to Fortune and chance the decision of choices in doubtful matters: *The lot fell upon Matthias.* Human reason is a two-edged and dangerous sword. Even in the hand of Socrates, its most intimate and familiar friend, see how many ends this stick has. So I am fit only to follow, and I easily let myself be carried along by the crowd.[37] I do not trust my powers enough to undertake to command or to guide. I am very glad to find my path traced out by others. If I must run the risk of an uncertain choice, I would rather it be under someone who is surer of his opinions and

36 René of Anjou (1409–1480), titular king of Sicily and Naples, and a painter; Francis II reigned 1559–1560. The line is from Petrarch.

37 Terence, The Woman of Andros; then Acts 1:26, on the choice of the apostle to replace Judas.

more wedded to them than I am to mine, whose foundation and footing I find slippery.

2.17.35 And yet I am not too quick to change, for all that, since I see the same weakness in the opposing opinions. *The very habit of assenting seems to be dangerous and slippery.* Especially in political affairs there is a wide field open for wavering and dispute. *As when a true balance is pressed down by equal weight, / and neither sinks on this side nor rises on that.* Machiavelli's reasonings, for example, were solid enough for the subject; yet it has been very easy to attack them, and those who did so have left it no less easy to attack their own.[38] In such an argument there would always be material for answers, rejoinders, replies, surrejoinders, rebutters, and that endless web of disputes which our legal quibbling has stretched out as far as it could in favor of lawsuits: *We are struck, and we wear out the enemy with as many blows.* For the reasons there have hardly any foundation but experience, and the diversity of human events offers us infinite examples in every sort of form.[39] A learned man of our time says that in our almanacs, where they say hot, a man might say cold, and wet instead of dry, and always put the opposite of what they forecast; and if he had to bet on the outcome of one or the other, he would not care which side he took—except in matters where there can be no uncertainty, such as promising extreme heat at Christmas and the rigors of winter on Saint John's Day at midsummer. I think the same of these political arguments: whatever part you are cast in, you have as good a game as your opponent, provided you do not run up against principles that are too gross and obvious. And yet, to my way of thinking, in public affairs there is no course so bad, provided it has age and constancy, that it is not better than change and upheaval. Our morals are extremely corrupt and lean with a remarkable inclination toward the worse; among our laws and customs there are many that are barbarous and monstrous. Nevertheless, because of the

38 Cicero, Academica; the verse is from the Panegyric of Messalla in the collection of Tibullus.

39 Horace, Epistles.

difficulty of putting ourselves in a better state, and the danger of such a collapse, if I could drive a peg into our wheel and stop it at this point, I would gladly do it. *Never do we use examples so foul and so shameful / that worse ones do not remain.* The worst thing I find in our state is instability, and that our laws, any more than our clothes, cannot take on any settled form. It is very easy to accuse a government of imperfection, for all mortal things are full of it. It is very easy to breed in a people contempt for its ancient observances; no man ever undertook that without succeeding. But as for establishing a better state in place of the one that has been ruined—at this, many of those who undertook it have worn themselves out in vain. I give my prudence little share in my conduct; I willingly let myself be led by the public order of the world.[40] Happy the people who do what they are commanded better than those who command, without tormenting themselves about the reasons; who let themselves roll gently along with the rolling of the heavens. Obedience is never pure or tranquil in one who reasons and argues.

THE ONE THING I VALUE IN MYSELF

Everyone thinks his own judgment sufficient; Montaigne looks inward and trusts opinions born with him.

2.17.36 In sum, to come back to myself: the one thing for which I think something of myself is the very thing in which no man ever thought himself deficient. My claim to distinction is ordinary, common and popular; for who ever believed he lacked sense? That would be a proposition containing its own contradiction. It is a sickness that is never present where it is seen. It is very tenacious and strong, and yet the first ray of the patient's sight pierces and dispels it, as the sun's gaze does a thick fog. To accuse oneself, in this matter, would be to excuse oneself, and to condemn oneself would be to acquit oneself. There was never a street porter or a silly woman who did not think they had sense enough for their needs. We readily recognize that others have

40 Juvenal, Satires.

the advantage in courage, bodily strength, experience, agility, beauty; but the advantage in judgment we yield to no one. And as for the reasonings that come from plain natural reason in someone else, it seems to us that we would have found them ourselves if we had only looked in that direction.

2.17.37 Learning, style and such qualities that we see in other people's works, we readily perceive when they surpass our own. But the simple products of the understanding—everyone thinks it was in him to hit upon exactly the same, and he can hardly perceive their weight and difficulty, except, and barely then, at an extreme and incomparable distance. And whoever could see clearly the height of another's judgment would reach it and bring his own up to it. So this is a kind of exercise from which one must hope for very little commendation and praise, and a kind of composition of little renown. And then, for whom are you writing? The learned, to whom jurisdiction over books belongs, know no other value than learning, and acknowledge no other way of proceeding in our minds than that of erudition and skill. If you have taken one of the Scipios for the other, what is left for you to say that is worth anything? Whoever is ignorant of Aristotle, according to them, is at the same time ignorant of himself. Coarse and common souls do not see the grace of a finely spun argument. Now these two kinds fill the world. The third, into whose lot you fall—souls well ordered and strong in themselves—is so rare that it rightly has neither name nor rank among us. It is half time wasted to aspire and strive to please it.[41]

2.17.38 It is commonly said that the fairest share of her gifts that Nature has given us is that of sense; for there is no one who is not content with what she has allotted him of it. Isn't that reasonable? Whoever saw beyond it would be seeing beyond his own sight. I think my opinions are good and sound; but who does not believe as much of his own? One of the best proofs I have of it is the low esteem in which I hold myself. For if they had not been

41 Scipio Africanus the Elder and Scipio Aemilianus the Younger, Roman generals easily confused.

well grounded, they would easily have let themselves be tricked by the affection I bear myself—a singular affection, since I bring it almost entirely back to myself and hardly spread it beyond. All that others distribute of it to an infinite multitude of friends and acquaintances, to their glory, to their greatness, I refer entirely to the repose of my mind and to myself. What escapes from me elsewhere is not strictly by the command of my reason: *Taught, indeed, to live and thrive for myself.*[42]

2.17.39 Now my opinions I find infinitely bold and constant in condemning my own inadequacy. In truth, this too is a subject on which I exercise my judgment as much as on any other. The world always looks straight ahead; as for me, I turn my gaze inward, I fix it there, I keep it busy there. Everyone looks in front of him; I look inside myself. I have no business but with myself; I consider myself unceasingly, I inspect myself, I taste myself. Others always go elsewhere, if they think about it; they always go forward. *No one tries to descend into himself.* As for me, I roll about inside myself.[43] This capacity for sifting out the truth, whatever it amounts to in me, and this free temperament that does not easily subject my belief, I owe chiefly to myself. For the firmest and most general notions I have are those which, so to speak, were born with me: they are natural and entirely mine. I produced them raw and simple, in a bold and strong birth, but a little confused and imperfect. Since then I have established and fortified them by the authority of others, and by the sound examples of the ancients, with whom I found myself in agreement in judgment. These confirmed my hold on them and gave me a clearer enjoyment and possession of them. The commendation everyone seeks for liveliness and quickness of mind, I claim for steadiness; the commendation for a brilliant and signal action, or for some particular ability, I claim for order, consistency and tranquility of opinions and conduct. *Assuredly, if anything is becoming, nothing is more so than consistency in one's*

42 Adapted from Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.
43 Persius, Satires.

whole life and in each of one's actions; and you cannot maintain it if you imitate the nature of others and abandon your own.[44]

NOT ESTEEMING OTHERS ENOUGH

Montaigne has met no truly great man except La Boétie, and judges the learned harshly.

2.17.40 That, then, is how far I feel myself guilty of the first part, which I said there was in the vice of presumption. As for the second, which consists in not esteeming others enough, I do not know whether I can excuse myself so well; for whatever it costs me, I am resolved to tell the truth of it. Perhaps the continual company I keep with the temperaments of the ancients, and the idea of those rich souls of times past, gives me a distaste both for others and for myself; or else, in truth, we live in an age that produces only very mediocre things. At any rate, I know of nothing worthy of great admiration. Nor do I know many men with the intimacy needed to be able to judge them. And those with whom my station most commonly throws me are for the most part people who care little for the cultivation of the soul, and who are offered honor as the whole of bliss and valor as the whole of perfection.

2.17.41 What I see that is fine in others I very willingly praise and esteem. Indeed I often go beyond what I think of it, and allow myself to lie that far. For I do not know how to invent a false subject. I readily bear witness for my friends as to what I find praiseworthy in them, and out of one foot of worth I gladly make a foot and a half. But lend them qualities that are not there, I cannot; nor openly defend them from the imperfections they have. Even to my enemies I plainly render the testimony of honor that I owe. My affection changes; my judgment does not. And I do not confuse my quarrel with other circumstances that have nothing to do with it. And I am so jealous of the freedom of my judgment that I can hardly give it up for any passion whatever. I do myself more harm by lying than I do the man I lie

44 Cicero, On Duties.

about. People remark on that praiseworthy and generous custom of the Persian nation: they spoke of their mortal enemies, against whom they waged war to the bitter end, honorably and fairly, as far as the merit of their virtue warranted.

2.17.42 I know plenty of men who have various fine parts: one has wit, another courage, another skill, another conscience, another eloquence, one a certain branch of learning, another a different one. But as for a great man overall, having so many fine pieces together, or one of them in such a degree of excellence that he ought to be admired or compared with those we honor from times past—my fortune has shown me none. And the greatest I have known in the flesh—I mean in the natural qualities of the soul—and the best born, was Étienne de La Boétie. His was truly a full soul, which showed a fine face from every side: a soul of the old stamp, which would have achieved great things if his fortune had willed it, for he had added much to that rich nature by learning and study.

2.17.43 But I do not know how it comes about—and come about it certainly does—that there is as much vanity and weakness of understanding in those who profess to have more ability, who take up literary callings and offices that depend on books, as in any other sort of people. Either because more is required and expected of them, and common faults cannot be excused in them; or because the reputation for learning gives them more boldness to put themselves forward and expose themselves too far, whereby they ruin and betray themselves. Just as a craftsman shows his stupidity much better in a rich material he has in hand, if he arranges and combines it foolishly and against the rules of his craft, than in a base one; and people are more offended by a flaw in a golden statue than in one of plaster. These men do the same when they put forward things that in themselves and in their place would be good. For they use them without discretion, doing honor to their memory at the expense

of their understanding, and doing honor to Cicero, Galen, Ulpian and Saint Jerome only to make themselves ridiculous.[45]

2.17.44 I readily fall back on this theme of the ineptitude of our education. Its aim has been to make us not good and wise, but learned; and it has succeeded. It has not taught us to follow and embrace virtue and prudence, but it has stamped on us their derivation and etymology. We know how to decline virtue, even if we do not know how to love it. If we do not know what prudence is in fact and by experience, we know it by jargon and by heart. With our neighbors, we are not content to know their lineage, their kin and their connections by marriage; we want to have them as friends and establish some conversation and understanding with them. Our education has taught us the definitions, divisions and subdivisions of virtue, like the surnames and branches of a family tree, without any further concern to establish between us and her some practice of familiarity and private acquaintance. It has chosen for our learning not the books with the soundest and truest opinions, but those that speak the best Greek and Latin; and amid their fine words it has slipped into our minds the emptiest fancies of antiquity.

45 Ulpian, the Roman jurist, and Saint Jerome, the Church Father, were, with Galen, the chief authorities in law, theology and medicine.

2.17.45 A good education changes judgment and conduct, as happened to Polemon, that debauched young Greek who, having gone by chance to hear a lecture by Xenocrates, did not merely notice the eloquence and ability of the lecturer, nor merely bring home the knowledge of some fine subject, but a more evident and more solid fruit: the sudden change and amendment of his former life. Who has ever felt such an effect from our schooling? *Would you do what once*
the reformed Polemon did? Would you lay aside the badges of your sickness,
your leg-bands, your elbow cushion, your neck-wraps, as he, in his cups,
is said to have stealthily plucked the garlands from his neck
after he was rebuked by the voice of the fasting master?[46]

2.17.46 The least contemptible class of people seems to me to be the one that, through simplicity, holds the lowest rank, and that offers us more orderly dealings. The conduct and talk of peasants I commonly find more in keeping with the prescriptions of true philosophy than those of our philosophers. *The common people are wiser, because they are only as wise as they need to be.*[47]

THE NOTABLE MEN OF HIS TIME

Montaigne names the soldiers, statesmen and poets of his age he admires, and Marie de Gournay.

2.17.47 The most notable men I have judged by outward appearances—for to judge them in my own way I would have to examine them more closely—have been, in matters of war and military ability, the Duke of Guise, who died at Orléans, and the late Marshal Strozzi. As men of ability and uncommon virtue, Olivier and L'Hospital, Chancellors of France. It seems to me also that poetry has had its heyday in our century. We have an

46 Polemon (4th century BC) later succeeded Xenocrates as head of Plato's Academy. The verse is from Horace, Satires.
47 Lactantius, Divine Institutes.

abundance of good craftsmen in that trade: Dorat, Beza, Buchanan, L'Hospital, Montdoré, Turnebus.[48] As for those who write in French, I think they have raised it to the highest degree it will ever reach; and in the qualities in which Ronsard and du Bellay excel, I find them hardly far from the perfection of the ancients. Adrianus Turnebus knew more, and knew better what he knew, than any man of his century or long before. The lives of the Duke of Alba, recently dead, and of our Constable de Montmorency were noble lives, and had several rare resemblances of fortune.[49] But the beauty and glory of the latter's death —in sight of Paris and of his King, in their service against his nearest kin, at the head of an army victorious under his leadership, and in hand-to-hand fighting, at so extreme an age—seem to me to deserve a place among the remarkable events of my time. So too do the constant goodness, gentleness of manners and conscientious affability of Monsieur de La Noue, amid such injustice of armed factions—a true school of treachery, inhumanity and brigandage—in which he was raised all his life, a great and very experienced man of war.[50]

2.17.48 I have taken pleasure in making public in several places the hope I have for Marie de Gournay le Jars, my adopted daughter—and certainly loved by me far more than as a father loves—enfolded in my retirement and solitude as one of the best parts of my own being. She is all I care for in the world now.[51] If youth can give any presage, this soul will one day be capable of the finest things, and among others of the perfection of that most holy friendship to which we do not read that her sex has yet been able to rise. The sincerity and solidity of her character are already sufficient for it; her affection for me more than

48 Piero Strozzi, Marshal of France, was killed at Thionville in 1558. Michel de L'Hospital succeeded Olivier as chancellor; the poets named wrote in Latin.
49 The Duke of Alba, Spanish general, died in 1582.
50 Anne de Montmorency was mortally wounded in 1567, aged about seventy-four, at the battle of Saint-Denis against the Protestants led by his nephews. François de La Noue was a Protestant commander.
51 Marie de Gournay (1565–1645), Montaigne's devoted admirer, who prepared this 1595 edition of the Essays.

superabundant—such, in short, that there is nothing left to wish for, except that her fear of my end, given the fifty-five years at which she met me, would torment her less cruelly. The judgment she formed of the first Essays—she a woman, and in this century, and so young, and alone in her part of the country—and the famous vehemence with which she loved me and long yearned to meet me, solely on the esteem she conceived for me before she had ever seen me, is an occurrence most worthy of consideration.

2.17.49 The other virtues have had little or no currency in this age; but valor has become common through our civil wars. In this respect there are among us souls firm to the point of perfection, and in such great numbers that it is impossible to sort out the best.

2.17.50 That is all I have known, up to this hour, of extraordinary and uncommon greatness.

II.18 Of Giving the Lie

Du desmentir
Montaigne justifies a book about an ordinary man, condemns lying as his age's vice, and asks why "you lie" provokes such outrage.

2.18.1 Yes, but someone will tell me that this plan of using oneself as a subject to write about would be excusable in rare and famous men, who by their reputation had given people some desire to know them. That is certain, I admit; and I know very well that to see a man of the common sort, an artisan will hardly raise his eyes from his work, whereas to see a great and distinguished personage arrive in a town, workshops and stores are left empty. It ill becomes anyone to make himself known except one who has something worth imitating, and whose life and opinions can serve as a model. Caesar and Xenophon had something on which to found and fix their narrative in the greatness of their deeds, as on a just and solid base. So too one could wish for the journals of Alexander the Great, and the Commentaries that Augustus, Cato, Sulla, Brutus and others had left of their exploits. The likenesses of such men we love and study, even in copper and in stone.

2.18.2 This remonstrance is very true; but it touches me only very little. *I recite to no one but my friends, and then only when asked;*
not everywhere, or before just anyone. There are many who recite their writings in the middle of the forum, and in the baths. I am not setting up a statue here to be planted at a city crossroads, or in a church or public square. *Indeed, this is not my aim, that my page should swell*
with bubbling trifles:
we are talking in private. It is for a corner of a library, and to amuse a neighbor, a relative, a friend, who will take pleasure in renewing acquaintance and familiarity with me in this image.[1]

Others have taken heart to speak of themselves because they found the subject worthy and rich; I, on the contrary, because I found it so barren and so meager that no suspicion of ostentation can fall on it. I readily judge the actions of others; of my own I give little to judge, because of their nothingness. I do not find so much good in myself that I cannot tell it without blushing. What satisfaction it would be to me to hear someone tell me, in this way, of the habits, the face, the bearing, the most commonplace words and the fortunes of my ancestors! How attentive I would be! Truly it would come from a bad nature to despise even the portraits of our friends and forebears, the cut of their clothes and of their armor. I keep their handwriting, their signature, and a sword that was peculiar to them; and I have not banished from my study the long canes my father usually carried in his hand. *A father's coat and ring are dearer to his descendants the greater their affection for their parent.* If, however, my posterity has other tastes, I shall have the means to get my revenge: for they could not think less of me than I shall think of them at that time. All the dealings I have with the public in this are that I borrow the tools of its writing, which are quicker and easier. In return, I shall perhaps prevent some pat of butter from

1 Horace, Satires; then Persius, Satires.

melting in the market. *So that young tunny may not lack a toga, nor olives a cloak, / and I shall often supply loose tunics for mackerel.*[2]

THE BOOK THAT MADE ME

Even if no one reads it, writing the book has shaped its author and helped him know himself.

2.18.3 And if no one reads me, have I wasted my time in entertaining myself for so many idle hours with such useful and agreeable thoughts? In molding this figure on myself, I have had to groom and compose myself so often to bring myself out that the model itself has grown firmer and in some sort taken shape. Painting myself for others, I have painted myself within, in clearer colors than my original ones were. I have no more made my book than my book has made me—a book consubstantial with its author, with no business but its own, a member of my life; not with some third-party, alien business and purpose, like all other books. Have I wasted my time in taking stock of myself so continually, so carefully? For those who go over themselves only in thought and in speech, for an hour or so, do not examine themselves so thoroughly, nor penetrate themselves, as one who makes it his study, his work and his trade, who binds himself to a lasting record with all his faith and all his strength. The most delicious pleasures, even so, are digested inwardly; they avoid leaving any trace of themselves, and avoid the sight not only of the public but of any other person. How many times has this task diverted me from troublesome thoughts! And all frivolous thoughts should be counted as troublesome. Nature has endowed us with a broad faculty for keeping our own company apart, and often calls us to it, to teach us that we owe ourselves in part to society, but for the better part to ourselves. In order to train my fancy to dream, even, with some order and purpose, and to keep it from losing itself and wandering off in the wind, there is nothing like giving body to and putting on record all the

2 Augustine, City of God; then Martial, Epigrams, on unsold books used as wrapping paper in the market. The "tools of its writing" are printing.

little thoughts that present themselves to it. I listen to my reveries because I have to enroll them. How many times, annoyed by some action that civility and reason forbade me to reprove openly, have I unburdened myself of it here—not without an eye to public instruction! And indeed these poetic lashes, *Whack on the eye, whack on the snout, / whack on the back of the Monkey,* stamp themselves even better on paper than on living flesh. What if I lend my ear a little more attentively to books, now that I am watching to see whether I can filch something from them to enamel or prop up my own? I have not studied in the least in order to make a book; but I have studied in some measure because I had made it—if it is studying in any measure to skim and pinch, by the head or by the feet, now one author, now another; in no way to form my opinions; yes, to assist them, long since formed, to second and serve them.[3]

LYING AND GIVING THE LIE

Truth is banished from the age; being called a liar is the worst insult because lying is cowardly.

2.18.4 But whom shall we believe when he speaks of himself, in so corrupt an age, seeing that there are few or none whom we can believe when they speak of others, where there is less to gain by lying? The first sign of the corruption of morals is the banishment of truth; for, as Pindar said, being truthful is the beginning of a great virtue, and it is the first article that Plato requires of the governor of his republic. Our truth nowadays is not what is, but what others can be persuaded of—just as we call money not only the genuine coin but also the counterfeit that passes current. Our nation has long been reproached with this vice. For Salvian of Marseille, who lived in the time of the Emperor Valentinian, says that for the French, lying and perjuring themselves is not a vice but a manner of speaking. Anyone who wanted to go one better than this testimony could say that for

3 From Clément Marot's satirical poem against the poet François de Sagon, punning on his name with "Sagoin" (monkey).

them it is now a virtue. People train themselves in it, shape themselves to it, as to an honorable exercise; for dissimulation is among the most notable qualities of this age.[4]

2.18.5 So I have often wondered where this custom could spring from, which we observe so religiously, of feeling more bitterly offended at being reproached with this vice, so ordinary among us, than with any other; so that to reproach us with lying is the worst insult that can be done to us in words. On this I find that it is natural to defend ourselves most against the faults with which we are most tainted. It seems that by resenting the accusation and getting worked up about it, we unburden ourselves somewhat of the guilt: if we have it in fact, at least we condemn it in appearance. Might it not also be that this reproach seems to imply cowardice and faintness of heart? Is there any more express cowardice than to go back on one's word? What, go back on what one knows? Lying is an ugly vice, and one that an ancient paints in most shameful colors when he says that it is giving proof of despising God and at the same time fearing men. It is not possible to represent more fully its horror, its baseness and its disorder. For what can one imagine more vile than to be a coward toward men and bold toward God? Since our mutual understanding is conducted solely by way of speech, he who falsifies it betrays public society.[5] It is the only tool by which our wills and thoughts are communicated; it is the interpreter of our soul. If it fails us, we no longer hold together, we no longer know one another. If it deceives us, it breaks off all our dealings and dissolves all the bonds of our public order. Certain nations of the new Indies—there is no point in recording their names, they no longer exist; for the desolation of that conquest, a marvelous and unheard-of example, has gone as far as the complete abolition of names and of the former knowledge of places—offered their gods human blood, but only such as was drawn from their tongues and ears, in expiation of the sin of lying, whether heard

4 Salvian, a 5th-century priest of Marseilles, said this of the Franks in his On the Government of God.

5 Plutarch, in his Life of Lysander.

or uttered. That good fellow from Greece used to say that children are beguiled with knucklebones, men with words.[6]

2.18.6 As for the various uses of our giving the lie, the laws of our honor in that matter, and the changes they have undergone, I put off to another time saying what I know of them. Meanwhile I will find out, if I can, at what time this custom began of weighing and measuring words so exactly and attaching our honor to them; for it is easy to judge that it did not exist in ancient times among the Romans and the Greeks. And it has often seemed to me new and strange to see them give each other the lie and insult each other without, for all that, coming to a quarrel. The laws of their duty took some other path than ours. Caesar is called now a thief, now a drunkard, to his face.[7] We see the freedom of the invectives they hurl at one another—I mean the greatest war leaders of both nations—where words are answered only by words and lead to no further consequence.

6 The Spartan commander Lysander, as reported by Plutarch.

7 To "give the lie" was to accuse someone of lying, an insult that in Montaigne's day called for a duel.

II.19 Of Freedom of Conscience

De la liberté de conscience
Julian the Apostate shows how zeal drives good men to injustice, and why religious liberty may weaken faction.

2.19.1 It is common to see good intentions, if they are pursued without moderation, drive men to very vicious acts. In this dispute by which France is now torn with civil wars, the best and soundest party is no doubt the one that upholds both the religion and the ancient government of the country. Among the good men who follow it, however—for I am not speaking of those who use it as a pretext either to carry out their private vengeances, or to feed their avarice, or to court the favor of princes, but of those who do so out of true zeal for their religion and a holy desire to maintain the peace and the state of their country—among these, I say, we see many whom passion drives beyond the bounds of reason, and sometimes leads to adopt unjust, violent and even rash counsels.

2.19.2 It is certain that in those early times when our religion began to gain authority with the laws, zeal armed many against every sort of pagan book, by which men of letters suffer an extraordinary loss. I reckon this disorder did more harm to letters than all the fires of the barbarians. Cornelius Tacitus is a good witness of this: for although the Emperor Tacitus, his kinsman, had by express ordinances stocked all the libraries in the world with him, nevertheless not a single complete copy could

escape the diligent search of those who wanted to abolish him for five or six idle clauses contrary to our belief.[1]

THE EMPEROR JULIAN

Montaigne defends Julian the Apostate's chastity, justice and courage against the slanders of Christian writers.

2.19.3 They also had this habit: readily lending false praise to all the emperors who favored us, and condemning wholesale all the actions of those who were our adversaries, as is easy to see in the case of the Emperor Julian, surnamed the Apostate. He was in truth a very great and rare man, as one whose soul was deeply dyed with the reasonings of philosophy, by which he professed to rule all his actions; and indeed there is no kind of virtue of which he has not left very notable examples. In chastity, of which the course of his life gives very clear testimony, we read of him a trait like that of Alexander and Scipio: that of many very beautiful captives he would not so much as look at one, though he was in the flower of his age—for he was killed by the Parthians at only thirty-one. As for justice, he took the trouble of hearing the parties himself; and although out of curiosity he asked those who came before him what religion they were, nonetheless the hostility he bore ours put no weight in the scales. He himself made several good laws, and cut a great part of the subsidies and taxes his predecessors had levied.

2.19.4 We have two good historians who were eyewitnesses of his actions. One of them, Marcellinus, sharply censures in several places of his history that edict of his by which he closed the schools and forbade all Christian rhetoricians and grammarians to teach, and says he wishes this action of Julian's could be buried in silence. It is likely that if Julian had done anything harsher against us, Marcellinus would not have forgotten it, being well disposed to our side. He was harsh toward us, in

1 The Emperor Marcus Claudius Tacitus (reigned AD 275–276) claimed descent from the historian.

truth, but not a cruel enemy.[2] For our own people tell this story of him: that as he was walking one day around the city of Chalcedon, Maris, the bishop of the place, dared to call him wicked, a traitor to Christ, and that he did nothing about it except answer: "Go, wretch, weep for the loss of your eyes." To which the bishop replied in turn: "I give thanks to Jesus Christ for having taken away my sight, so that I need not see your impudent face." In this, they say, Julian was affecting a philosophical patience. At any rate, this act cannot well be squared with the cruelties he is said to have practiced against us. He was, says Eutropius, my other witness, an enemy of Christianity, but without shedding blood.[3]

2.19.5 And to return to his justice, there is nothing in it to find fault with except the severity he showed at the beginning of his reign toward those who had followed the party of Constantius, his predecessor. As for his sobriety, he always lived a soldier's life, and in full peacetime fed himself like one who was preparing and accustoming himself to the austerity of war. His vigilance was such that he divided the night into three or four parts, the smallest of which was the one he gave to sleep. The rest he spent either inspecting in person the state of his army and his guards, or studying; for among his other rare qualities, he was most excellent in every kind of literature. It is said of Alexander the Great that when he lay down, for fear that sleep might lure him away from his thoughts and studies, he had a basin placed beside his bed and held one hand out over it with a little copper ball, so that if sleep overtook him and loosened the grip of his fingers, the noise of the ball falling into the basin would wake him. Julian had his soul so intent on what he wanted, and so little clouded with fumes, thanks to his singular abstinence, that he could easily do without this device. As for military ability, he was admirable in every part of a great captain. Indeed he spent almost his whole life in continual warfare, and most of it with us, in France, against the Alemanni and the Franks. We hardly

2 Ammianus Marcellinus, 4th-century historian who served in Julian's army.
3 Eutropius, Roman historian who took part in Julian's Persian campaign.

remember any man who faced more dangers or more often put his own person to the test.

2.19.6 His death has something in common with that of Epaminondas. For he was struck by a dart and tried to pull it out, and would have done so had not the dart, being sharp-edged, cut and weakened his hand. He kept asking to be carried back, just as he was, into the fray, to encourage his soldiers there; and they contested that battle very bravely without him until night separated the armies. He owed to philosophy a singular contempt in which he held his life and human things. He firmly believed in the eternity of souls.[4]

2.19.7 In matters of religion he was wrong all round. He was surnamed the Apostate for having abandoned ours; yet the more likely opinion, to my mind, is that he had never held it at heart, but had feigned it in obedience to the laws until he held the empire in his hand. He was so superstitious in his own that even those who shared it in his time mocked him; and it was said that if he had won the victory against the Parthians he would have made the race of oxen die out in the world to supply his sacrifices. He was also besotted with the art of divination and lent authority to every kind of prognostication. Among other things, he said as he was dying that he was grateful to the gods and thanked them for not having chosen to kill him by surprise, since they had long warned him of the place and hour of his end; nor by a soft or cowardly death, better suited to idle and delicate people; nor by a lingering, long and painful one; and that they had found him worthy of dying in this noble way, in the course of his victories and in the flower of his glory. He had had a vision like that of Marcus Brutus, which first threatened him in Gaul and later appeared to him again in Persia, on the point of his death. The words they put in his mouth when he felt himself struck—"You have conquered, Nazarene," or, as others have it, "Be content, Nazarene"—would hardly have been forgotten if my witnesses had believed them, for they were present in

4 Epaminondas was killed at the battle of Mantinea in 362 BC.

the army and noted even the slightest movements and words of his end; nor would certain other miracles that are attached to it.

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

Julian granted religious freedom to divide the Christians; French kings now grant it to bring peace.

2.19.8 And to come to the point of my subject: he had long nursed paganism in his heart, says Marcellinus, but because his whole army was made up of Christians, he did not dare reveal it. At last, when he saw himself strong enough to make his will public, he had the temples of the gods opened and tried by every means to set up idolatry. To achieve his aim, he found the people of Constantinople at odds and the prelates of the Christian Church divided. So he summoned them to the palace and earnestly urged them to calm these civil dissensions, and to let each man follow his religion without hindrance and without fear. He pressed this with great care, hoping that such license would increase the factions and intrigues of the division. It would keep the people from uniting, and so from strengthening themselves against him through their concord and unanimous understanding. For he had learned by experience, from the cruelty of some Christians, that there is no beast in the world so much to be feared by man as man.

2.19.9 Those are roughly his words. What deserves consideration here is that the Emperor Julian uses, to stir up the trouble of civil dissension, the very same remedy of freedom of conscience that our kings have just employed to extinguish it. One can say, on the one hand, that to give the factions free rein to hold their opinions is to spread and sow division; it is almost to lend a hand in increasing it, since there is no barrier or constraint of the laws to curb and check its course. But on the other hand one could also say that to give the factions free rein to hold their opinions is to soften and slacken them through ease and facility. It is to blunt the spur that is sharpened by rarity, novelty

and difficulty.[5] And yet, for the honor of our kings' piety, I prefer to believe this: that being unable to do what they wanted, they pretended to want what they could do.

5 The French kings' edicts of pacification during the Wars of Religion granted the Protestants limited freedom of worship.

II.20 We Taste Nothing Pure

Nous ne goustons rien de pur
No pleasure or virtue reaches us unmixed, Montaigne argues;
even our best goodness and sharpest wisdom carry some taint.

2.20.1 The weakness of our condition means that things in their natural simplicity and purity cannot come into our use. The elements we enjoy are altered; so are the metals; and gold itself must be debased with some other substance to fit it for our service. Neither virtue in the simple form that Ariston and Pyrrho, and the Stoics too, made the end of life has been able to serve us without admixture, nor the pleasure of the Cyrenaics and Aristippus. Of all the pleasures and goods we have, there is none free from some mixture of evil and discomfort: *From the very fountain of delights / Something bitter rises, to torment us among the flowers themselves.* Our extreme pleasure has something of the air of groaning and lament.[1] Wouldn't you say it is dying of anguish? Indeed, when we forge its image at its finest, we paint it with sickly and painful epithets and qualities: languor, softness, weakness, faintness, *morbidezza*—strong evidence of their kinship and common substance. Deep joy has more seriousness than gaiety. Extreme and complete contentment has more calm than playfulness. *Happiness itself, unless it tempers itself, crushes us.* Ease chews us up. That is what an ancient Greek verse says, in this sense: The gods sell us all the goods they give us. That is to

1 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things. Ariston of Chios was a Stoic; the Cyrenaic school of Aristippus made pleasure the highest good.

say, they give us none pure and perfect, none that we do not buy at the price of some evil.[2]

2.20.2 Toil and pleasure, very unlike in nature, are nonetheless joined by some natural link I cannot explain. Socrates says that some god tried to knead pain and pleasure into one mass and fuse them, but, unable to manage it, decided at least to couple them by the tail. Metrodorus said that in sadness there is some alloy of pleasure. I do not know whether he meant something else; but for my part I can well imagine that there is intent, consent and self-indulgence in feeding on melancholy. I mean that, besides ambition, which may also mingle in it, there is some shadow of daintiness and delicacy that smiles on us and flatters us in the very lap of melancholy.[3] Are there not temperaments that make it their food? *There is a certain pleasure in weeping.* And a certain Attalus in Seneca says that the memory of our lost friends pleases us as bitterness does in wine that is too old: *Boy, you who pour the old Falernian, / Fill my cups with the more bitter wine*—and like sweetly sour apples. Nature reveals this mixture to us. Painters hold that the movements and folds of the face that serve for weeping serve also for laughing. Indeed, before either one is fully expressed, look at how the painting proceeds: you are in doubt which way it is heading. And the extreme of laughter mingles with tears. *No evil is without its compensation.*[4]

2.20.3 When I imagine a man besieged by desirable comforts—let us suppose that all his limbs were seized forever by a pleasure like that of generation at its most extreme point—I feel him melting under the burden of his ease, and I see him wholly incapable of bearing so pure, so constant and so universal a pleasure. Indeed, he flees it when he is in it, and naturally hastens to escape from it, as from ground where he cannot stand firm, where he fears he will sink.

2.20.4 When I confess myself to myself scrupulously, I find that the best goodness I have has some tinge of vice. And I fear that

2 Morbidezza is Italian for delicacy or softness, literally "sickliness." The Latin is Seneca, Letters; the Greek verse is attributed to the comic poet Epicharmus.
3 Socrates speaks thus in Plato's Phaedo.

Plato, in his purest virtue (I who am as sincere and loyal an admirer of it, and of virtues of that stamp, as anyone can be), if he had listened closely (and he did listen closely), would have heard in it some false note of human admixture—but an obscure note, perceptible only to himself. Man, in everything and everywhere, is nothing but patchwork and motley. The very laws of justice cannot subsist without some mixture of injustice. And Plato says that those who claim to remove all drawbacks and disadvantages from the laws are trying to cut off the Hydra's head.[5] *Every great example has in it something unjust, which is compensated, at the expense of individuals, by the public good,* says Tacitus.[6]

MINDS TOO SHARP FOR AFFAIRS

Overly subtle minds manage business badly; ordinary, blunter minds succeed better at practical life.

2.20.5 It is likewise true that, for the practice of life and the service of public dealings, there can be excess in the purity and sharpness of our minds. That penetrating clarity has too much subtlety and curiosity. Our minds must be weighed down and blunted to make them more obedient to example and practice, and thickened and darkened to fit them to this murky, earthly life. That is why common, less strained minds turn out to be more fit and more successful at conducting affairs, and the lofty, exquisite opinions of philosophy turn out to be unsuited to practice. This sharp liveliness of soul, this supple, restless volubility, disturbs our negotiations. Human undertakings must be handled more roughly and superficially, and a good large share of them left to the rights of Fortune. There is no need to shine a light into affairs so deeply and so subtly. One gets lost considering so

4 The quotations are from Ovid, Tristia; Catullus; and Seneca, Letters.

5 Plato, Republic IV. Each head of the mythical Hydra grew back double when cut off.

6 Tacitus, Annals XIV, on the execution of all the slaves of a household after one of them murdered their master.

many contrary lights and different forms: *as they turned over these conflicting matters, their minds were numbed.*[7]

2.20.6 That is what the ancients say of Simonides. On the question King Hiero had put to him—to answer which he had taken several days of thought—his imagination presented him with various sharp and subtle considerations; and doubting which was the most probable, he despaired of the truth altogether.[8]

2.20.7 Whoever seeks out and embraces all the circumstances and consequences of a matter hampers his choice. A middling mind proceeds evenly and is adequate to carrying out affairs of great and small weight. Notice that the best managers are those who can least tell us how they do it, and that those able talkers most often achieve nothing worthwhile. I know a great talker, a most excellent describer of every kind of household management, who has very pitifully let a hundred thousand livres of income slip through his hands. I know another who says he gives better counsel than any man in his council, and there is no finer display of mind and ability in the world; yet in practice his servants find him quite another man—and I say this without counting his bad luck.

7 Livy, History of Rome.

8 The Greek poet Simonides of Ceos, asked by Hiero, tyrant of Syracuse, what God is, kept asking for more time (Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods).

II.21 Against Idleness

Contre la faineantise
Rulers should labor until death, Montaigne argues, citing Vespasian and a Moorish king who directed a battle with his last breath.

2.21.1 The Emperor Vespasian, sick with the illness that killed him, still insisted on hearing the state of the Empire; even in his bed he kept dispatching many matters of consequence. When his physician scolded him for it as harmful to his health, he said: "An emperor must die standing." That, to my mind, is a fine saying, and worthy of a great prince.[1] The Emperor Hadrian later used it for the same purpose. It ought often to be recalled to kings, to make them feel that this great charge they are given, the command of so many men, is not an idle charge. Nothing can so justly discourage a subject from taking pains and running risks in his prince's service as seeing the prince himself meanwhile sunk in sloth, in lax and futile occupations—nor from caring for his safety, when he sees him so careless of ours.

2.21.2 If someone wants to maintain that it is better for a prince to conduct his wars through others than in person, Fortune will supply him with plenty of examples of princes whose lieutenants brought great enterprises to completion, and also of princes whose presence would have done more harm than good. But no virtuous and courageous prince could bear to be fed such shameful instruction. Under color of preserving his head, like a saint's statue, for the good fortune of his state, they demote him

1 Vespasian, Roman emperor, died in AD 79; the anecdote comes from Suetonius.

from his office, which consists entirely in military action, and declare him incapable of it. I know one who would much rather be beaten than sleep while others fought for him, and who never saw even his own men do something great in his absence without jealousy. And Selim I said, rightly it seems to me, that victories won without the master are not complete. All the more readily would he have said that the master ought to blush with shame at claiming a share in them for his name, when he has put to work only his voice and his thoughts. Not even those, since in such work the advice and commands that bring honor are only those given on the field and in the thick of the action. No pilot does his job from dry land.[2] The princes of the Ottoman line, the foremost line in the world for fortune in war, have warmly embraced this opinion. And Bayezid II and his son, who departed from it, amusing themselves with learning and other stay-at-home occupations, dealt their Empire some very hard blows; and the present ruler, Murad III, following their example, is beginning to fare much the same. Was it not the King of England, Edward III, who said this of our King Charles V: "There was never a king who took up arms less, and yet there was never a king who gave me so much trouble"? He was right to find it strange, as an effect of chance rather than of reason.[3] Those who want to count the kings of Castile and Portugal among the warlike and magnanimous conquerors, because twelve hundred leagues from their idle residence, under the escort of their agents, they made themselves masters of the Indies East and West, must look for some supporter other than me. As for those Indies, it remains to be seen whether they would even have the courage to go and enjoy them in person.

2.21.3 The Emperor Julian said even more: that a philosopher and a man of honor ought not even to breathe—that is, ought to give bodily needs only what cannot be refused them, keeping

2 Selim I, Ottoman sultan (r. 1512–1520), conqueror of Syria and Egypt.
3 Bayezid II reigned 1481–1512; Murad III, 1574–1595. Charles V of France (r. 1364–1380) won back much of what the English had taken while leaving the fighting to his captains.

soul and body always busy with fine, great and virtuous things. He was ashamed to be seen spitting or sweating in public (which is also said of the Spartan youth, and by Xenophon of the Persian youth), because he thought that exercise, continual toil and sobriety ought to have cooked and dried up all those superfluities. What Seneca says will fit in not badly here: that the ancient Romans kept their young people upright. They taught their children nothing, he says, that had to be learned sitting down.

2.21.4 It is a noble wish to want to die even usefully and manfully; but the outcome lies not so much in our good resolution as in our good fortune. A thousand have resolved to conquer or die fighting who failed at both: wounds and captivity thwarted their design and lent them a forced life. There are diseases that lay low even our desires and our awareness. Fortune was under no obligation to back the vanity of the Roman legions who bound themselves by oath to die or conquer. *I shall return from the battle victorious, Marcus Fabius; if I break my word, I call down upon myself the wrath of Father Jupiter, Mars Gradivus and the other gods.* The Portuguese say that at a certain point in their conquest of the Indies they met soldiers who had condemned themselves, with horrible curses, to accept no terms but to be killed or to win; and as a sign of this vow they wore their heads and beards shaved. It is no use our taking risks and being stubborn. Blows seem to flee those who offer themselves too eagerly, and not to come readily to the man who offers himself too readily and so spoils their aim.[4] Many a man, unable to get himself killed by the enemy after trying everything, has been forced—to fulfill his resolution to bring back honor or not to bring back his life—to put himself to death in the very heat of combat. There are other examples, but here is one. Philistus, commander of the younger Dionysius's fleet against the Syracusans, offered them battle, which was fiercely contested, the forces being equal. At first he

4 Livy, History of Rome: the oath sworn by the soldiers to the consul Marcus Fabius in 480 BC.

had the upper hand through his prowess.[5] But as the Syracusans closed in around his galley to surround it, after performing great feats of arms in person to break free, and no longer hoping for any way out, he took with his own hand the life he had so freely, and so vainly, abandoned to enemy hands.

THE DEATH OF MOLEY MOLUCH

The dying King of Fez commands his army to victory and dies with a finger on his lips.

2.21.5 Moley Moluch, King of Fez, who has just won against Sebastian, King of Portugal, that battle famous for the death of three kings and for the passing of that great crown to the crown of Castile, was gravely ill from the moment the Portuguese invaded his state; and from then on he kept growing worse, heading toward death and foreseeing it. Never did a man make more vigorous and gallant use of himself. He found himself too weak to sustain the ceremonial pomp of entering his camp, which in their fashion is full of magnificence and laden with a great deal of ritual; and he handed that honor over to his brother.[6] But that was also the only duty of a commander that he handed over: all the others, necessary and useful, he carried out most gloriously and exactly. He kept his body lying down, but his understanding and his courage upright and firm until his last breath—and in a way beyond it. He could have worn down his enemies, who had advanced rashly into his lands; and it weighed on him terribly that, for want of a little more life and having no one to take his place in conducting this war and the affairs of a troubled state, he had to seek a bloody and hazardous victory when he held another, pure and clean, in his hands. Nevertheless he managed the length of his illness miraculously, to wear his enemy down and draw him far from his fleet and from

5 Philistus, Greek historian and admiral of Dionysius II of Syracuse, died in this sea battle in 356 BC (Plutarch, Life of Dion).

6 Abd al-Malik, Sultan of Morocco, defeated King Sebastian at Alcácer Quibir in 1578, the "Battle of the Three Kings"; Philip II of Spain took the Portuguese crown in 1580.

the strongholds he held on the coast of Africa, until the last day of his life, which he deliberately reserved and used for this great battle. He drew up his army in a circle, besieging the Portuguese host on all sides. As this circle bent and tightened, it hampered them not only in the fighting—which was very fierce thanks to the valor of that young attacking king, since they had to face in every direction—but also in their flight after their rout. Finding all the exits seized and closed, they were forced to fall back on themselves—*and they were heaped up not only by the slaughter but also by their flight*—and to pile up on one another, giving the victors a most murderous and most complete victory. Dying, he had himself carried and hauled wherever need called him, and moving along the ranks he exhorted his captains and soldiers one after another. But when one corner of his battle line gave way, there was no holding him back from mounting his horse sword in hand. He struggled to go and join the fray, while his men held him back, some by the bridle, some by his robe and his stirrups. This effort finished off what little life he had left. They laid him down again. He came round from this swoon as if with a start, and with every other faculty failing him, to give warning that his death should be kept quiet (the most necessary command he had to give at that moment, so as not to breed despair among his men with the news), he died holding his finger against his closed lips, the usual sign for silence. Who ever lived so long and so far into death? Who ever died so upright? The highest degree of meeting death courageously, and the most natural, is to look on it not only without dismay but without concern, freely continuing the course of life right into it. Like Cato, who occupied himself with studying and sleeping while he had a violent and bloody death present in his heart and held it in his hand.[7]

7 Before stabbing himself at Utica, Cato read Plato's Phaedo and slept soundly.

II.22 Of Riding Post

Des Postes

From his own riding to Cyrus's relay stations and Caecina's swallows, Montaigne collects stories of how news was carried at speed.

2.22.1 I have not been one of the weakest at this exercise, which suits people of my build, stocky and short; but I am giving up the trade: it tests us too hard to keep it up for long.[1]

2.22.2 I was just reading that King Cyrus, to receive news more easily from every quarter of his Empire, which was very extensive, had it measured how far a horse could go in a day at one stretch; and at that distance he stationed men whose task was to keep horses ready to supply those riding to him. And some say that this speed of travel matches the speed of the flight of cranes.[2]

2.22.3 Caesar says that Lucius Vibullius Rufus, in haste to carry a warning to Pompey, rode toward him day and night, changing horses to make speed. And Caesar himself, according to Suetonius, covered a hundred miles a day in a hired carriage. But he was a furious courier: where rivers cut across his road, he swam across them, and never turned aside to look for a bridge or a ford. Tiberius Nero, going to see his brother Drusus, who was sick in Germany, covered two hundred miles in twenty-four hours, using three carriages. In the Romans' war against

1 The essay is titled "Of Riding Post," that is, traveling fast with relays of post-horses.

2 Xenophon, Cyropaedia.

King Antiochus, T.[3] Sempronius Gracchus, says Livy, *using relays of horses, reached Pella from Amphissa on the third day, at an almost incredible speed*; and from the passage it appears that these were established posts, not ones newly arranged for this ride.

2.22.4 Caecina's device for sending news back to his household was much quicker still. He took swallows along with him and released them toward their nests when he wanted to send back news, dyeing them with a colored mark that signified what he wished, as he had agreed with his people.[4]

2.22.5 At the theater in Rome, heads of households kept pigeons in the folds of their robes, to which they tied letters when they wanted to send some message to their people at home; and the birds were trained to bring back an answer. D. Brutus used them when he was besieged at Mutina, and others did elsewhere.[5]

2.22.6 In Peru they traveled post on men, who carried them on their shoulders in litters with such agility that, while still running, the first bearers passed their load on to the second without stopping a step.

2.22.7 I hear that the Valachi, the Sultan's couriers, travel at extreme speed, since they are entitled by law to unhorse the first passerby they meet on their road, giving him their own exhausted horse. To keep from tiring, they bind themselves very tightly around the body with a broad band, as many others do. I have found no relief in this practice.[6]

3 Tiberius Nero is the future emperor Tiberius; his brother Drusus died in Germany in 9 BC (Pliny, Natural History).

4 Caecina of Volaterrae, a Roman knight, owner of racing chariots, who sent home the results this way (Pliny, Natural History).

5 Decimus Brutus, one of Caesar's assassins, was besieged by Mark Antony at Mutina (modern Modena) in 43 BC.

6 The Valachi (Wallachians) served as couriers for the Ottoman sultan.

II.23 Of Bad Means Used for a Good End

Des mauuais moyens employez à bonne fin
Montaigne compares states with diseased bodies and considers whether foreign wars and gladiator shows are justified ways to purge civic ills.

2.23.1 There is a wonderful relationship and correspondence in this universal government of Nature's works, which shows clearly that it is neither a matter of chance nor directed by several masters. The diseases and conditions of our bodies are seen also in states and governments: kingdoms and republics are born, flourish and wither with age, as we do. We are subject to a useless and harmful surfeit of humors. It may be of good humors: for even this the physicians fear, and because nothing in us is stable, they say that a perfection of health too buoyant and vigorous must be trimmed and reduced by art, lest our nature, unable to settle in any fixed place and having nowhere higher to climb to improve, should fall back in disorder and too suddenly; that is why they prescribe purges and bleedings for athletes, to draw off that superabundance of health. Or it may be a surfeit of bad humors, which is the ordinary cause of diseases.

2.23.2 States are often seen to be sick with a similar surfeit, and various kinds of purgation are customarily used. Sometimes a great multitude of families are sent off to relieve the country of them, and they go seeking a place to settle elsewhere at others' expense. In this way our ancient Franks, setting out from the depths of Germany, came to seize Gaul and drive out its first inhabitants; so was formed that boundless tide of men that poured into Italy under Brennus and others; so the Goths and

Vandals; and so, too, the peoples who now possess Greece left their native country to settle elsewhere with more room. There are hardly two or three corners in the world that have not felt the effect of such a migration.[1] The Romans founded their colonies by this means: feeling their city swell beyond measure, they relieved it of the less necessary people and sent them to live on and farm the lands they had conquered. Sometimes, too, they deliberately kept wars going with some of their enemies, not only to keep their men in trim, for fear that idleness, the mother of corruption, might bring them some worse trouble—*We suffer the evils of a long peace; luxury, more cruel than arms, / Weighs upon us*—but also to serve as a bloodletting for their Republic, to vent a little of the too vehement heat of their youth, to lop and thin the branches of a trunk that grew too lustily. That is what they once used the war against the Carthaginians for.[2]

2.23.3 At the Treaty of Brétigny, Edward III, King of England, refused to include the dispute over the Duchy of Brittany in the general peace he made with our king, so that he would have somewhere to unload his men of war, and so that the throng of Englishmen he had used in his affairs over here would not spill back into England. This was one of the reasons why our King Philip agreed to send his son John to the war overseas: so that he would take with him a great number of hot-blooded young men who were among his men-at-arms.[3] There are many in our time who reason in the same way, wishing that the feverish agitation among us could be diverted into some neighboring war, for fear that the noxious humors now dominating our body, unless drained off elsewhere, will keep our fever always at full strength and in the end bring about our complete ruin. And indeed, a foreign war is a much milder evil than civil war; but I do not believe that God would favor so unjust an enterprise as to injure others and pick quarrels with them for our own convenience.

1 Brennus led the Gauls who sacked Rome around 390 BC; the peoples now holding Greece are the Turks.

2 Juvenal, Satires.

3 The Treaty of Brétigny (1360) halted the Hundred Years' War for a time. Philip VI of France planned a crusade in the 1330s.

Rhamnusian maiden, may nothing please me so much / That I would rashly seize it against its owners' will.[4]

GLADIATORS

Rome trained its people in courage by gladiatorial combats, a bad means used for a good end.

2.23.4 Yet the weakness of our condition often drives us to the necessity of using bad means for a good end. Lycurgus, the most virtuous and perfect lawgiver who ever lived, devised this very unjust method of teaching his people temperance: he had the Helots, who were their serfs, made drunk by force, so that the Spartans, seeing them thus lost and buried in wine, would come to abhor the excess of this vice. Those were even more in the wrong who in ancient times allowed criminals, whatever kind of death they had been condemned to, to be cut open alive by physicians, so as to see our internal parts in their natural state and establish greater certainty in their art. For if we must go astray, it is more excusable to do so for the health of the soul than for that of the body. Thus the Romans trained the people in valor and in contempt of dangers and death through those furious spectacles of gladiators and fencers fighting to the death, who fought, carved up and killed one another before their eyes: *What else does the impious art of these mad games mean, / What these deaths of young men, what this pleasure fed on blood?* And this practice lasted until the Emperor Theodosius.[5]

4 Catullus. The "Rhamnusian maiden" is Nemesis, goddess of retribution, worshipped at Rhamnus in Attica.

5 Prudentius, Against Symmachus; the poet addresses the Emperor Honorius.

Seize, prince, the glory reserved for your reign,
And be heir to what remains of your father's praise.
Let no one fall in the city whose punishment is a pleasure.
Let the infamous arena, content now with wild beasts alone,
No longer stage murders with bloodstained weapons. It was, in truth, a wonderful example, and most fruitful for the education of the people, to see every day before their eyes a hundred, two hundred, even a thousand pairs of armed men set against one another hack each other to pieces with such extreme firmness of courage that they were never seen to let slip a word of weakness or pity, never to turn their backs, nor even to make a cowardly movement to dodge their opponent's blow, but rather to stretch out their necks to his sword and offer themselves to the stroke.

Many of them, mortally wounded many times over, sent to ask the people whether they were satisfied with their performance before lying down to give up the ghost on the spot. It was not enough that they fight and die steadfastly; they had to do it cheerfully too, so that they were howled at and cursed if they were seen to resist receiving death. Even the young women urged them on: *She rises at each blow;*
And every time the victor plunges his sword into a throat,
She calls it her delight, and, turning her thumb,
The modest virgin bids the fallen man's breast be pierced. The early Romans used criminals for this example.

But later they used innocent slaves, and even free men who sold themselves for the purpose—even Roman senators and knights—and women as well: *Now men sell their lives to death and to burial in the arena,*
And each, when wars are at rest, makes himself an enemy.
Amid this uproar and these new games
Stands the sex untrained and ignorant of the sword,
And shamelessly takes up men's combats. I would find this very strange and incredible, if we were not used to seeing every day in our wars many thousands of foreigners pledging their blood and their lives for money in quarrels in which they have no stake.[6]

6 Manilius, Astronomica; and Statius, Silvae.

II.24 Of the Greatness of Rome

De la grandeur Romaine
A short essay using Cicero's letters and other anecdotes to show how far Rome's power exceeded the paltry grandeurs of Montaigne's time.

2.24.1 I want to say only a word on this infinite subject, to show the simple-mindedness of those who compare the paltry grandeurs of our time with that one.

2.24.2 In the seventh book of Cicero's familiar letters (and let the grammarians remove that epithet "familiar" if they like, for in truth it is not very apt; and those who have substituted *ad familiares* for "familiar" can draw some argument for their side from what Suetonius says in his life of Caesar, that there was a volume of his letters *ad familiares*), there is one addressed to Caesar, who was then in Gaul. In it Cicero repeats these words, which came at the end of another letter Caesar had written him: "As for Marcus Furius, whom you recommended to me, I will make him king of Gaul; and if you want me to promote some other friend of yours, send him to me."[1] It was nothing new for a simple Roman citizen, as Caesar then was, to dispose of kingdoms: he took his kingdom away from King Deiotarus to give it to a gentleman of the city of Pergamum named Mithridates. Those who write his life record several kingdoms sold by him; and Suetonius says that he extracted from King Ptolemy, at one stroke, three million six hundred thousand crowns, which came

1 Ad familiares means "to his friends," the title now usual for this collection of Cicero's letters.

very close to selling him his own. *So many coins for Galatia, so many for Pontus, so many for Lydia.*[2]

2.24.3 Mark Antony said that the greatness of the Roman people showed itself not so much by what it took as by what it gave. Yet some century before Antony it had taken away one kingdom among others with such wondrous authority that in all its history I know of no mark that raises the name of its power higher. Antiochus held all of Egypt and was about to conquer Cyprus and other remnants of that empire. In the course of his victories C. Popilius came to him on behalf of the Senate, and on first meeting him refused to take his hand until he had first read the letters he was bringing.[3] When the king had read them and said that he would deliberate on them, Popilius drew a circle with his rod around the spot where he stood, saying: "Give me an answer I can take back to the Senate before you step out of this circle." Antiochus, stunned by the harshness of so urgent a command, thought for a moment and said: "I will do what the Senate commands me." Then Popilius greeted him as a friend of the Roman people. To have given up so great a monarchy, and the course of such fortunate prosperity, at the impression of three strokes of writing! He was truly right, as he did, to send word afterward to the Senate through his ambassadors that he had received their order with the same respect as if it had come from the immortal gods.

2.24.4 All the kingdoms that Augustus won by right of war he either gave back to those who had lost them or made presents of to foreigners. On this subject Tacitus, speaking of the English king Cogidunus, makes us feel this infinite power with a marvelous stroke. The Romans, he says, had been accustomed from the most ancient times to leave the kings they had conquered in possession of their kingdoms, under their authority, so as to have even kings as tools of servitude: *So that they might have even*

2 Claudian, Against Eutropius.

3 Antiochus IV, king of Syria, was forced out of Egypt by the envoy Gaius Popilius Laenas in 168 BC.

kings as instruments of servitude.[4] It is likely that Suleiman, whom we have seen make a gift of the kingdom of Hungary and other states, was looking more to this consideration than to the one he used to allege: that he was sated and overloaded with all the monarchies and dominion that his valor, or that of his ancestors, had won him.[5]

4 Tacitus, Agricola; Cogidunus was a king of the Britons allied to Rome in the 1st century AD.

5 Suleiman left Hungary to vassal rulers after his victory at Mohács in 1526.

II.25 Of Not Pretending to Be Sick

De ne contrefaire le malade
Stories of people who faked gout or blindness and then truly got it lead Montaigne to warn against counterfeiting illness.

2.25.1 There is an epigram in Martial—one of the good ones, for he has all kinds—in which he amusingly tells the story of Caelius. To avoid paying court to certain great men in Rome, attending their levees, waiting on them and following them about, Caelius pretended to have gout; and to make his excuse more convincing, he had his legs anointed and kept them wrapped up, and imitated the bearing and demeanor of a gouty man in every detail. In the end Fortune did him the favor of making him one in earnest. *So much can care and the art of pain achieve! / Caelius has stopped pretending to have gout.*

2.25.2 I have read somewhere in Appian, I think, a similar story of a man who wanted to escape the proscriptions of the triumvirs at Rome. To keep from being recognized by those pursuing him, he stayed hidden and disguised, and added a further trick: he pretended to be blind in one eye. When he came to recover a little more freedom and wanted to remove the plaster he had long worn over his eye, he found that his sight had actually been lost under this mask. It is possible that the action of sight had been dulled by going so long without exercise, and that the power of seeing had all been transferred into the other eye.[1] For we clearly feel that the eye we keep covered sends some part of its function to its companion, so that the remaining one grows

1 The triumvirs Antony, Octavian and Lepidus outlawed their enemies in 43 BC.

stronger and swells from it. Just as, too, idleness, together with the heat of the bandages and ointments, may well have drawn some gouty humor to Martial's gouty man.

2.25.3 Reading in Froissart of the vow of a troop of young English gentlemen to wear their left eye bandaged until they had crossed into France and performed some feat of arms against us, I have often been tickled by the thought that it might have happened to them as to those others, and that they might all have found themselves one-eyed when they saw again the ladies for whose sake they had undertaken the enterprise.

2.25.4 Mothers are right to scold their children when they mimic the one-eyed, the lame, the cross-eyed and other such physical defects. Besides the fact that a body so tender may take a bad bent from it, I don't know how, but Fortune seems to enjoy taking us at our word; and I have heard many examples of people who fell ill after planning to pretend to be. I have always been in the habit of carrying a switch or a stick in my hand, on horseback and on foot—even going so far as to seek elegance in it and to lean on it with an affected air. Many have warned me that Fortune would one day turn this affectation into necessity. I rely on the fact that I would be the first of my line to have gout.

2.25.5 But let us lengthen this chapter and patch it with another piece, on the subject of blindness. Pliny tells of a man who dreamed in his sleep that he was blind and found that he was so the next day, without any previous illness. The power of imagination may well help in that, as I have said elsewhere, and Pliny seems to be of this opinion. But it is more likely that the movements the body felt within, which were taking away his sight—the physicians will find their cause if they care to—were what occasioned the dream.[2]

2.25.6 Let us add one more story related to this subject, which Seneca tells in one of his letters. "You know," he says, writing to Lucilius, "that Harpaste, my wife's fool, has stayed on in my house as a burden I inherited. For my own taste is against such spectacles; and if I want to laugh at a fool, I need not look far: I

2 Montaigne refers to his essay "Of the Power of the Imagination" (I.21).

laugh at myself. This fool has suddenly lost her sight. I am telling you something strange but true: she does not feel that she is blind, and keeps pressing her attendant to take her out, because she says my house is dark.[3] What we laugh at in her, believe me, happens to every one of us. No one knows that he is avaricious, no one that he is covetous. The blind at least ask for a guide; we go astray of our own accord. 'I am not ambitious,' we say, 'but in Rome one cannot live otherwise. I am not extravagant, but the city demands great expense. It is not my fault if I am irascible; if I have not yet settled on any fixed way of life, it is the fault of youth.' Let us not look outside ourselves for our ailment: it is within us, planted in our vitals. And the very fact that we do not feel we are sick makes the cure harder. If we do not begin early to tend ourselves, when will we have dealt with so many wounds and so many ills? Yet we have a very sweet medicine in philosophy: with the others, we feel the pleasure only after the cure; this one pleases and cures at the same time." That is what Seneca says, and he has carried me away from my subject; but there is profit in the exchange.

3 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius 50; Harpaste was a female household jester.

II.26 Of Thumbs

Des pouces
A brief gathering of ancient lore about thumbs: their names, their role in oaths and spectacles, and their deliberate mutilation.

2.26.1 Tacitus relates that among certain barbarian kings, to make a binding pledge, their custom was to clasp their right hands tightly together and interlace their thumbs; and when by dint of squeezing the blood had risen to the tips, they pricked them with some light point and then sucked each other's.[1]

2.26.2 Physicians say that the thumbs are the master fingers of the hand, and that their Latin name comes from *pollere*. The Greeks call it αντιχειρ, as if to say "another hand." And it seems that the Latins sometimes also take them in this sense, for the whole hand: *But neither roused by coaxing words / nor urged by a gentle thumb, does it rise.*[2]

2.26.3 In Rome it was a sign of favor to press down and lower the thumbs: *Your backer will praise your game with both thumbs*; and of disfavor to raise them and turn them outward: *When the crowd turns its thumb, / they kill whomever the people please.*[3]

2.26.4 The Romans exempted from war those who were wounded in the thumb, as if they no longer had a firm enough grip on their weapons. Augustus confiscated the property of a Roman knight who had maliciously cut off the thumbs of two of

1 Tacitus, Annals XII, on the kings of Armenia and Iberia (in the Caucasus).
2 Latin *pollex*, "thumb," was derived from *pollere*, "to be strong." The verse is from Martial, Epigrams.
3 Horace, Epistles; then Juvenal, Satires.

his young children to excuse them from serving in the armies. And before him, the Senate, at the time of the Italic War, had condemned Caius Vatienus to life imprisonment and confiscated all his property for having deliberately cut off the thumb of his left hand to exempt himself from that campaign.

2.26.5 Someone, I do not remember who, having won a naval battle, had the thumbs of his defeated enemies cut off, to take away their means of fighting and of pulling an oar. The Athenians had them cut off the Aeginetans, to take away their superiority in seamanship.

2.26.6 In Sparta the schoolmaster punished children by biting their thumbs.

II.27 Cowardice, the Mother of Cruelty

Coüardise mere de la cruauté
Montaigne traces cruelty to cowardice and fear, from tyrants who weep easily to duelists who rely on fencing skill instead of courage.

2.27.1 I have often heard it said that cowardice is the mother of cruelty. And I have indeed noticed by experience that this bitterness and harshness of a malicious and inhuman heart is usually accompanied by a spineless softness. I have seen some of the cruelest men prone to weep easily, and for trivial reasons. Alexander, tyrant of Pherae, could not bear to watch tragedies performed in the theater, for fear his citizens would see him groan at the misfortunes of Hecuba and Andromache—he who pitilessly had so many people cruelly murdered every day. Could it be weakness of soul that makes them so pliable to every extreme? Valor, whose nature is to exercise itself only against resistance—*Nor does it delight except in the neck of a bullock that fights back*—stops when it sees the enemy at its mercy.[1] But cowardice, so as to say that it too was at the party, having been unable to take part in that first role, takes for its share the second, that of massacre and blood. The killings that follow victories are usually carried out by the common people and the officers of the baggage train. And what causes so many unheard-of cruelties to be seen in popular wars is that this rabble of common people plays the warrior and the man-at-arms by bloodying itself up to the elbows and hacking to pieces a body at its

1 Alexander ruled Pherae in Thessaly in the 4th century BC. The verse is from Claudian, describing a lion.

feet, having no feeling for any other kind of valor. *Both the wolf and the foul bears set upon the dying, / and every beast of lesser nobility.* Like cowardly dogs, which in the house tear and bite the skins of wild beasts they did not dare attack in the fields.[2] What is it that makes all our quarrels mortal nowadays? And that, where our fathers had some gradation in revenge, we now begin with the last degree, and from the very outset there is talk of nothing but killing? What is it, if not cowardice?

2.27.2 Everyone can feel that there is more boldness and disdain in beating one's enemy than in finishing him off, and in making him knuckle under than in making him die. Moreover, the appetite for revenge is better satisfied and contented that way, for revenge aims only at making itself felt. That is why we do not attack an animal or a stone when it hurts us: they are incapable of feeling our revenge. And to kill a man is to put him beyond the reach of our injury. Bias cried out to a wicked man, "I know that sooner or later you will be punished for it, but I fear I shall not see it." And he pitied the Orchomenians because the repentance Lyciscus felt for the treachery he had committed against them came at a time when no one was left of those who had been harmed by it, and to whom the pleasure of that repentance should have fallen. In just the same way revenge is to be pitied when the man against whom it is directed loses the means of feeling it. For just as the avenger wants to see it, so as to get pleasure from it, so the man on whom he takes revenge must see it too, so as to receive pain and repentance from it. "He'll be sorry for it," we say. And because we have put a pistol shot in his head, do we think he is sorry? On the contrary, if we pay attention, we will find that he is making a face at us as he falls. He does not even bear us a grudge for it, let alone repent of it. And we do him the kindest of all life's services, which is to make him die quickly and without feeling. We are left hiding in burrows, scurrying about and fleeing the officers of justice who are after us, while he is at rest. Killing him is good for avoiding a future injury, not for avenging one already done. It is an act more of

2 Ovid, Tristia.

fear than of bravado, of precaution than of courage, of defense than of attack. It is plain that by it we abandon both the true end of revenge and the care of our reputation. We fear that if he stays alive he will come back at us with the same. It is not against him, it is for your own sake, that you get rid of him.

2.27.3 In the kingdom of Narsinga this expedient would be of no use to us. There not only soldiers but artisans too settle their quarrels with the sword. The king never refuses a field to anyone who wants to fight, and he attends when they are persons of rank, presenting the victor with a gold chain. But to win that chain, the first man who feels like it may come to arms with the one who wears it. And by getting clear of one fight, he has several on his hands.

2.27.4 If we thought that by our valor we would always be masters of our enemy and could lord it over him at our pleasure, we would be very sorry to have him escape us, as he does by dying. We want to win more safely than honorably. And in our quarrel we seek the end rather than the glory.

2.27.5 Asinius Pollio, less excusable in that he was an honorable man, displayed a similar error: having written invectives against Plancus, he waited until Plancus was dead to publish them. That was making rude gestures at a blind man and hurling insults at a deaf one, and offending a man without feeling rather than running the risk of his resentment. So it was said on Plancus's behalf that only goblins wrestle with the dead. The man who waits to see an author die before attacking his writings—what is he saying, except that he is weak and quarrelsome? Aristotle was told that someone had spoken ill of him. "Let him do more," he said; "let him whip me, so long as I am not there."[3]

SECONDS IN DUELS

Bringing seconds into duels is a kind of cowardice; Montaigne's brother was jailed in Rome for it.

2.27.6 Our fathers were content to repay an insult by giving the lie, the lie by a blow, and so on in order. They were valiant enough not to fear their adversary when he was alive and outraged. We tremble with fright as long as we see him on his feet. And to prove that this is so, does not our fine present-day practice require us to pursue to the death the man we have offended just as much as the man who has offended us? It is also a sort of cowardice that has brought into our single combats this custom of taking along seconds, and thirds, and fourths. In the old days these were duels; now they are skirmishes and battles. Solitude frightened the first men who invented this: *Since each had very little confidence in himself.* For naturally any company whatever brings comfort and relief in danger. In the old days third persons were used to make sure that no disorder or foul play took place, and to bear witness to the outcome of the combat. But since the practice has taken hold that they join in themselves, whoever is invited cannot honorably stand by as a spectator, for fear it be put down to a lack either of affection or of courage. Besides the injustice and baseness of such an action—committing to the protection of your honor a valor and strength other than your own—I find it a disadvantage for a good man, who fully trusts himself, to go and mix his fortune with that of a second. Each man runs enough risk for himself without running it for another as well. And he has enough to do to rely on his own valor in defense of his life, without putting so precious a thing into a third party's hands. For unless it has been expressly agreed otherwise, the four of them make one combined match. If your second is down, you have two on your hands, and rightly so. And as for saying that this is foul play—so it is indeed, like charging fully armed at a man who has only a stump of a sword,

3 Lucius Munatius Plancus was a Roman statesman of the late Republic.

or, unhurt, at a man who is already badly wounded. But if these are advantages you have won in fighting, you may use them without reproach. Disparity and inequality are weighed and considered only according to the state in which the fight begins; for the rest, blame Fortune. And when you alone have three upon you, your two companions having let themselves be killed, you are done no more wrong than I would do in war by running my sword into an enemy I saw grappling with one of our men, with a like advantage. Where there is troop against troop—as when our Duke of Orléans challenged King Henry of England, a hundred against a hundred; three hundred against as many, like the Argives against the Spartans; three against three, like the Horatii against the Curiatii—the nature of such a fellowship requires that the number on each side be regarded only as one single man. Wherever there is company, the risk is pooled and mingled.[4]

2.27.7 I have a family interest in this discussion. For my brother, the Sieur de Mattecoulon, was invited in Rome to act as second to a gentleman he hardly knew, who was the defendant, having been challenged by another. In this combat he happened by chance to find himself facing a man who was closer to him and better known to him. (I wish someone would explain to me these laws of honor, which so often go clashing with and disturbing those of reason.) Having disposed of his man, and seeing the two principals in the quarrel still on their feet and unhurt, he went to relieve his companion. What less could he do? Should he have kept still and watched the defeat, if fate had so willed it, of the man he had come there to defend?[5] What he had done until then had done nothing for the business: the quarrel was undecided. The courtesy you can, and certainly should, show your enemy when you have brought him to a bad pass and put him at some great disadvantage—I do not see how you can

4 Louis, Duke of Orléans, challenged Henry IV of England in 1402. In legend the three Roman Horatii brothers fought the three Curiatii of Alba to decide a war.
5 Bertrand de Montaigne, Sieur de Mattecoulon, was Montaigne's youngest brother; the duel took place in 1583.

show it when another man's interest is at stake, where you are only a follower, where the dispute is not yours. He could be neither just nor courteous at the risk of the man to whom he had lent himself. And so he was freed from the prisons of Italy by a very prompt and solemn intercession from our king. Reckless nation!

LEARNING TO FENCE

The French go to Italy to learn fencing, a skill unworthy of true valor and useless in war.

We are not content to make our vices and follies known to the world by report; we go to foreign nations to show them off in person. Put three Frenchmen in the deserts of Libya, and they will not be together a month without harassing and scratching one another. You would think these travels of ours were a show put on to give foreigners the pleasure of our tragedies—and most often to those who rejoice in our misfortunes and laugh at them. We go to Italy to learn fencing, and we practice it at the cost of our lives before we know how. Yet the proper order of instruction would require us to put theory before practice. We betray our apprenticeship: *Wretched first fruits of youth, harsh schooling / for the war to come!*[6]

2.27.8 I know well that it is a skill useful for its purpose (in the duel between the two princes, first cousins, in Spain, the elder, says Livy, easily overcame the reckless strength of the younger by skill in arms and by cunning), and, as I have learned by experience, one whose mastery has swelled the courage of some men beyond its natural measure. But it is not properly valor, since it draws its support from skill and rests on some foundation other than itself. The honor of combat lies in rivalry of courage, not of knowledge. And so I have seen one of my friends, renowned as a great master of this exercise, choose for his quarrels weapons that deprived him of the means of this advantage, weapons that depended entirely on Fortune and on

6 Virgil, Aeneid.

steadiness, so that his victory would not be put down to his fencing rather than to his valor. And in my childhood the nobility shunned the reputation of being a good fencer as an insult, and learned it in secret, as a trade of cunning, unworthy of true and natural valor.

These men will not dodge, nor parry, nor give ground,
nor has dexterity any part here;
they deal no feinting blows, now full, now light;
rage and fury take away the use of skill.
Hear the swords clash horribly
blade on blade; no foot stirs from its print,
the foot is ever firm, the hand ever moving;
no cut falls in vain, no thrust into empty air.[7]

2.27.9 Shooting at the butts, tournaments, jousting at the barriers—the image of warlike combat—were the exercises of our fathers. This other exercise is all the less noble in that it looks only to a private end. It teaches us to destroy one another, against the laws and justice, and in every way it always produces harmful effects. It is far more worthy and fitting to exercise ourselves in things that strengthen our government rather than harm it, things that look to public safety and the common glory. Publius Rutilius Consus was the first to teach the soldier to handle his weapons with skill and knowledge, who joined art to valor—not for use in private quarrels, but for war and the quarrels of the Roman people. Public and civic fencing.[8] And besides the example of Caesar, who ordered his men to strike chiefly at the faces of Pompey's horsemen at the battle of Pharsalus, a thousand other commanders have likewise thought of inventing new kinds of weapons, new ways of striking and of covering themselves, according to the needs of the business at hand.

2.27.10 Philopoemen condemned wrestling, at which he excelled, because the training used for that exercise was different from what belongs to military discipline, to which alone he

7 Tasso, Jerusalem Delivered.

8 Publius Rutilius Rufus was consul in 105 BC; "Consus" is Montaigne's slip for "consul."

thought men of honor should devote themselves. In just the same way it seems to me that this dexterity to which we shape our limbs, these dodges and movements in which young men are trained in this new school, are not only useless but rather contrary and harmful to the practice of military combat. And so our people commonly use special weapons for it, intended specifically for that purpose. And I have seen it thought hardly proper for a gentleman challenged to sword and dagger to present himself in the equipment of a man-at-arms. Or for another to offer to go with his cloak instead of a dagger. It is worth noting that Laches, in Plato, speaking of a training in handling weapons like ours, says he has never seen any great soldier come out of that school, and especially not from among its masters. As for those masters, our experience says as much. For the rest, at least we can hold that these are abilities with no relation or correspondence to each other. And in the education of the children of his commonwealth, Plato forbids the arts of fighting with the fists, introduced by Amycus and Epeius, and of wrestling, introduced by Antaeus and Cercyon, because they have an aim other than making the young fit for military service, and contribute nothing to it.[9] But I am drifting rather a long way off course from my theme.

WHY TYRANTS KILL

Fear makes tyrants cruel; Philip of Macedon's killings drive Theoxena to drown herself and her children.

2.27.11 The Emperor Maurice, warned by dreams and several omens that one Phocas, a soldier then unknown, was to kill him, asked his son-in-law Philippicus who this Phocas was, and about his nature, character and habits. And when, among other things, Philippicus told him that he was cowardly and fearful, the emperor at once concluded from this that he must therefore be murderous and cruel. What makes tyrants so bloodthirsty? It is concern for their own safety, and the fact that their cowardly

9 Plato, Laches and Laws.

hearts give them no other means of securing themselves than by exterminating those who can harm them—even women, for fear of a scratch.[10] *He strikes at everything, because he fears everything.* The first cruelties are committed for their own sake. From them is born the fear of a just revenge, which then produces a string of new cruelties, to smother the one with the other. Philip, King of Macedon—the one who had so many tangles to unravel with the Roman people—troubled by the horror of the murders committed by his order, and seeing no way to secure himself against so many families injured at various times, decided to seize all the children of those he had had killed, so as to do away with them day by day, one after another, and thus establish his peace.[11]

2.27.12 Fine material sits well wherever it is sown. I, who care more about the weight and usefulness of my reflections than about their order and sequence, need not fear to lodge a very fine story here, a little off to one side. When such stories are so rich in their own beauty and can more than stand on their own, I am content with the end of a hair to tie them to my subject.

2.27.13 Among others condemned by Philip had been one Herodicus, a prince of the Thessalians. After him, Philip had later put to death his two sons-in-law as well, each of whom left a very small son. Theoxena and Archo were the two widows. Theoxena could not be induced to remarry, though she was much courted. Archo married Poris, the leading man among the Aenians, and had a number of children by him, all of whom she left very young. Theoxena, spurred by a mother's love for her nephews, married Poris so as to have them under her guidance and protection. Then came the proclamation of the king's edict. This courageous mother, distrusting both Philip's cruelty and the license of his henchmen toward these fine and tender young people, dared to say that she would kill them with her own hands rather than hand them over. Poris, alarmed at this declaration, promised her to steal them away and take them to Athens,

10 Maurice, Byzantine emperor, was overthrown and killed by Phocas in AD 602.
11 Claudian, Against Eutropius.

into the keeping of some faithful friends of his. They seized the occasion of an annual festival held at Aenia in honor of Aeneas, and went there. Having attended the ceremonies and the public banquet by day, at night they slipped away in a ship made ready to carry them to safety by sea. The wind was against them; and finding themselves the next day within sight of the land they had set out from, they were pursued by the harbor guards. As the guards closed in, while Poris was busy urging the sailors on in their flight, Theoxena, frantic with love and vengeance, went back to her first resolve. She got weapons and poison ready and, setting them before the children's eyes, said: "Come now, my children, death is now the only means of your defense and your liberty, and it will give the gods matter for their holy justice. These drawn swords, these full cups, open the way to it for you. Courage! And you, my son, who are the eldest, take hold of this blade, to die the stronger death." With this vigorous counselor on one side and the enemy at their throats on the other, they rushed in a frenzy, each to whatever was nearest to hand. And half dead, they were thrown into the sea. Theoxena, proud of having so gloriously provided for the safety of all her children, embraced her husband warmly: "Let us follow these boys, my love, and share the same grave with them." And holding each other thus, they threw themselves overboard, so that the ship was brought back to shore empty of its masters.

TORMENTS BEYOND DEATH

Everything beyond plain death is cruelty; Montaigne recalls atrocious tortures from history and his own century.

2.27.14 Tyrants, in order to do both things at once—kill and make their anger felt—have used all their ingenuity to find ways of drawing out death. They want their enemies to go, but not so fast that they themselves lack the leisure to savor their revenge. Here they are in great difficulty: for if the torments are violent, they are short; if they are long, they are not painful enough to suit them. So there they are, measuring out their devices. We see

a thousand examples of this in antiquity; and I do not know whether, without realizing it, we do not retain some trace of this barbarism.

2.27.15 Everything beyond plain death seems to me pure cruelty. Our justice cannot hope that a man whom the fear of dying, of being beheaded or hanged, will not keep from wrongdoing will be stopped by the thought of a slow fire, or pincers, or the wheel. And I do not know, meanwhile, whether we are not driving such men to despair. For what state can a man's soul be in, waiting twenty-four hours for death, broken on a wheel, or, in the old fashion, nailed to a cross? Josephus relates that during the Romans' wars in Judea, passing a place where some Jews had been crucified three days before, he recognized three of his friends and obtained leave to take them down. Two of them died, he says; the other lived on afterward.[12]

2.27.16 Chalcondyles, a trustworthy man, in the memoirs he left of the things that happened in his time and near him, relates as the most extreme punishment one that the Emperor Mehmed often practiced: having men cut in two through the waist, at the diaphragm, with a single stroke of the scimitar. As a result they died, as it were, two deaths at once; and one could see, he says, both parts, full of life, thrashing about for a long time afterward in torment. I do not think there was much suffering in that movement. The punishments most hideous to see are not always the hardest to bear.[13] And I find more atrocious what other historians relate of his treatment of certain lords of Epirus: that he had them flayed bit by bit, in stages so maliciously arranged that their lives lasted fifteen days in that agony.

2.27.17 And these two others. Croesus, having had a gentleman who was a favorite of his brother Pantaleon seized, took him to a fuller's shop, where he had him scraped and carded with the cards and combs of that trade until he died. George Sechel, leader of those peasants of Poland who did so much harm under

12 The episode is in Josephus' Life.

13 Laonicus Chalcondyles was a 15th-century Byzantine historian of the Ottoman conquests.

the name of the Crusade, was defeated in battle by the Voivode of Transylvania and captured. He was tied naked for three days on a wooden horse, exposed to every kind of torment that anyone could bring against him; during which time several other prisoners were made to fast.[14] Finally, while he was still alive and watching, they made Lucat, his dear brother, drink his blood—Lucat, for whose safety alone he was pleading, drawing upon himself all the blame for their misdeeds. And they made twenty of his most favored captains feed on him, tearing his flesh with their teeth and swallowing the pieces. The rest of his body and his inner parts, once he had expired, were put to boil and given to others of his followers to eat.

14 This is György Dózsa (Székely), leader of the Hungarian peasant revolt of 1514, which began as a crusade against the Turks.

II.28 All Things Have Their Season

Toutes choses ont leur saison
Learning Greek in old age, as Cato the Censor did, strikes Montaigne as unseemly; he himself is now winding down his hopes.

2.28.1 Those who pair Cato the Censor with the younger Cato, who killed himself, are pairing two fine natures of similar form. The first exercised his in more ways, and excels in military exploits and in the usefulness of his public offices. But the virtue of the younger—besides the fact that it is blasphemy to set any beside it in vigor—was far purer. For who could clear the Censor's virtue of envy and ambition, when he dared to attack the honor of Scipio, a man far greater than he, in goodness and in every quality of excellence, and greater than any other man of his age?[1]

2.28.2 What is said of him, among other things, that in his extreme old age he set about learning the Greek language with an ardent appetite, as if to quench a long thirst, does not seem to me much to his honor. It is precisely what we call falling back into childhood. All things have their season, good ones and all. And I can say my Paternoster at the wrong time. Thus Titus Quinctius Flamininus was accused because, when he was general of an army, he had been seen off to one side at the moment of the clash, busy praying to God, in a battle that he won. *The wise man sets a limit even to good things.*[2]

2.28.3 Eudemonidas, seeing Xenocrates, very old, eagerly attending the lessons of his school, said: "When will this man

1 Cato the Censor (234–149 BC) was the great-grandfather of Cato the Younger.
2 Juvenal, Satires.

know, if he is still learning?" And Philopoemen, to those who were highly praising King Ptolemy for hardening his body every day in the exercise of arms: "It is not a praiseworthy thing," he said, "for a king of his age to practice with them; by now he ought to be using them in earnest." The young should make their preparations, the old enjoy them, say the wise. And the greatest vice they note in us is that our desires keep growing young again. We are always beginning to live.

2.28.4 Our studies and our desires ought sometimes to smack of old age. We have one foot in the grave, and our appetites and pursuits are only just being born. *You contract for marble to be cut*
on the very brink of death, and, forgetful of the tomb,
you build houses. The longest of my plans does not extend a year. I think now only of ending; I am getting rid of all new hopes and undertakings; I take my last leave of every place I depart from; and every day I strip myself of what I have. *For a long time now I have neither lost nor gained anything; I have more provisions for the journey than journey left. I have lived, and finished the course that Fortune gave me.*[3]

2.28.5 This, in short, is all the relief I find in my old age: that it deadens in me many desires and cares by which life is disturbed —care for the course of the world, care for riches, for greatness, for knowledge, for health, for myself. This man is learning to speak when he ought to be learning to be silent forever. One can go on studying at any age, but not going to school. What a silly thing, an old man learning his ABCs! *Different things please different men; not all things / suit all ages.*[4]

2.28.6 If we must study, let us take up a study suited to our condition, so that we may answer like the man who, when asked what he wanted these studies for in his decrepitude, replied: "To leave this world better and more at ease." Such was the study of

3 Horace, Odes; then Seneca, Letters; then Virgil, Aeneid.
4 Maximianus, Elegies.

the younger Cato when, feeling his end approaching, he came upon Plato's discourse on the eternity of the soul. Not, we must believe, that he had not long been furnished with every kind of provision for such a departure. Of assurance, firm will and learning he had more than Plato has in his writings. His knowledge and his courage were, in this respect, above philosophy.[5] He took up this occupation not for the sake of his death. Rather, as a man who did not even interrupt his sleep for the gravity of such a decision, he also went on with his studies, without choosing and without changing, along with the other customary actions of his life. The night after he was refused the praetorship he spent playing games. The night on which he was to die he spent reading. Losing life or losing office—it was all one to him.

5 Plato's Phaedo, on the immortality of the soul.

II.29 Of Virtue

De la vertu
Heroic virtue comes in fits and starts, Montaigne finds, rarely becoming settled habit, and fanatics' readiness to die proves little.

2.29.1 I find by experience that there is a great difference between the sallies and bursts of the soul and a settled and constant habit. And I see well that there is nothing we cannot do—even to the point of surpassing divinity itself, as someone says, since it is more to make oneself impassive by one's own effort than to be so by one's original condition—and even to the point of joining to man's weakness a resolution and assurance worthy of God. But it comes in fits and starts.[1] And in the lives of those heroes of times past there are sometimes miraculous strokes that seem to surpass our natural strength by far. But they are only strokes, to tell the truth; and it is hard to believe that the soul can be so dyed and steeped in these lofty qualities that they become ordinary to it, and as if natural. It happens even to us, who are only stunted specimens of men, to launch our soul at times far beyond its ordinary range, when it is roused by the reasonings or examples of others. But it is a kind of passion that drives and stirs it, and carries it somewhat out of itself. For once that whirlwind is past, we see that it unbends and slackens of its own accord, without our thinking about it—if not down to the lowest note, at least to the point of no longer being up there; so that then, on every occasion, for a lost bird or a broken glass, we let

1 Seneca, Letters.

ourselves be upset almost like one of the common people. Except for order, moderation and constancy, I think that all things are within reach of a man who is quite lacking and deficient on the whole. That is why, say the wise, to judge a man properly we must chiefly examine his common actions and catch him in his everyday life.

PYRRHO'S CONSISTENCY

Pyrrho tried to live his skepticism, yet admitted that it is hard to strip off the man entirely.

2.29.2 Pyrrho, who built so amusing a science out of ignorance, tried, like all other true philosophers, to make his life match his doctrine. He maintained that the weakness of human judgment was so extreme that it could not take sides or lean either way, and he wanted it held perpetually suspended in balance, regarding and receiving all things as indifferent. And so it is said that he always kept the same manner and the same countenance. If he had begun saying something, he did not fail to finish it even if the person he was speaking to had gone away. If he was walking, he would not turn from his path for any obstacle that came up, and had to be kept from precipices, from collisions with carts and other accidents by his friends. For to fear or avoid anything would have clashed with his propositions, which took away all choice and certainty even from the senses. Sometimes he endured being cut and cauterized with such constancy that he was not even seen to blink. It is something to bring the soul to these notions; it is more to join deeds to them; and yet it is not impossible. But to join them with such perseverance and constancy as to make them one's ordinary way of life—truly, in undertakings so remote from common practice, it is almost unbelievable that anyone could do it. That is why, when he was once caught at home scolding his sister very sharply, and was reproached for failing in his indifference in this: "What?" he said. "Must this little woman too serve as a test of my rules?" Another time, when he was seen defending himself against a

dog: “It is very difficult,” he said, “to strip off the man entirely; and one must make it one’s duty and strive to fight against things, first by deeds, but at worst by reason and argument.”

2.29.3 About seven or eight years ago, two leagues from here, a villager who is still alive, whose head had long been pounded by his wife’s jealousy, came home from work one day and was greeted by her usual shrieking. He flew into such a fury that on the spot, with the billhook he still had in his hands, he cleanly harvested from himself the parts that put her in such a fever, and threw them in her face. And it is said that a young gentleman of our parts, amorous and lusty, having by his perseverance at last softened the heart of a beautiful mistress, was in despair because at the very moment of the charge he had found himself soft and failing, and because *not manfully / had his sluggish penis raised its aged head*. As soon as he got home he deprived himself of it, and sent it to her, a cruel and bloody victim in atonement for his offense. If he had done it out of reasoning and religion, like the priests of Cybele, what would we not say of so lofty an undertaking?[2]

2.29.4 A few days ago at Bergerac, five leagues from my house, up the river Dordogne, a woman who had been tormented and beaten the evening before by her husband, a morose man, ill-tempered by nature, resolved to escape his harshness at the cost of her life. On getting up she chatted with her neighbors as usual, let slip a few words commending her affairs to them, took one of her sisters by the hand and led her onto the bridge. And after taking leave of her, as if in jest, without showing any other change or disturbance, she threw herself headlong from the top into the river, where she was lost. What is more remarkable in this is that the resolve ripened for a whole night in her head.

2 The verse is from the Priapea, once attributed to Tibullus. The priests of the goddess Cybele castrated themselves in her honor.

THE WIDOWS OF INDIA

Indian widows and Gymnosophists burn themselves, a lifelong resolve that Montaigne finds miraculous.

2.29.5 It is quite another thing with the women of India. For since it is their custom for husbands to have several wives, and for the dearest of them to kill herself after her husband, each one aims, by the design of her whole life, to win this point and this advantage over her companions. And the good services they render their husband look for no other reward than to be chosen to keep him company in death. *When the last torch has been thrown on the funeral bed,*

the dutiful throng of wives stands with streaming hair,
and they contend in death, which of them shall follow her husband
alive: it is a disgrace not to be allowed to die.
The winners burn, and offer their breasts to the flames,
and lay their scorched lips upon their husbands.[3]

2.29.6 A man writes, in our own day too, that he saw in those Eastern nations this custom held in honor: that not only do wives bury themselves after their husbands, but also the slave women he has enjoyed. It is done in this manner. When the husband has died, the widow may, if she wishes—but few wish it—ask for two or three months' time to settle her affairs. When the day comes, she mounts a horse, dressed as for a wedding, and with a cheerful face goes, as she says, to sleep with her husband, holding a mirror in her left hand and an arrow in the other.[4] Having paraded thus in pomp, accompanied by her friends and relatives and a great crowd in festive mood, she is soon brought to the public place set aside for such spectacles. It is a large square, in the middle of which there is a pit full of wood, and

3 Propertius, Elegies.

4 Montaigne's source is the Venetian Gasparo Balbi's account of his travels in the East Indies (1590).

next to it a platform raised four or five steps, onto which she is led and served a magnificent meal. After it she begins to dance and sing, and orders the fire to be lit when she sees fit. That done, she comes down and, taking by the hand her husband's nearest relative, goes with him to the river nearby, where she strips quite naked, distributes her jewels and clothes to her friends, and plunges into the water as if to wash away her sins. Coming out of it, she wraps herself in a yellow cloth fourteen fathoms long and, again giving her hand to this relative of her husband, goes back with him to the mound, where she speaks to the people and commends her children to them, if she has any. Between the pit and the mound a curtain is usually drawn, to keep them from seeing that blazing furnace; some of the women forbid it, to show greater courage. When she has finished speaking, a woman presents her with a vessel full of oil to anoint her head and her whole body, and she throws it into the fire when she has done; and in that instant she throws herself in. At once the people heap a quantity of logs on her, to keep her from lingering; and all their joy turns to mourning and sadness. If they are persons of lesser standing, the dead man's body is carried to the place where they wish to bury him and there set upright in a sitting position, with the widow on her knees before him, embracing him tightly. She stays in that position while a wall is built around them. When it has risen to the height of the woman's shoulders, one of her people takes her head from behind and wrings her neck; and once she has given up the ghost, the wall is quickly raised and closed over, and there they remain buried.

2.29.7 In that same country there was something similar among their Gymnosophists. Not under constraint from others, nor from the impulse of a sudden mood, but by express profession of their rule, their custom was this: once they had reached a certain age, or saw themselves threatened by some illness, they had a pyre built, and on top of it a richly adorned bed. After joyfully feasting their friends and acquaintances, they went and settled themselves on that bed with such resolution that, when the fire

was lit, they were not seen to move either foot or hand. That is how one of them, Calanus, died in the presence of the whole army of Alexander the Great.[5] Among them no one was thought either holy or blessed who had not killed himself in this way, sending forth his soul purged and purified by the fire once it had consumed all that was mortal and earthly in him. What makes the miracle is this constant premeditation throughout a whole life.

FATE AND FOREKNOWLEDGE

God's foreknowledge does not force events; belief in fixed destiny steadies Turks, Bedouins and assassins.

2.29.8 Among our other disputes, the dispute over *Fatum* has got mixed in. To tie future things, and even our will, to a certain and inevitable necessity, people still rely on this argument from times past: since God foresees that all things are to happen thus, as he undoubtedly does, they must therefore happen thus. To which our masters reply that to see something happen, as we do, and as God does likewise (for since everything is present to him, he sees rather than foresees), is not to force it to happen. Indeed, we see because things happen, and things do not happen because we see. The happening makes the knowledge, not the knowledge the happening.[6] What we see happen, happens; but it could have happened otherwise. In the register of the causes of events that God holds in his foreknowledge, he also has the causes called fortuitous, and the voluntary ones, which depend on the freedom he has given to our free will; and he knows that we shall go wrong, because we will have willed to go wrong.

2.29.9 Now I have seen plenty of people encourage their troops with this fatal necessity: if our hour is fixed at a certain point, neither the enemy's arquebus shots, nor our boldness, nor our flight and cowardice can bring it forward or put it back. That is

5 The Gymnosophists ("naked philosophers") were Indian ascetics, so named by the Greeks. Calanus burned himself alive in 323 BC.

6 *Fatum* is Latin for "fate." "Our masters" are the theologians.

fine to say, but look for someone who will act on it. And if it is true that a strong and lively belief draws actions of the same kind after it, then certainly this faith we are forever mouthing is wonderfully light in our times—unless its contempt for works makes it disdain their company. Be that as it may, on this very subject the Sire de Joinville, as credible a witness as any, tells us something about the Bedouins, a nation mixed with the Saracens, with whom King Saint Louis had dealings in the Holy Land. They believed so firmly, in their religion, that each man's days were fixed and numbered from all eternity by an inevitable preordination, that they went to war naked except for a Turkish-style sword, their bodies covered only with a white linen cloth. And for their most extreme curse, when they were angry with their own people, they always had on their lips: "Cursed be you, like the man who arms himself for fear of death." That is a very different proof of belief and faith from ours. Of the same rank, too, is the proof given by those two friars of Florence in our fathers' time. Being in some dispute over a point of learning, they agreed that both would walk into the fire, in the presence of all the people and in the public square, each to verify his own side. The preparations were already all made, and the thing was just on the point of being carried out, when it was interrupted by an unforeseen accident.[7]

2.29.10 A young Turkish lord had performed a remarkable feat of arms in person, in sight of the two armies of Amurath and Hunyadi, which were ready to engage. Amurath asked him what had filled him, so young and inexperienced as he was (for it was the first war he had seen), with such noble vigor of courage. He replied that his supreme teacher of valor had been a hare. One day when I was out hunting, he said, I came upon a hare in its form; and although I had two excellent greyhounds at my side, it still seemed better to me, so as not to miss it, to use my bow as well, for it offered me a very fine shot.[8] I began to loose my

7 The ordeal by fire proposed in Florence in 1498 between a Franciscan and a Dominican follower of Savonarola; it was called off.

8 John Hunyadi, Hungarian general, fought the Ottomans in the 1440s.

arrows, all forty that were in my quiver, not only without hitting it but without even waking it. After all that, I unleashed my greyhounds on it, and they could do no better. I learned from this that it had been protected by its destiny, and that neither arrows nor swords strike home except by leave of our fate, which it is not in our power to put back or bring forward. This story should serve to show us, in passing, how pliable our reason is to every sort of image. A man great in years, in name, in rank and in learning boasted to me that he had been led to a certain very important change in his faith by an outside prompting just as bizarre, and moreover so unconvincing that I found it stronger the other way round. He called it a miracle, and so did I, in a different sense. Their historians say that the conviction, widely spread among the common people of the Turks, that the span of their days is fatally and inflexibly prescribed, evidently helps to make them steady in danger. And I know a great prince who profits from it nicely, whether he believes it or takes it as an excuse, to run extraordinary risks—provided Fortune does not tire too soon of backing him.[9]

2.29.11 Within our memory there has been no more admirable instance of resolution than that of the two men who plotted the death of the Prince of Orange. It is a marvel how anyone could fire up the second, who carried it out, for an undertaking in which his companion had fared so badly after putting into it all he could. And how he could, on the same track and with the same weapons, go and attack a lord armed with so fresh a lesson in distrust, powerful in his following of friends and in bodily strength, in his own hall, among his guards, in a town wholly devoted to him. Certainly he brought to it a very determined hand and a courage stirred by a vigorous passion.[10] A dagger is surer for striking home, but since it needs more movement and strength of arm than a pistol, its blow is more liable to be deflected or disturbed. I have little doubt that this man was running to

9 The prince is probably Henry of Navarre, the future Henry IV.
10 William of Orange was wounded by a pistol shot in 1582 and killed by Balthasar Gérard at Delft in 1584.

certain death; for the hopes with which he might have been beguiled could not lodge in a settled mind, and the conduct of his exploit shows that he lacked a settled mind no more than he lacked courage. The motives for so powerful a conviction may be various, for our fancy makes of itself and of us whatever it pleases. The deed done near Orléans had nothing like it; there was more luck than vigor in it. The wound was not mortal, had Fortune not made it so. And the plan of shooting on horseback, from a distance, at a man moving with the motion of his horse, was the plan of a man who would rather miss his aim than fail to save himself. What followed showed it. For he was so transfixed and intoxicated by the thought of so lofty a deed that he entirely lost his wits, both in managing his flight and in managing his tongue in his answers. What did he need to do but reach his friends across a river?[11] It is a means I have resorted to in lesser dangers, and I consider it of little risk, whatever the width of the crossing, provided your horse finds the way in easy and you foresee on the far side an easy bank, given the current. The other man, when his horrible sentence was pronounced, said: "I was prepared for it; I shall stun you with my endurance."

2.29.12 The Assassins, a nation dependent on Phoenicia, are reputed among the Muslims to be of supreme devotion and purity of morals. They hold that the shortest road to winning Paradise is to kill someone of the opposite religion. That is why they have often been seen to attack powerful enemies, one or two at a time, without armor, at the price of certain death and without any concern for their own danger. In this way our Count Raymond of Tripoli was assassinated (the word is borrowed from their name) in the middle of his city, during our enterprises in the holy war; and likewise Conrad, Marquis of Montferrat, his murderers going to their execution all swollen and proud of so fine a masterpiece.[12]

11 Poltrot de Méré's shooting of the Duke of Guise in 1563.

12 The Nizari Ismailis of Syria; Raymond II of Tripoli was killed in 1152, Conrad of Montferrat in 1192.

II.30 Of a Monstrous Child

D'vn enfant monstrueux
A plain description of conjoined twins Montaigne saw, ending with the claim that nothing is contrary to nature, only to custom.

2.30.1 This story will go out plain, for I leave it to the physicians to discuss it. The day before yesterday I saw a child being led about by two men and a nurse, who said they were his father, uncle and aunt, to make a little money by showing him because of his strangeness. In all the rest he was of a common shape: he stood on his feet, walked and babbled more or less like other children of the same age. He had not yet been willing to take any nourishment except from his nurse's breast; what they tried to put in his mouth in my presence he chewed a little and gave back without swallowing. His cries did seem to have something peculiar about them. He was exactly fourteen months old. Below his nipples he was attached and stuck to another child, without a head, whose back passage was stopped up, the rest being whole; for though one of its arms was shorter, it had been broken by accident at their birth. They were joined face to face, as if a smaller child were trying to hug a slightly bigger one. The joint and the space by which they held together was only four fingers wide or thereabouts, so that if you lifted up this imperfect child you could see the other's navel beneath; thus the seam ran between his nipples and his navel. The navel of the imperfect one could not be seen, but all the rest of his belly could. So the parts of this imperfect one that were not attached, such as arms, buttocks, thighs and legs, hung dangling on the other, and might

reach down to his mid-leg. The nurse added that he urinated through both places. The limbs of the other were also nourished and alive, and in the same condition as his own, except that they were smaller and thinner. This double body and these various limbs, connected to a single head, might well provide a favorable omen for the King, that he will maintain these various parts and pieces of our State under the union of his laws. But for fear that the outcome may give it the lie, it is better to let the event go first; for there is nothing like divining things already done, *so that, once they have happened, they may then be brought back to the prophecy by some interpretation*—as they say of Epimenides that he prophesied backward.[1]

2.30.2 I have just seen a shepherd in Médoc, about thirty years old, who has no sign of genital parts. He has three holes through which he passes water continually. He is bearded, has desire, and seeks the touch of women.

WHAT WE CALL MONSTERS

Nothing is against nature; we call monstrous only what is contrary to our custom.

2.30.3 What we call monsters are not so to God, who sees in the immensity of his work the infinity of forms he has included in it. And it is to be believed that this figure that astonishes us relates and belongs to some other figure of the same kind, unknown to man. From his all-wisdom nothing proceeds but what is good, common and regular; but we do not see its arrangement and relation. *What he sees often he does not wonder at, even if he does not know why it happens. What he has not seen before, if it happens, he thinks a portent.* We call contrary to nature what happens contrary to custom. Nothing whatever exists that is not in accordance with nature. Let this universal and natural reason drive out of us the error and astonishment that novelty brings us.

1 Cicero, On Divination. Aristotle says that Epimenides divined not the future but the past.

II.31 Of Anger

De la cholere

Starting with parents who beat children in anger, Montaigne studies anger's effects and the folly of punishing while angry.

2.31.1 Plutarch is admirable everywhere, but especially where he judges human actions. You can see the fine things he says in his comparison of Lycurgus and Numa about our great foolishness in abandoning children to the government and charge of their fathers. Most of our states, as Aristotle says, leave to each man, in the manner of the Cyclopes, the management of his wife and children according to his own foolish and thoughtless fancy; and almost the only ones that have committed the discipline of childhood to the laws are the Spartan and the Cretan. Who does not see that in a State everything depends on its education and upbringing?[1] And yet, without any discernment, it is left at the mercy of parents, however foolish and wicked they may be.

1 In Homer each Cyclops lays down the law for his own wife and children; Aristotle cites them in the Ethics.

2.31.2 Among other things, how many times, as I passed through our streets, have I felt like putting on a farce to avenge little boys whom I saw being flayed, beaten senseless and battered by some father or mother raging and mad with anger! You see fire and fury coming out of their eyes, *With rage inflaming their liver, they rush*
Headlong, like rocks torn from the ridges when the mountain
Gives way beneath them and the side falls away from the overhanging slope (and according to Hippocrates the most dangerous diseases are those that disfigure the face), with a sharp and piercing voice, often against a child just out of the nurse's hands. And then there they are, maimed, stunned by blows; and our justice takes no account of it, as if these dislocations and sprains were not of members of our commonwealth.[2]

It is a welcome thing that you have given a citizen to your country and people,
If you make him fit for his country, useful in the fields,
Useful in carrying out the affairs of both war and peace.

NEVER PUNISH IN ANGER

Punishment given in anger is vengeance; Plutarch, Archytas and Plato refused to punish while angry.

2.31.3 There is no passion that so shakes the soundness of our judgments as anger. No one would hesitate to punish with death a judge who had condemned his criminal out of anger; why then is it any more permitted to fathers and schoolmasters to whip children and punish them while angry? It is no longer correction; it is vengeance. Punishment serves as medicine for children; and would we put up with a doctor who was worked up and angry with his patient?

2.31.4 We ourselves, to do right, should never lay a hand on our servants while our anger lasts. While our pulse is racing and we

2 Juvenal, Satires.

feel agitated, let us put off the match. Things will truly seem different to us when we have calmed and cooled down. It is passion that commands then, passion that speaks, not we. Through it, faults look larger to us, like bodies seen through a fog. He who is hungry makes use of food; but he who would make use of punishment must have neither hunger nor thirst for it. And besides, punishments carried out with weight and discretion are much better received, and with more benefit, by the one who suffers them. Otherwise he does not think he has been justly condemned by a man shaken with wrath and fury; and he alleges in his own justification his master's extraordinary movements, the inflamed face, the unusual oaths, and that restlessness and rash haste of his. *Faces swell with anger, veins grow black with blood, / Eyes flash more fiercely than a Gorgon's fire.* Suetonius relates that when Gaius Rabirius had been condemned by Caesar, what helped him most with the people (to whom he appealed) in winning his case was the animosity and harshness Caesar had brought to the judgment.[3]

THE PREACHER AND THE SERMON

Saying and doing differ, yet words carry more weight when the speaker lives by them.

2.31.5 Saying is one thing and doing another; we must consider the sermon apart and the preacher apart. Those in our time who have tried to shake the truth of our Church through the vices of its ministers have given themselves an easy game; the Church draws its testimonies from elsewhere. It is a foolish way of arguing, and one that would throw everything back into confusion. A man of good morals may hold false opinions, and a wicked man may preach the truth—even one who does not believe it. It is no doubt a fine harmony when doing and saying go together; and I do not wish to deny that saying, when actions follow, carries more authority and effect. As Eudamidas said, hearing a philosopher discourse on war: "These remarks are

3 Ovid, The Art of Love.

fine, but the man who makes them is not to be believed, for his ears are not used to the sound of the trumpet." And Cleomenes, hearing a rhetorician harangue about valor, burst out laughing; and when the other was offended, he said to him: "I would do the same if it were a swallow talking about it; but if it were an eagle, I would gladly listen."[4] I notice, it seems to me, in the writings of the ancients, that the man who says what he thinks strikes home far more vividly than the one who is pretending. Listen to Cicero speak of the love of liberty; listen to Brutus speak of it: the very writings ring out to you that this man was one to buy it at the price of his life. Let Cicero, the father of eloquence, treat of the contempt of death; let Seneca treat of it too: the former drags along languidly, and you feel that he wants to make you resolved about something on which he is not resolved himself. He gives you no heart, for he has none himself; the other rouses and inflames you. I never look at an author, especially one of those who write about virtue and actions, without inquiring curiously what kind of man he was. For the ephors at Sparta, seeing a dissolute man propose a useful piece of advice to the people, ordered him to be silent, and asked a good man to claim the idea as his own and propose it.

2.31.6 Plutarch's writings, if we savor them well, reveal him to us well enough, and I think I know him to the very soul; yet I wish we had some record of his life. And I have launched into this digression because of the gratitude I feel toward Aulus Gellius for leaving us in writing this story about his character, which brings me back to my subject of anger.[5] A slave of his, a bad and vicious man, but whose ears were somewhat steeped in the lessons of philosophy, had been stripped by Plutarch's order for some fault of his. While he was being whipped, he grumbled at first that it was without reason and that he had done nothing. But in the end, starting to shout and insult his master in good earnest, he reproached him for not being the philosopher he boasted of being: he had often heard him say that it was ugly to

4 Eudamidas was a king of Sparta; both sayings come from Plutarch.
5 Aulus Gellius, Roman author of the 2nd century AD, wrote the Attic Nights.

get angry, indeed he had written a book about it; and the fact that he was now, wholly plunged in anger, having him so cruelly beaten, flatly contradicted his writings. To this Plutarch replied, quite coolly and calmly: "What, you lout, what makes you judge that I am angry now? Does my face, my voice, my color, my speech give you any sign that I am agitated? I do not think my eyes are wild, or my face troubled, or my voice a frightful cry. Am I flushing? Am I foaming? Does anything escape me that I shall have to repent of? Am I trembling? Am I shaking with rage? For let me tell you, those are the true signs of anger." And then, turning to the man doing the whipping: "Carry on with your work," he said, "while this fellow and I argue." That is his story.

2.31.7 Archytas of Tarentum, returning from a war in which he had been commander-in-chief, found his household in a thorough mess and his lands lying fallow through the bad management of his steward. He had him summoned and said: "Go—if I were not angry, I would give you a good thrashing." Plato likewise, having grown heated against one of his slaves, gave Speusippus the job of punishing him, excusing himself from laying a hand on him himself on the ground that he was angry. Charillus, a Spartan, said to a helot who was behaving too insolently and boldly toward him: "By the gods, if I were not angry, I would have you put to death this very moment."[6]

2.31.8 It is a passion that delights in itself and flatters itself. How many times, when we have been stirred up on a false cause, if someone comes and offers us some good defense or excuse, do we get annoyed at truth itself and innocence? I have kept in mind a wonderful example of this from antiquity. Piso, a man of notable virtue in every other respect, grew angry with one of his soldiers because, coming back alone from foraging, he could not tell him where he had left a comrade. Piso took it as proven that he had killed him and condemned him to death on the spot.[7] Just as he was at the gallows, along came the lost comrade. The whole army made a great celebration of it, and after many

6 Archytas of Tarentum was a Pythagorean philosopher and general.
7 Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso; the story is told by Seneca in On Anger.

embraces and hugs between the two comrades, the executioner brought them both before Piso, the whole company fully expecting that it would be a great pleasure to him too. But it was quite the reverse: out of shame and spite, his fury, which was still at its height, redoubled; and with a subtlety his passion suddenly supplied, he made three guilty men out of finding one innocent, and had all three dispatched: the first soldier, because there was a sentence against him; the second, who had got lost, because he was the cause of his comrade's death; and the executioner, for not having obeyed the order he had been given.

2.31.9 Those who have to deal with stubborn women may have found out into what a rage they are thrown when you meet their agitation with silence and coldness and disdain to feed their wrath. The orator Caelius was wonderfully hot-tempered by nature. A man was supping in his company, a man of soft and gentle conversation, who, so as not to provoke him, had decided to approve and agree with everything he said. Caelius, unable to bear having his ill humor pass thus without fuel, said: "Deny me something, by the gods, so that there may be two of us!" Women likewise get angry only so that you will get angry back, in imitation of the laws of love.[8] Phocion, faced with a man who was interrupting his speech with harsh insults, did nothing but keep silent and give him all the time he wanted to exhaust his anger; that done, without any mention of this disturbance, he resumed his speech at the point where he had left off. There is no retort so stinging as such contempt.[9]

8 Marcus Caelius Rufus, Roman orator and friend of Cicero; the story is in Seneca's On Anger.

9 Phocion, Athenian general and statesman of the 4th century BC.

HIDDEN ANGER AND MY OWN

Suppressed anger gnaws within; Montaigne explains how he manages his own sudden but brief outbursts.

2.31.10 Of the most hot-tempered man in France (and it is always a flaw, but more excusable in a military man, for in that profession there are certainly parts that cannot do without it) I often say that he is the most patient man I know at bridling his anger. It shakes him with such violence and fury, *As when a fire of twigs, with a great roar, is heaped*

Beneath the ribs of a seething cauldron,
And the water leaps with the heat; within, the smoking flood
Rages and boils up high with foam,
And the water can no longer contain itself; black steam flies up into the air, that he has to restrain himself cruelly to moderate it. For my part, I know of no passion that I could make such an effort to hide and withstand.[10]

I would not want to set so high a price on wisdom. I look not so much at what he does as at how much it costs him not to do worse. Another man boasted to me of the orderliness and gentleness of his manners, which is truly remarkable. I told him that it was indeed something, especially for people like him of eminent rank, on whom all eyes are fixed, always to present themselves to the world well tempered; but that the main thing was to provide for the inside and for oneself; and that it was not, to my mind, managing one's affairs well to be gnawing at oneself inwardly—which I feared he was doing in order to keep up that mask and that orderly outward appearance.

2.31.11 By hiding anger we drive it into our body—as Diogenes said to Demosthenes, who, for fear of being seen in a tavern, was drawing back inside: "The further back you go, the further in you are." I advise giving your valet a slap on the cheek, a bit

10 Virgil, Aeneid.

unseasonably, rather than torturing your mind to put on this wise countenance. And I would rather bring my passions out than brood on them at my own expense. They weaken by being vented and expressed. It is better that their point should act outward than that we bend it against ourselves. *All vices are lighter in the open, and most pernicious when they lurk beneath a pretense of health.*[11]

2.31.12 I warn those in my household who have the right to get angry, first, to husband their anger and not scatter it about at every turn, for that hinders its effect and weight. Rash and constant scolding becomes routine and makes everyone despise it. The scolding you use against a servant for his theft is not felt, since it is the very same he has seen you use against him a hundred times for rinsing a glass badly or setting a stool down wrong. Secondly, not to get angry into thin air, and to see that their reproof reaches the person they are complaining of; for usually they shout before he is in their presence and go on shouting for an age after he has gone. *And wanton madness quarrels with itself.* They take on their own shadow and drive this storm to a place where no one is punished or touched by it, except, by the din of their voice, someone who is not to blame. I likewise blame, in quarrels, those who bluster and rebel with no opponent present: one must keep these rodomontades for where they strike home.[12]

> *As when a bull, before his first battle, raises*
> *Terrifying bellows and tries to put anger into his horns,*
> *Butting against a tree trunk, and lashes the winds*
> *With blows, and paws the sand in prelude to the fight.*

2.31.13 When I get angry, it is as sharply, but also as briefly and privately, as I can. I do lose myself in speed and violence, but not in confusion—not so far as to go flinging every sort of insult about recklessly and at random, without taking care to plant my barbs pointedly where I think they will wound most; for usually

11 Seneca, Letters.

12 The Latin is Claudian, Against Eutropius. Rodomontades: from Rodomonte, the boastful warrior of Boiardo and Ariosto.

I use only my tongue. My servants get off more cheaply on big occasions than on small ones. The small ones take me by surprise; and the misfortune is that once you are over the precipice, it does not matter who gave you the push: you always go right to the bottom. The fall presses on, gathers speed and hurries of itself. On big occasions I am repaid by this: they are so just that everyone expects to see a reasonable anger arise from them, and I pride myself on cheating their expectation. I brace and prepare myself against these; they put me on my guard and threaten to carry me very far if I followed them. I easily keep myself from entering into it, and I am strong enough, if I am expecting it, to repel the impulse of this passion, however violent its cause; but if it catches me unawares and once seizes me, it carries me away, however trivial its cause. So I strike this bargain with those who may have words with me: "When you feel that I am the first to be roused, let me run on, rightly or wrongly; I will do the same for you in my turn." The storm arises only from the clash of angers, which readily breed one from the other and are not born at the same moment. Let us give each its run, and we are always at peace. A useful rule, but hard to carry out. Sometimes I also happen to play the angry man, for the good order of my household, without any real emotion. As age makes my temper sourer, I study to resist it; and if I can, I shall make myself henceforth all the less peevish and difficult, the more excuse and inclination I have to be so—although hitherto I have been among those who are least so.

2.31.14 One more word to close this topic. Aristotle says that anger sometimes serves as a weapon for virtue and valor. That is plausible; yet those who contradict it reply amusingly that it is a weapon of a novel kind: for we wield other weapons, but this one wields us. Our hand does not guide it; it guides our hand. It holds us; we do not hold it.

II.32 A Defense of Seneca and Plutarch

Defence de Seneque et de Plutarque
Montaigne defends Seneca against a Protestant pamphlet likening him to a hated cardinal, and Plutarch against Jean Bodin's charges.

2.32.1 The familiarity I have with these two figures, and the help they give to my old age and to my book, built purely out of their spoils, oblige me to take up the defense of their honor.

2.32.2 As for Seneca: among the myriad little pamphlets that those of the so-called Reformed Religion circulate in defense of their cause—some of which come from a good hand, and it is a great pity that it is not employed on a better subject—I once saw one which, to stretch out and fill in the likeness it seeks to find between the government of our poor late King Charles IX and that of Nero, pairs the late Cardinal of Lorraine with Seneca: their fortunes, in that both were first in the government of their princes, and along with that their characters, their conditions and their conduct.[1] In which, in my opinion, he does the said Lord Cardinal great honor. For although I am one of those who greatly esteem his mind, his eloquence, his zeal for his religion and for the service of his King, and his good fortune in being born in an age when it was so novel and so rare, and at the same time so necessary for the public good, to have a churchman of such nobility and rank who was competent and equal to his office—still, to confess the truth, I do not consider his ability

1 Charles de Guise, Cardinal of Lorraine (1524–1574), chief adviser to the French crown under Francis II and Charles IX.

anywhere near Seneca's, nor his virtue so clean, so whole or so firm.

2.32.3 Now this book I am speaking of, to reach its goal, gives a very insulting description of Seneca, having borrowed these reproaches from Dio the historian, whose testimony I do not believe at all. For besides being inconsistent—after calling Seneca at one moment most wise and at another a mortal enemy of Nero's vices, he elsewhere makes him avaricious, a usurer, ambitious, cowardly, given to pleasure, and a philosopher under false colors—Seneca's virtue appears so lively and vigorous in his writings, and his defense against some of these charges, such as his wealth and excessive spending, is so clear there, that I would believe no testimony to the contrary. Moreover, it is much more reasonable in such matters to believe the Roman historians than the Greeks and foreigners.[2] Now Tacitus and the others speak very honorably both of his life and of his death, and portray him to us as in all things a most excellent and virtuous man. And I will allege no other reproach against Dio's judgment than this one, which is unanswerable: his feeling for Roman affairs is so unsound that he dares to uphold the cause of Julius Caesar against Pompey, and of Antony against Cicero.

BODIN AGAINST PLUTARCH

Montaigne answers Jean Bodin's charges that Plutarch told incredible tales and favored the Greeks.

2.32.4 Let us come to Plutarch. Jean Bodin is a good author of our time, endowed with far more judgment than the mob of scribblers of his age, and he deserves to be judged and considered. I find him a little bold in the passage of his Method of History where he accuses Plutarch not only of ignorance (on which I would have let him have his say, for that is not my game), but also of often writing "things incredible and entirely fabulous" (those are his words).[3] If he had simply said "things otherwise

2 Cassius Dio, Greek historian of Rome, early 3rd century AD.
3 Bodin's Method for the Easy Understanding of History appeared in 1566.

than they are," it would not have been a great reproach; for what we have not seen we take from the hands of others and on credit. And I see that he sometimes knowingly tells the same story in different ways: for instance, Hannibal's judgment of the three best captains who ever lived is given one way in the Life of Flamininus and another in that of Pyrrhus. But to charge him with having taken incredible and impossible things for ready cash is to accuse the most judicious author in the world of a lack of judgment.

2.32.5 And here is his example: "As," he says, "when he relates that a Spartan boy let his whole belly be torn open by a fox cub he had stolen and was keeping hidden under his robe, going so far as to die rather than reveal his theft." I find this example badly chosen in the first place, because it is very hard to set bounds to the efforts of the faculties of the soul, whereas with bodily strength we have more right to limit and know it. For that reason, if it had been up to me, I would rather have chosen an example of this second kind; and there are some less believable ones. For instance, among others, what he relates of Pyrrhus: that, wounded as he was, he dealt an enemy armed from head to foot such a blow with his sword that he split him from the top of his head to the bottom, so that the body fell apart in two pieces. In Bodin's example I find no great miracle; nor do I accept the excuse with which he covers Plutarch, that he added the words "as they say" to warn us and keep a rein on our belief. For except in matters received on authority and out of reverence for antiquity or religion, Plutarch would not have wanted either to accept himself, or to offer us for belief, things incredible in themselves. And that he does not use these words "as they say" here for that purpose is easy to see from what he himself tells us elsewhere on this subject of the endurance of Spartan children—examples that occurred in his own time and are harder to credit. Such is the one that Cicero also attested before him, having, as he says, been on the spot: that even in their time there were children to be found, in that test of endurance to which they were put before the altar of Diana, who let themselves be whipped

there until the blood ran all over them, not only without crying out but even without groaning, and some to the point of willingly giving up their lives there. And there is what Plutarch also relates, along with a hundred other witnesses: that at a sacrifice, a burning coal slipped into the sleeve of a Spartan boy while he was burning incense, and he let his whole arm burn until the smell of cooked flesh reached the bystanders. By their custom there was nothing in which their reputation was more at stake, nor for which they had to suffer more blame and shame, than being caught stealing. I am so steeped in the greatness of those men that not only does Plutarch's story not seem incredible to me, as it does to Bodin, but I do not even find it rare or strange. Spartan history is full of a thousand harsher and rarer examples; by that standard it is all miracle.

2.32.6 Marcellinus relates, on this subject of theft, that in his time no kind of torture had yet been found that could force Egyptians caught in this crime, which was very common among them, even to tell their name.

2.32.7 A Spanish peasant, put to torture to name the accomplices in the murder of the praetor Lucius Piso, cried out in the midst of his torments that his friends should not budge but should stand by and watch in complete safety, and that it was not in the power of pain to wring from him one word of confession; and nothing else was got from him the first day. The next day, as they were bringing him back to begin his torture again, he wrenched himself vigorously out of his guards' hands, dashed his head against a wall and killed himself.

2.32.8 Epicharis glutted and wearied the cruelty of Nero's henchmen, withstanding their fire, their beatings and their instruments for a whole day without a word revealing her conspiracy. Carried back to the torture the next day, her limbs all broken, she passed a cord from her dress through one arm of her chair, with a running knot, put her head into it, and strangled herself with the weight of her body. Having the courage to die thus and escape the earlier torments, does she not seem to have deliberately lent her life to that trial of her endurance the day before, in

order to mock the tyrant and encourage others to a similar enterprise against him?[4]

2.32.9 And if you ask our light horsemen about what they have seen in these civil wars, you will find instances of endurance, obstinacy and stubbornness, in our wretched age and among this soft and spineless rabble, softer even than the Egyptian one, worthy of comparison with the examples of Spartan virtue we have just related. I know that there have been simple peasants who let the soles of their feet be roasted, the ends of their fingers crushed with the hammer of a pistol, and their bloody eyes forced out of their heads by a cord drawn tight around their foreheads, before they would so much as agree to pay a ransom. I have seen one left for dead, stark naked in a ditch. His neck was all bruised and swollen from a halter still hanging from it, by which he had been dragged all night at a horse's tail. His body had been pierced in a hundred places with dagger thrusts, given him not to kill him but to cause him pain and fear. He had endured all this, to the point of losing speech and feeling, resolved, as he told me, to die a thousand deaths (and indeed, so far as suffering goes, he had gone through one entire death) rather than promise anything. And yet he was one of the richest farmers in the whole region. How many have we seen let themselves be patiently burned and roasted for opinions borrowed from others, which they did not understand and did not know? I have known hundreds upon hundreds of women (for they say that Gascon heads have some special privilege in this) whom you could sooner have made sink their teeth into red-hot iron than make them let go of an opinion they had formed in anger. Blows and constraint only make them more furious. The man who made up the tale of the woman who, for all the correction of threats and beatings, would not stop calling her husband lousy, and who, thrown into the water and choking, still raised her hands and made above her head the sign of cracking lice, made up a tale of which, in truth, we see the exact image every

4 Epicharis, a freedwoman involved in the conspiracy of Piso against Nero in AD 65, as told by Tacitus.

day in the stubbornness of women. And stubbornness is the sister of constancy, at least in vigor and firmness.

2.32.10 We must not judge what is possible and what is not by what is credible or incredible to our own mind, as I have said elsewhere. It is a great fault, and yet one into which most men fall (I do not say this about Bodin), to balk at believing of others what they themselves could not do, or would not. Each man thinks that the master pattern of human nature is in himself, and that all others must be measured by it. Ways of going that do not match his own are feigned and false. Is he told something about another man's actions or faculties? The first thing he calls in to consult his judgment is his own example: as things go with him, so goes the order of the world. Oh, what dangerous and intolerable asininity! As for me, I regard some men as far above me, notably among the ancients. And though I clearly recognize that I am powerless to follow them within a thousand paces, I still follow them with my eyes and judge the springs that raise them so high, the seeds of which I perceive in myself to some degree. I do the same with the extreme baseness of some minds, which does not stun me, and which I do not disbelieve either. I can see the swing those lofty souls give themselves to rise, and I admire their greatness; and those leaps, which I find very beautiful, I embrace. If my strength does not reach that far, at least my judgment applies itself to them most willingly.

2.32.11 The other example he cites of incredible and wholly fabulous things told by Plutarch is that Agesilaus was fined by the ephors for having drawn to himself alone the hearts and goodwill of his fellow citizens. I do not know what mark of falsehood he finds in that. But at all events Plutarch is speaking there of things that must have been far better known to him than to us. And it was nothing new in Greece to see men punished and exiled for this alone, for being too pleasing to their fellow citizens: witness ostracism and petalism.[5]

2.32.12 In this same passage there is another accusation that stings me on Plutarch's behalf. Bodin says that Plutarch matched

Romans with Romans and Greeks with Greeks in good faith, but not Romans with Greeks: witness, he says, Demosthenes and Cicero, Cato and Aristides, Sulla and Lysander, Marcellus and Pelopidas, Pompey and Agesilaus. He holds that Plutarch favored the Greeks by giving them such ill-matched companions. That is to attack precisely what is most excellent and praiseworthy in Plutarch. For in his comparisons (which are the most admirable part of his works, and the part in which, in my opinion, he took most pleasure) the fidelity and sincerity of his judgments equal their depth and their weight. He is a philosopher who teaches us virtue. Let us see whether we can defend him against this charge of bad faith and falsehood. What I imagine gave rise to this judgment is the great and dazzling luster of Roman names that we carry in our heads: it does not seem to us that Demosthenes can equal the glory of a consul, proconsul and quaestor of that great republic. But if one considers the truth of the matter, and the men in themselves (which is what Plutarch chiefly aimed at, weighing their characters, their natures and their abilities rather than their fortune), I think, contrary to Bodin, that Cicero and the elder Cato fall short of their companions. For his purpose I would rather have chosen the example of the younger Cato compared with Phocion: in that pair there would be a more plausible disparity to the Roman's advantage. As for Marcellus, Sulla and Pompey, I can see that their feats of war are grander, more glorious and more showy than those of the Greeks whom Plutarch pairs with them. But the finest and most virtuous actions, in war no more than elsewhere, are not always the most famous. I often see the names of commanders smothered beneath the splendor of other names of less merit: witness Labienus, Ventidius, Telesinus and many others. And taking it from that angle, if I had to complain on behalf of the Greeks, could I not say that Camillus is much less comparable to Themistocles, the Gracchi to Agis and Cleomenes, Numa

5 Petalism was the Syracusan counterpart of Athenian ostracism, with the names of those to be banished written on olive leaves.

to Lycurgus? But it is folly to try to judge with a single stroke things that have so many faces.

2.32.13 When Plutarch compares them, he does not for all that make them equal. Who could point out their differences more clearly and conscientiously? Does he come to compare the victories, the feats of arms, the strength of the armies led by Pompey, and his triumphs, with those of Agesilaus? I do not believe, he says, that Xenophon himself, if he were alive, even though he was allowed to write whatever he liked to the advantage of Agesilaus, would dare to set them side by side. Does he speak of comparing Lysander with Sulla? There is no comparison, he says, either in the number of victories or in the hazard of battles: for Lysander won only two naval battles, etc. That is not robbing the Romans of anything. By merely setting them beside the Greeks he cannot have wronged them, whatever disparity there may be. And Plutarch does not weigh them against each other as wholes; there is no overall preference. He matches the parts and the circumstances one after another and judges them separately. So if anyone wanted to convict him of partiality, he should have picked apart some particular judgment, or said in general that Plutarch was wrong to match such a Greek with such a Roman, since there were others better suited to the pairing and more alike.

II.33 The Story of Spurina

L'histoire de Spurina
A handsome youth who disfigured his face to escape women's desire leads Montaigne to Caesar's ambition and the mastery of passions.

2.33.1 Philosophy does not think it has used its means badly when it has given reason sovereign mastery over our soul and the authority to hold our appetites in check. Among these appetites, those who judge that none are more violent than the ones love engenders base their opinion on the fact that they belong to both body and soul, and that the whole man is possessed by them, so much so that even health depends on them and medicine is sometimes forced to act as their procurer. But on the contrary, one could also say that the admixture of the body brings them some abatement and weakening: for such desires are subject to satiety and can be cured by material remedies.

2.33.2 Many who wanted to free their souls from the continual alarms this appetite gave them have resorted to cutting and amputating the aroused and disordered parts. Others have entirely beaten down its force and ardor by frequent application of cold things, such as snow and vinegar. The hair shirts of our forefathers served this purpose: it is a fabric woven of horsehair, of which some of them made shirts, and others belts to torment their loins. A prince told me not long ago that in his youth, on a solemn feast day at the court of King Francis I, when everyone was dressed in finery, he took a fancy to put on his father's hair shirt, which is still in his house. But whatever devotion he had, he could not find the patience to wait until night to take it

off, and he was ill from it for a long time. He added that he did not think there was any heat of youth so fierce that this remedy could not quench it. Still, perhaps he has never felt the most burning ones. For experience shows us that such a stirring very often persists under rough and shabby clothes, and that hair shirts do not always make sorry wretches of those who wear them.[1]

2.33.3 Xenocrates went about it more rigorously. His disciples, to test his continence, had slipped into his bed Lais, that beautiful and famous courtesan, quite naked except for the weapons of her beauty and her wanton lures, her love potions. Feeling that in spite of his reasonings and his rules his unruly body was beginning to mutiny, he had the members that had lent an ear to this rebellion burned. Whereas the passions that are wholly in the soul, such as ambition, avarice and the rest, give reason much more trouble: for there it can be helped only by its own means; nor are those appetites capable of satiety; indeed they are sharpened and increased by enjoyment.

CAESAR'S TWO PASSIONS

Caesar loved women passionately, but ambition always mastered his pleasures and finally ruined him.

2.33.4 The single example of Julius Caesar may suffice to show us the disparity between these appetites: for never was a man more given to amorous pleasures. The meticulous care he took of his person is evidence of it, to the point of using for that purpose the most lascivious means then in fashion, such as having his whole body plucked and anointing himself with perfumes of extreme refinement. And by nature he was a handsome figure, fair-skinned, tall and nimble, with a full face and dark, keen eyes, if we are to believe Suetonius: for the statues of him to be seen in Rome do not everywhere match this portrait. Besides his wives, whom he changed four times, and not counting the loves of his boyhood with the King of Bithynia, Nicomedes, he had the

1 Montaigne puns on haire (hair shirt) and here (poor wretch).

maidenhead of that so famous Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra: witness little Caesarion, who was born of it. He also had affairs with Eunoe, Queen of Mauritania, and in Rome with Postumia, wife of Servius Sulpicius; with Lollia, wife of Gabinius; with Tertulla, wife of Crassus; and even with Mucia, wife of the great Pompey. That was the reason, say the Roman historians, why her husband divorced her, though Plutarch admits he did not know it. And the Curios, father and son, later reproached Pompey, when he married Caesar's daughter, with making himself son-in-law to a man who had made him a cuckold, and whom he himself used to call Aegisthus.[2] Besides all these, he kept Servilia, Cato's sister and the mother of Marcus Brutus, and everyone holds that this was the source of the great affection he bore Brutus, since Brutus was born at a time when it seemed likely that he was his son. So I am right, it seems to me, to take him for a man extremely given to this kind of debauchery and of a very amorous constitution. But the other passion, ambition, by which he was also infinitely wounded, coming to fight against that one, at once made it give ground.

2.33.5 Recalling on this subject Mehmed, the one who subjugated Constantinople and brought about the final extermination of the Greek name, I know of no one in whom these two passions are more evenly balanced: he was as tireless a rake as he was a soldier. But when in his life they compete with each other, the quarrelsome ardor always masters the amorous ardor. And the latter, though it was out of its natural season, regained full sovereign authority only when he was in great old age and no longer able to bear the burden of war.

2.33.6 What is told as a contrary example about Ladislaus, King of Naples, is remarkable: that, though a good commander, courageous and ambitious, he set as the chief end of his ambition the satisfaction of his pleasure and the enjoyment of some rare beauty. His death was of a piece with this. Having by a well-pressed siege reduced the city of Florence to such straits that its

2 Aegisthus seduced Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon, while her husband was away at Troy.

inhabitants were about to negotiate the terms of his victory, he let them off on condition that they hand over to him a girl of their city, of excellent beauty, of whom he had heard. They had no choice but to grant her to him, and to avert the public ruin by a private wrong.[3] She was the daughter of a physician famous in his time, who, finding himself caught in so vile a necessity, resolved on a bold undertaking. While everyone was adorning his daughter and decking her out with ornaments and jewels that might make her pleasing to this new lover, he too gave her a handkerchief, exquisite in scent and workmanship, which she was to use in their first embraces, an article women in those parts hardly ever forget. This handkerchief, poisoned with all the skill of his art, rubbing against those heated bodies and open pores, breathed its venom into them so swiftly that their warm sweat suddenly turned cold, and they expired in each other's arms.

2.33.7 I come back to Caesar. His pleasures never made him steal a single minute of an hour, or turn a single step aside from the opportunities that offered for his advancement. This passion, ambition, ruled all the others in him so sovereignly, and possessed his soul with such complete authority, that it carried him wherever it wished. Indeed it vexes me, when I consider otherwise the greatness of the man and the marvelous gifts he had: such ability in every kind of learning that there is hardly a science on which he did not write. He was such an orator that many have preferred his eloquence to Cicero's; and he himself, in my opinion, thought he owed him little in this respect. His two Anti-Catos were written chiefly to counterbalance the fine speaking that Cicero had used in his Cato. For the rest, was there ever a soul so vigilant, so active and so enduring of toil as his? And it was certainly adorned as well with many rare seeds of virtue, living, natural ones, I mean, not counterfeit. He was singularly sober, and so little fastidious in his eating that Oppius relates that one day, when he was served at table some sauce made with medicinal oil instead of plain oil, he ate a good deal

3 Ladislaus of Anjou-Durazzo, King of Naples (r. 1386–1414).

of it so as not to shame his host. Another time he had his baker whipped for serving him different bread from what was served to everyone else. Cato himself used to say of him that he was the first sober man to set out to ruin his country. As for this same Cato calling him a drunkard one day, it happened in this way. They were both in the Senate, where Catiline's conspiracy, of which Caesar was suspected, was being discussed, when someone brought him a sealed note from outside. Cato, thinking it was something the conspirators were informing him of, demanded that he hand it over, which Caesar was forced to do to avoid greater suspicion. It happened to be a love letter that Servilia, Cato's sister, had written him. Cato, having read it, threw it back at him, saying, "Take it, drunkard." That, I say, was rather a word of disdain and anger than a deliberate reproach for that vice: just as we often insult those who annoy us with the first insults that come to our lips, though they are in no way deserved by the people we pin them on. Besides, the vice Cato reproaches him with is wonderfully close to the one in which he had caught Caesar: for Venus and Bacchus readily get along, as the proverb says. But with me Venus is much livelier in the company of sobriety.

2.33.8 The examples of his gentleness and clemency toward those who had offended him are countless. I mean besides those he gave while the civil war was still in progress, which, as he himself makes clear enough in his writings, he used to win over his enemies and make them less afraid of his future rule and victory. But it must still be said that if those examples are not enough to prove his natural gentleness, they at least show us a marvelous confidence and greatness of heart in the man. He often sent whole armies back to his enemy after defeating them, without even deigning to bind them by oath, if not to support him, at least to refrain from making war on him. He captured certain of Pompey's commanders three and four times, and as many times set them free. Pompey declared as his enemies all those who did not follow him to the war; Caesar had it proclaimed that he held as friends all those who stayed put and did

not actually take up arms against him. To those of his officers who slipped away from him to take service elsewhere, he even sent back their arms, horses and baggage. The towns he had taken by force he left free to follow whatever side they pleased, giving them no other garrison than the memory of his gentleness and clemency. On the day of his great battle of Pharsalus he forbade anyone to lay hands on Roman citizens except in the last extremity. These are very risky strokes, in my judgment; and it is no wonder if, in the civil wars we are suffering, those who, like him, are fighting against the ancient state of their country do not follow his example. These are extraordinary means, and only Caesar's fortune and his admirable foresight could carry them off successfully. When I consider the incomparable greatness of that soul, I excuse victory for being unable to break free of him, even in that most unjust and iniquitous cause.

2.33.9 To return to his clemency, we have many unfeigned examples of it from the time of his rule, when everything was in his hands and he no longer had to pretend. Gaius Memmius had written very stinging speeches against him, to which he had replied very sharply; yet soon afterward he did not fail to help make him consul. Gaius Calvus, who had written several abusive epigrams against him, had used some of his friends to bring about a reconciliation, and Caesar took it upon himself to write to him first. And our good Catullus, who had roughed him up so harshly under the name of Mamurra, came to apologize to him, and Caesar had him to supper at his table that very day.[4] When he was told of some people who were speaking ill of him, all he did was declare in one of his public speeches that he had been told of it. He feared his enemies even less than he hated them. When certain conspiracies and meetings formed against his life were revealed to him, he was content to publish an edict saying that he knew of them, without otherwise prosecuting those responsible. As for the regard he had for his friends: when Gaius

4 Mamurra, Caesar's chief engineer, is attacked together with Caesar in several of Catullus's poems.

Oppius, traveling with him, fell ill, he gave up to him the only lodging there was and slept all night on the hard ground in the open. As for his justice, he had a servant of his whom he was exceptionally fond of put to death for having slept with the wife of a Roman knight, though no one had complained. Never did a man show either more moderation in victory or more resolution in adverse fortune.

2.33.10 But all these fine inclinations were spoiled and stifled by that furious passion of ambition, by which he let himself be carried away so far that one may easily maintain it held the tiller and the rudder of all his actions. Out of a liberal man it made a public robber, to supply all that profusion and largesse. It made him utter that base and most unjust remark, that if the most wicked and abandoned men in the world had been faithful to him in the service of his advancement, he would cherish them and promote them as far as his power allowed, just as much as the best of men. It intoxicated him with so extreme a vanity that he dared to boast in the presence of his fellow citizens that he had made that great Roman Republic a name without form or body; to say that his answers should henceforth serve as laws; to receive the body of the Senate seated when it came to him; and to allow himself to be worshiped and divine honors to be paid him in his presence. In sum, this one vice, in my opinion, ruined in him the finest and richest nature there ever was, and has made his memory abominable to all good men, for having sought his glory in the ruin of his country and the overthrow of the most powerful and flourishing republic the world will ever see. One could, on the other hand, find many examples of great men whom pleasure made forget the conduct of their affairs, such as Mark Antony and others. But where love and ambition were evenly balanced and came to clash with equal force, I have no doubt that ambition would carry off the prize of mastery.

SPURINA'S FACE

A beautiful young Tuscan scars his own face; Montaigne admires the act more than he honors it.

2.33.11 Now, to get back on my track: it is a great deal to be able to curb our appetites by the reasoning of reason, or to force our members by violence to keep to their duty. But to scourge ourselves for the sake of our neighbors; not only to rid ourselves of that sweet passion that tickles us, the pleasure we feel in seeing ourselves pleasing to others, loved and sought after by everyone, but even to take a hatred and aversion to the graces that cause it, and to condemn our own beauty because someone else is inflamed by it—of that I have seen few examples. Here is one.

> Spurina, a young man of Tuscany, *As a gem sparkles that parts the tawny gold,*
> *an ornament for neck or head, or as, by art*
> *inlaid in boxwood or Orician terebinth,*
> *ivory gleams,* was endowed with a singular beauty, so excessive that the most continent eyes could not continently bear its brilliance. Not content to leave without relief all the fever and fire he went kindling everywhere, he fell into a furious rage against himself and against those rich gifts Nature had given him, as if they were to blame for the faults of others. And with wounds he deliberately inflicted on himself, and with scars, he slashed and spoiled the perfect proportion and order that Nature had so carefully observed in his face.[5]

2.33.12 To give my own opinion: I admire such actions more than I honor them. These excesses are enemies of my rules. The intention was fine and conscientious, but, in my view, somewhat lacking in prudence. What if his ugliness afterward served to cast others into the sin of contempt and hatred, or of envy at

5 Virgil, Aeneid. The story of Spurina comes from Valerius Maximus.

the glory of so rare a distinction, or of slander, interpreting his temperament as a frenzied ambition? Is there any form from which vice cannot, if it wishes, draw an occasion to exercise itself in some way? It would have been more just, and also more glorious, for him to make of these gifts of God a subject of exemplary virtue and self-control.

2.33.13 Those who slip away from the common duties, and from that infinite number of thorny, many-faced rules that bind a man of strict integrity in civil life, make, to my mind, a nice saving, whatever sharp point of peculiar austerity they impose on themselves. It is in a way dying to escape the trouble of living well. They may have some other merit; but the merit of difficulty I have never thought they had. Nor have I thought that anything is harder than to keep upright amid the waves of the world's throng, loyally answering and meeting all the parts of one's charge. It is perhaps easier to do without the whole sex altogether than to conduct oneself properly in every respect in the company of one's wife. And one can slip along more carelessly in poverty than in abundance justly dispensed. Use guided by reason is harder than abstinence. Moderation is a far more demanding virtue than endurance. The good life of the younger Scipio has a thousand forms; the good life of Diogenes has only one. Diogenes' life surpasses ordinary lives in innocence by as much as the most exquisite and accomplished lives surpass it in usefulness and strength.

II.34 Observations on Julius Caesar's Methods of Making War

Obseruation sur les moyens de faire la guerre, de Iulius Cæsar
Montaigne gathers rare traits of Caesar's generalship from his Commentaries—his speed, daring, discipline and personal courage.

2.34.1 It is told of several military leaders that they held certain books in particular esteem: Alexander the Great, Homer; Scipio Africanus, Xenophon; Marcus Brutus, Polybius; Charles V, Philippe de Commynes. And it is said that in our time Machiavelli is still in favor elsewhere. But the late Marshal Strozzi, who had taken Caesar for his share, certainly chose much better: for in truth he ought to be the breviary of every soldier, as being the true and supreme model of the military art. And God knows, besides, with what grace and what beauty he has embellished this rich matter, with a style so pure, so delicate and so perfect that, to my taste, there are no writings in the world that can be compared to his in this respect. I want to record here certain particular and rare traits concerning his wars that have stayed in my memory.

2.34.2 His army was in some alarm at the rumor going around of the great forces King Juba was leading against him. Instead of beating down the opinion his soldiers had formed of them and belittling his enemy's means, he had them assembled to reassure them and give them courage, and took a path quite contrary to the one we usually take. He told them they need no longer trouble to inquire about the forces the enemy was bringing, since he had very reliable information about them; and

then he gave them a number far exceeding both the truth and the reports going around his army. This follows what Cyrus advises in Xenophon.[1] For being deceived does not matter so much when we find the enemy actually weaker than we had expected, as when we find him truly very strong after judging him weak by report.

2.34.3 Above all he accustomed his soldiers to obey simply, without meddling in criticizing or discussing their commander's plans, which he told them only at the moment of execution. And if they had found out something about them, he took pleasure in changing his mind on the spot to deceive them. Often, for this purpose, having fixed a camp in some place, he would go on past it and lengthen the day's march, especially if the weather was bad and rainy.

2.34.4 At the beginning of his Gallic wars, the Swiss sent to him asking for passage through Roman territory. He was determined to stop them by force, but he nevertheless put on a pleasant face and took a few days' delay before answering them, so as to use that time to assemble his army. These poor people did not know how excellent a manager of time he was: for he said many times that the most supreme quality of a commander is the knowledge of seizing opportunities at the right moment, and speed, which in his own exploits is, in truth, unheard-of and incredible.[2]

2.34.5 If he was not very scrupulous about taking advantage of his enemy under color of a treaty, he was just as unscrupulous in requiring of his soldiers no other virtue than valor and hardly punishing any vices but mutiny and disobedience. Often after his victories he gave them free rein for every license, dispensing them for a time from the rules of military discipline, and adding that his soldiers were so well trained that, all perfumed and musked as they were, they still went furiously into battle. Indeed he liked them to be richly armed, and made them wear engraved, gilded and silvered armor, so that their concern to keep their arms would make them fiercer in defending them-

1 Juba I, King of Numidia, ally of Pompey's party in Africa (46 BC).
2 The Helvetii, in 58 BC.

selves. When he spoke to them he called them by the name of comrades, which we still use. Augustus, his successor, changed this, judging that Caesar had done it out of the necessity of his affairs and to flatter the hearts of those who followed him only voluntarily: *On the waters of the Rhine Caesar was my general; / here he is my comrade; crime makes equal those it stains;* but that this form of address was too lowly for the dignity of an emperor and commander of armies, and he went back to calling them simply soldiers.[3]

2.34.6 With this courtesy, however, Caesar mixed great severity in keeping them in check. When the Ninth Legion mutinied near Piacenza, he disbanded it with ignominy, though Pompey was still standing at the time, and took it back into favor only after many entreaties. He calmed them more by authority and boldness than by gentleness.

2.34.7 Where he speaks of his crossing of the Rhine into Germany, he says that, judging it unworthy of the honor of the Roman people for him to take his army across in boats, he had a bridge built so that it might cross on firm footing. It was there that he built that admirable bridge whose construction he describes in detail: for there is no point in the account of his deeds where he lingers so willingly as in showing us the ingenuity of his inventions in such kinds of handiwork.

2.34.8 I have also noticed that he sets great store by his exhortations to his soldiers before battle: for where he wants to show that he was taken by surprise or hard pressed, he always pleads that he did not even have time to harangue his army. Before that great battle against the people of Tournai, Caesar, he says, having arranged everything else, ran swiftly wherever fortune took him to exhort his men; and coming upon the Tenth Legion, he had time only to tell them to remember their customary valor, not to be dismayed, and to withstand the enemy's attack boldly. And because the enemy had already come within a javelin's throw, he gave the signal for battle; and having then gone quickly elsewhere to encourage others, he found that they were

3 Lucan, Pharsalia.

already engaged. That is what he says of it in that passage.[4] Indeed, his tongue did him very notable service on many occasions, and even in his own time his military eloquence was so highly esteemed that many in his army collected his harangues; in this way volumes of them were compiled which survived long after him. His speech had a particular grace, so that his intimates, among them Augustus, hearing what had been collected read aloud, could recognize, down to the phrases and the words, what was not his.

2.34.9 The first time he left Rome with a public office, he reached the river Rhône in eight days, with a secretary or two in front of him in his carriage writing continuously, and behind him the man who carried his sword. And certainly, even if one did nothing but travel, one could hardly match the speed with which, ever victorious, he left Gaul, pursued Pompey to Brindisi and subjugated Italy in eighteen days; came back from Brindisi to Rome; went from Rome to the farthest end of Spain, where he got through extreme difficulties in the war against Afranius and Petreius and in the long siege of Marseille; went back from there to Macedonia and beat the Roman army at Pharsalus; went on from there in pursuit of Pompey to Egypt, which he subjugated; came from Egypt to Syria and the country of Pontus, where he fought Pharnaces; from there to Africa, where he defeated Scipio and Juba; and doubled back once more through Italy into Spain, where he defeated Pompey's sons.

> *Swifter than the lightning of heaven or a tigress with young.*
> *And as a rock plunging headlong from a mountain's top,*
> *when it crashes down, torn away by the wind, or a stormy rain*
> *washes it loose, or the slow lapse of years undermines it,*
> *the relentless mass is borne down the steep with mighty force*
> *and bounds along the ground, sweeping forests, herds and men*
> *along with it.*[5]

4 The Nervii, at the battle of the Sambre (57 BC), whom Montaigne places around Tournai.

5 The first line is from Lucan, Pharsalia; the rest from Virgil, Aeneid.

CAESAR'S DARING

Caesar reconnoitered in person and took enormous risks, from storms at sea to the siege of Alesia.

2.34.10 Speaking of the siege of Avaricum, he says it was his custom to stay night and day near the workmen he had at work. In all undertakings of consequence he always did the reconnoitering himself, and he never took his army through a place he had not first examined. And if we believe Suetonius, when he undertook the crossing to England, he was the first to sound the ford.[6]

2.34.11 He used to say that he preferred a victory won by counsel to one won by force. In the war against Petreius and Afranius, when Fortune offered him a very evident opportunity of gaining the advantage, he refused it, he says, hoping, with a little more time but less risk, to get the better of his enemies. He also performed a wonderful stroke there, ordering his whole army to swim across the river without any necessity: *The soldier, rushing into battle, seized*

the path he would have feared in flight; then they warm their wet limbs in the armor they take up again, and by running restore their bodies chilled by the flood.

6 Avaricum is modern Bourges (52 BC).

2.34.12 I find him somewhat more restrained and deliberate in his undertakings than Alexander: for Alexander seems to seek out dangers and run at them full tilt, like an impetuous torrent that strikes and attacks everything it meets, without discernment and without choice. *So rolls the bull-shaped Aufidus,*
that flows through the realm of Apulian Daunus,
when it rages and plots a fearful
deluge for the tilled fields. And he was engaged in this in the flower and first heat of his youth, whereas Caesar took it up when already mature and well on in years. Besides, Alexander was of a more sanguine, choleric and ardent temperament, and he stirred up this humor still further with wine, from which Caesar abstained most strictly.[7]

2.34.13 But when occasions of necessity arose and the situation demanded it, there was never a man who held his own person cheaper. As for me, I seem to read in several of his exploits a certain resolve to throw away his life to escape the shame of defeat. In that great battle he fought against the people of Tournai, seeing the front of his army wavering, he ran to place himself facing the enemy's front ranks, without a shield, just as he was; and this happened to him several other times. Hearing that his men were besieged, he passed in disguise through the enemy army to strengthen them with his presence. Having crossed to Dyrrachium with very small forces, and seeing that the rest of his army, which he had left Antony to bring over, was slow to follow him, he undertook to cross the sea back again alone in a tremendous storm, and he stole away to go and fetch the rest of his forces, though the ports on the other side and the whole sea were held by Pompey. As for the enterprises he undertook by force of arms, there are several that go beyond all the reasoning of military science in their risk. For with what slender means did he undertake to subjugate the kingdom of Egypt, and afterward to go and attack the forces of Scipio and Juba, ten times lar-

7 Horace, Odes.

ger than his own? Such men have had some more than human confidence in their fortune; and he used to say that great enterprises must be carried out, not deliberated. After the battle of Pharsalus, having sent his army ahead into Asia, he was crossing the strait of the Hellespont with a single vessel when he met Lucius Cassius at sea with ten great warships. He had the courage not only to wait for him but to make straight for him and summon him to surrender—and he carried it off.

2.34.14 He undertook that furious siege of Alesia, where there were eighty thousand men defending the town. All Gaul had risen to fall upon him and raise the siege, and had raised an army of a hundred and nine thousand horse and two hundred and forty thousand foot. What boldness, what manic confidence was it, to refuse to give up his undertaking and to resolve to take on two such great difficulties at once? Yet he withstood them both. After winning that great battle against those outside, he soon brought those he held shut in to his mercy. The same thing happened to Lucullus at the siege of Tigranocerta against King Tigranes, but under very unequal conditions, given the softness of the enemies Lucullus had to deal with.

2.34.15 I want to note here two rare and extraordinary events concerning this siege of Alesia. One is that the Gauls, gathering to come and confront Caesar there, took a count of all their forces and resolved in their council to cut off a good part of that great multitude, for fear of falling into confusion. This is a new kind of example: to be afraid of being too many. But taken rightly, it is likely that the body of an army should be of moderate size, kept within certain bounds, whether because of the difficulty of feeding it or the difficulty of leading it and keeping it in order. At least it would be easy to show by examples that those armies monstrous in number have hardly ever done anything worthwhile. As Cyrus says in Xenophon, it is not the number of men but the number of good men that gives the advantage; the rest are more of a hindrance than a help. And Bajazet based his resolution to give battle to Tamburlaine, against the advice of all his captains, chiefly on this: that the countless num-

ber of his enemy's men gave him sure hope that they would fall into confusion. Scanderbeg, a good judge and very expert, used to say that ten or twelve thousand loyal fighting men should be enough for a competent commander to secure his reputation in every kind of military need. The other point, which seems contrary both to the practice and to the reason of war, is that Vercingetorix, who had been named leader and general of all the rebellious parts of Gaul, chose to go and shut himself up in Alesia. For whoever commands a whole country should never commit himself except in that extremity where his last stronghold is at stake and there is nothing more to hope for but in defending it. Otherwise he must keep himself free, so as to be able to provide generally for every part of his command.

2.34.16 To return to Caesar: with time he became somewhat slower and more deliberate, as his intimate friend Oppius testifies, judging that he should not lightly risk the honor of so many victories, which a single misfortune could make him lose. This is what the Italians mean when they want to reproach the reckless boldness seen in young men: they call them needy of honor, *in want of honor*, and say that, being still in that great hunger and dearth of reputation, they are right to seek it at any price—which those who have already acquired enough of it should not do.[8] There can be some just measure in this desire for glory, and some point of fullness in this appetite as in the others: plenty of people practice it that way.

2.34.17 He was far removed from that scrupulousness of the ancient Romans, who would make use in their wars only of plain, unaffected valor. Still, he brought more conscience to it than we would nowadays, and did not approve of every kind of means for gaining victory. In the war against Ariovistus, while he was parleying with him, some disturbance arose between the two armies, started through the fault of Ariovistus's horsemen. In this tumult Caesar found himself with a very great advantage

8 Gaius Oppius, Caesar's friend and agent, wrote about him; Montaigne takes this from Plutarch.

over his enemies; yet he would not use it, for fear that he might be reproached with having acted in bad faith.[9]

2.34.18 He used to wear rich clothing in battle, of a brilliant color, to make himself noticed.

2.34.19 He kept a tighter rein on his soldiers, and held them more closely in check, when they were near the enemy.

2.34.20 When the ancient Greeks wanted to accuse someone of utter incompetence, they would say, as a common proverb, that he could neither read nor swim. He held this same opinion, that skill in swimming was very useful in war, and he drew several advantages from it. If he had to move fast, he usually swam across the rivers he came upon; for he liked to travel on foot, like Alexander the Great. In Egypt he was forced to get into a small boat to save himself, and so many people jumped in along with him that it was in danger of sinking. He preferred to throw himself into the sea, and swam to his fleet, which was more than two hundred paces off, holding his writing tablets out of the water in his left hand and dragging his coat of armor along in his teeth so that the enemy should not have it—and this when he was already well on in years.

CAESAR'S LOYAL SOLDIERS

His soldiers served him unpaid, died rather than desert him, and the besieged of Salona broke out.

2.34.21 Never did a commander have such credit with his soldiers. At the beginning of his civil wars, the centurions offered each to pay for a man-at-arms out of his own purse, and the foot soldiers offered to serve him at their own expense, the better-off even undertaking to support the neediest. The late Admiral de Châtillon showed us a similar case recently in our own civil wars: the Frenchmen in his army contributed from their own purses to pay the foreigners who were with him. Hardly any examples of such ardent and ready affection would be found among those who march along the old road, under the ancient government of

9 Ariovistus, a Germanic king, was defeated by Caesar in 58 BC.

the laws. Passion commands us far more forcefully than reason.[10] Yet it did happen in the war against Hannibal that, following the example of the generosity of the Roman people in the city, the men-at-arms and captains refused their pay; and in Marcellus's camp those who took it were called mercenaries. When Caesar had had the worst of it near Dyrrachium, his soldiers came of their own accord to offer themselves to be chastised and punished, so that he had more need to console them than to scold them. A single cohort of his held off four of Pompey's legions for more than four hours, until it was almost entirely destroyed by missiles; and a hundred and thirty thousand arrows were found in the trench. A soldier named Scaeva, who commanded at one of the entrances, held out there unconquered with one eye put out, a shoulder and a thigh pierced, and his shield pierced in two hundred and thirty places. Many of his soldiers who were taken prisoner chose to accept death rather than promise to change sides. Granius Petronius was captured by Scipio in Africa. Scipio, having put his companions to death, sent him word that he would spare his life, since he was a man of rank and a quaestor. Petronius answered that Caesar's soldiers were accustomed to give life to others, not to receive it; and immediately killed himself with his own hand.

2.34.22 There are countless examples of their loyalty. We must not forget the deed of those who were besieged at Salona, a town that took Caesar's side against Pompey, because of a rare event that happened there. Marcus Octavius held them under siege. Those inside were reduced to extreme want of everything. To make up for their lack of men, most of them having been killed or wounded, they had freed all their slaves; and to work their siege engines they had been forced to cut off the hair of all the women to make ropes from it—on top of a terrible shortage of food. And yet they were resolved never to surrender.[11] The siege

10 Gaspard de Coligny, Admiral of France and Protestant leader, killed in the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572.

11 Salona, on the Dalmatian coast near modern Split; the siege took place in 48 BC.

had dragged on a long time, which made Octavius more careless and less attentive to his enterprise. They chose a day, around noon, and after lining up the women and children on their walls to keep up appearances, they sallied out against the besiegers in such fury that they broke through the first, the second and the third guard posts, and the fourth, and then the rest; they made them abandon the trenches altogether and chased them right into their ships. Octavius himself escaped to Dyrrachium, where Pompey was. I cannot remember for now having seen any other example where the besieged beat the besiegers wholesale and won mastery of the field, or where a sally resulted in a pure and complete victory in battle.

II.35 Of Three Good Women

De trois bonnes femmes
Montaigne praises three wives—a humble neighbor of Pliny's, Arria and Seneca's Paulina—who chose to die alongside their husbands.

2.35.1 They do not come by the dozen, as everyone knows, and especially not in the duties of marriage. For it is a bargain full of so many thorny circumstances that it is hard for a woman's will to stay whole in it for long. Men, though they are in a somewhat better position in it, have their hands full. The touchstone of a good marriage, and its true proof, concerns the time the partnership lasts: whether it has been constantly gentle, loyal and agreeable. In our age, women more commonly save the display of their good offices and the vehemence of their affection for their lost husbands; at least then they try to give evidence of their goodwill. Late evidence, and out of season. Rather, they prove by this that they love them only dead. Life is full of strife; death, full of love and courtesy. As fathers hide their affection for their children, so wives willingly hide theirs for their husbands, to maintain a decorous respect. This mystery is not to my taste. They may tear their hair and scratch their faces all they like; I go and whisper in the ear of a chambermaid or a secretary: "How were they? How did they live together?" I always remember that good saying: *Those who grieve least make the most show of it*. Their sour faces are odious to the living and useless to the dead. We will gladly let them laugh afterward, provided they

smile on us while we live.[1] Isn't it enough to make a man rise from the dead in vexation, that a woman who spat in my face while I lived should come and rub my feet when I am no more? If there is any honor in weeping for husbands, it belongs only to those who smiled on them: let those who wept during their life laugh at their death, outwardly as well as inwardly. So do not look at those moist eyes and that pitiful voice; look at that bearing, that complexion, and the plumpness of those cheeks under those great veils: that is where she speaks plain French. There are few whose health does not improve, and that is a quality that cannot lie. That ceremonious demeanor looks not so much behind as ahead; it is an investment rather than a repayment. In my childhood, a virtuous and very beautiful lady, who is still living, the widow of a prince, wore something more in her attire than the laws of our widowhood allow. To those who reproached her for it she said: "It is because I am no longer making new friendships, and have no wish to remarry."

2.35.2 So as not to depart entirely from our custom, I have chosen here three women who also exerted all the force of their goodness and affection around the death of their husbands. Yet these are rather different examples, and so pressing that they boldly bring life itself into the bargain.

A HUMBLE WIFE

A woman of low station ties herself to her incurably sick husband and leaps with him into the sea.

2.35.3 Pliny the Younger had, near one of his houses in Italy, a neighbor terribly tormented by some ulcers that had appeared on his private parts. His wife, seeing him languish so long, begged him to let her examine the state of his illness closely and at leisure, saying she would tell him more frankly than anyone else what he had to hope for. Having obtained this from him and examined him carefully, she found that it was impossible for him to recover, and that all he had to look forward to was drag-

1 Adapted from Tacitus, Annals.

ging out a painful and languishing life for a very long time. So she advised him, as the surest and sovereign remedy, to kill himself.[2] And finding him a little faint-hearted at so hard an undertaking, she said: "Do not think, my love, that the pains I see you suffer do not touch me as much as you, or that, to free myself from them, I do not mean to use the very medicine I prescribe for you. I want to go with you in the cure as I have in the illness. Put away this fear, and think that we shall have nothing but pleasure in this passage which is to free us from such torments: we shall go away happily together." That said, and having rekindled her husband's courage, she decided that they would throw themselves into the sea from a window of their house that overlooked it. And to keep up to the end the loyal and vehement affection with which she had embraced him during his life, she wanted him also to die in her arms. But for fear that her arms might fail her, and that the grip of her embrace might loosen in the fall and the fright, she had herself tied and bound very tightly to him by the waist; and so she gave up her life for the repose of her husband's. She was of low station; and among people of that condition it is not so unusual to see some act of rare goodness: *Justice, as she left the earth, / left her last footprints among them.*[3]

2.35.4 The other two are noble and rich, a station where examples of virtue rarely lodge.

ARRIA

Arria follows her condemned husband, then stabs herself first and tells him, "Paetus, it does not hurt."

2.35.5 Arria, wife of Caecina Paetus, a man of consular rank, was the mother of another Arria, wife of Thrasea Paetus—the man whose virtue was so renowned in Nero's time—and through this son-in-law she was the grandmother of Fannia. For the likeness of the names of these men and women, and of their fortunes,

2 He tells the story in his Letters (VI.24).
3 Virgil, Georgics II.473–474, of country folk.

has led many people astray.[4] This first Arria's husband, Caecina Paetus, was taken prisoner by the Emperor Claudius's men after the defeat of Scribonianus, whose party he had followed. She begged those who were taking him prisoner to Rome to take her aboard their ship, where she would cost them much less expense and trouble than the number of people they would need to serve her husband; she alone would see to his room, his kitchen and every other duty. They refused her; and throwing herself into a fishing boat that she hired on the spot, she followed him in this way all the way from Dalmatia.[5] When they were in Rome, one day, in the Emperor's presence, Junia, Scribonianus's widow, came up to her familiarly because of the fortunes they shared. Arria pushed her away roughly with these words: "I," she said, "speak to you, or listen to you? You, in whose lap Scribonianus was killed, and you are still alive?" These words, along with many other signs, made her relatives realize that she meant to do away with herself, unable to bear her husband's fate. And Thrasea, her son-in-law, begged her on this account not to throw her life away, saying to her: "What? If I ran the same risk as Caecina, would you want my wife, your daughter, to do the same?" "What then? Would I want it?" she replied. "Yes, yes, I would want it, if she had lived as long and in as good harmony with you as I have with my husband." These answers increased the care taken of her, and made them watch her conduct more closely. One day, after saying to those who were guarding her, "It's no use: you can make me die a worse death, but you cannot keep me from dying," she sprang furiously from the chair where she was sitting and went and dashed her head with all her strength against the wall nearby. The blow laid her out full length in a faint, badly hurt; and after they had with great difficulty brought her round, she said: "I told you that if you refused me some easy way of killing myself, I would choose some other, however hard it might be." The end of so

4 Arria the Elder died in AD 42; Thrasea Paetus, a Stoic senator, was forced to die by Nero in AD 66.

5 Scribonianus, governor of Dalmatia, rebelled against Claudius in AD 42.

admirable a virtue was this. Her husband Paetus did not have a heart firm enough of itself to give himself the death to which the Emperor's cruelty was driving him. One day, after first using the reasonings and exhortations suited to the advice she was giving him to do it, she took the dagger her husband wore and, holding it drawn in her hand as the conclusion of her exhortation, she said to him: "Do this, Paetus." And at the same instant, having struck herself a mortal blow in the breast and then pulled the dagger from the wound, she handed it to him, ending her life at that very moment, with these noble, generous and immortal words: *Paetus, it does not hurt.*

> She had time only to say those three words of such fine substance: "Here, Paetus, it did not hurt me." *When chaste Arria handed Paetus the sword*
> *she herself had drawn from her own flesh,*
> *"Believe me," she said, "the wound I made does not hurt;*
> *it is the one you will make, Paetus, that hurts me."* The saying is much more vivid in its natural form, and richer in meaning. For the wound and death of her husband, and her own, were so far from weighing on her that she had been their counselor and promoter. But having undertaken this lofty and courageous deed solely for her husband's sake, she thinks only of him, even at the last moment of her life, and of taking away his fear of following her in death.[6]

Paetus immediately struck himself with that same blade—ashamed, in my opinion, to have needed so dear and precious a lesson.

PAULINA AND SENECA

Seneca's young wife chooses to die with him when Nero orders his death, but is saved against her will.

2.35.6 Pompeia Paulina, a young and very noble Roman lady, had married Seneca in his extreme old age. Nero, his fine pupil, sent

his henchmen to him to announce his sentence of death, which was done in this way.[7] When the Roman emperors of that time had condemned some man of rank, they sent their officers to tell him to choose whatever death he liked and to take it within such and such a period, which they had set for him according to the temper of their anger—sometimes shorter, sometimes longer—giving him time during that period to put his affairs in order, and sometimes taking away the means of doing so by the shortness of the time. And if the condemned man resisted their order, they brought men fit to carry it out, either cutting the veins of his arms and legs or forcing him to swallow poison. But people of honor did not wait for this necessity, and used their own physicians and surgeons for the purpose. Seneca heard their message with a calm and steady face, and then asked for paper to make his will. When the captain refused him, he turned to his friends: "Since I cannot," he said, "leave you anything else in acknowledgment of what I owe you, I leave you at least the finest thing I have, namely the image of my character and my life. I beg you to keep it in your memory, so that in doing so you may win the glory of sincere and true friends." And at the same time, now soothing with gentle words the bitterness of the grief he saw them suffering, now hardening his voice to scold them, he said: "Where are those fine precepts of philosophy? What has become of the provisions we have laid in for so many years against the accidents of fortune? Was Nero's cruelty unknown to us? What could we expect from a man who had killed his mother and his brother, but that he should also put to death his tutor, who brought him up and raised him?" Having said these words to them all, he turned to his wife and held her tightly in his arms, as she was failing in heart and strength under the weight of her grief. He begged her to bear this misfortune a little more patiently, for love of him; he said that the hour had come when he must show, no longer by reasoning and debate but in deed, the fruit he had drawn from his studies, and that he was

6 Martial, Epigrams I.13.

7 Seneca was forced to die in AD 65; Montaigne follows Tacitus, Annals XV.

undoubtedly embracing death not only without pain but with gladness. "Therefore, my dear," he said, "do not dishonor it with your tears, lest it seem that you love yourself more than my reputation. Calm your grief, and console yourself with the knowledge you have had of me and of my actions, spending the rest of your life in the honorable occupations to which you are devoted." Paulina, having recovered her spirits a little and rekindled the greatness of her courage through a most noble affection, replied: "No, Seneca, I am not one to leave you without my company in such a need. I do not want you to think that the virtuous examples of your life have not yet taught me how to die well; and when could I do it better, or more honorably, or more to my liking, than with you? So count on it: I am going with you." Then Seneca took his wife's fine and glorious resolution in good part; besides, it freed him from the fear of leaving her after his death at the mercy and cruelty of his enemies. "I had advised you, Paulina," he said, "what would help you lead your life more happily; so you prefer the honor of death. Truly, I will not begrudge it you. Let our constancy and resolution be equal in our common end, but let the beauty and the glory be greater on your side." That done, the veins of their arms were cut at the same time. But because Seneca's veins, shrunk both by old age and by his abstemious diet, let the blood flow too slowly and too sluggishly, he ordered the veins of his thighs to be cut as well. And for fear that the torment he suffered might weaken his wife's heart, and also to free himself from the distress he felt at seeing her in so pitiful a state, he took a most loving leave of her and begged her to let herself be carried into the next room, which was done. But since all these incisions were still not enough to kill him, he ordered Statius Annaeus, his physician, to give him a draught of poison, which had hardly any more effect: because of the weakness and coldness of his limbs, it could not reach his heart. So they also had a very hot bath prepared for him. Then, feeling his end near, as long as he had breath he went on with most excellent discourses on the state in which he found himself, which his secretaries took down as long as they

could hear his voice; and his last words long remained in credit and honor in men's hands. It is a very grievous loss to us that they have not come down to us. As he felt the last throes of death, he took some of the bathwater, all bloody, and sprinkled his head with it, saying: "I dedicate this water to Jupiter the Liberator." Nero, informed of all this, feared that the death of Paulina, who was among the best-connected ladies of Rome and against whom he had no particular enmity, might bring reproach upon him; he sent back in all haste to have her wounds bound up again. Her own servants did this without her knowledge, for she was already half dead and without any feeling. And as for living on afterward, against her intention, she did so most honorably and as befitted her virtue, showing by the pallor of her face how much life had drained out of her through her wounds.

2.35.7 There are my three very true tales, which I find as pleasing and as tragic as those we invent at our pleasure to entertain the common people. And I am amazed that those who devote themselves to that work do not think of choosing instead from the ten thousand very fine stories to be found in books, where they would have less trouble and would bring more pleasure and profit. And whoever wanted to build a whole, connected body out of them would need to supply of his own only the joining, like the solder of another metal. In this way he could pile up plenty of true events of all kinds, arranging and varying them as the beauty of the work required, much as Ovid stitched and patched together his Metamorphoses out of that great number of various fables.

LIVING FOR ANOTHER'S SAKE

Seneca's letter shows that prolonging one's life for a loved one can itself be magnanimity.

2.35.8 In this last couple, this too is worth considering: that Paulina willingly offers to give up life for love of her husband, and that her husband had once also given up death for love of

her. To us there is no great counterweight in this exchange; but given his Stoic temperament, I believe he thought he had done as much for her in prolonging his life for her sake as if he had died for her. In one of the letters he writes to Lucilius, he tells him how, having been taken with fever in Rome, he immediately got into a carriage to go to a country house of his, against the opinion of his wife, who wanted to keep him back; and how he had answered her that the fever he had was not a fever of the body but of the place. He goes on thus: She let me go, urging me strongly to look after my health.[8] Now I, knowing that I lodge her life in mine, begin to take care of myself in order to take care of her. The privilege my old age had given me, making me firmer and more resolute about many things, I lose when I remember that in this old man there is a young woman whom I benefit. Since I cannot bring her to love me more bravely, she brings me to love myself more carefully. For we must grant something to honorable affections; and sometimes, even though circumstances urge us the other way, we must call life back, even in torment; we must hold the soul between our teeth, since the law of living for good men is not as long as they please but as long as they ought. He who does not value his wife or a friend enough to prolong his life for them, and who obstinately insists on dying, is too fastidious and too soft. The soul must command itself to do this when the needs of those close to us require it. We must sometimes lend ourselves to our friends, and when we would like to die for our own sake, interrupt our plan for theirs. It is a sign of greatness of heart to return to life out of regard for another, as many excellent men have done; and it is a mark of singular goodness to preserve one's old age (whose greatest advantage is indifference to how long it lasts, and a bolder and more disdainful use of life) if one feels that this service is sweet, agreeable and useful to someone who loves us dearly. And one receives a very pleasant reward for it: for what is sweeter than to be so dear to one's wife that, for her sake, one becomes dearer to oneself? So my Paulina has burdened me not only with her fear

8 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius 104.

but also with my own. It was not enough for me to consider how resolutely I could die; I have also considered how irresolutely she could bear it. I have forced myself to live, and sometimes it is magnanimity to live. Those are his words, excellent as always.

II.36 Of the Most Excellent Men

Des plus excellens hommes
Montaigne ranks Homer, Alexander and above all Epaminondas as the most excellent men he knows, weighing each one's gifts and faults.

2.36.1 If I were asked to choose among all the men who have come to my knowledge, I think I find three who excel above all the others.

HOMER

Homer is the first of the three most excellent men, the master of all later poets and thinkers.

2.36.2 One is Homer. Not that Aristotle or Varro, for example, were not perhaps as learned as he; nor even, possibly, that Virgil is not comparable to him in his own art. I leave that to be judged by those who know them both. I, who know only one of them, can say only this, as far as my capacity goes: I do not believe the Muses themselves went beyond the Roman. *He makes such a song on his learned lyre / as the Cynthian god tunes with his fingers on the strings.* Yet in this judgment we must still not forget that it is chiefly from Homer that Virgil gets his ability, that Homer is his guide and schoolmaster, and that a single stroke of the Iliad supplied the body and matter for that great and divine Aeneid.[1] That is not how I reckon: I add many other circumstances that make this man admirable to me, almost above the human condition. And indeed I am often astonished that he, who by his

1 The verse is from Propertius II.34; the "Cynthian god" is Apollo.

authority produced so many deities and brought them into credit in the world, did not himself win the rank of a god. Blind, poor, living before the sciences were set down in rules and sure observations, he knew them so well that all those who have since undertaken to establish governments, conduct wars, or write about religion or philosophy, of whatever school, or about the arts, have used him as a most perfect master in the knowledge of all things.

> And they have drawn on his books as on a nursery of every kind of ability: *He tells us what is fine, what is foul, what is useful and what is not,*
> *more fully and better than Chrysippus and Crantor.* And as another says: *From whom, as from an everlasting spring,*
> *the lips of poets are moistened with Pierian waters.* And another: *Add the companions of the Heliconian Muses, among whom Homer alone*
> *has won the stars.* And another: *From whose overflowing mouth*
> *all posterity has drawn its waters for its songs,*
> *and dared to divert the river into slender streams,*
> *rich in the wealth of one man.*[2]

2.36.3 It is against the order of Nature that he produced the most excellent work there can be. For the ordinary birth of things is imperfect; they grow and grow stronger as they develop. The infancy of poetry, and of several other sciences, he made mature, perfect and complete. For this reason he may be called the first and last of poets, in keeping with the fine testimony antiquity has left us about him: that having had no one before him whom he could imitate, he has had no one after him who could imitate him. His words, according to Aristotle, are the only words that have movement and action; they are the only words of substance. Alexander the Great, having found a rich casket among the spoils of Darius, ordered it to be kept for him

2 Horace, Epistles I.2; Ovid, Amores III.9; Lucretius III.1037–1038; Manilius, Astronomica II.8–11.

to hold his Homer, saying that it was the best and most faithful counselor he had in his military affairs. For this same reason Cleomenes, son of Anaxandridas, said that he was the poet of the Spartans, because he was a very good master of the discipline of war. This singular and special praise has also remained his in Plutarch's judgment: that he is the only author in the world who has never sated or wearied people, always showing himself quite different to his readers, and always flowering with new grace. That madcap Alcibiades, having asked a man who professed letters for a book of Homer, slapped him because he had none—as if one found one of our priests without a breviary.

2.36.4 Xenophanes complained one day to Hiero, tyrant of Syracuse, that he was so poor he could not afford to feed two servants. "What?" Hiero answered. "Homer, who was much poorer than you, feeds more than ten thousand, dead as he is." What else did Panaetius mean when he called Plato the Homer of philosophers? Besides, what glory can compare with Homer's? Nothing lives in men's mouths like his name and his works; nothing is so well known and so accepted as Troy, Helen and her wars, which perhaps never happened. Our children are still called by names he coined more than three thousand years ago. Who does not know Hector and Achilles? Not only certain particular families but most nations seek their origin in his inventions. Mehmed, second of that name, Emperor of the Turks, writing to our Pope Pius II, said: "I am astonished that the Italians band together against me, given that we have our common origin in the Trojans, and that I, like them, have an interest in avenging the blood of Hector on the Greeks, whom they keep favoring against me." Is it not a noble farce, in which kings, commonwealths and emperors have been playing their parts for so many centuries, and for which this whole great universe serves as the theater?[3] Seven Greek cities disputed the place of his birth, so much honor did even his obscurity bring him: *Smyrna, Rhodes, Colophon, Salamis, Chios, Argos, Athens.*[4]

3 Pius II was pope from 1458 to 1464.

4 A verse quoted by Aulus Gellius, Attic Nights III.11.

ALEXANDER

Alexander is the second, admired for his deeds and virtues and preferred even to Caesar.

2.36.5 The second is Alexander the Great. For consider the age at which he began his enterprises; the scant means with which he carried out so glorious a design; the authority he won, in this childhood of his, among the greatest and most experienced captains in the world, who followed him; the extraordinary favor with which Fortune embraced and favored so many of his hazardous—I almost said rash—exploits, *Overthrowing whatever stood in the way of his reaching for the heights, / and rejoicing to have made his path through ruin*; that greatness of having, at the age of thirty-three, passed victorious through the whole habitable earth, and of having reached in half a life the utmost power of human nature,[5] so that you cannot imagine his natural span, and the continuation of his growth in virtue and fortune up to a proper term of age, without imagining something above man; having caused so many royal branches to spring from his soldiers, leaving the world after his death divided among four successors, mere captains of his army, whose descendants lasted so long afterward, holding on to that great possession; so many excellent virtues that were in him—justice, temperance, generosity, faithfulness to his word, love for his own people, humanity toward the vanquished. For his character truly seems to deserve no just reproach—though some of his particular actions, rare and extraordinary ones, do. But it is impossible to conduct such great movements within the rules of justice. Such men must be judged as a whole, by the chief end of their actions. The destruction of Thebes; the murder of Menander and of Hephaestion's physician; of so many Persian prisoners at once; of a troop of Indian soldiers, not without damage to his word; of the Cossaeans, down to the little children—these are outbursts that are rather hard to excuse. As for Clitus, the fault was atoned for bey-

5 Lucan, Pharsalia I.149–150, said there of Caesar.

ond its weight; and this action testifies, as much as any other, to the gentleness of his temperament, and shows that his was in itself a nature excellently formed for goodness. It has been cleverly said of him that he had his virtues from Nature and his vices from Fortune. As for his being somewhat boastful, somewhat too impatient of hearing himself spoken ill of, and as for the mangers, weapons and bits he had scattered about in India—all these things seem to me pardonable in view of his age and the strange prosperity of his fortune.[6]

> Consider at the same time so many military virtues—diligence, foresight, endurance, discipline, subtlety, magnanimity, resolution, good fortune—in which, even if Hannibal's authority had not taught us so, he was the first of men; the rare beauty and qualities of his person, amounting to a miracle; that bearing and that venerable demeanor beneath so young, ruddy and radiant a face: *As when the Morning Star, bathed in the Ocean's wave, whom Venus loves above all the other fires of the stars, lifts his sacred face to the sky and dispels the darkness*; the excellence of his learning and capacity;[7]

the duration and greatness of his glory, pure, clean, free of stain and envy; and that long after his death it was a religious belief that his medals brought luck to those who carried them; and that more kings and princes have written of his deeds than other historians have written of the deeds of any other king or prince whatever; and that even now the Muslims, who despise all other histories, accept and honor his alone by special privilege. Whoever considers all this taken together will admit that I was right to prefer him even to Caesar, who alone could make me hesitate in my choice. And it cannot be denied that there is more of Caesar's own in his exploits, and more of Fortune in Alexander's. They had many things equal, and Caesar perhaps

6 Alexander left oversized arms and horse gear in India to impress posterity.
7 Virgil, Aeneid VIII.589–591.

some greater. They were two fires, or two torrents, ravaging the world in different places.

> *And as fires let loose from different sides*
> *into a dry forest and thickets crackling with laurel;*
> *or as when foaming rivers, rushing headlong down from the high mountains,*
> *roar and run to the sea,*
> *each having laid waste its own path.* But even if Caesar's ambition had more moderation in itself, it has such ill fortune, having met with that vile object, the ruin of his country and the universal worsening of the world, that with all the pieces gathered up and put in the scales, I cannot help leaning to Alexander's side.[8]

EPAMINONDAS

Epaminondas, the third and greatest, joined valor and ability to a conscience without stain.

2.36.6 The third, and in my opinion the most excellent, is Epaminondas. Of glory he has nowhere near as much as others (nor is it any part of the substance of the thing). Of resolution and valor he had all that can be imagined: not the kind that ambition sharpens, but the kind that wisdom and reason can plant in a well-ordered soul. Of proof of this virtue of his, he gave as much, in my view, as Alexander himself, and as Caesar. His feats of war are neither so frequent nor so swollen. Yet if you consider them well, with all their circumstances, they are just as weighty and hard-fought, and bear as much witness to boldness and military skill. The Greeks paid him the honor, without dispute, of calling him the first man among them; but to be the first of Greece is easily to be the foremost in the world. As for his learning and ability, this ancient judgment has come down to us: that no man ever knew so much and spoke so little. For he was of the Pythagorean sect. And when he did speak, no one ever spoke better: he was an excellent orator and highly per-

8 Virgil, Aeneid XII.521–525.

suasive. But in his character and conscience he far surpassed all who have ever had a hand in managing affairs. In this respect, which ought to be considered above all, which alone truly marks what we are, and which alone I weigh against all the others put together, he yields to no philosopher, not even to Socrates. In him innocence is a quality that is his own, ruling, constant, uniform, incorruptible. Set beside his, Alexander's looks subordinate, uncertain, motley, soft, and accidental.

2.36.7 Antiquity judged that if you examine all the other great captains in detail, you find in each some special quality that makes him illustrious. In this one alone there is a virtue and ability that is full and even throughout. In all the offices of human life it leaves nothing to be desired: in public or private occupation, in peace or in war, in living or in dying grandly and gloriously. I know of no form or fortune of man that I regard with so much honor and love.

2.36.8 It is true that I find his obstinacy in poverty somewhat overscrupulous, as his best friends portray it. And this one action, lofty though it is and most worthy of admiration, I find a little too sharp for me to wish, even in wishing, to imitate it in the form it took in him.

2.36.9 Only Scipio Aemilianus, if we granted him an end as proud and magnificent and a knowledge of the sciences as deep and universal, could be set against him in the other pan of the scale. Oh, what a vexation time has caused me by taking from our sight, as if on purpose and among the very first, precisely the pair of lives that was rightly the noblest in Plutarch: those of these two men, by the common consent of the world the one the first of the Greeks, the other of the Romans! What material, and what a craftsman![9]

2.36.10 For a man who is no saint, but what we call a fine gentleman, of civil and ordinary ways and moderate elevation, the richest life I know of to be lived among the living, as they say,

9 Scipio Aemilianus (185–129 BC) destroyed Carthage in 146 BC. Plutarch's paired Lives of Epaminondas and Scipio are lost.

and the one furnished with the most rich and desirable qualities, is, all things considered, that of Alcibiades, in my opinion.[10]

2.36.11 But as for Epaminondas, as an example of an excessive goodness, I want to add here some of his opinions. The sweetest satisfaction he had in all his life, he declared, was the pleasure he had given his father and mother by his victory at Leuctra. That is going very far, to prefer their pleasure to his own, so just and so full of so glorious an action. He did not think it permissible, even to recover his country's liberty, to kill a man without knowing the case against him. That is why he was so cool toward the enterprise of his companion Pelopidas for the deliverance of Thebes.[11] He also held that in battle one should avoid meeting a friend who was on the opposing side, and spare him. And his humanity even toward his enemies made the Boeotians suspicious of him. After miraculously forcing the Spartans to open to him the pass they had undertaken to guard at the entrance to the Morea, near Corinth, he had been content to ride over them without pursuing them to the bitter end. For this he was deposed from his office of commander-in-chief.[12] Very honorably for him, given such a cause; and to their shame, since necessity soon forced them to restore him to his rank and to acknowledge how much their glory and their safety depended on him. Victory followed him like his shadow wherever he led; and the prosperity of his country died when he died, as it had been born through him.

10 Alcibiades (c. 450–404 BC), brilliant and unstable Athenian statesman and general, a companion of Socrates.

11 At Leuctra (371 BC) Epaminondas defeated the Spartans. In 379 BC Pelopidas led the conspiracy that freed Thebes from its Spartan garrison.

12 The Morea is the medieval and later name for the Peloponnese.

II.37 Of the Resemblance of Children to Their Fathers

De la ressemblance des enfans aux peres
Suffering from kidney stones like his father, Montaigne marvels at inherited traits and mounts a long, mocking attack on medicine and doctors.

2.37.1 This bundle of so many different pieces is made on this condition: I set my hand to it only when too slack an idleness presses me, and nowhere but at home. So it has been built up in various stages and intervals, as occasions sometimes keep me elsewhere for several months. For the rest, I do not correct my first notions by my second ones—well, perhaps a word here and there, but to vary, not to remove. I want to show the progress of my moods, and to let each piece be seen as it was born. I would have liked to have begun sooner, so as to recognize the course of my changes. A servant who used to write them down at my dictation thought he had made a fine haul by stealing several pieces from me, picked as he pleased. It consoles me that he will gain no more from it than I have lost.

THE STONE ARRIVES

Montaigne describes his kidney stone and how he is learning to live with the pain.

2.37.2 I have grown older by seven or eight years since I began. It has not been without some new acquisition. Through the liberality of the years I have made the acquaintance of the colic: their company and long familiarity seldom pass without some

such fruit. Of the many other presents they have to give to those who keep company with them long, I could wish they had chosen one more acceptable to me; for they could not have given me any that I had held in greater horror since my childhood. Of all the accidents of old age, it was precisely the one I feared most.[1]

2.37.3 I had often thought to myself that I was going too far, and that on so long a road I would not fail to run at last into some unpleasant encounter. I felt and declared often enough that it was time to leave, and that life should be cut off in the living and sound flesh, following the rule surgeons observe when they have to amputate a limb; and that from the man who did not give it back in time, Nature was accustomed to exact very harsh interest. So far was I from being ready then, that in the eighteen months or so that I have been in this unpleasant state, I have already learned to adapt myself to it.

1 By "the colic" Montaigne means the kidney stone and its attacks, from which he suffered from about 1578.

> I am already coming to terms with this colicky life; I find in it something to console me and something to hope for. So firmly are men attached to their miserable existence that there is no condition so harsh that they will not accept it in order to stay alive. Listen to Maecenas: *Make me maimed in the hand,*
> *Lame in the foot and hip,*
> *Shake my loosened teeth:*
> *So long as life remains, all is well.* And Tamburlaine cloaked in a foolish humanity the fantastic cruelty he practiced on lepers, having as many put to death as came to his knowledge, in order, he said, to deliver them from the painful life they were living. For there was not one of them who would not rather have been a leper three times over than not be at all. And Antisthenes the Stoic, being very ill, cried out: "Who will deliver me from these ills?"[2]

Diogenes, who had come to see him, held out a knife: "This will do it, if you like, and soon." "I don't mean from life," he replied, "I mean from my ills." Sufferings that touch me only through the soul afflict me much less than they do most other men. Partly this comes from judgment: the world thinks many things horrible, or to be avoided at the cost of life, that are almost indifferent to me. Partly it comes from a dull and insensible constitution I have toward accidents that do not strike me head-on—a constitution I consider one of the best parts of my natural condition. But sufferings that are truly essential and bodily I feel very keenly. And yet, foreseeing them in the past with a weak and delicate sight, softened by the enjoyment of the long and happy health and repose that God lent me for the better part of my life, I had imagined them so unbearable that in truth I was more afraid of them than I have found them painful. This keeps strengthening my belief that most of the faculties of

2 Maecenas, Augustus's minister and patron of Virgil and Horace; his lines are quoted by Seneca, Letters 101.

our soul, as we use them, disturb the repose of life more than they serve it.

2.37.4 I am grappling with the worst of all diseases: the most sudden, the most painful, the most deadly, and the most incurable. I have already gone through five or six very long and painful bouts of it. Yet either I flatter myself, or there is still something in this state to hold a man up, if his soul is freed from the fear of death, and freed from the threats, conclusions and consequences that medicine stuffs into our heads. And even the actual effect of the pain does not have so harsh and piercing a sting that a settled man should be driven by it to rage and despair. I gain at least this profit from the colic: what I had not yet managed to do with myself, to reconcile myself wholly to death and become familiar with it, the colic will complete. For the more it presses and harasses me, the less I shall have to fear death. I had already gained this much: to hold on to life only by life itself. The colic will untie even this bond. And God grant that in the end, if its harshness comes to overpower my strength, it does not throw me to the other extreme, no less vicious: loving and desiring to die. *Neither fear your last day nor long for it.* These are two passions to be feared, but one has its remedy much closer to hand than the other.[3]

2.37.5 For the rest, I have always found that precept merely ceremonious which so strictly orders us to keep a good face and a disdainful, composed bearing when we suffer pain. Why does philosophy, which looks only at the living substance and at effects, waste its time on these external appearances? Let it leave that care to actors and teachers of rhetoric, who set such store by our gestures. Let it boldly grant to pain this cowardice of the voice, if it is neither of the heart nor of the stomach; and let it count our voluntary complaints among the sighs, sobs, palpitations and pallors that Nature has put beyond our control. Provided the heart is without fright and the words without despair, let it be content. What does it matter if we twist our arms, provided we do not twist our thoughts? Philosophy trains us for

3 Martial, Epigrams.

ourselves, not for others; to be, not to seem. Let it confine itself to governing our understanding, which it has undertaken to instruct. In the onslaughts of the colic, let it keep the soul able to know itself and to follow its accustomed course: fighting the pain and bearing up under it, not prostrating itself shamefully at its feet; stirred and heated by the combat, not beaten down and overthrown; capable of conversation and other occupation, up to a certain point. In accidents so extreme, it is cruelty to require of us so composed a bearing. If we hold a good hand, it matters little that we pull a long face. If the body finds relief in complaining, let it complain. If agitation pleases it, let it toss and thrash about as it likes. If it seems that the pain somehow evaporates when the voice is forced out more violently (as some physicians say this helps pregnant women in delivery), or if the body distracts its torment that way, let it shout outright. Let us not order this voice to come out, but let us allow it. Epicurus not only forgives his wise man for crying out under torture; he advises him to. *Boxers too, when they strike, groan as they swing their gauntlets, because in letting out the voice the whole body is braced and the blow lands harder.* We have labor enough from the pain without laboring over these superfluous rules.[4]

2.37.6 I say this to excuse those we commonly see raging under the shocks and assaults of this disease. For my part, I have so far gone through it with a somewhat better countenance, and I content myself with groaning without bawling. Not that I take any pains to maintain this outward decency, for I set little store by such an advantage. In this I give the pain as much as it wants; but either my pains are not so extreme, or I bring more firmness to them than most people. I complain, I fret, when the sharp stabs press me, but I do not come to despair, like that man: *With wailing, lament, groaning and roaring, / Making all resound, he utters doleful cries.* I sound myself out in the thick of the pain, and I have always found that I could speak, think and answer as sanely as at any other time, but not as steadily, for the pain disturbs and distracts me. When I am thought to be most crushed

4 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations.

and those around me spare me, I often test my strength and myself start them on subjects as remote as can be from my condition. I can do anything by a sudden effort; but don't ask it to last.[5] Oh, why don't I have the gift of that dreamer in Cicero who, dreaming he was embracing a girl, found he had passed his stone among his sheets! Mine cure me of girls wonderfully. In the intervals of this excessive pain, when my ureters slacken without gnawing at me, I at once return to my ordinary form, since my soul takes no alarm but the physical, bodily one.[6]

> This I certainly owe to the care I have taken to prepare myself by reasoning for such accidents: *No new or unexpected face of hardship*
> *Rises before me now; I have foreseen everything*
> *And gone through it all in my mind beforehand.* All the same, I am being tried rather roughly for an apprentice, and by a very sudden and harsh change, having fallen all at once from a very sweet and happy condition of life into the most painful and wretched one imaginable. For besides being a disease much to be feared in itself, in me it makes its beginnings far harsher and more difficult than usual.[7]

The attacks return so often that I hardly ever feel completely healthy any more. Yet so far I keep my mind in such a state that, provided I can bring constancy to it, I find myself in a much better condition of life than a thousand others who have no fever or ill but what they give themselves through the fault of their own reasoning.

THE MYSTERY OF HEREDITY

How a drop of seed carries a father's traits, including the stone, across many years.

2.37.7 There is a certain kind of subtle humility that springs from presumption, such as this: we acknowledge our ignorance in

5 Lines from Accius's tragedy Philoctetes, quoted by Cicero.

many things, and are courteous enough to admit that in the works of Nature there are some qualities and conditions that we cannot perceive, and whose means and causes our ability cannot discover. By this honest and conscientious declaration we hope to be believed about those we say we do understand. We have no need to go picking out miracles and remote difficulties. It seems to me that among the things we see every day there are oddities so incomprehensible that they surpass all the difficulty of miracles. What a prodigy it is that this drop of seed from which we are produced carries in itself the impressions not only of bodily form but of the thoughts and inclinations of our fathers! This drop of water—where does it lodge that infinite number of forms? And how does it carry these resemblances by a course so random and irregular that the great-grandson will take after his great-grandfather, the nephew after his uncle? In the family of Lepidus at Rome there were three, not one after another but at intervals, who were born with the same eye covered with cartilage. At Thebes there was a family whose members bore from their mother's womb the shape of a spearhead, and anyone who did not bear it was held to be illegitimate. Aristotle says that in a certain nation where women were held in common, children were assigned to their fathers by resemblance.

2.37.8 It is likely that I owe this stony quality to my father, for he died terribly afflicted by a large stone in his bladder. He did not notice his illness until the sixty-seventh year of his age. Before that he had had no threat or twinge of it, in the kidneys, the sides, or anywhere else; he had lived until then in happy health, very little subject to illness; and he lasted another seven years with this disease, dragging out a very painful end of life. I was born more than twenty-five years before his illness, while he was in his best condition, the third of his children in order of birth. Where was the propensity to this defect brooding all that time? And when he was so far from the disease, how did that slight bit of his substance from which he built me carry so great

6 The anecdote is in Cicero, On Divination.
7 Virgil, Aeneid (Aeneas to the Sibyl).

an impression of it for its share? And how did it keep it so hidden that I began to feel it only forty-five years later—alone so far among so many brothers and sisters, all of one mother? Whoever can enlighten me about this process, I will believe him about as many other miracles as he likes, provided he does not pay me, as they do, with a doctrine far more difficult and fantastic than the thing itself.

A FAMILY WITHOUT DOCTORS

Montaigne's forebears lived long without medicine, and he inherited their distrust of it.

2.37.9 Let the physicians forgive my freedom a little, for by this same fatal infusion and insinuation I have received my hatred and contempt for their doctrine. This antipathy I have for their art is hereditary. My father lived seventy-four years, my grandfather sixty-nine, my great-grandfather nearly eighty, without having tasted any kind of medicine; and among them anything that was not in ordinary use counted as a drug. Medicine is formed by examples and experience; so is my opinion. Is this not a very clear experience, and a very favorable one? I do not know whether they will find me three people in their records, born, raised and dead at the same hearth, under the same roof, who have lived as long under their guidance. They must admit that in this, if reason is not on my side, at least Fortune is; and with physicians Fortune counts for much more than reason. Let them not take advantage of me now; let them not threaten me, laid low as I am: that would be foul play. Besides, to tell the truth, I have won enough against them with my family examples, even if those stop here. Human things do not have so much constancy: this trial has lasted us two hundred years, all but eighteen, for the first was born in the year 1402. It is quite reasonable, really, that this experience should begin to fail us.[8] Let them not reproach me with the ills that now have me by the

8 Montaigne's great-grandfather Ramon Eyquem, the Bordeaux merchant who bought the estate of Montaigne in 1477.

throat. Is it not enough to have lived healthy, for my part, for forty-seven years? Even if this is the end of my course, it is one of the longer ones.

2.37.10 My ancestors disliked medicine through some hidden and natural inclination, for the very sight of drugs horrified my father. The Seigneur de Gaviac, my paternal uncle, a churchman, was sickly from birth and yet made that feeble life last until sixty-seven. Once, when he had fallen into a severe and violent continuous fever, the physicians ordered that he be told that if he would not let himself be helped (they call "help" what is most often a hindrance) he was a dead man for certain. The good man, terrified as he was by this horrible sentence, answered: "Then I'm dead." But God soon after made this prognosis vain. The youngest of the brothers—there were four—the Sieur de Bussaguet, younger by a long way, alone submitted to this art, because of his dealings, I believe, with the other arts, for he was a counselor in the court of Parlement. It turned out so badly for him that, though to all appearances of stronger constitution, he died long before the others, except one, the Sieur de Saint-Michel.

2.37.11 It is possible that I received from them this natural dislike of medicine; but if there had been only that consideration, I would have tried to overcome it. For all those dispositions that arise in us without reason are vicious; they are a kind of disease that must be fought. It may be that I had this propensity, but I have supported and strengthened it by the reasonings that have established in me the opinion I hold. For I also hate the attitude of refusing medicine because of its bitter taste. That would hardly be my temperament, which finds health worth buying back by all the most painful cauteries and incisions there are. And following Epicurus, I think pleasures should be avoided if they bring greater pains in their train, and pains sought if they bring greater pleasures in their train. Health is a precious thing, and in truth the only one that deserves our spending on its pursuit not only time, sweat, trouble and goods, but even life itself; for without it life becomes a burden and an injury to us. Pleas-

ure, wisdom, knowledge and virtue tarnish and vanish without it. And to the firmest and most strenuous arguments that philosophy may try to impress on us to the contrary, we need only oppose the image of Plato struck down by epilepsy or apoplexy, and on that supposition challenge him to call on the rich faculties of his soul for help. To me, no road that would lead us to health can be called either harsh or costly. But I have some other indications that make me strangely distrustful of all this merchandise. I do not say there cannot be some art in it. That there are, among so many works of Nature, things suited to preserving our health—that is certain. I quite understand that there is some herb that moistens and some other that dries. I know by experience that horseradish produces wind and that senna leaves loosen the bowels; I know several such experiences, just as I know that mutton nourishes me and wine warms me. And Solon said that eating was, like other drugs, a medicine against the disease of hunger. I do not disown the use we make of the world, nor do I doubt the power and fertility of Nature and its fitness for our needs. I can see that pikes and swallows do well by it. What I distrust are the inventions of our mind, of our science and art, for whose sake we have abandoned Nature and her rules, and in which we cannot keep to any moderation or limit. We call justice the hodgepodge of the first laws that fall into our hands, and their administration and practice, which are often very inept and very unjust; and those who mock it and accuse it do not mean to insult that noble virtue, but only to condemn the abuse and profanation of that sacred title. In the same way, with medicine, I do honor that glorious name, its aim, and its promise, so useful to mankind; but what the name stands for among us I neither honor nor esteem.

AGAINST THE PHYSICIANS

Doctors make the healthy sick, claim nature's cures as their own and blame their failures on patients.

2.37.12 In the first place, experience makes me fear it; for as far as my knowledge goes, I see no kind of people so soon sick and so slow to be cured as those under the jurisdiction of medicine. Their very health is altered and corrupted by the constraint of regimens. Physicians are not content to have illness under their governance; they make health sick, to make sure that no one can escape their authority at any season. From steady and complete health, do they not draw the argument for a great illness to come? I have been ill often enough. Without their help I have found my illnesses (and I have tried almost every kind) as easy to bear and as short as anyone's, and I have not mixed into them the bitterness of their prescriptions. My health I have free and whole, without rules and without any other discipline than my habit and my pleasure. Any place is good for me to stop in, for when I am sick I need no comforts other than those I need when I am well. It does not upset me to be without a physician, without an apothecary, and without help—things I see most people more distressed about than about the illness. What? Do they themselves show us any happiness or length of life that could bear witness to some visible effect of their science?

2.37.13 There is no nation that has not gone several centuries without medicine—and those the first centuries, that is to say the best and happiest; and even now a tenth of the world does not use it. Countless nations do not know it, where people live both more healthily and longer than they do here; and among us the common people get along happily without it. The Romans had gone six hundred years before accepting it. But after trying it, they drove it out of their city through the agency of Cato the Censor, who showed how easily he could do without it: he lived eighty-five years and kept his wife alive to extreme old age—not without medicine, but certainly without a physician, for any-

thing found healthful to our life can be called medicine. He kept his household in health, Plutarch says, by the use, if I remember rightly, of hare. Just as the Arcadians, says Pliny, cure all illnesses with cow's milk. And the Libyans, says Herodotus, generally enjoy rare health thanks to a custom of theirs: when their children reach the age of four, they cauterize and burn the veins of their heads and temples, thereby blocking for life the way to any flow of catarrh. And the village people of this country use nothing for every ailment but the strongest wine they can get, mixed with plenty of saffron and spice—all with the same success.

2.37.14 And to tell the truth, from all this variety and confusion of prescriptions, what other end and effect is there, after all, than emptying the belly? A thousand household herbs can do that. And I do not even know whether it is as useful as they say, or whether our nature does not need its excrements to stay in it up to a point, as wine needs its lees to keep. You often see healthy men fall into vomiting or diarrhea from some accident from outside and make a great discharge of excrement without any previous need and without any benefit afterward—indeed, to their harm and detriment. It was from the great Plato that I learned not long ago that of the three kinds of movement proper to us, the last and worst is that of purgations, which no man, unless he is a fool, should undertake except in extreme necessity. We go on stirring up and rousing the illness by opposing it with contraries. It must be our way of life that gently weakens it and brings it to its end. The violent grapplings between drug and disease are always at our expense, since the quarrel is fought out inside us, and the drug is an ally not to be trusted: by its nature an enemy to our health, with no access to our system except through disturbance. Let us leave things alone a little.[9] The order that provides for fleas and moles provides also for men who have the same patience as fleas and moles in letting themselves be governed. We may shout "Gee up!" all we like: it will make us hoarse, but it will not hurry it on. It is a proud and

9 Plato, Timaeus.

pitiless order. Our fear and our despair disgust it and slow its help, instead of inviting it. It owes its course to illness as much as to health. It will not let itself be bribed in favor of the one to the prejudice of the other's rights; that would throw it into disorder. Let us follow, in God's name, let us follow! It leads those who follow; those who do not, it drags along, rage, medicine and all. Have a purge prescribed for your brain. It will be better spent there than on your stomach.

2.37.15 A Spartan was asked what had kept him healthy so long. "Ignorance of medicine," he replied. And the Emperor Hadrian kept crying out as he was dying that the crowd of physicians had killed him. A bad wrestler became a physician. "Well done," Diogenes told him, "you're right: now you will put into the ground those who once put you there." But they have this good luck, according to Nicocles, that the sun shines on their successes and the earth hides their mistakes.

2.37.16 Besides that, they have a very advantageous way of making use of every kind of outcome. Whatever good and healthful effect Fortune, Nature, or some other outside cause (and there are infinitely many) produces in us, it is the privilege of medicine to take credit for it. All the happy successes that befall the patient under its regimen, he owes to medicine. The causes that have cured me, and that cure a thousand others who never call in physicians, they appropriate in their own patients. As for bad outcomes, either they disown them entirely and put the blame on the patient, with reasons so empty that they never run any risk of failing to find plenty of them: he uncovered his arm; he heard the noise of a coach—*carriages passing / In the narrow bend of the streets*; someone opened his window a crack; he lay on his left side; or some painful thought passed through his head. In short, a word, a dream, a glance seems to them excuse enough to clear themselves of blame.[10] Or, if they please, they use even the worsening and turn it to account by another means that can never fail them: when the illness is found to be inflamed by their treatments, they pay us with the assurance that it would

10 Juvenal, Satires.

have been far worse without their remedies. The man they have thrown from a chill into a daily fever would have had the continuous fever without them. They have no fear of doing their work badly, since the damage turns to their profit. Truly they are right to require of the patient a favorable disposition to believe; it must indeed be favorable in earnest, and very supple, to bend itself to notions so hard to believe. Plato said very aptly that only physicians had the right to lie with complete freedom, since our health depends on the vanity and falseness of their promises. Aesop, an author of very rare excellence, whose graces few people discover in full, is amusing in the way he shows us the tyrannical authority they usurp over these poor souls weakened and cast down by illness and fear. He tells how a sick man, asked by his physician what effect he felt from the medicines he had given him, answered: "I have sweated a great deal." "That is good," said the physician. Another time the physician asked him again how he had been since. "I have been extremely cold," he said, "and I shivered a lot." "That is good," the physician went on. The third time he asked him once more how he was. "I feel myself swelling and puffing up," he said, "as if with dropsy." "That is going well," added the physician. Afterward one of his household came to ask him how he was. "Truly, my friend," he replies, "I am dying of being so well."

2.37.17 In Egypt there was a juster law, by which the physician took charge of his patient for the first three days at the patient's risk and peril, but once the three days were past, at his own. For what reason is there that Aesculapius, their patron, should have been struck by lightning for bringing Hippolytus back from death to life, *For the almighty Father, indignant that any mortal*
Should rise from the shades below to the light of life,
Himself hurled down with his thunderbolt to the Stygian waters
The son of Phoebus, discoverer of such healing and such skill,
while his followers, who send so many souls from life to death, go free? A physician was boasting to Nicocles that his art carried great authority. "Indeed it does," said Nicocles, "since it can kill so many people with impunity."[11]

2.37.18 For the rest, if I had been in their counsels, I would have made my discipline more sacred and mysterious. They had made a fairly good start, but they did not finish in the same way. It was a good beginning to have made gods and daemons the authors of their science, and to have adopted a language of its own and a script of its own—whatever philosophy may think of it, holding that it is folly to advise a man for his own good in a way he cannot understand: *As if a physician were to order a patient to take an earth-born, grass-walking, house-carrying, bloodless creature.* It was a good rule in their art, and one that goes with all fanatical, vain and supernatural arts, that the patient's faith must anticipate their effect and operation with good hope and assurance.[12] They keep to this rule so far that they consider the most ignorant and crude physician better suited to a patient who trusts him than the most experienced one whom he does not know. Even the choice of most of their drugs is somewhat mysterious and divine: the left foot of a tortoise, the urine of a

11 Aesculapius, son of Apollo (Phoebus), was the god of medicine. The lines are from Virgil, Aeneid.
12 A riddling description of a snail, from the poet Pacuvius, quoted by Cicero, On Divination.

lizard, elephant dung, the liver of a mole, blood drawn from under the right wing of a white pigeon; and for us colic sufferers (so disdainfully do they abuse our misery), powdered rat droppings, and other such monkey tricks that look more like a magic spell than solid science. I leave aside the odd number of their pills, the assigning of certain days and feasts of the year, the distinguishing of hours for gathering the herbs for their ingredients, and that forbidding, knowing grimace of their bearing and countenance, which even Pliny mocks. But where they failed, I mean, was in not adding to this fine beginning one more thing: making their meetings and consultations more religious and secret. No profane man should have been admitted to them, any more than to the secret ceremonies of Aesculapius. For from this fault it comes about that their irresolution, the weakness of their arguments, divinations and foundations, and the bitterness of their disputes, full of hatred, jealousy and private interest, are laid open to everyone. And then one must be wonderfully blind not to feel oneself in great danger in their hands. Who ever saw a physician use a colleague's prescription without taking something out or putting something in? By this they give their art away plainly enough, and show us that they care more about their reputation, and therefore their profit, than about the interest of their patients. Wiser was that one of their teachers who long ago laid down for them that only one physician should take charge of treating a patient. For if he does nothing worthwhile, the reproach to the art of medicine will not be very great for one man's fault; and conversely, the glory will be great if he happens to hit the mark. Whereas when there are many of them, they discredit the profession every time, since they happen to do harm more often than good. They should have been content with the perpetual disagreement found in the opinions of the chief masters and ancient authors of this science, which is known only to men versed in books, without also showing the common people the controversies and inconsistencies of judgment that they nourish and keep up among themselves.

A SCIENCE AT WAR WITH ITSELF

Ancient and modern physicians overturn one another's doctrines, and the patient pays.

2.37.19 Do we want an example of the ancient debate in medicine? Herophilus places the original cause of diseases in the humors; Erasistratus, in the blood of the arteries; Asclepiades, in invisible atoms flowing through our pores; Alcmaeon, in the excess or deficiency of bodily strength; Diocles, in the imbalance of the body's elements and in the quality of the air we breathe; Strato, in the abundance, crudeness and corruption of the food we eat; Hippocrates places it in the spirits. One of their friends, whom they know better than I do, exclaims on this subject that the most important science we have in use, since it has charge of our preservation and health, is unfortunately the most uncertain, the most confused, and the most shaken by changes.[13] There is no great danger if we miscalculate the height of the sun, or a fraction in some astronomical computation. But here, where our whole being is at stake, it is not wisdom to abandon ourselves to the mercy of so many contrary winds.

2.37.20 Before the Peloponnesian War there was little news of this science. Hippocrates brought it into repute. Everything he had established, Chrysippus overturned; then Erasistratus, Aristotle's grandson, overturned everything Chrysippus had written on it. After these came the Empirics, who took a path quite different from the ancients' in practicing this art. When the credit of these last began to grow old, Herophilus brought another kind of medicine into use, which Asclepiades in turn came to attack and destroy. Next the opinions of Themison gained authority, then those of Musa, and after that those of Vettius Valens, a physician famous for his intimacy with Messalina.[14] In

13 These are Greek physicians and natural philosophers of the 6th–3rd centuries BC. The "friend" is Pliny the Elder, in his Natural History, book 29.

14 Messalina was the wife of the emperor Claudius; Vettius Valens was one of her lovers.

Nero's time the empire of medicine fell to Thessalus, who abolished and condemned everything that had been held about it until his day. His doctrine was overthrown by Crinas of Marseille, who brought in the novelty of regulating all medical operations by the ephemerides and movements of the stars: eating, sleeping and drinking at whatever hour pleased the moon and Mercury. His authority was soon afterward supplanted by Charinus, a physician of that same city of Marseille. This man attacked not only the old medicine but also the use of hot baths, which was public and had been customary for so many centuries before. He had men bathe in cold water, even in winter, and plunged the sick into the natural water of streams.[15] Until Pliny's time no Roman had yet deigned to practice medicine. It was done by foreigners and Greeks, just as among us French it is done by people who talk Latin. For, as a very great physician says, we do not readily accept a medicine we understand, any more than a drug we gather ourselves. If the nations from which we bring guaiacum, sarsaparilla and chinaroot have physicians, how highly must they prize our cabbages and our parsley, do we suppose, on the same recommendation of strangeness, rarity and costliness? For who would dare scorn things sought from so far away, at the risk of so long and so perilous a journey?[16] Since these ancient changes in medicine there have been countless others down to our own day, and most often complete and universal changes, such as those produced in our time by Paracelsus, Fioravanti and Argenterius. For they change not merely a prescription but, so I am told, the whole structure and government of the body of medicine, accusing of ignorance and fraud all who practiced it before them. I leave you to imagine where that leaves the poor patient.[17]

2.37.21 If at least we were sure that, when they make a mistake, it would not harm us even if it did not help us, that would be a

15 Ephemerides are astronomical tables giving the daily positions of the heavenly bodies.

16 Guaiacum, sarsaparilla and chinaroot were costly imported remedies, used chiefly against syphilis.

very reasonable bargain: to risk gaining some good without putting ourselves in danger of loss. Aesop tells the story of a man who had bought a dark-skinned slave and, thinking that his color had come to him by accident and from ill treatment by his first master, had him doctored with great care with many baths and potions. It turned out that the slave's dark complexion was not improved in the least, but he entirely lost the good health he had had before. How often do we see physicians blaming one another for the death of their patients? I remember an epidemic that struck the towns in my neighborhood some years ago, deadly and very dangerous. When this storm had passed, after carrying off countless people, one of the most famous physicians in the whole region published a little book on the subject, in which he has second thoughts about their having used bloodletting, and admits that it was one of the chief causes of the harm that resulted. Moreover their authors hold that there is no medicine without some harmful part. And if even those that help us do us some harm, what must those do that are applied to us quite wrongly? For my part, even if there were nothing else, I think that for those who hate the taste of medicine it is a dangerous and damaging strain to have to swallow it at such an inconvenient hour and with such loathing; and I believe it tries the patient terribly, at a time when he so needs rest. Besides, if we consider the occasions on which they usually ground the cause of our illnesses, they are so slight and so delicate that I conclude from this that a very small error in dispensing their drugs can do us a great deal of harm. Now if the physician's mistake is dangerous, we are in a bad way, for it is very hard for him not to fall into it often: he needs too many pieces, considerations and circumstances to aim his plan accurately. He must know the patient's constitution, his temperament, his humors, his inclinations, his actions, even his thoughts and his fancies. He must take account of external circumstances: the nature of the place, the condition of the air and the weather, the position of the plan-

17 Leonardo Fioravanti and Giovanni Argenterio were Italian physicians who, like Paracelsus, attacked the established medicine of Galen.

ets and their influences. He must know, in the disease, its causes, its symptoms, its effects, its critical days; in the drug, its weight, strength, country, shape, age and dispensing. And he must know how to proportion all these pieces and relate them to one another so as to produce a perfect symmetry. If he falls short in this in the slightest, if out of so many springs one single one pulls the wrong way, that is enough to finish us. God knows how hard it is to know most of these parts. For example, how will he find the proper symptom of the disease, when each one admits of an infinite number of symptoms? How many disputes and doubts do they have among themselves over the reading of urine? Otherwise where would it come from, this continual wrangling we see among them over identifying the illness? How could we excuse the mistake they so often fall into, of taking a marten for a fox? In the illnesses I have had, if there was the least difficulty, I have never found three of them in agreement. I note most readily the examples that concern me. Recently in Paris a gentleman was cut for the stone on the physicians' orders, and no more stone was found in his bladder than in his hand. And in the same city a bishop who was a close friend of mine had been urgently pressed by most of the physicians he called into consultation to have himself cut; I myself, trusting others' word, helped persuade him. When he had died and was opened, it was found that his trouble was only in the kidneys. They are less excusable with this disease in that it is to some extent palpable. That is why surgery seems to me much more certain: it sees and handles what it is doing; there is less to conjecture and guess.[18] Whereas physicians have no *speculum for the womb* to show them our brain, our lungs and our liver.[19]

2.37.22 Even the promises of medicine are incredible. They have to provide against various and contrary ailments that often press on us together and are almost necessarily linked, such as

18 To be "cut" was to undergo lithotomy, the surgical removal of a stone from the bladder.

19 Montaigne's Latin, *speculum matricis*, names the surgeon's instrument for looking inside the womb.

heat in the liver and coldness in the stomach. So they try to persuade us that, of their ingredients, this one will warm the stomach and that one will cool the liver; one has the task of going straight to the kidneys, or even to the bladder, without spreading its effects anywhere else, keeping its strength and virtue along that long road full of obstacles until it reaches the place it is destined to serve by its occult property; another will dry the brain; that one will moisten the lungs. When they have made a single potion out of this whole heap, is it not a kind of madness to hope that these virtues will divide and sort themselves out of this confusion and mixture, to run off on such different errands? I should be terribly afraid that they might lose or swap their labels and mix up their quarters. And who could imagine that in this liquid confusion these faculties do not corrupt, confound and alter one another? And what of the fact that carrying out this prescription depends on yet another officer, to whose good faith and mercy we once again abandon our life?

2.37.23 We have doublet-makers and hose-makers to clothe us, and we are all the better served because each deals only with his own subject and has a narrower and shorter range of knowledge than a tailor who takes in everything. And to feed us, great people have, for greater convenience, separate offices of soup-cooks and roasters, which a cook who takes on the whole charge cannot manage so exquisitely. In the same way, for curing us, the Egyptians were right to reject the general trade of physician and to cut the profession up: for each disease, for each part of the body, its own workman.[20] For that part was treated much more properly and less confusedly because it alone received special attention. Ours do not realize that he who provides for everything provides for nothing; that the total government of this little world is more than they can digest. While they were afraid to stop the flux of a man with dysentery, so as not to give him a fever, they killed a friend of mine who was worth more than the whole lot of them put together. They weigh their guesses against the present ills; and so as not to cure the brain at

20 Montaigne follows Herodotus, Histories 2.84.

the expense of the stomach, they injure the stomach and make the brain worse with these turbulent and quarrelsome drugs.[21]

2.37.24 As for the variety and weakness of the reasoning of this art, it is more obvious than in any other art. Aperients are useful to a man with colic, because by opening and dilating the passages they move along that sticky matter from which gravel and stone are built, and carry downward what is beginning to harden and collect in the kidneys. Aperients are dangerous to a man with colic, because by opening and dilating the passages they move toward the kidneys the matter suited to building gravel; and since the kidneys readily seize on it, from the propensity they have for it, they can hardly fail to keep back much of what has been carried there.[22] Moreover, if by chance some body is lodged there that is a little too large to pass through all the narrows still to be crossed before it is expelled, this body, set moving by these aperients and thrown into those narrow channels, will block them and bring on a certain and very painful death. They show the same firmness in the advice they give us about our way of life. It is good to pass water often, for we see by experience that by letting it stagnate we give it leisure to deposit its sediment and dregs, which will serve as material for building a stone in the bladder. It is good not to pass water often, for the heavy sediment it carries with it will not be swept away without some force; as we see by experience that a torrent rushing down vigorously sweeps the place it passes over much cleaner than the course of a soft and sluggish brook. Likewise, it is good to have frequent intercourse with women, for that opens the passages and moves the gravel and sand along. It is also very bad, for it heats the kidneys, tires them and weakens them. It is good to bathe in hot springs, because that relaxes and softens the places where the sand and stone lie stagnating. It is also bad, because this application of external heat helps the kidneys bake, harden and petrify the matter lying ready in them.

21 Probably La Boétie, who died of dysentery in 1563.

22 Aperients are medicines that "open" the body's passages, as laxatives or diuretics; Montaigne's colic was caused by kidney stones.

For those taking the waters, it is healthier to eat little in the evening, so that the water they are to drink the next morning may work better, finding the stomach empty and unencumbered. On the contrary, it is better to eat little at the midday meal, so as not to disturb the working of the water, which is not yet complete, and not to burden the stomach so soon after that other labor, and to leave the task of digesting to the night, which does it better than the day, when body and mind are in perpetual movement and action. That is how they juggle and trifle at our expense in all their reasoning; and they could not offer me a single proposition against which I could not build a contrary one of equal force. So let no one rail any more at those who, in this confusion, let themselves be gently led by their appetite and the counsel of Nature, and commit themselves to common fortune.

TAKING THE WATERS

Montaigne's experience of the spas of Europe: harmless, pleasant, and of uncertain effect.

2.37.25 In the course of my travels I have seen almost all the famous baths of Christendom, and for some years now I have begun to use them. For in general I consider bathing healthy, and I believe we incur no slight harm to our health from having lost this custom of washing the body every day, which was generally observed in times past in almost all nations and still is in many. And I cannot imagine that we are not much the worse for keeping our limbs encrusted like this and our pores stopped up with dirt. And as for drinking the waters, Fortune has arranged, first, that it is not at all disagreeable to my taste; second, it is natural and simple, and so at least not dangerous, even if it is useless. As guarantee of this I take the countless people of every sort and constitution who gather there. And yet I have not noticed any extraordinary or miraculous effect there. On the contrary, inquiring into it a little more carefully than people usually do, I have found ill-founded and false all the reports of such cures

that are spread about in those places and believed there (as the world easily deceives itself about what it desires). Still, I have also seen hardly anyone whom these waters have made worse; and one cannot without malice deny them this: that they awaken the appetite, aid digestion and lend us some fresh liveliness, provided one does not go there too worn down in strength, which I advise against. They are not meant to raise up a heavy ruin; they can prop up a slight decline or ward off the threat of some disorder. Whoever does not bring enough liveliness to enjoy the pleasure of the company found there, and of the walks and exercise to which we are invited by the beauty of the places where these waters usually lie, undoubtedly loses the best and surest part of their effect. For this reason I have so far chosen to stop at and use those where there was the greatest pleasantness of setting and convenience of lodging, food and company: in France, the baths of Bagnères; on the border of Germany and Lorraine, those of Plombières; in Switzerland, those of Baden; in Tuscany, those of Lucca, and especially those *at La Villa*, which I have used most often and in different seasons.[23]

2.37.26 Each nation has its own opinions about using them, and its own laws and ways of taking them, all different; and in my experience the effect is about the same. Drinking is not accepted at all in Germany. For every illness they bathe, and stay paddling about in the water like frogs almost from sunrise to sunset. In Italy, when they drink for nine days, they bathe for at least thirty; and they usually drink the water mixed with other drugs to assist its working. Here we are told to walk about to digest it; there they keep people in bed, where they drank it, until they have voided it, keeping their stomachs and feet continually warmed. Just as the Germans have the peculiarity of having themselves almost all cupped and bled, with scarification, in the bath, so the Italians have their *doccie*, which are certain streams of this hot water that they bring through pipes; with them, for a month, they bathe for an hour in the morning

23 La Villa is one of the spa villages of Bagni di Lucca, where Montaigne took the waters in 1581, as his Travel Journal records.

and as long in the afternoon either the head, or the stomach, or whatever other part of the body they are dealing with. There are countless other differences of custom in each region; or, to put it better, there is almost no resemblance between them. So you see how this branch of medicine, the only one I have let myself go along with, though it is the least artificial, still has its fair share of the confusion and uncertainty seen everywhere else in this art.

2.37.27 The poets say whatever they please with more emphasis and grace: witness these two epigrams. *Yesterday Alcon touched the statue of Jove. It,*
Though marble, suffers the physician's power.
Look: today, ordered moved from its ancient temple,
It is carried out for burial, though it is a god and a stone. And the other: *Andragoras bathed with us, dined merrily, and yet*
In the morning he was found dead.
You ask, Faustinus, the cause of so sudden a death?
In his sleep he had seen the doctor Hermocrates. On this subject I want to tell two stories.[24]

TWO STORIES

A mountain village loses its health with its first doctor, and a goat bred for its blood turns out to have stones.

2.37.28 The Baron de Caupène in Chalosse and I share the right of patronage of a benefice of wide extent at the foot of our mountains, called Lahontan. It is with the inhabitants of this corner as is said of those of the valley of Angrogna: they had a life of their own, their own ways, dress and manners, ruled and governed by certain particular laws and customs handed down from father to son, which they bound themselves to obey with no other constraint than reverence for their own practice.[25] This little state had continued since time immemorial in so happy a

24 The first epigram is by Ausonius; the second is Martial, Epigrams 6.53.
25 Lahontan is a parish in Béarn, near the Pyrenees; the valley of Angrogna in Piedmont was a stronghold of the Waldensians.

condition that no neighboring judge had ever had to trouble himself to inquire into their business, no lawyer had been employed to advise them, no outsider called in to settle their quarrels; and no one from that district had ever been seen begging. They shunned marriages and dealings with the outside world so as not to alter the purity of their way of governing themselves. Then, as they tell it, one of them, within their fathers' memory, his soul spurred by a noble ambition, took it into his head, in order to bring his name into credit and repute, to make one of his children Master John or Master Peter; and having had him taught to write in some neighboring town, he at last made him a fine village notary. This man, once grown up, began to scorn their ancient customs and to fill their heads with the pomp of the regions on our side.[26] The first of his fellow villagers who had a horn knocked off his goat, he advised to seek redress from the royal judges thereabouts; and so from one to another, until he had corrupted everything. Following this corruption, they say, another soon came of worse consequence, by means of a physician who took a fancy to marry one of their daughters and settle among them. This man began by teaching them the names of fevers, colds and abscesses, and the location of the heart, the liver and the intestines, a science until then very remote from their knowledge. And instead of garlic, with which they had learned to drive out all sorts of ills, however harsh and extreme, he got them used to taking foreign mixtures for a cough or a chill, and began to traffic not only in their health but also in their death. They swear that only since then have they noticed that the evening dew made their heads heavy, that drinking when hot did harm, and that the autumn winds were more harmful than those of spring; that since they began using this medicine they find themselves overwhelmed by a legion of unaccustomed diseases, and notice a general decline in their old vigor and their lives cut short by half. That is the first of my stories.

2.37.29 The other is this. Before I was subject to the gravel, I heard many people prize goat's blood as a heavenly manna sent in these latter centuries for the protection and preservation of human life, and heard men of good understanding speak of it as an admirable drug of infallible effect. I, who have always thought myself exposed to all the accidents that can befall any other man, took pleasure, while in perfect health, in providing myself with this miracle, and ordered a goat to be raised for me at home according to the recipe. For it must be shut away in the hottest months of summer, and given nothing to eat but aperient herbs and nothing to drink but white wine. I happened to come home on the day it was to be killed. They came to tell me that my cook was finding in its paunch two or three large balls knocking against each other among its food. I was curious enough to have all these tripes brought before me, and had that big, broad skin opened. Out came three large bodies, light as sponges, so that they seemed hollow, but otherwise hard and firm on the surface, mottled with several dull colors: one perfectly round, the size of a ball for short bowls; the other two a little smaller, imperfectly rounded, as though they were on their way to it. Having had inquiries made of those who are used to opening up these animals, I found that it is a rare and unusual occurrence. It is likely that these are stones, cousins to ours. And if so, it is a very vain hope for sufferers from the gravel to draw their cure from the blood of a beast that was itself about to die of a similar disease. For as to saying that the blood is not touched by this contagion and does not have its usual virtue altered, it is rather to be believed that nothing is produced in a body except by the conspiracy and communication of all the parts: the mass acts as a whole, though one piece contributes more than another, according to the diversity of operations. Therefore it is very likely that in all the parts of this goat there was some petrifying quality. It was not so much out of fear for the future, and for myself, that I was curious about this experiment, as because in my house, as in many others, the women

26 "Master" was the title given to lawyers and men of letters.

gather a store of such petty drugs to help the common people. They use the same recipe for fifty diseases, and a recipe they do not take themselves; and yet they triumph in good results.

2.37.30 For the rest, I honor physicians—not according to the precept, out of necessity (for against that passage another is set, from the prophet reproving King Asa for having had recourse to the physician), but for their own sake, having seen many of them who were decent men and worthy of being loved. It is not them I have a quarrel with; it is their art. And I do not much blame them for profiting from our folly, for most of the world does the same. Many callings, both lesser and worthier than theirs, have no foundation or support but public deception.[27] I call them in to keep me company when I am ill, if they happen to be at hand; I ask to be entertained by them, and I pay them as others do. I give them leave to order me to cover up warmly, if I prefer that to the alternative. They can choose between leeks and lettuce for what my broth is to be made of, and prescribe white wine or claret; and so with all other things that are indifferent to my appetite and habits. I fully understand that this is doing nothing for them, since bitterness and strangeness are accidents of the very essence of medicine. Lycurgus prescribed wine for sick Spartans. Why? Because when healthy they hated drinking it. In just the same way a gentleman, a neighbor of mine, uses it as a most beneficial drug for his fevers, because by nature he mortally hates its taste. How many of them do we see who are of my temperament? who scorn medicine for their own use, and adopt a free way of life, quite contrary to the one they prescribe for others? What is that but brazenly abusing our simplicity? For they hold their life and health no less dear than we do, and would match their actions to their doctrine if they did not themselves know its falsity.

2.37.31 It is fear of death and of pain, impatience with illness, a furious and reckless thirst for cure, that blinds us so. It is pure

27 The precept is Ecclesiasticus 38:1, which bids us honor the physician because we need him; 2 Chronicles 16:12 blames King Asa for seeking physicians rather than God.

cowardice that makes our belief so soft and pliable. Most people, however, do not so much believe as endure and let things be done; for I hear them complain and talk about it as we do. But in the end they make up their minds: "What else am I to do?" As if impatience were in itself a better remedy than patience. Is there anyone who has let himself fall into this miserable subjection who does not surrender equally to every kind of imposture? who does not put himself at the mercy of anyone with the impudence to promise him a cure? The Babylonians carried their sick into the public square: the physician was the people, each passer-by being bound by humanity and civility to ask about their condition and, according to his experience, give them some healthy advice. We do hardly otherwise. There is not a simple little woman whose mumbled charms and amulets we do not make use of; and to my mind, if I had to accept any medicine, I would accept this kind more willingly than any other, since at least there is no harm to fear from it. What Homer and Plato said of the Egyptians, that they were all physicians, ought to be said of every people.[28] There is no one who does not boast of some recipe and try it out on his neighbor, if he will believe him. The other day I was in a gathering where someone or other of my fraternity brought news of a kind of pill compounded of a hundred-odd ingredients, duly counted. It set off a celebration and a singular comfort: for what rock could withstand the force of so numerous a battery? I hear, however, from those who tried it, that not the smallest grain of gravel deigned to stir for it.[29]

HOW REMEDIES ARE FOUND

Montaigne doubts that chance experiments could ever establish a reliable cure.

2.37.32 I cannot leave this paper without saying one more word about this: that as guarantee of the certainty of their drugs they

28 The Babylonian custom is from Herodotus, Histories 1.197; Homer speaks of the Egyptians in the Odyssey, book 4.
29 His "fraternity" are his fellow sufferers from the stone.

offer us the experiments they have made. Most medicinal virtues, and I believe more than two-thirds of them, consist in the quintessence or occult property of medicinal plants, about which we can learn nothing except by use. For quintessence is nothing but a quality whose cause we cannot find by our reason. Among such proofs, those they say they have acquired by the inspiration of some daemon I am content to accept (for as to miracles, I never touch them); or again the proofs drawn from things that for other reasons often come into our use: as when some occult drying property is found by accident in the wool we usually wear, which cures chilblains on the heel; or when some aperient effect turns up in the horseradish we eat as food. Galen tells how a leper happened to be cured by the wine he drank, because by chance a viper had crept into the jar. In this example we find the means and a likely path to the discovery; as also in those to which physicians say they were led by the example of certain animals. But in most other experiments, to which they say they were led by fortune, with no other guide than chance, I find the progress of this discovery incredible. I imagine a man looking around him at the infinite number of things—plants, animals, metals. I do not know where to have him begin his trial. And when his first fancy lights on an elk's horn, which requires a very soft and easy belief, he finds himself just as perplexed in his second step. He is faced with so many diseases and so many circumstances that, before he has reached certainty on the point where his experiment must come to completion, human sense is at its wits' end. And before he has found, among this infinity of things, that it is this horn; among this infinity of diseases, epilepsy; among so many constitutions, the melancholic; among so many seasons, winter; among so many nations, the French; among so many ages, old age; among so many celestial changes, the conjunction of Venus and Saturn; among so many parts of the body, the finger. Since in all this he is guided neither by argument, nor conjecture, nor example, nor divine inspiration, but only by the movement of fortune, it would have to happen by a fortune perfectly skillful, regular

and methodical. And then, when the cure was done, how can he be sure that it was not because the illness had reached its term? or an effect of chance? or the working of something else he had eaten, drunk or touched that day? or the merit of his grandmother's prayers? Moreover, even if this proof had been perfect, how many times was it repeated? and this long string of chances and coincidences strung together again, to conclude a rule from it? When it is concluded, by whom? Out of so many millions there are only three men who take the trouble to record their experiments. Will chance have hit exactly on one of these? What if another, and a hundred others, have made contrary experiments? We might perhaps see some light if all the judgments and reasonings of men were known to us. But that three witnesses and three doctors should rule the human race is not reasonable: human nature would have had to depute and choose them, and declare them our representatives by express power of attorney.

TO MADAME DE DURAS

An address to a friend: he wants his book to show him as he naturally is.

2.37.33 To Madame de Duras.[30]

2.37.34 Madame, you found me at this very point the last time you came to see me. Since these absurdities may perhaps fall into your hands some day, I want them also to bear witness that their author feels very greatly honored by the favor you will show them. You will recognize in them the same bearing and the same air you have seen in his conversation. Even if I could have adopted some manner other than my usual one, and some other, more honorable and better form, I would not have done so; for all I want from these writings is that they bring me back to your memory as I naturally am. These same qualities and faculties that you have known and welcomed, Madame, with much

30 Marguerite de Gramont, wife of Jean de Durfort, lord of Duras, and a friend of Montaigne.

more honor and courtesy than they deserve, I want to lodge—but without alteration or change—in a solid body that may last a few years, or a few days, after me, where you will find them again whenever you please to refresh your memory of them, without otherwise taking the trouble to remember them; nor indeed are they worth it. I wish you to continue the favor of your friendship toward me by means of the same qualities that brought it about.

2.37.35 I do not in the least seek to be loved and esteemed more dead than alive. The temperament of Tiberius is ridiculous, and yet common: he cared more about extending his fame into the future than about making himself esteemed and agreeable to the men of his own time. If I were one of those to whom the world may owe praise, I would let it off for half, provided it paid me in advance. Let the praise hurry and pile up all around me, thicker rather than longer, fuller rather than lasting. And let it boldly vanish along with my awareness of it, when that sweet sound no longer reaches my ears. It would be a silly whim, now that I am about to give up the company of men, to go and present myself to them with a new recommendation. I set no store by goods I have not been able to put to use in my life. Whatever I am, I want to be it elsewhere than on paper. My skill and my industry have been employed in making myself worth something; my studies, in teaching me to do, not to write. I have put all my efforts into shaping my life. That is my trade and my work. I am less a maker of books than of anything else. I have wanted ability for the service of my present and essential needs, not to lay it up in store as a reserve for my heirs. Whoever has worth, let him show it in his conduct and his ordinary talk: in making love or in quarrels, at play, in bed, at table, in managing his affairs, in running his household. Those I see writing good books in shabby breeches would have seen to their breeches first, if they had listened to me. Ask a Spartan whether he would rather be a good rhetorician than a good soldier; ask me whether I would rather be one than a good cook, if I had no one to cook for me—I would not. My God, Madame, how I would hate

such a reputation: to be an able man on paper, and a nobody and a fool everywhere else. I would still rather be a fool both here and there than have chosen so badly where to employ my worth. And so far am I from expecting to win any new honor by these follies that I shall do well if I lose none of the little I had acquired. For besides what this dead and mute painting will steal from my natural being, it does not correspond to my best condition, but to one much fallen from my former vigor and liveliness, turning withered and stale. I am at the bottom of the cask, which will soon taste of the dregs and lees.

2.37.36 For the rest, Madame, I would not have dared stir up the mysteries of medicine so boldly, given the credit you and so many others give it, if I had not been led to it by its own authors. I believe they have only two among the ancient Latins, Pliny and Celsus. If you look at them some day, you will find that they speak much more harshly to their art than I do: I only pinch it; they cut its throat. Pliny mocks, among other things, the fine way out they have invented when they are at the end of their rope: sending the patients they have harassed and tormented for nothing with their drugs and regimens, some to the help of vows and miracles, others to the hot springs.[31] Do not be angry, Madame: he is not speaking of those on this side, which are under the protection of your house and all belong to the Gramonts. They have a third sort of way out, to drive us away from them and clear themselves of the reproaches we can make them for the little improvement in our ills, which they have had in their charge so long that they have no device left to keep us amused: it is to send us off to seek the good air of some other region.[32]

2.37.37 Madame, that is enough. You will surely give me leave to pick up the thread of my subject again, which I had left in order to talk with you.

31 Celsus (1st century AD) wrote On Medicine; Pliny the Elder attacks physicians in book 29 of his Natural History.

32 Madame de Duras was born into the Gramont family, whose lands in the Pyrenean foothills included hot springs.

2.37.38 It was Pericles, I think, who, when asked how he was, said: "You can judge by this," showing the amulets he had tied around his neck and arm. He meant that he must be very ill, since he had come to the point of turning to such empty things and letting himself be rigged out in that way. I do not say that I may not one day be carried away into this ridiculous notion of putting my life and health at the mercy and under the rule of doctors. I may fall into that delusion; I cannot answer for my future firmness. But then, if someone asks me how I am, I too can tell him, like Pericles: "You can judge by this," showing my hand loaded with six drams of medicinal paste. That will be a very clear sign of a violent illness: my judgment will be wonderfully unhinged. If impatience and fear win that much ground over me, people may conclude that there is a very sharp fever in my soul.

2.37.39 I have taken the trouble to plead this cause, which I understand rather poorly, in order to prop up and strengthen a little the natural bent against the drugs and practice of our medicine that has come down to me from my ancestors. I wanted it to be not merely a dull and rash inclination, but to have a little more shape. I also wanted those who see me so firm against the urgings and threats I receive when my illnesses press me hard not to think it simple obstinacy—or anyone to be so disagreeable as to judge that it is some spur of glory. That would be a fine target to aim at: to want to win honor from an action I share with my gardener and my muleteer. Truly, my heart is not so puffed up or so windy that I would go and exchange a solid, fleshy, marrowy pleasure like health for an imaginary, spiritual, airy one. Glory, even the glory of the four sons of Aymon, is too dearly bought by a man of my temperament if it costs him three good bouts of colic. Health, in God's name! Those who love our medicine may also have their own reasons, good, great and strong. I do not hate notions contrary to my own.[33] I am so far from being startled to see my judgments

33 The four sons of Aymon, led by Renaud de Montauban, are the heroes of a popular medieval French epic.

at odds with other people's, or from making myself unfit for the company of men because they hold another opinion and party than mine, that on the contrary I find it much rarer to see our temperaments and our designs agree. For variety is the most general pattern Nature has followed, and more in minds than in bodies, since minds are of a more supple substance and more receptive to forms. There never were in the world two identical opinions, any more than two hairs or two grains. Their most universal quality is diversity.

III.1 Of the Useful and the Honorable

De l'vtile et de l'honeste
Montaigne asks whether private morality yields to public expediency and refuses treachery, keeping his own dealings open and honest.

3.1.1 No one is exempt from talking nonsense; the misfortune is to talk it with great care: *Indeed, this man will have taken great pains to say great trifles.*[1]

3.1.2 That does not concern me. My trifles slip out of me as carelessly as they deserve, which is lucky for them. I would drop them at once if they cost me anything at all. I neither buy nor sell them for more than they weigh. I speak to paper as I speak to the first person I meet. To prove this is true, here is an example.

3.1.3 Who could fail to find treachery detestable, since Tiberius refused it when so much was at stake? Word was sent to him from Germany that, if he approved, Arminius could be got rid of for him by poison. Arminius was the most powerful enemy the Romans had; he had treated them so shamefully under Varus, and he alone was blocking the growth of Tiberius's dominion in those regions. Tiberius replied that the Roman people were accustomed to take vengeance on their enemies openly, weapons in hand, not by fraud and in secret: he gave up the useful for the honorable. He was a hypocrite, you will tell me. I believe it: that is no great miracle in people of his profession.[2] But the confession of virtue carries no less weight in the mouth

1 Terence, The Self-Tormentor.
2 Arminius was the German chief who destroyed Varus's legions in AD 9.

of one who hates it, since truth wrests it from him by force, and if he will not take virtue into himself, at least he cloaks himself in it as an ornament.

NECESSARY VICES

Society needs treachery and lying, but those tasks should be left to others more pliable.

3.1.4 Our structure, both public and private, is full of imperfection. But there is nothing useless in nature, not even uselessness itself. Nothing has worked its way into this universe that does not hold a fitting place in it. Our being is cemented with sickly qualities: ambition, jealousy, envy, vengeance, superstition, despair dwell in us with so natural a possession that their image can be recognized in the beasts as well. Even cruelty, so unnatural a vice: for in the midst of compassion we feel within us some bittersweet prick of malicious pleasure at seeing others suffer, and children feel it too: *It is sweet, when the winds are churning the waters of the great sea, / To watch from land another's great struggle.* Whoever removed the seeds of these qualities from man would destroy the fundamental conditions of our life. Likewise, in every government there are necessary offices that are not only abject but even vicious. Vices find their place there and are put to work stitching our society together, as poisons are used to preserve our health.[3] If they become excusable because we need them and common necessity wipes out their true quality, we must leave this part to be played by the more vigorous and less fearful citizens, who sacrifice their honor and their conscience as those men of old sacrificed their lives for the safety of their country. We weaker ones take roles that are both easier and less risky. The public good requires that men betray, and lie, and massacre: let us hand over that commission to people more obedient and more pliable.

3.1.5 Truly, I have often been vexed to see judges lure a criminal into revealing his deed by fraud and false hopes of favor or par-

3 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.

don, using trickery and impudence to do it. It would be of good service to justice, and to Plato himself, who favors this practice, to supply me with other means more to my liking. It is a malicious kind of justice, and I consider it no less wounded by itself than by others.

AN HONEST NEGOTIATOR

Montaigne describes his own open, uncommitted way of dealing between hostile princes.

3.1.6 Not long ago I answered that I would hardly betray my prince for a private individual, I who would be very sorry to betray any private individual for my prince. And I do not only hate deceiving; I also hate people deceiving themselves about me. I do not want even to supply the material or the occasion for it. In the little I have had to negotiate between our princes, in these divisions and subdivisions that are tearing us apart today, I have carefully avoided letting them be mistaken about me and impale themselves on my mask. People in the trade keep themselves as covered as they can, and present and disguise themselves as being as moderate and as close to the other side's views as possible. I offer myself with my most lively opinions and in the form most my own. A tender and novice negotiator, who would rather fail in the business than fail myself! Yet up to now it has gone with such luck (for Fortune certainly has the principal share in it) that few have passed from one side to the other with less suspicion, and with more favor and intimacy. I have an open manner, quick to make its way in and win trust at first acquaintance. Naturalness and pure truth, in whatever century, still find their opening and their currency. And then, the freedom of those who work with no interest of their own is little suspected and little resented. They can truly use the reply of Hyperides to the Athenians, who complained of the harshness of his speech: "Gentlemen, do not consider whether I am outspoken, but whether I am so without taking anything and without bettering my own affairs by it." My outspokenness has also easily

cleared me of any suspicion of pretense, by its vigor (I spared nothing I had to say, however weighty and stinging; I could not have said worse behind their backs) and by its evident look of simplicity and nonchalance. I seek no other fruit from acting than the acting itself, and I attach no long sequels and proposals to it. Each action plays its own game separately: let it hit home if it can.[4]

3.1.7 For the rest, I am not driven by any passion, either of hatred or of love, toward the great, nor is my will tied by any particular offense or obligation. I regard our kings with an affection that is simply lawful and civil, neither moved toward them nor moved away by private interest, and I am pleased with myself for it. Nor does the general and just cause bind me except moderately and without fever. I am not subject to those penetrating and intimate mortgages and pledges. Anger and hatred go beyond the duty of justice; they are passions useful only to those who are not held firmly enough to their duty by plain reason: *Let him use the impulse of passion who cannot use reason.*[5] All legitimate intentions are temperate in themselves; otherwise they turn seditious and illegitimate. That is what makes me walk everywhere with my head high, my face and my heart open. In truth—and I am not afraid to admit it—I would readily, if need be, carry one candle to Saint Michael and the other to his serpent, like the old woman in the story. I will follow the right side up to the fire, but not into it, if I can. Let Montaigne be swallowed up along with the public ruin, if need be; but if there is no need, I will be grateful to Fortune for saving him, and all the rope my duty allows me I use to preserve him.[6] Was it not Atticus who, holding to the just side, and to the side that lost, saved himself by his moderation in that universal shipwreck of the world, amid so many changes and upheavals? For men who, like him, are private persons, it is easier. And in that kind of business I find

4 Hyperides was an Athenian orator and statesman of the 4th century BC.
5 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations.
6 The proverbial old woman lit one candle to Saint Michael and another to the devil, shown as a serpent or dragon at his feet, to be safe either way.

that one may rightly lack the ambition to thrust oneself forward and invite oneself in.[7]

3.1.8 To stay wavering and half-and-half, to keep one's affection unmoved and leaning nowhere in the troubles of one's country and in a public division—this I find neither handsome nor honorable: *That is not a middle way, but no way at all, like those who wait on the outcome in order to fit their plans to fortune.* That may be permitted in the affairs of neighbors. Gelon, tyrant of Syracuse, thus held back his leanings in the war of the barbarians against the Greeks: he kept an embassy at Delphi with presents, to be on the lookout to see which way fortune would fall, and to seize the right moment to win the victors over to him.[8] It would be a kind of treason to do this in one's own domestic affairs, in which one must necessarily take sides. But for a man who has no office or express command pressing him, staying out of it I find more excusable (though I do not use this excuse for myself) than in foreign wars—in which, however, by our laws, no one need take part who does not wish to. Yet even those who commit themselves wholly can do so with such order and moderation that the storm will pass over their heads without harm. Were we not right to hope so in the case of the late Bishop of Orléans, the sieur de Morvilliers?[9] And I know some of those working valiantly at it now whose characters are so even or so gentle that they will remain standing, whatever damaging upheaval and fall heaven may be preparing for us. I hold that it is properly for kings to take up arms against kings, and I laugh at those minds who light-heartedly throw themselves into such disproportionate quarrels. For marching against a prince openly and courageously, for one's honor and according to one's duty, is not picking a private quarrel with him. If he does not love such a man, he does better: he esteems him. In particular, the cause of the laws and the defense of the established order always have

7 Atticus survived the Roman civil wars of the 1st century BC by staying on good terms with all sides.

8 Livy. The war is Xerxes' Persian invasion of Greece in 480 BC.

9 Jean de Morvillier (1506–1577), bishop of Orléans and keeper of the seals, a moderate royal statesman during the Wars of Religion.

this about them: even those who disturb that order for their own designs excuse its defenders, if they do not honor them.

3.1.9 But we must not call duty, as we do every day, a sourness and inner harshness born of private interest and passion; nor call courage a treacherous and malicious way of acting. They call their propensity to malice and violence zeal. It is not the cause that inflames them, it is their interest. They stir up war not because it is just but because it is war.

3.1.10 Nothing prevents one from conducting oneself agreeably and loyally among men who are enemies to one another. Conduct yourself there with an affection which, if not equal everywhere (for it can admit different measures), is at least temperate, and does not commit you so much to one side that he can demand everything of you. Content yourself, too, with a moderate measure of their favor, and with gliding through troubled waters without trying to fish in them.

3.1.11 The other way, offering oneself with all one's strength to both sides, shows even less prudence than conscience. The man for whom you betray another, by whom you are equally welcome—does he not know that you do as much to him in his turn? He holds you for a wicked man; meanwhile he listens to you, draws information from you, and does his business by your disloyalty. For double-dealers are useful in what they bring, but one must take care that they carry away as little as possible.

3.1.12 I say nothing to one side that I could not say to the other at the proper time, with only the tone a little changed; and I report only things that are either indifferent, or already known, or of common use. There is no advantage for which I allow myself to lie to them. What has been entrusted to my silence I keep religiously hidden; but I take on as little to hide as I can. Guarding the secrets of princes is a tiresome duty for someone who has no use for them. I readily offer this bargain: let them confide little to me, but let them boldly trust what I bring them. I have always known more than I wanted to. Open speech opens up another's speech and draws it out, as wine and love do. Philippides, to my mind, answered wisely when King Lysimachus

asked him, "What would you like me to share with you of my possessions?" "Whatever you like, so long as it is not your secrets." I see that everyone bristles if the heart of the business he is employed in is hidden from him, and if some ulterior meaning has been kept from him. For my part, I am content to be told no more than they want me to put to use, and I do not want my knowledge to outrun and constrain my speech. If I must serve as an instrument of deception, let it at least be with my conscience safe.[10] I do not want to be thought a servant so devoted or so loyal that I would be found fit to betray anyone. A man who is unfaithful to himself is excusably so to his master. But these are princes who do not accept men by halves and who despise limited and conditional services. There is no help for it: I tell them frankly where my limits lie. For a slave I should be only to reason, and even that I cannot quite manage. And they too are wrong to demand of a free man the same subjection to their service, and the same obligation, as of a man they have made and bought, or whose fortune is particularly and expressly bound up with theirs. The laws have relieved me of great trouble: they have chosen my side for me and given me a master. Every other authority and obligation must be relative to that one and subordinate to it. That is not to say that if my affection carried me another way, I would at once lend a hand to it. Will and desires make a law for themselves; actions must receive theirs from public ordinance.

3.1.13 All this way of proceeding of mine is rather out of tune with our customs. It would not be the way to produce great effects, nor to last long: innocence itself could not today negotiate without dissimulation or bargain without lying. So public occupations are by no means my game. What my profession requires of them I supply, in the most private form I can. As a youth I was plunged into them up to my ears, and it was going well; yet I got myself out of them early. Since then I have often avoided getting involved, rarely accepted, never asked, keeping my back turned to ambition—if not exactly like rowers, who

10 Philippides was an Athenian comic poet.

move forward that way, backwards—yet in such a way that for not having embarked on it I owe less to my resolution than to my good luck. For there are paths less hostile to my taste and better suited to my capacity by which, had fortune once called me to public service and to advancement in the world's esteem, I know I would have overridden the reasoning of my reflections to follow it. Those who commonly say, against what I profess, that what I call frankness, simplicity and naturalness in my ways is art and cunning—prudence rather than goodness, contrivance rather than nature, good sense rather than good luck—do me more honor than they take away.

3.1.14 But they certainly make my cunning too cunning. Whoever has followed me and watched me closely, I will grant him the game if he does not admit that there is no rule in their school that could reproduce this natural movement, and keep up an appearance of freedom and license so consistent and so unbending along such twisting and varied paths; and that all their attention and ingenuity could not bring them to it. The way of truth is one and simple; the way of private profit and of convenience in the affairs one has in hand is double, uneven and haphazard. I have often seen these counterfeit and artificial freedoms in use, but most often without success. They tend to smack of Aesop's ass, which, in emulation of the dog, gaily threw itself with both forefeet onto its master's shoulders; but for the same welcome for which the dog received caresses, the poor ass received twice as many blows of the stick. *What best becomes each man is what is most his own.* I do not want to deprive deception of its rank; that would be to misunderstand the world. I know that it has often served profitably, and that it maintains and feeds most of men's occupations. There are lawful vices, just as there are many actions, either good or excusable, that are unlawful.

3.1.15 Justice in itself, natural and universal, is regulated otherwise, and more nobly, than that other special, national justice, which is bound to the needs of our governments: *We possess no solid and exact likeness of true law and genuine justice; we make use*

of shadows and images. So that the sage Dandamis, hearing the lives of Socrates, Pythagoras and Diogenes recounted, judged them great men in every other respect, but too enslaved to reverence for the laws. To give the laws authority and support, true virtue has to give up much of its original vigor; and many vicious actions take place not only with their permission but even at their urging.[11] *Crimes are committed by decrees of the Senate and of the people.* I follow common language, which distinguishes between useful things and honorable ones, so that some natural actions, not only useful but necessary, it calls dishonorable and dirty.[12]

TRAITORS BETRAYED

Rulers who profit from treachery often punish the traitors they have used.

3.1.16 But let us continue with our example of treachery. Two claimants to the kingdom of Thrace had fallen into dispute over their rights. The emperor prevented them from taking up arms; but one of them, under color of arranging a friendly settlement at a meeting, invited his rival to a feast at his house and had him imprisoned and killed. Justice required that the Romans obtain satisfaction for this crime, but the difficulty blocked the ordinary ways. What they could not do lawfully, without war and without risk, they undertook to do by treachery: what they could not do honorably, they did usefully. A certain Pomponius Flaccus proved fit for the job.[13] By false words and assurances he drew the man into his nets, and instead of the honor and favor he had promised him, sent him to Rome bound hand and foot. Here one traitor betrayed another, contrary to the usual practice; for traitors are full of distrust, and it is hard to catch

11 Dandamis was an Indian sage said to have met Alexander the Great.
12 Seneca, Letters.
13 The story is told by Tacitus: Rhescuporis of Thrace murdered his nephew Cotys in AD 19, under Tiberius.

them by their own art—witness the painful experience we have just had of it.

3.1.17 Let whoever wants be Pomponius Flaccus, and there are plenty who will want to. As for me, both my word and my faith are, like the rest of me, parts of this common body; their best use is public service; I take that for granted. But if I were ordered to take charge of the law courts and lawsuits, I would reply, "I know nothing about it"; or the post of leader of sappers, I would say, "I am called to a worthier role." In the same way, if someone wanted to employ me to lie, to betray and to perjure myself for some notable service—not to mention assassinating or poisoning—I would say, "If I have robbed or stolen from anyone, send me to the galleys instead." For a man of honor may speak as the Spartans did when, defeated by Antipater, they were about to come to terms: "You may impose on us burdens as heavy and damaging as you please; but as for shameful and dishonorable ones, you will be wasting your time ordering them." Each of us should have sworn to himself what the kings of Egypt made their judges solemnly swear: that they would not stray from their conscience for any command the kings themselves might give them. In such commissions there is an evident mark of ignominy and condemnation. Whoever gives you one is accusing you, and, if you understand it rightly, gives it to you as a burden and a penalty.[14] As much as public affairs improve through your exploit, so much do your own grow worse: the better you do the job, the worse you do for yourself. And it will be nothing new, nor perhaps without some air of justice, if the very man who put you to work ruins you.

3.1.18 If treachery can be excusable in any case, it is so only when it is used to punish and betray treachery. There are plenty of perfidies that were not only refused but punished by those in whose favor they had been undertaken. Who does not know the sentence Fabricius passed on Pyrrhus's physician?[15]

14 Antipater defeated the Spartans in 331 BC.

15 Fabricius sent back to King Pyrrhus the physician who had offered to poison him (278 BC).

3.1.19 But this is also found: a man has ordered treachery and afterward avenged it harshly on the one he had used for it, rejecting so unbridled an authority and power, and disowning so abject and abandoned a servitude and obedience. Yaropolk, Duke of Russia, suborned a Hungarian gentleman to betray King Bolesław of Poland, either by having him killed or by giving the Russians the means to do him some notable damage. This fellow went about it like a smart man: he devoted himself more than before to the king's service, and won a place on his council and among his most trusted men.[16] With these advantages, and choosing just the right moment when his master was away, he betrayed to the Russians Wiślica, a great and rich city, which they sacked and burned completely, slaughtering not only all its inhabitants, of every sex and age, but a great number of the nobility from the surrounding area, whom he had gathered there for that purpose. Yaropolk had sated his vengeance and his anger, which was not without grounds (for Bolesław had greatly offended him, and by similar conduct), and was glutted with the fruit of this treachery. But when he came to consider its ugliness, bare and by itself, and to look at it with a sound eye no longer clouded by passion, he was seized with such remorse and revulsion that he had his agent's eyes put out and his tongue and private parts cut off.

3.1.20 Antigonus persuaded the soldiers of the Silver Shields to betray to him Eumenes, their commander-in-chief and his adversary. But no sooner had he had Eumenes killed, after they handed him over, than he wished to act himself as the agent of divine justice in punishing so detestable a crime. He consigned them to the governor of the province, with the most express order to destroy them and bring them to a bad end by any means whatsoever. So that of all their great number, not one ever saw the air of Macedonia again. The better he had been

16 Yaropolk, a 12th-century Rus' prince, and Bolesław III of Poland; the city in the next passage is Wiślica.

served by them, the more wicked and punishable he judged the service to have been.[17]

3.1.21 The slave who betrayed the hiding place of his master, P. Sulpicius, was set free, in keeping with the promise of Sulla's proscription; but in keeping with the promise of public reason, once free, he was thrown from the Tarpeian Rock.[18]

3.1.22 And our King Clovis, instead of the golden arms he had promised them, had the three servants of Cannacre hanged after they had betrayed their master to him, as he had suborned them to do. They have such men hanged with the purse of their payment around their necks. Having honored their second and special pledge, they honor the general and first one.[19]

3.1.23 Mehmed II, wanting to get rid of his brother out of jealousy for power, as is the custom of their dynasty, used one of his officers for the purpose, who suffocated the boy by making him swallow a great quantity of water too fast. That done, to expiate the murder, he delivered the murderer into the hands of the dead boy's mother (for they were brothers only on the father's side). In Mehmed's presence she cut open the murderer's belly and, while it was still warm, groped with her hands, tore out his heart and threw it to the dogs to eat. Even to worthless men it is so sweet, once they have drawn the profit from a vicious action, to be able henceforth to stitch onto it, in complete safety, some touch of goodness and justice, as a kind of compensation and correction of conscience. Besides, they regard the agents of such horrible crimes as people who reproach them with those crimes, and they seek by their death to stifle the knowledge and evidence of such dealings.

3.1.24 Now if by chance you are rewarded for it, so as not to cheat the public need of this extreme and desperate remedy, the man who rewards you still holds you, unless he is one himself,

17 The Silver Shields were Alexander's veteran infantry; they handed Eumenes over to Antigonus in 316 BC.

18 Publius Sulpicius Rufus, tribune, was killed in 88 BC; the Tarpeian Rock was the cliff in Rome from which traitors were thrown.

19 Cannacre is Ragnachar, a Frankish king of Cambrai whom Clovis had killed around AD 509, as told by Gregory of Tours.

for an accursed and execrable man. He holds you more a traitor than does the man you betray; for he touches the wickedness of your heart with his own hands, with nothing to deny it, nothing to stand in the way. But he employs you just as desperate men are employed to carry out sentences of death: a post as useful as it is dishonorable. Besides the baseness of such commissions, there is a prostitution of conscience in them. The daughter of Sejanus could not be put to death under a certain form of judgment in Rome, because she was a virgin; so, to let the laws take their course, she was raped by the executioner before he strangled her. Not only his hand but his soul is a slave to public convenience.[20]

3.1.25 When Murad I, to sharpen the punishment of his subjects who had supported his son's parricidal rebellion, ordered that their nearest relatives should lend a hand in the execution, I find it most honorable in some of them to have chosen to be unjustly held guilty of another's parricide rather than serve justice by a parricide of their own. And where, in some small forts taken by storm in my time, I have seen scoundrels agree to hang their friends and comrades to save their own lives, I have held them to be in a worse condition than the men they hanged.[21] They say that Vytautas, Prince of Lithuania, introduced into that nation the rule that a criminal condemned to death should do away with himself with his own hand, finding it strange that a third party, innocent of the offense, should be employed and burdened with a homicide.[22]

WHEN NECESSITY OVERRIDES FAITH

A prince forced to break his word acts from misfortune, not virtue, and should grieve over it.

3.1.26 When an urgent circumstance, some violent and unforeseen event arising from the needs of his state, makes a prince bend

20 Sejanus, Tiberius's chief minister, was executed in AD 31; Tacitus records his young daughter's fate.

his word and his faith, or otherwise throws him out of his ordinary duty, he must attribute that necessity to a stroke of the divine rod. It is not vice, for he has given up his own reason for a more universal and powerful reason; but it is certainly misfortune. So when someone asked me, "What remedy?" "No remedy," I said. "If he was truly racked between these two extremes (*but let him take care not to seek a pretext for perjury*), he had to do it. But if he did it without regret, if it did not grieve him to do it, that is a sign that his conscience is in a bad way." If there were someone of so tender a conscience that no cure seemed to him worth so heavy a remedy, I would not esteem him the less for it. He could not be ruined more excusably and decently. We cannot do everything. Be that as it may, we must often, as with our last anchor, commit the protection of our ship to the guidance of heaven alone. For what more just necessity is he saving himself? What is less possible for him to do than what he can do only at the expense of his faith and his honor—things that perhaps ought to be dearer to him than his own safety, and than the safety of his people? When, with folded arms, he simply calls on God for help, may he not hope that divine goodness will not refuse the favor of its extraordinary hand to a hand that is pure and just? These are dangerous examples, rare and sickly exceptions to our natural rules. We must yield to them, but with great moderation and circumspection. No private advantage is worth our doing this violence to our conscience; the public advantage is, when it is both very evident and very important.

3.1.27 Timoleon fittingly cleared himself of the strangeness of his deed by the tears he shed, remembering that it was with a brother's hand that he had killed the tyrant. And it rightly pricked his conscience that he had been forced to buy the public good at such a cost to the integrity of his conduct. Even the Senate, freed from servitude by his means, dared not decide outright on so lofty a deed, torn between two such weighty and con-

21 Murad I, Ottoman sultan (reigned 1362–1389), put down a revolt by his son Savcı.

22 Vytautas the Great, Grand Duke of Lithuania (died 1430).

trary aspects. But the Syracusans, at that very moment and most opportunely, had sent to ask the Corinthians for their protection and for a leader fit to restore their city to its former dignity and to rid Sicily of several petty tyrants who were oppressing it. The Senate sent Timoleon there, with this novel evasion and declaration: that according to whether he conducted himself well or badly in his charge, their verdict would come down in favor of the liberator of his country or against the murderer of his brother. This fanciful conclusion has some excuse, given the danger of the example and the weight of so ambiguous a deed. And they did well to relieve their judgment of it, or to rest it elsewhere, on outside considerations. Now Timoleon's conduct on this expedition soon made his cause clearer, so worthily and virtuously did he bear himself in every way. And the good fortune that attended him through the hardships he had to overcome in this noble task seemed to have been sent to him by the gods, conspiring and favorable to his justification.

3.1.28 This man's aim is excusable, if any could be. But the profit of increasing the public revenue, which served the Roman Senate as a pretext for the foul decision I am about to relate, is not strong enough to warrant such an injustice. Certain cities had bought back their freedom for money from L. Sulla, by order and with the permission of the Senate. When the matter came up for judgment again, the Senate condemned them to pay tribute as before, and ruled that the money they had spent to buy themselves back would remain lost to them. Civil wars often produce these vile examples: we punish private persons for having believed us when we were different. And the same magistrate makes those who can do nothing about it bear the penalty for his change. The master whips his pupil for being docile, and the guide his blind man for following. A horrible image of justice.

3.1.29 There are rules in philosophy that are both false and soft. The example put to us to make private advantage prevail over a pledged word does not gain enough weight from the circumstance they mix into it. Robbers have captured you; they have

set you free after extracting an oath from you to pay a certain sum. It is wrong to say that a good man will be released from his word without paying, once he is out of their hands. Not at all. What fear once made me will, I am bound to will still without fear. And even if fear forced only my tongue, without my will, I am still bound to make good my word to the last penny. For my part, when my tongue has sometimes thoughtlessly run ahead of my thought, I have still made it a matter of conscience not to disown it. Otherwise, step by step, we will come to abolish all the right a third party gains from our promises. *As if indeed force could be applied to a brave man.* Private interest has the right to excuse us for failing in our promise in this case only: if we have promised something wicked and unjust in itself. For the right of virtue must prevail over the right of our obligation.

EPAMINONDAS AGAIN

Epaminondas shows that even in war some things remain unlawful against an enemy.

3.1.30 I once placed Epaminondas in the first rank of excellent men, and I do not take it back. To what heights did he carry his regard for his own personal duty? He never killed a man he had defeated. Even for that inestimable good, giving his country back its freedom, he scrupled to kill a tyrant or his accomplices without the forms of justice. And he judged a wicked man, however good a citizen he might be, anyone who, among the enemy and in battle, did not spare his friend and his host. There is a soul of rich composition. He wedded to the roughest and most violent of human actions goodness and humanity—indeed the most delicate kind to be found in the school of philosophy. That courage, so great, so swollen and stubborn against pain, death and poverty—was it nature or art that had softened it to the point of such extreme gentleness and kindness of temperament? Terrible with iron and blood, he goes smashing and shattering a nation invincible against anyone but him alone; and in the midst of such a fray he swerves aside when he meets his host

and his friend. Truly, that man was properly in command of war who made it bear the bit of kindness at the moment of its greatest heat, inflamed as it was and all foaming with fury and slaughter. It is a miracle to be able to mix some image of justice into such actions; but it belongs only to the firmness of Epaminondas to be able to mix into them the gentleness and ease of the mildest manners, and pure innocence. One man told the Mamertines that statutes had no currency with armed men; another told the tribune of the people that the time for justice and the time for war were two different things; a third said that the din of arms kept him from hearing the voice of the laws. This man was not even kept from hearing the voice of civility and pure courtesy. Had he not borrowed from his enemies the custom of sacrificing to the Muses when going to war, to temper that martial fury and harshness with their sweetness and gaiety?[23] After so great a teacher, let us not be afraid to hold that there is something unlawful even against enemies; that the common interest must not demand everything of everyone against private interest: *the memory of private right remaining even amid the rupture of public treaties: And no power has the strength / To warrant a friend in doing wrong*; and that not everything is permissible to a good man in the service of his king, or of the general cause and of the laws. *For our country does not take precedence over all other duties, and it is to its own advantage to have citizens who are dutiful toward their parents.* This is a lesson suited to our times.[24] We have no need to harden our hearts with these iron plates; it is enough that our shoulders are armored. It is enough to dip our pens in ink without dipping them in blood. If it is greatness of courage, and the effect of a rare and singular virtue, to despise friendship, private obligations, one's word and kinship for the common good and obedience to the magistrate, truly it is excuse enough for us that this is a greatness that could find no room in the greatness of Epaminondas's courage.

23 The three are Pompey, Julius Caesar and Marius, in anecdotes told by Plutarch; the enemies are the Spartans.

24 The verse lines are from Ovid, Letters from Pontus.

3.1.31 I abhor the frenzied exhortations of that other unruly soul:

While the weapons flash, let no image of filial love,
Nor the sight of your fathers facing you in the opposing line,
Move you: slash with the sword those faces you should revere.

Let us take this pretext of reason away from wicked, bloodthirsty and treacherous natures. Let us leave aside that monstrous justice, which is out of its mind, and hold to the most humane models. How much time and example can do! In one engagement of the civil war against Cinna, a soldier of Pompeius who had unwittingly killed his brother, who was on the other side, killed himself on the spot from shame and grief. And some years later, in another civil war of this same people, a soldier demanded a reward from his captains for having killed his brother.[25]

3.1.32 It is bad reasoning to argue the honor and beauty of an action from its usefulness. It is also a bad conclusion to think that everyone is obliged to it, and that it is honorable for everyone, if it is useful. *All things are not equally fitting for all.* Let us choose the most necessary and most useful institution of human society: that will be marriage. And yet the counsel of the saints finds the opposite course more honorable, and excludes from marriage the most venerable calling among men, just as we put the animals of least value out to stud.[26]

25 Lucan, Pharsalia 7.320–322, from Caesar's speech to his troops before Pharsalus. Both soldiers' stories are told by Tacitus, Histories 3.51; Cinna was opposed by Pompeius Strabo in 87 BC.

26 Propertius, Elegies 3.9.7. The "most venerable calling" is the priesthood, bound to celibacy.

III.2 Of Repentance

Du repentir
Montaigne portrays himself as ever-changing and argues that true repentance must reach the self, not just regret particular acts.

3.2.1 Others form man; I tell of him, and portray a particular one, very badly formed. If I had to fashion him anew, I would truly make him very different from what he is. But by now it is done. Still, the strokes of my portrait do not go astray, though they change and vary. The world is nothing but a perpetual see-saw. All things in it are constantly swaying: the earth, the rocks of the Caucasus, the pyramids of Egypt, both with the common motion and with their own. Constancy itself is nothing but a more languid swaying. I cannot keep my subject still. It goes along muddled and staggering, with a natural drunkenness. I take it at this point, as it is, at the moment I give it my attention. I do not portray being; I portray passing: not a passing from one age to another, or, as the people say, from seven years to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute. I must suit my story to the hour. I may soon change, not only by fortune but also by intention. This is a record of various and changeable occurrences, and of notions that are unsettled and, when it so happens, contradictory, whether because I myself am different or because I grasp my subjects in other circumstances and from other points of view. At any rate, I may well contradict myself now and then; but the truth, as Demades said, I do not contradict. If my soul could find its footing, I would not be trying

myself out; I would be making up my mind. It is always in apprenticeship and on trial.

3.2.2 I set forth a humble life, without luster. It makes no difference. You can attach the whole of moral philosophy to a common and private life just as well as to a life of richer stuff. Every man bears the whole form of the human condition. Authors communicate with the public through some special and extraneous mark. I am the first to do so through my universal being, as Michel de Montaigne, not as a grammarian or a poet or a jurist. If the world complains that I speak too much of myself, I complain that it does not even think of itself. But is it reasonable that I, so private in my way of life, should claim to make myself known to the public? Is it reasonable, too, that I should set before the world, where fashion and art have so much credit and command, products of nature that are crude and simple, and of a nature that is rather feeble at that? Is it not like making a wall without stone, or something of the kind, to build books without learning? The fantasias of music are guided by art; my fancies, by chance. At least I have this much according to the rules: that no man ever treated a subject he understood and knew better than I do the one I have undertaken, and that in this subject I am the most learned man alive. Second, that no one ever went deeper into his material, or picked apart its parts and consequences more distinctly, or reached more exactly and fully the goal he had set for his work. To complete it, I need bring to it only faithfulness, and that is there, the most sincere and pure to be found. I speak the truth, not my fill of it, but as much as I dare to speak. And I dare a little more as I grow old, for it seems that custom grants this age more freedom to babble and more indiscretion in talking about oneself. What I often see happen cannot happen here: that the craftsman and his work contradict each other. Has a man so decent in conversation written so foolish a book? Or have such learned writings come from a man so feeble in conversation? If a man's talk is commonplace and his writings exceptional, that means his ability lies in the place he borrows it from, and not in himself. A learned man is not

learned in everything; but the able man is able in everything, even in being ignorant. Here we go in step and at the same pace, my book and I. Elsewhere one can commend or condemn the work apart from the workman; not here: whoever touches the one touches the other. He who judges it without knowing it will do more wrong to himself than to me; he who has come to know it has satisfied me completely. I shall be happy beyond my deserts if I have only this share of public approval: that I make men of understanding feel that I would have been capable of profiting from learning, if I had had any, and that I deserved better help from my memory.

WHY I RARELY REPENT

True vice brings its own repentance, and a good conscience its own reward.

3.2.3 Let me excuse here what I often say, that I rarely repent and that my conscience is content with itself, not as the conscience of an angel or of a horse, but as the conscience of a man. I always add this refrain, not a refrain of ceremony but of genuine and essential submission: that I speak as one who inquires and does not know, referring the decision purely and simply to the common and lawful beliefs. I do not teach; I tell.

3.2.4 There is no vice truly a vice that does not offend, and that a sound judgment does not condemn. For its ugliness and harmfulness are so evident that perhaps those are right who say it is chiefly produced by stupidity and ignorance, so hard is it to imagine that anyone could know it without hating it. Wickedness sucks up most of its own venom and poisons itself with it. Vice leaves in the soul, like an ulcer in the flesh, a repentance that is always scratching itself and making itself bleed. For reason wipes out other sadnesses and sorrows, but it engenders that of repentance, which is the more grievous because it is born within, just as the cold and heat of fevers are sharper than those that come from outside. I count as vices (but each according to its measure) not only those that reason and nature condemn,

but also those that the opinion of men has forged, even false and mistaken opinion, if laws and usage give it authority.

3.2.5 Likewise, there is no goodness that does not gladden a wellborn nature. There is indeed a certain self-congratulation in doing well that gladdens us within, and a noble pride that goes with a good conscience. A boldly vicious soul may perhaps arm itself with a sense of security; but this contentment and satisfaction it cannot supply for itself. It is no slight pleasure to feel oneself preserved from the contagion of so corrupt an age, and to say to oneself: "Whoever could see right into my soul would still not find me guilty of anyone's affliction or ruin, or of vengeance or envy, or of any public offense against the laws, or of innovation and disturbance, or of breaking my word. And whatever the license of the times allowed and taught everyone, I have never laid hands on the goods or the purse of any Frenchman, and have lived on my own purse alone, in war as in peace. Nor have I used anyone's labor without paying for it." These testimonies of conscience give pleasure; and this natural rejoicing is a great boon to us, and the only payment that never fails us.

3.2.6 To base the reward of virtuous actions on the approval of others is to choose too uncertain and murky a foundation, especially in a corrupt and ignorant age like this one: the good opinion of the people is an insult. Whom do you trust to see what is praiseworthy? God keep me from being a good man according to the description I see everyone giving of himself every day, to his own honor. *What were vices are now morals.* Some of my friends have at times undertaken to take me to task and lecture me frankly, either of their own accord or at my invitation, as a service which, to a well-made soul, surpasses all the services of friendship, not only in usefulness but in sweetness too.[1] I have always welcomed it with the most open arms of courtesy and gratitude. But to speak of it now in all conscience, I have often found such false measure in their reproaches and their praises that I would hardly have erred in erring rather than in doing well their way. We especially, who live a private life that is on

1 Seneca, Letters 39.6.

show only to ourselves, must have set up a pattern within us against which to test our actions, and by which we now make much of ourselves, now punish ourselves. I have my own laws and my own court to judge me, and I turn to them more than anywhere else. I do restrain my actions according to others, but I extend them only according to myself. No one but you knows whether you are cowardly and cruel, or loyal and devout. Others do not see you; they guess at you by uncertain conjectures; they see not so much your nature as your art. Therefore do not hold to their verdict; hold to your own. *You must use your own judgment. Great is the weight of one's own conscience in matters of virtue and vice: take it away, and everything collapses.*[2]

3.2.7 But the saying that repentance follows close upon sin does not seem to concern sin in its full regalia, sin that lodges in us as in its own home. We can disown and retract the vices that take us by surprise and toward which our passions sweep us. But those that, through long habit, are rooted and anchored in a strong and vigorous will are not open to contradiction. Repentance is nothing but a retraction of our will and a contradiction of our notions, and it leads us about in every direction. It makes this man disown his past virtue and continence: *Why did I not have as a boy the mind I have today? / Or why, with this mind, do my smooth cheeks not come back?*[3]

ORDER AT HOME

The real test of a life is its private, ordinary conduct, not its public show.

3.2.8 It is an exceptional life that keeps itself in order even in private. Anyone can take part in the mountebank show and play a decent character on the stage. But to be well-ordered within, in one's own breast, where everything is permitted to us and everything is hidden: that is the point. The next step is to be so

2 Both sentences are from Cicero; the second is from On the Nature of the Gods 3.35.

3 Horace, Odes 4.10.7–8.

in one's own house, in one's ordinary actions, for which we need give account to no one, where there is no studied effort, no artifice. And so Bias, describing an excellent household, says it is one whose master is the same within, by himself, as he is outside, through fear of the law and of what people say. And it was a worthy remark of Julius Drusus to the workmen who offered, for three thousand crowns, to fix his house so that his neighbors would no longer have the view into it they had: "I will give you six thousand," he said, "and make it so that everyone can see in from every side." Agesilaus' practice is recorded to his honor: when traveling he lodged in temples, so that the people, and the gods themselves, might see into his private actions. Many a man has seemed a marvel to the world in whom his wife and his valet saw nothing even remarkable. Few men have been admired by their own households. No one has been a prophet, not only in his own house but in his own country, says the experience of history.[4] The same holds in things of no account, and in this lowly example one can see the image of the great. In my region of Gascony, people think it a joke to see me in print. The farther the knowledge of me travels from my lair, the more I am worth. In Guyenne I pay the printers; elsewhere they pay me. This is what those people count on who hide themselves while they are alive and present, in order to win credit once they are dead and absent. I would rather have less of it. I throw myself upon the world only for the share I get out of it. Once I am out of it, we are quits. The people escort that man back to his door in awe after some public act. He leaves this role behind with his robe, and falls back all the lower for having climbed so high. Within, in his own house, everything is disorderly and base. Even if there were order there, it would take a keen and discriminating judgment to perceive it in these lowly and private actions. Besides, order is a dull and somber virtue. To take a breach, conduct an embassy, govern a people: these are brilliant actions. To scold, laugh, sell, pay, love, hate, and deal gently and justly with one's

4 Marcus Livius Drusus, Roman tribune (91 BC); both anecdotes are told by Plutarch.

household and with oneself, not to let oneself go, not to belie oneself: that is rarer, more difficult, and less noticed. Retired lives therefore carry duties, whatever people say, as harsh and strenuous as other lives do, or more so. And private persons, says Aristotle, serve virtue with more difficulty and in a higher way than those in office. We prepare ourselves for eminent occasions more for glory than for conscience. The shortest way to reach glory would be to do for conscience what we do for glory. And the virtue of Alexander seems to me to show much less vigor on its stage than that of Socrates in his lowly and obscure activity. I can easily imagine Socrates in Alexander's place; Alexander in Socrates', I cannot. Ask the one what he knows how to do, and he will answer, "Conquer the world"; ask the other, and he will say, "Lead human life in conformity with its natural condition": a far more general, weightier, and more legitimate knowledge.

3.2.9 The worth of the soul consists not in going high, but in going in good order. Its greatness is exercised not in greatness but in the middle range. Those who judge and probe us within make little account of the luster of our public actions, and see that these are only jets and spurts of clear water springing from a bed that is otherwise muddy and heavy. In the same way, those who judge us by this fine outward show draw the same conclusion about our inner constitution, and cannot couple faculties that are ordinary and like their own with those other faculties that astonish them, so far beyond their range of sight. So it is that we give demons wild shapes. And who does not give Tamburlaine raised eyebrows, flaring nostrils, a frightful face, and an enormous stature, as enormous as the image he has formed of him from the fame of his name? If someone had shown me Erasmus in former days, it would have been hard for me not to take for adages and apophthegms everything he said to his valet and his landlady. We imagine much more fittingly a craftsman on his privy or on his wife than a great presiding judge, venerable for his bearing and ability. It seems to us that from those lofty thrones they do not stoop so low as to live. Just as vicious

souls are often incited to do good by some outside impulse, so are virtuous ones to do evil.[5] So we must judge them in their settled state, when they are at home, if ever they are; or at least when they are nearest to repose and in their natural posture.

3.2.10 Natural inclinations are helped and strengthened by education, but they are hardly ever changed or overcome. A thousand natures in my time have broken away toward virtue or toward vice in spite of a contrary training. *So when wild beasts, grown unused to the forests and shut in a cage,*

Have become tame, and laid aside their threatening looks,
And learned to put up with man, if a little hot blood
Comes to their burning mouths, their rage and fury return,
And their jaws, reminded by the taste of blood, swell;
Their anger boils, and barely spares their trembling keeper.

These original qualities are not uprooted; they are covered over and hidden. Latin is almost my native tongue; I understand it better than French. But for forty years I have not used it at all for speaking, and hardly at all for writing.[6]

And yet in extreme and sudden emotions, which I have fallen into two or three times in my life (one of them when I saw my father, in perfect health, fall back on me in a faint), the first words I have poured out from the depths of my entrails have always been Latin: Nature welling up and expressing itself by force, against so long a habit. And this example is told of many others.

3.2.11 Those who in my time have tried to correct the world's morals by new opinions reform the vices of appearance; those of essence they leave alone, if they do not increase them. And their increase is to be feared. People readily rest from all other good-doing on these external reforms, which cost less and win

5 Erasmus (c. 1466–1536) compiled famous collections of Adages and Apophthegms.

6 Lucan, Pharsalia 4.237–242. Montaigne's father had him taught Latin as his first language (see I.26).

more credit; and in this way they cheaply pay off the other vices, which are natural, consubstantial and internal. Just look a little at what our experience shows. There is no one who, if he listens to himself, does not discover in himself a form of his own, a ruling form, that struggles against education and against the storm of the passions that oppose it. As for me, I hardly feel myself shaken by jolts. I find myself almost always in my place, as heavy and weighty bodies do. If I am not at home, I am always very near it. My excesses do not carry me very far; there is nothing extreme or strange about them. And besides, I have sound and vigorous recoveries.

3.2.12 The true condemnation, and one that applies to the common run of our men, is that even their retreat from vice is full of corruption and filth: their idea of amendment is smudged, their penance diseased and almost as much at fault as their sin. Some, either because they are glued to vice by a natural attachment or through long habit, no longer see its ugliness. For others, of whose regiment I am, vice weighs heavily, but they counterbalance it with pleasure or some other consideration, and put up with it and lend themselves to it at a certain price, viciously, however, and basely. Yet one could perhaps imagine so vast a disproportion of measure that pleasure might justly excuse the sin, as we say of usefulness. And not only if the pleasure were incidental and separate from the sin, as in theft, but in the very exercise of it, as in intercourse with women, where the urge is violent and, they say, sometimes invincible. On the estate of a kinsman of mine, the other day when I was in Armagnac, I saw a peasant whom everyone nicknames the Thief. This is how he told the story of his life. Born a beggar, and finding that by earning his bread with the work of his hands he would never manage to arm himself well enough against want, he decided to become a thief. He had spent his whole youth at this trade in safety, thanks to his bodily strength. For he harvested grain and grapes from other people's lands, but far away and in such huge loads that it was unimaginable that one man could have carried off so much on his shoulders in one night. And besides, he took care to

even out and spread the damage he did, so that the burden was less unbearable for each individual. Now, in his old age, he finds himself rich for a man of his station, thanks to this traffic, which he openly confesses. And to make his peace with God over his acquisitions, he says he is busy every day making amends, by good deeds, to the heirs of those he robbed; and if he does not finish (for he cannot provide for it all at once), he will charge his own heirs with it, according to the knowledge, which he alone has, of the harm he did to each. By this description, whether true or false, this man regards theft as a dishonorable action and hates it, but less than poverty. He repents of it quite simply; but insofar as it was counterbalanced and compensated in this way, he does not repent of it. That is not the habit which incorporates us into vice and conforms even our understanding to it; nor is it that impetuous wind which keeps troubling and blinding our soul in gusts, and hurls us for the moment, judgment and all, into the power of vice.

ALL OF A PIECE

Montaigne cannot repent of what he is, only regret it; he blames fortune, not his choices.

3.2.13 Usually I do wholly what I do, and move all in one piece. I have hardly any impulse that hides and steals away from my reason, and that is not guided, more or less, by the consent of all my parts, without division, without internal sedition. My judgment takes the whole blame or the whole praise for it; and the blame it once has, it always has, for almost from its birth it has been one: the same inclination, the same road, the same strength. And on general questions, from childhood I settled at the point where I was to hold. There are impetuous, prompt and sudden sins; let us leave them aside. But as for those other sins, so many times repeated, deliberated and pondered, whether sins of temperament or sins of profession and calling, I cannot conceive that they can be planted so long in the same heart without the reason and conscience of their possessor constantly

willing it and understanding it so. And the repentance which he boasts comes to him at a certain prescribed moment is a little hard for me to imagine and picture. I do not follow the school of Pythagoras, that men take on a new soul when they approach the images of the gods to receive their oracles. Unless he meant just this: that it must indeed be a foreign soul, new and lent for the occasion, since ours shows so little sign of a purification and cleanness worthy of that office.

3.2.14 They do just the opposite of the Stoic precepts, which do bid us correct the imperfections and vices we recognize in ourselves, but forbid us to disturb the repose of our soul over them. These people make us believe that they feel great displeasure and remorse within; but of amendment and correction, or even of a pause, they show us nothing. Yet it is no cure if one does not get rid of the disease. If repentance were weighed in the scale, it would outweigh the sin. I find no quality so easy to counterfeit as devoutness, if one does not make one's morals and life conform to it. Its essence is abstruse and hidden; its appearances are easy and showy.

3.2.15 As for me, I may desire in general to be other than I am; I may condemn and dislike my form as a whole, and pray God for my entire reformation and for pardon for my natural weakness. But this, it seems to me, I ought not to call repentance, any more than my displeasure at being neither an angel nor Cato. My actions are regulated by and conform to what I am and to my condition. I cannot do better. And repentance does not properly concern things that are not in our power; regret certainly does. I imagine countless natures loftier and better ordered than mine. Yet I do not improve my faculties by doing so, just as neither my arm nor my mind becomes more vigorous by imagining another that is. If imagining and desiring a nobler way of acting than ours produced repentance for ours, we would have to repent of our most innocent operations, since we judge well enough that in a more excellent nature they would have been carried out with greater perfection and dignity; and we would want to do the same. When I consult my old age about the conduct of my

youth, I find that I generally conducted myself in an orderly way, according to my own lights. That is all my resistance can do. I do not flatter myself: in similar circumstances, I would always be the same. It is not a smudge; it is rather a universal dye that stains me. I know no repentance that is superficial, middling and ceremonial. It must touch me in every part before I call it that, and it must pinch my entrails and afflict them as deeply as God sees me, and as universally.

3.2.16 As for business, many good opportunities have slipped from me for want of successful handling; yet my decisions chose well, according to the circumstances presented to them. Their way is always to take the easiest and safest course. I find that in my past deliberations I have proceeded wisely, according to my rule, given the state of the matter put before me; and I would do the same a thousand years from now on similar occasions. I do not look at what the matter is now, but at what it was when I was deliberating on it. The force of all counsel lies in its time: occasions and matters roll and change ceaselessly. I have fallen into some gross and important errors in my life, not for lack of good judgment but for lack of good luck. There are secret and unguessable parts in the matters we handle, especially in the nature of men: silent qualities, without outward show, sometimes unknown even to their possessor, which are brought out and awakened by unforeseen occasions. If my prudence could not see into them and foretell them, I bear it no ill will: its charge is confined within its limits. If the outcome beats me, and favors the course I rejected, there is no help for it. I do not blame myself; I blame my fortune, not my work. That is not called repentance.

3.2.17 Phocion had given the Athenians some advice which was not followed. When the affair nevertheless turned out prosperously, contrary to his opinion, someone said to him: “Well, Phocion, are you pleased that things are going so well?” “I am indeed pleased,” he said, “that this has happened, but I do not repent of having advised that.” When my friends come to me for advice, I give it freely and clearly, without stopping, as almost

everyone does, to think that since the matter is risky it may turn out contrary to my view, so that they may reproach me for my advice. I do not care about that. For they will be wrong, and I could not refuse them that service.[7]

3.2.18 I have hardly anyone but myself to blame for my faults or misfortunes. For in fact I rarely use other people's advice, except out of ceremonious courtesy, save where I need expert instruction or knowledge of the facts. But in matters where I have only my judgment to apply, other people's reasons can serve to support me, but hardly to turn me aside. I listen to them all favorably and courteously; but, as far as I can remember, I have never yet believed any but my own. To my mind they are mere flies and motes that set my will wandering. I set little value on my opinions, but I set just as little on those of others. Fortune pays me as I deserve. If I do not take advice, I give just as little. I am seldom asked for it, and even more seldom believed; and I know of no public or private undertaking that my advice has set right and brought back on course. Even those whom fortune had in some way bound to it have more willingly let themselves be guided by any other brain than mine. Being a man quite as jealous of the rights of my repose as of the rights of my authority, I prefer it so. In leaving me alone, people act according to my profession, which is to settle and contain myself wholly within myself. It is a pleasure to me to have no stake in other people's affairs and to be free from answering for them.

3.2.19 In all affairs, once they are past, however they turned out, I feel little regret. For this thought puts me out of pain: that they were bound to pass that way. There they are, in the great course of the universe and in the chain of Stoic causes. Your fancy cannot, by wishing and imagining, move a single point of them without the whole order of things overturning both past and future.

7 The anecdote is from Plutarch.

THE FALSE REPENTANCE OF AGE

Montaigne refuses to credit old age with virtue for the vices it can no longer commit.

3.2.20 For the rest, I hate that incidental repentance that age brings. The man who said long ago that he was obliged to the years for having rid him of sensual pleasure held a different opinion from mine. I shall never be grateful to impotence for any good it may do me. *Nor will Providence ever seem so hostile to its own work that weakness should be counted among the best things.* Our appetites are few in old age; a profound satiety seizes us after the act. In this I see nothing of conscience. Peevishness and weakness stamp on us a slack and rheumy virtue. We must not let ourselves be carried away so entirely by natural changes as to let them debase our judgment.[8] Youth and pleasure did not once make me fail to recognize the face of vice in pleasure; nor does the distaste that the years bring me now make me fail to recognize the face of pleasure in vice. Now that I am no longer in it, I judge it as if I were. Shaking my reason briskly and attentively, I find that it is the very same as I had in my more licentious years, except perhaps that it has grown weaker and worse with age. And I find that if it refuses to plunge me into this pleasure, it does so out of concern for my bodily health; for the sake of spiritual health it would do no more than it did before. I do not think it any braver for seeing it out of the fight. My temptations are so broken and deadened that they are not worth its opposing them. Merely by holding out my hands before me, I conjure them away. Let that old lust be set before it again, and I fear it would have less strength to withstand it than it once had. I do not see it judge anything on its own that it did not judge then, nor see any new light in it. Therefore, if there is convalescence, it is a blighted convalescence. A miserable kind of remedy, to owe one's health to sickness! It is not for our mis-

8 The ancient was Sophocles, as reported in Plato's Republic, Book 1. The Latin is from Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory 5.12.

fortune to perform this office; it is for the good fortune of our judgment. Offenses and afflictions can make me do nothing but curse them. That is for people who wake up only under the whip. My reason runs a freer course in prosperity. It is much more distracted and taken up with digesting ills than pleasures. I see much more clearly in fair weather. Health admonishes me more cheerfully, and therefore more usefully, than sickness. I advanced as far as I could toward my reform and regulation while I had health to enjoy it. I would be ashamed and vexed if the misery and misfortune of my old age were to be preferred to my good years, healthy, wakeful and vigorous; and if people were to value me not for what I have been but for what I have ceased to be.

3.2.21 In my opinion it is living happily, not, as Antisthenes said, dying happily, that makes human happiness. I have not set out to attach, monstrously, the tail of a philosopher to the head and body of a profligate; nor have I intended this sorry remnant to disown and belie the finest, fullest and longest part of my life. I want to present myself and be seen everywhere in the same way. If I had to live again, I would live as I have lived. I neither lament the past nor fear the future; and unless I deceive myself, things have gone much the same within as without. It is one of the chief debts I owe my fortune that the course of my bodily life has run each thing in its season. I have seen its grass, its flowers and its fruit; and now I see it drying up. Happily, since it is naturally. I bear the ills I have much more gently because they come in their proper time, and because they also make me remember more fondly the long happiness of my past life. Likewise my wisdom may well be of the same size in both periods; but it was far more accomplished and more graceful then, green, gay and natural, than it is now, broken, grumbling and laborious. I therefore renounce these chance and painful reformations. God must touch our heart. Our conscience must amend of itself, through the strengthening of our reason, not through the weakening of our appetites. Pleasure is not in itself pale or discolored because it is seen by bleary and clouded eyes.

3.2.22 We should love temperance for its own sake, and out of respect for God who has ordained it for us, and chastity too. What catarrhs lend us, and what I owe to the kindness of my colic, is neither chastity nor temperance. One cannot boast of despising and fighting pleasure if one does not see it, if one does not know it, its graces, its powers, and its most alluring beauty. I know both the one and the other; it is for me to say. But it seems to me that in old age our souls are subject to more troublesome ailments and imperfections than in youth. I said so when I was young, and then people threw my beardless chin in my face. I say it again now that my gray hair gives me credit. We call wisdom the crabbedness of our temperament, our distaste for present things. But in truth we do not so much give up our vices as change them, and, in my opinion, for the worse. Besides a foolish and decrepit pride, tedious chatter, prickly and unsociable moods, superstition, and a ridiculous concern for riches when we have lost the use of them, I find more envy, injustice and malice in it. Old age attaches more wrinkles to our minds than to our faces; and one sees no souls, or very rare ones, that do not smell sour and musty as they grow old. Man moves all of a piece toward his growth and toward his decline. Considering the wisdom of Socrates and several circumstances of his condemnation, I would venture to believe that he lent himself to it to some extent, by deliberate collusion, being so close, at seventy years of age, to suffering the numbing of the rich movements of his mind and the dimming of its accustomed brightness. What metamorphoses I see it work every day in many of my acquaintances! It is a powerful disease, and one that creeps on naturally and imperceptibly. It takes a great store of study and great precaution to avoid the imperfections it loads us with, or at least to slow their progress. I feel that, despite all my entrenchments, it is gaining on me foot by foot. I hold out as long as I can; but I do not know where in the end it will lead even me. At all events, I am content that people should know from where I shall have fallen.

III.3 Of Three Kinds of Company

De trois commerces
Montaigne weighs the three kinds of company he enjoys—friends, women, and books—and describes the library in his tower.

3.3.1 We should not rivet ourselves so firmly to our temperaments and dispositions. Our chief ability is knowing how to apply ourselves to various uses. To stay tied and bound by necessity to a single course is to exist, but it is not to live. The finest souls are those that have the most variety and suppleness. Here is an honorable testimony about old Cato: *His mind was so versatile, so equally suited to everything, that whatever he was doing you would have said he had been born for that alone.* If it were up to me to train myself in my own way, there is no way of being so good that I would want to be fixed in it and unable to get free of it. Life is an uneven, irregular and multiform motion.[1] To follow oneself incessantly is not to be a friend to oneself, still less a master; it is to be a slave to oneself. So is being so caught by one's inclinations that one cannot stray from them or bend them. I say this now because I cannot easily rid myself of the importunity of my mind. It usually cannot amuse itself except where it gets entangled, nor apply itself except tense and whole. However slight a subject you give it, it readily enlarges and stretches it until it has to work at it with all its strength. For this reason its idleness is a painful occupation for me, and one that harms my health. Most minds need outside matter to rouse and

1 Livy, History of Rome 39.40, on Cato the Censor.

exercise them; mine needs it rather to settle and rest. *The vices of idleness must be shaken off by activity.* For its most laborious and principal study is to study itself. Books, for it, are among the occupations that lure it away from that study. At the first thoughts that come to it, it bestirs itself and proves its vigor in every direction. It exercises its handling now toward force, now toward order and grace; it marshals, moderates and strengthens itself. It has the means to awaken its faculties by itself. Nature has given it, as to all, enough matter of its own for its use, and enough subjects of its own on which to invent and judge.[2]

3.3.2 Meditation is a powerful and full study for anyone who knows how to probe himself and put himself vigorously to work. I would rather forge my mind than furnish it. There is no occupation either weaker or stronger than entertaining one's own thoughts, depending on what the mind is. The greatest minds make it their vocation, *for whom to live is to think*. And so nature has favored it with this privilege: there is nothing we can do for so long, and no action we devote ourselves to more habitually and easily. It is the work of the gods, says Aristotle, and from it is born both their blessedness and ours.[3]

3.3.3 Reading serves me especially to awaken my reasoning through various objects, to occupy my judgment, not my memory. So few conversations hold me if they lack vigor and force. It is true that charm and beauty fill and occupy me as much as weight and depth, or more. And since I doze in every other kind of conversation and lend it only the bark of my attention, it often happens to me, in that sort of feeble, slack talk, talk for form's sake, that I say and answer dreamy nonsense and silly things, unworthy of a child, and ridiculous. Or else I keep obstinately silent, which is still more inept and uncivil. I have a dreamy way that withdraws me into myself; and on the other hand a dense and childish ignorance of many ordinary things. Thanks to these two qualities I have earned the distinction that

2 Seneca, Letters 56.

3 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations 5.38; Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 10.8.

five or six stories can truthfully be told about me as foolish as about anyone at all.

3.3.4 Now, to continue with my subject, this difficult temperament makes me fastidious in dealing with men—I have to pick them out with great care—and makes me unfit for ordinary activities. We live and deal with the people. If their conversation bores us, if we disdain to adapt ourselves to low and common souls—and the low and common are often as well ordered as the most refined, and all wisdom is insipid that does not accommodate itself to common unwisdom—then we must no longer meddle in our own affairs or in other people's; for both public and private affairs are worked out with those people. The least strained and most natural motions of our soul are the finest; the best occupations are the least forced. My God, what a good service wisdom does for those whose desires it brings into line with their power! There is no more useful knowledge. "As far as one can": that was Socrates' refrain and favorite saying. A saying of great substance: we must direct and fix our desires on the easiest and nearest things. Is it not a foolish disposition in me to be at odds with a thousand people to whom my fortune joins me, and whom I cannot do without, in order to cling to one or two who are outside my company—or rather to a fanciful desire for something I cannot recover? My gentle ways, enemies of all sourness and harshness, may easily have spared me envy and enmity. No man ever gave more reason—I do not say to be loved, but not to be hated. But the coldness of my manner has rightly robbed me of the goodwill of many, who may be excused for interpreting it in another, worse sense.

3.3.5 I am very capable of acquiring and keeping rare and exquisite friendships. I seize with such hunger on the acquaintances that suit my taste, I put myself forward and throw myself into them so avidly, that I rarely fail to attach myself and to make an impression where I strike; I have often had happy proof of it. In ordinary friendships I am somewhat barren and cold, for my going is not natural unless it is under full sail. Besides, my fortune trained me from youth for a single, perfect friend-

ship and gave me a taste for it. That has in truth somewhat put me off the others, and impressed too deeply on my mind that friendship is a companionable creature, not a herd animal, as that ancient said.[4] Also, I find it naturally hard to communicate myself by halves and with reservations, with that servile and suspicious prudence prescribed for us in the dealings of these numerous and imperfect friendships. And it is prescribed especially in these times, when one cannot speak of the world except dangerously or falsely.

3.3.6 And yet I see clearly that anyone who, like me, has for his aim the comforts of his life—I mean its essential comforts—should flee these difficulties and this fastidiousness of temperament like the plague. I would praise a soul with several stories, one that knows how both to tighten and to unbend itself. It should be at ease wherever its fortune carries it. It should be able to chat with its neighbor about his building, his hunting and his quarrel, and to converse with pleasure with a carpenter and a gardener. I envy those who know how to be at ease with the least of their retinue and to make conversation within their own household.

4 His friendship with La Boétie (I.28). The ancient is Plutarch, On Having Many Friends.

> And I do not like Plato's advice always to speak to one's servants in a masterly tone, without banter, without familiarity, whether to the men or the women. For, apart from my own reason, it is inhuman and unjust to make so much of this paltry prerogative of fortune. And the governments that tolerate less disparity between servants and masters seem to me the most equitable. Others strive to launch their minds aloft and hoist them up; I, to lower mine and lay it down. It goes wrong only when it stretches. *You tell of the line of Aeacus*
> *and the wars fought beneath sacred Troy;*
> *but at what price we may buy a jar of Chian,*
> *who will warm the water over the fire,*
> *who will lend a house, and at what hour*
> *I shall escape the Pelignian cold, you do not say.*[5]

3.3.7 Spartan valor needed moderation, and the soft, gracious sound of flutes to soothe it in war, for fear it should throw itself into rashness and fury; whereas all other nations usually employ shrill, strong sounds and voices that stir the soldiers' courage and inflame it to excess. In the same way, it seems to me, contrary to the usual pattern, that in the use of our mind we mostly need lead more than wings, coolness and rest more than ardor and agitation. Above all, to my taste, it is playing the fool to play the expert among those who are not: to speak always under strain, *to talk on the point of a fork*. You must come down to the level of those you are with, and sometimes affect ignorance. Put force and subtlety aside; in ordinary use it is enough to keep order. For the rest, crawl along the ground, if they wish.[6]

5 Plato, Laws 6; Horace, Odes 3.19.
6 An Italian expression for affected, overly precise speech.

3.3.8 Learned men readily stumble on this stone: they always parade their mastery and scatter their books everywhere. In these times they have poured them so heavily into the studies and ears of the ladies that if the ladies have not retained the substance, at least they have the look of it. On every sort of topic and subject, however low and popular, they use a new and learned way of speaking and writing. *In this language they voice their fears, their anger, joys, cares;*
in this they pour out all their soul's secrets. What more?
They make love learnedly. And they cite Plato and Saint Thomas on matters for which the first person they met would serve just as well as a witness.[7]

The learning that could not reach their souls has stayed on their tongues. If well-born women will believe me, they will be content to make the most of their own natural riches. They hide and cover their beauties under foreign beauties. It is great simplicity to smother one's own brightness in order to shine with borrowed light. They are buried and entombed under the art of being *all out of a box*. That is because they do not know themselves well enough. The world has nothing more beautiful; it is for them to do honor to the arts and to paint the paint. What do they need but to live loved and honored? For that they have and know all too much. They need only awaken a little and rekindle the faculties that are in them.[8] When I see them taken up with rhetoric, judicial astrology, logic and similar trumpery, so vain and useless for their needs, I begin to fear that the men who advise them to it do so in order to have the right to rule over them under that pretext. For what other excuse could I find for them? Enough that they can, without us, set the grace of their eyes to gaiety, to severity and to sweetness. They can season a "no" with harshness, with doubt, and with favor. They need no interpreter for the speeches made to court them. With this

7 Juvenal, Satires 6, where the language in question is Greek.
8 Seneca, Letters 115, said of fops groomed as if taken straight out of a box.

knowledge they command imperiously and rule over the teachers and the school.

3.3.9 If, however, it vexes them to yield to us in anything at all, and out of curiosity they want a share in books, poetry is an amusement suited to their need. It is a playful and subtle art, disguised, talkative, all pleasure, all show, like them. They will also draw various benefits from history. In philosophy, from the part that serves life, they will take the reasonings that train them to judge our temperaments and characters and to defend themselves against our betrayals. These will teach them to regulate the rashness of their own desires, to manage their freedom, to prolong the pleasures of life, and to bear with humanity a suitor's inconstancy, a husband's rudeness, the burden of years and wrinkles, and the like. That, at most, is the share in learning I would assign them.

3.3.10 There are some particular natures, retiring and inward. My essential form is suited to communication and to bringing forth: I am all outward and in view, born for society and friendship. The solitude that I love and preach is chiefly nothing but bringing my affections and thoughts back to myself. It means restraining and narrowing not my steps but my desires and cares, resigning concern for outside things, and shunning servitude and obligation like death—and not so much the crowd of men as the crowd of affairs. Solitude of place, to tell the truth, rather extends me and enlarges me outward: I throw myself into affairs of state and into the universe more willingly when I am alone. At the Louvre and in the crowd, I draw in and shrink into my skin. The crowd pushes me back into myself. And I never entertain myself so foolishly, so licentiously and privately, as in places that call for respect and ceremonious prudence. It is not our follies that make me laugh; it is our wisdoms. By constitution I am no enemy to the bustle of courts. I have spent part of my life there, and I am used to carrying myself cheerfully in great gatherings, provided it is at intervals and when I choose. But that softness of judgment I speak of ties me by force to solitude. Even at home, in the midst of a populous household

and one of the most frequented of houses, I see people enough, but rarely those with whom I like to converse. And there I reserve, both for myself and for others, an unusual freedom. There is a truce there from ceremony, from attendance and escorting, and other such painful rules of our courtesy (oh, what a servile and tiresome custom!). Everyone conducts himself as he pleases; whoever wishes entertains his own thoughts. I keep silent, dreamy and shut up in myself, without offense to my guests.

MEN OF WORTH

The first kind of company: conversation with able, honorable men.

3.3.11 The men whose society and familiarity I seek are those called honorable and capable men; the image of these spoils my taste for the others. Rightly considered, it is the rarest of our types, and a type owed chiefly to nature. The aim of this association is simply intimacy, company and conversation: the exercise of souls, with no other fruit. In our talk all subjects are alike to me. I do not care whether there is weight or depth in it; grace and pertinence are always there. Everything is tinged with a mature and steady judgment, and mingled with goodness, frankness, gaiety and friendship. It is not only on the subject of entails, or in the affairs of kings, that our mind shows its beauty and strength; it shows them just as much in private conversations. I know my people even by their silence and their smiles, and perhaps discover them better at table than in council. Hippomachus rightly said that he could recognize good wrestlers just by seeing them walk down a street. If learning cares to join our talk, it will not be refused—not magisterial, imperious and tiresome, as it usually is, but itself deferential and docile. We seek there only to pass the time. When it is time to be instructed and preached to, we will go and find it on its throne.[9] Let it come down to our level for this once, if it pleases. For useful and desirable as it is, I presume that even at need we could do entirely

9 Hippomachus was a Greek wrestling master; the remark is in Plutarch.

without it and achieve our purpose without it. A well-born soul, practiced in dealing with men, makes itself thoroughly agreeable on its own. Art is nothing but the record and register of the productions of such souls.

WOMEN

The second kind: the company of beautiful and honorable women, enjoyed with care.

3.3.12 Another sweet association for me is that of beautiful and decent women: *for we too have learned eyes.* If the soul has not as much to enjoy here as in the first, the bodily senses, which have a greater share in this one, bring it to a proportion close to the other, though in my view not equal. But it is an association in which one must stay a little on one's guard, especially those in whom the body has great power, as in me. I scalded myself at it in my youth, and suffered all the frenzies that the poets say befall those who abandon themselves to it without order and without judgment. It is true that this whipping has since served me as a lesson. *Whoever of the Argive fleet has escaped Caphareus / always turns his sails away from Euboean waters.* It is folly to fasten all one's thoughts on it and to engage in it with a furious and indiscreet passion. But on the other hand, to mix in it without love and without commitment of the will, like actors, playing a common part of one's age and of custom, putting nothing of one's own into it but words—that is indeed providing for one's safety, but in a very cowardly way, like a man who would abandon his honor, his profit or his pleasure for fear of danger. For it is certain that those who go in for such a practice can expect from it no fruit that touches or satisfies a fine soul.[10] One must have truly desired what one wants truly to take pleasure in enjoying. I mean this even if fortune should unjustly favor their mask. That often happens, because there is no woman, however ill-favored, who does not think herself quite lovable, and who

10 Ovid, Tristia 1.1. Caphareus, a cape of Euboea, is where the Greek fleet was wrecked on its return from Troy.

does not commend herself by her age, or her hair, or her way of moving (for there are no more women universally ugly than universally beautiful). And the Brahmin girls who lack other recommendation go into the square, the people having been assembled for the purpose by public crier, and display their matrimonial parts, to see whether by that at least they are not worth a husband. Consequently there is not one who does not easily let herself be persuaded by the first vow made to her to serve her. Now from this common and ordinary treachery of the men of today, there must follow what experience already shows us. Either women rally and fall back on themselves, or on one another, to avoid us; or else they too, on their side, fall in with the example we give them. They play their part in the farce and lend themselves to this transaction without passion, without care and without love: *in thrall neither to their own feelings nor to another's.* They reckon, following the argument of Lysias in Plato, that they can give themselves to us profitably and conveniently, all the more as we love them less.[11] It will be as with comedies: the audience will get as much pleasure from them as the actors, or more. For my part, I no more know Venus without Cupid than motherhood without offspring. They are things that lend and owe each other their essence. So this cheating rebounds on the one who practices it: it costs him little, but he gains nothing worth having either. Those who made Venus a goddess took into account that her principal beauty was incorporeal and spiritual. But the beauty these people seek is not merely human, nor even animal: the beasts do not want it so gross and earthy. We see that imagination and desire often heat and stir the beasts before the body does. We see in both sexes that, in the herd, they have choice and discrimination in their affections, and that they form attachments among themselves of long goodwill. Even those to whom old age denies bodily strength still quiver, neigh and tremble with love. We see them before the act full of hope and ardor, and when the body has

11 Tacitus, Annals 13.45, of Poppaea. Lysias' speech in Plato's Phaedrus argues that one should favor a non-lover over a lover.

played its part, still tickling themselves with the sweetness of that memory. And we see some who swell with pride on leaving it, and who produce songs of festivity and triumph, weary and sated. Whoever has only to relieve his body of a natural necessity has no need to involve another in it with such elaborate preparations. This is no food for a gross and heavy hunger.

3.3.13 As one who does not ask to be thought better than I am, I will say this about the errors of my youth. I hardly ever went in for paid, public liaisons—not only because of the danger to health (and yet I did not manage so well that I escaped two touches of it, light ones, however, and preliminary), but also out of contempt. I wanted to sharpen that pleasure by difficulty, by desire and by some glory. And I liked the way of the Emperor Tiberius, who was captivated in his loves as much by modesty and nobility as by any other quality. And the disposition of the courtesan Flora, who would give herself to no one less than a dictator, a consul or a censor, and took her delight in the dignity of her lovers. Certainly pearls and brocade contribute something to it, and titles, and a retinue.[12]

3.3.14 For the rest, I set great store by the mind, but provided the body was not lacking. For, to answer in conscience, if one or the other of the two beauties had necessarily to be missing, I would sooner have chosen to give up the spiritual one. It has its use in better things. But in the matter of love, a matter that relates chiefly to sight and touch, something can be done without the graces of the mind, nothing without the graces of the body. Beauty is the true advantage of women. It is so much theirs that ours, though it calls for somewhat different features, is at its best only when it is mixed with theirs, boyish and beardless. They say that at the court of the Grand Signor, those who serve him by reason of their beauty, who are infinite in number, are dismissed at twenty-two at the latest. Reasoning, prudence and the offices of friendship are found better among men; that is why they govern the affairs of the world.[13]

12 Flora was a Roman courtesan whom Plutarch says Pompey loved.
13 The Ottoman sultan.

BOOKS

The third and surest kind: books, always at hand, which console and divert.

3.3.15 These two kinds of association are fortuitous and depend on others. One is distressing in its rarity; the other withers with age; so they would not have provided sufficiently for the needs of my life. That of books, which is the third, is much more secure and more our own. It yields the other advantages to the first two, but it has for its share the constancy and ease of its service. It goes along beside my whole course and attends me everywhere. It consoles me in old age and in solitude. It relieves me of the weight of a wearisome idleness, and rids me at any hour of company that annoys me. It blunts the stings of pain, unless the pain is altogether extreme and in command. To divert me from a troublesome fancy, I need only turn to books: they easily draw me to them and steal it away from me. And yet they do not mutiny on seeing that I seek them only for lack of those other pleasures, more real, lively and natural; they always receive me with the same face. He may well go on foot, they say, who leads his horse by the bridle. And our Jacques, king of Naples and Sicily, handsome, young and healthy, had himself carried about the country on a stretcher, lying on a wretched feather pillow, dressed in a gown of gray cloth with a cap to match. Meanwhile he was followed by great royal pomp, litters, led horses of all sorts, gentlemen and officers. He displayed an austerity still tender and wavering. The sick man is not to be pitied who has his cure up his sleeve. In the experience and practice of this maxim, which is very true, lies all the fruit I draw from books. In fact I make hardly more use of them than those who do not know them at all.[14] I enjoy them as misers enjoy their treasures, knowing that I shall enjoy them when I please; my soul is sated and contented with this right of possession. I do

14 Jacques de Bourbon, count of La Marche (d. 1438), husband of Queen Joanna II of Naples, who later became a Franciscan.

not travel without books, either in peace or in war. Yet many days will pass, and months, without my using them. Soon, I say, or tomorrow, or when I please; meanwhile time runs on and goes by without hurting me. For it is impossible to say how much I rest and take my ease in the thought that they are at my side to give me pleasure when I choose, and in recognizing how much help they bring to my life.

THE LIBRARY IN THE TOWER

Montaigne describes the round library where he reads, dreams and dictates.

It is the best provision I have found for this human journey, and I greatly pity men of intelligence who lack it. I take up any other sort of amusement first, however slight, since this one cannot fail me. At home I turn aside a little more often to my library, from which I direct my household at the same time. It is over the entrance, and I see below me my garden, my farmyard, my courtyard, and into most parts of my house. There I leaf through now one book, now another, without order and without plan, in disconnected pieces. Now I muse; now I record and dictate, walking up and down, these musings of mine you have here. It is on the third floor of a tower.[15] The first floor is my chapel, the second a bedroom with its adjoining rooms, where I often lie down to be alone. Above it is a large wardrobe room. In times past it was the most useless place in my house. There I spend most of the days of my life and most of the hours of the day. I am never there at night. Next to it is a rather elegant little study, with a fireplace for the winter, very pleasantly windowed. And if I feared the trouble no more than the expense—the trouble that drives me from every task—I could easily join on to each side a gallery a hundred paces long and twelve wide, on the same level, for I have found all the walls already built, for another purpose, to the height I need. Every secluded place needs a

15 The tower still stands at the château de Montaigne in the Périgord, with the Latin and Greek maxims he had painted on the library beams.

walk. My thoughts fall asleep if I make them sit down. My mind does not go on its own, as it does when my legs move it. Those who study without a book are all in the same case. Its shape is round, with no flat part except what is needed for my table and chair. Curving around me, it offers me at a glance all my books, arranged on shelves five tiers high all the way round. It has three views with a rich and open prospect, and sixteen paces of free space across. In winter I am there less continually, for my house is perched on a hillock, as its name says, and has no room more exposed to the wind than this one. I like it for being a little hard to reach and out of the way, both for the benefit of the exercise and to keep the crowd at a distance. That is my seat.[16] I try to make my rule there absolute, and to withdraw this one corner from all community, conjugal, filial and civil. Everywhere else I have only a verbal authority, in essence confused. Wretched, to my mind, is the man who has nowhere in his own home where he can be by himself, where he can pay court to himself in private, where he can hide. Ambition pays its people well by keeping them always on display, like a statue in a marketplace. *A great fortune is a great servitude.* They cannot even have their privy for privacy. I have found nothing so harsh in the austerity of life our monks affect as what I see in some of their orders: a rule of perpetual sharing of place, and numerous company among them in every action whatever. And I find it somewhat more bearable to be always alone than never to be able to be so.

3.3.16 If someone tells me that it is degrading the Muses to use them only as a toy and a pastime, he does not know, as I do, how much pleasure, play and pastime are worth. I would almost say that any other aim is ridiculous. I live from day to day, and, saving your reverence, I live only for myself; my plans end there. In youth I studied for show; later, a little to make myself wiser; now for amusement; never for gain. I once had a vain, spendthrift humor for this sort of furniture—not merely to provide for my need, but to go three steps beyond it, to deck and adorn myself with it. I gave it up long ago.

16 "Montaigne" means "mountain."

3.3.17 Books have many qualities pleasing to those who know how to choose them. But no good without pain. It is a pleasure no more clean and pure than the others; it has its drawbacks, and heavy ones. The mind exercises itself, but the body, whose care I have not forgotten either, meanwhile remains inactive, grows heavy and dejected. I know of no excess more harmful to me, or more to be avoided, in this decline of age.

3.3.18 Those are my three favorite and particular occupations. I do not speak of those I owe to the world by civic obligation.

III.4 Of Diversion

De la Diuersion
Montaigne shows that grief, fear, and passion are better eased by turning the mind aside than by facing them head-on.

3.4.1 I was once employed to console a lady who was truly afflicted. Most of their mourning is artificial and ceremonious. *Tears always abundant, always ready at their post, waiting for her to command them how to flow.* It is a mistake to oppose this passion, for opposition goads them and drives them further into sadness. One aggravates the ill by the jealousy of debate. We see from ordinary conversation that if something I have said carelessly comes to be contested, I take offense and embrace it—much more so something in which I have an interest.[1]

And then, in doing so, you begin your operation with a rough approach, whereas the physician's first greetings to his patient should be gracious, cheerful and pleasant. No ugly, sullen physician ever achieved anything. So, on the contrary, you must from the start help and encourage their lament, and show some approval and excuse for it. By this understanding you gain credit to go further, and by an easy and imperceptible inclination you slide into firmer arguments, fitter to cure them. I, who wanted chiefly to beguile the company, who had their eyes on me, decided to plaster over the ill. And indeed I find by experience that I have a poor and unfruitful hand at persuading.

1 Juvenal, Satires 6.

Either I present my reasons too sharp and too dry, or too abruptly, or too casually. After I had applied myself to her torment for a while, I did not try to cure it with strong and lively reasons, because I lack them, or because I thought I could achieve my purpose better otherwise. Nor did I go choosing among the various methods of consolation that philosophy prescribes: that what one laments is not an evil, like Cleanthes; that it is a slight evil, like the Peripatetics; that lamenting is an action neither just nor praiseworthy, like Chrysippus. Nor did I use this one of Epicurus, closer to my style, of transferring one's thoughts from unpleasant things to pleasant ones; nor did I make a load of this whole heap and dispense it as occasion arose, like Cicero.[2] But steering our talk very gently, and turning it little by little to nearby subjects and then to ones a little further away, as she lent herself more to me, I imperceptibly stole that painful thought from her, and kept her composed and entirely calm for as long as I was there. I used diversion. Those who followed me in the same service found no improvement in her, for I had not laid the axe to the roots.

DIVERSIONS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

Generals, Atalanta's suitor and physicians all succeed by turning attention elsewhere.

3.4.2 Perhaps I have touched here on some sort of public diversions. And the military practice that Pericles used in the Peloponnesian War, and a thousand others elsewhere, to draw enemy forces away from their own countries, is all too frequent in the histories. It was an ingenious ruse by which the Sieur d'Himbercourt saved both himself and others in the city of Liège. The Duke of Burgundy, who was besieging it, had sent him in to carry out the terms of their agreed surrender. The people, assembled by night to deal with this, began to rebel against the agreements made, and many resolved to fall upon

2 Cicero reviews these methods of consolation in Tusculan Disputations 3.

the negotiators, whom they held in their power.[3] He, getting wind of the first wave of these people, who were coming to storm his lodging, at once sent out to them two of the city's inhabitants (for he had some with him). They carried new and milder offers, which he had invented on the spot for his need, to be put before their council. These two stopped the first storm, leading the agitated mob back to the town hall to hear their message and deliberate on it. The deliberation was short. Then a second storm broke loose, as fierce as the first; and he sent four new and similar intercessors out to meet them, declaring that this time they had richer proposals to put to them, entirely to their content and satisfaction. By this the people were driven back once more into the conclave. In short, by such a dispensing of distractions, turning aside their fury and dissipating it in vain consultations, he finally lulled it to sleep and held out until daylight, which was his main concern.

3.4.3 This other story also falls into the same category. Atalanta, a girl of excellent beauty and wonderful agility, wanted to rid herself of the throng of a thousand suitors who sought her in marriage. She gave them this law: she would accept the one who equaled her in a race, provided that those who failed lost their lives. There were enough who judged that prize worth such a risk, and who incurred the penalty of this cruel bargain. Hippomenes, who had to make his trial after the others, turned to the goddess who is guardian of this amorous ardor and called on her for help. She granted his prayer and supplied him with three golden apples and with instructions for their use. When the race began, as Hippomenes feels his beloved pressing on his heels, he lets one of the apples drop as if by inadvertence. The girl, beguiled by its beauty, does not fail to turn aside to pick it up: *The maiden was dazzled, and in her desire for the shining fruit / she swerves from her course and picks up the rolling gold.* He did the same at the right moment with the second and the third, until

3 Guy de Brimeu, lord of Humbercourt, envoy of Charles the Bold at Liège in 1467; the story is from Commynes' Memoirs.

by this straying and diversion the advantage in the race remained his.[4]

3.4.4 When physicians cannot purge a catarrh, they divert it and shift it to another, less dangerous part. I notice that this is also the most usual remedy for the diseases of the soul. *The mind must sometimes be drawn away to other pursuits, concerns, cares, business; and finally it must often be treated by a change of place, like sick people who are not recovering.* We seldom make it meet ills head-on; we make it neither withstand their attack nor beat it back; we make it dodge and sidestep them.[5]

3.4.5 That other lesson is too lofty and too difficult. It is for those of the first rank to keep purely to the thing itself, to consider it, to judge it. It belongs to Socrates alone to meet death with an ordinary face, to grow familiar with it and play with it. He seeks no consolation outside the thing itself. Dying seems to him a natural and indifferent accident; he fixes his gaze precisely there and makes up his mind to it, without looking elsewhere. The disciples of Hegesias, who starved themselves to death, fired by the fine discourses of his lessons—and in such numbers that King Ptolemy had him forbidden to entertain his school any longer with these murderous discourses—those people do not consider death in itself; they do not judge it; that is not where they fix their thought. They run, they aim at a new existence.[6]

3.4.6 Those poor people we see on the scaffold, filled with ardent devotion, occupy all their senses with it as much as they can: their ears with the instructions given to them, their eyes and hands raised to heaven, their voices in loud prayers, with a harsh and continual emotion. They are certainly doing something praiseworthy and fitting for such a necessity. We should praise them for religion, but not properly for steadfastness. They flee the struggle; they turn their attention away from death, as we distract children when we are about to give them

4 Ovid, Metamorphoses 10; the goddess is Venus.
5 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations 4.35.
6 Hegesias was nicknamed "the death-persuader"; the story is in Cicero.

the stroke of the lancet. I have seen some who, if their gaze sometimes dropped to the horrible harshness of death around them, froze with fear and furiously threw their thoughts elsewhere. Those who cross over a frightful depth are told to close or avert their eyes.

3.4.7 Subrius Flavus had been condemned by Nero's command to be put to death at the hands of Niger, both of them military commanders. When he was led out to the field where the execution was to take place, he saw that the pit Niger had had dug to put him in was uneven and badly shaped. "Not even this," he said, turning to the soldiers who were present, "is according to military discipline." And to Niger, who was urging him to hold his head steady: "If only you strike as steadily." He guessed right, for Niger's arm trembled and he cut off his head in several blows. This man seems to have kept his thought squarely and fixedly on the matter.[7]

3.4.8 The man who dies in the thick of the fight, weapons in hand, is not studying death at that moment; he neither feels it nor considers it: the heat of combat carries him away. A decent man of my acquaintance fell while fighting with the sword, and felt his enemy stab him with a dagger nine or ten times as he lay on the ground. Every one of the bystanders was shouting at him to think of his conscience. But he told me afterward that although these voices reached his ears, they had not touched him at all, and that he thought of nothing but getting free and taking revenge. He killed his man in that same fight. A great service was done to L. Silanus by the man who brought him his sentence. Having heard his reply, that he was well prepared to die, but not at the hands of criminals, this man rushed at him with his soldiers to overpower him; and as Silanus, completely unarmed, stubbornly defended himself with fists and feet, he had him killed in the struggle. So he dissipated, in a quick and

7 Subrius Flavus, a tribune of the praetorian guard, was executed in AD 65 for his part in the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero; the story is in Tacitus, Annals XV.

tumultuous anger, the painful feeling of the long, prepared death to which Silanus had been destined.[8]

3.4.9 We are always thinking of something else. The hope of a better life stops us and props us up; or the hope of our children's worth; or the future glory of our name; or escape from the ills of this life; or the vengeance that threatens those who cause our death: *I hope indeed, if the righteous powers can do anything, that amid the rocks*
You will drain your punishment to the dregs, and call on Dido by name
Again and again.
I shall hear it, and the news will reach me down among the shades. Xenophon was offering a sacrifice, wearing a garland, when they came to tell him of the death of his son Gryllus at the battle of Mantinea. At the first impression of the news he threw his garland to the ground; but as the account went on, hearing how very valiant a death it had been, he picked it up and put it back on his head.[9]

Epicurus himself, at his end, consoles himself with the eternity and usefulness of his writings. *All labors that bring fame and renown become bearable.* And the same wound, the same toil, does not weigh as heavily, says Xenophon, on a general as on a soldier. Epaminondas took his death far more cheerfully once he had been told that the victory had remained on his side. *These are the consolations, these the soothing remedies for the greatest pains.* And other such circumstances amuse, divert and turn us away from considering the thing itself. Even the arguments of philosophy are forever skirting and sidestepping the matter, barely brushing its crust.[10] The foremost man of the foremost school of philosophy, the one that presides over all the others, the great Zeno, argues against death: "No evil is honorable;

8 Lucius Junius Silanus was killed on Nero's orders in AD 65 (Tacitus, Annals XVI).
9 Virgil, Aeneid IV: Dido cursing the departing Aeneas. The battle of Mantinea was fought in 362 BC.
10 Both Latin quotations are from Cicero, Tusculan Disputations II.

death is honorable; therefore death is not an evil." Against drunkenness: "No one entrusts his secret to a drunkard; everyone entrusts it to the wise man; therefore the wise man will not be a drunkard." Is that hitting the target? I like to see these leading souls unable to break free of our common fellowship. However perfect they may be, they are still, very clumsily, men.

DIVERTING PASSIONS

Revenge and love can be weakened by turning them aside rather than fighting them head-on.

3.4.10 Revenge is a sweet passion, one that strikes deep and comes naturally: I can see that well enough, though I have no experience of it. Recently, to draw a young prince away from it, I did not go telling him that out of the duty of charity he must offer his cheek to the man who had struck him on the other one; nor did I go setting before him the tragic outcomes that poetry attributes to this passion. I left it alone and busied myself making him savor the beauty of a contrary picture: the honor, the favor, the goodwill he would gain by clemency and kindness. I diverted him toward ambition. That is how it is done.

3.4.11 If your affection in love is too powerful, disperse it, they say. And they are right, for I have often tried it to good effect. Break it up into various desires; one of them may be ruler and master, if you like, but for fear it should bully and tyrannize you, weaken it, hold it in check by dividing and diverting it. *When the peevish vein throbs in your restless groin,*

Discharge the gathered fluid into any body you please. And see to it early, for fear you will be in trouble once it has seized you. *Unless you confound the first wounds with fresh blows,*

And heal them while still new, roaming after a roving Venus.[11]

3.4.12 I was once struck by a powerful grief, powerful for a temperament like mine, and even more just than powerful. I might

well have been lost in it if I had simply relied on my own strength. Needing a vehement diversion to draw me away from it, I made myself fall in love, by art and by study, in which my age helped me. Love relieved me and drew me out of the pain that friendship had caused me. It is the same everywhere else. A bitter notion takes hold of me: I find it quicker to change it than to subdue it. I put another in its place, if not a contrary one, at least a different one. Variation always relieves, dissolves and dissipates. If I cannot fight it, I escape it; and in fleeing it I take detours and play tricks.[12] Changing place, occupation, company, I slip away into the crowd of other amusements and thoughts, where it loses my trail and loses track of me.

3.4.13 Nature proceeds this way, by the benefit of inconstancy. For time, which she has given us as the sovereign physician of our passions, achieves its effect chiefly by this: by supplying our imagination with one matter after another, it unravels and breaks down that first impression, however strong it may be. A wise man sees his friend dying hardly less after twenty-five years than in the first year; and according to Epicurus, not a bit less, for he attributed no easing of troubles either to foreseeing them or to their being old. But so many other thoughts cut across this one that it languishes and at last grows weary.

3.4.14 To turn the drift of common gossip elsewhere, Alcibiades cut off the ears and tail of his beautiful dog and drove it out into the public square, so that, having given the people this to chatter about, they would leave his other actions in peace. I have also seen women, for this same purpose of diverting public opinion and conjecture and throwing the talkers off the scent, cover their true affections with counterfeit ones. But I have seen one who, while counterfeiting, let herself be caught in earnest, and abandoned her true and original affection for the feigned one. From her I learned that those who find themselves well placed are fools to consent to this masquerade. Since the public welcomes and conversations are reserved for this planted suitor,

11 Persius, Satires VI; Lucretius, On the Nature of Things IV.
12 Generally taken to be the death of La Boétie in 1563.

believe me, he is not very clever if he does not end up putting himself in your place and sending you to his. That is truly cutting and stitching a shoe for someone else to wear.

LITTLE THINGS MOVE US

Small images and sounds stir our grief more than the thing itself.

3.4.15 Little things divert and distract us, for little things hold us. We hardly ever look at subjects as a whole and by themselves; it is circumstances, or small, superficial images, that strike us, and the empty husks that peel off from subjects. *As cicadas in summer / Leave behind their smooth husks.* Even Plutarch mourns his daughter through the little antics of her childhood. The memory of a farewell, of an action, of some particular grace, of a last request, afflicts us. Caesar's robe threw all Rome into turmoil, which his death had not done. The very sound of names ringing in our ears: "My poor master," or "My great friend," "Alas, my dear father," or "My good daughter."[13] When these refrains pinch me and I look at them closely, I find it is a grammarian's lament: the word and the tone wound me. Just as preachers' exclamations often move their audience more than their reasons do, and as the pitiful cry of an animal being killed for our use strikes us —all without my weighing or getting to the bottom, meanwhile, of the true and solid essence of my subject. *With these goads grief spurs itself on.* These are the foundations of our mourning.[14]

3.4.16 The stubbornness of my stones, especially in the penis, has sometimes thrown me into long retentions of urine, of three or four days, and brought me so far into death that it would have been folly to hope to avoid it—indeed, to wish to, given the cruel agonies this condition brings me. Oh, what a great master in the science of torture was that good emperor who had his criminals' penises tied up so as to make them die for want of pissing! Finding myself in that state, I considered by what slight causes and

13 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things IV. Caesar's bloodstained robe was displayed by Mark Antony at the funeral in 44 BC.
14 Lucan, Pharsalia II.

objects imagination fed my regret for life in me; out of what atoms the weight and difficulty of this departure were built up in my soul; to what frivolous thoughts we gave room in so great an affair.[15] A dog, a horse, a book, a glass, and what not, counted in my loss. For others, their ambitious hopes, their purse, their learning—no less foolishly, to my mind. I look at death nonchalantly when I look at it universally, as the end of life. Wholesale, I lord it over death; retail, it robs me. The tears of a lackey, the giving away of my cast-off clothes, the touch of a familiar hand, an ordinary word of consolation, disconsole me and melt me. In the same way, the laments of fables trouble our soul; and the grief of Dido and of Ariadne stirs even those who do not believe in them, in Virgil and in Catullus. It is a sign of an obstinate, hard nature to feel no emotion at them, as is told of Polemon as a marvel; but then he did not even turn pale when a mad dog bit him and tore away the calf of his leg. And no wisdom goes so far as to grasp the cause of a sadness so vividly and completely by judgment that it is not increased by presence, when the eyes and ears have their share—parts that can be stirred only by superficial incidents.

3.4.17 Is it reasonable that even the arts should make use of our natural weakness and stupidity and profit by them? The orator, says rhetoric, in the farce of his pleading, will be moved by the sound of his own voice and by his feigned agitations, and will let himself be taken in by the passion he is portraying. By means of the act he is putting on, he will impress on himself a true and essential grief, in order to pass it on to the judges, whom it concerns even less. Just like those people who are hired at funerals to help with the ceremony of mourning, who sell their tears and their sadness by weight and measure. For although they set themselves going in a borrowed form, still, by adjusting and arranging their countenance, it is certain that they are often carried away entirely and take into themselves a real melancholy. I was one of several of his friends who escorted the body of Monsieur de Gramont to Soissons from the siege of La Fère, where he

15 The emperor is Tiberius, according to Suetonius.

was killed. I observed that everywhere we passed, we filled the people we met with lamentation and tears, merely by the outward show of our funeral procession; for not even the dead man's name was known there.[16] Quintilian says he has seen actors so deeply caught up in a role of mourning that they were still weeping over it at home; and says of himself that, having set out to stir some passion in others, he had so embraced it that he found himself overcome not only by tears but by a pallor of face and the bearing of a man truly crushed by grief.

3.4.18 In a region near our mountains, the women play both parts at once. For as they magnify their grief for the husband they have lost by recalling the good and pleasant qualities he had, they also, in the same breath, gather up and proclaim his imperfections, as if to strike some balance of their own accord and turn themselves from pity to disdain. They do it with much better grace than we do, who, on losing any acquaintance at all, make a point of lending him new and false praises, and of making him, once he is out of our sight, quite different from what he seemed to us when we could see him. As if regret were something that teaches, or as if tears, by washing our understanding, made it clearer.[17] I renounce here and now any favorable testimonies people may want to give me, not because I shall deserve them but because I shall be dead.

THE POWER OF IMAGINATION

Empty fancies inflame and torment us as much as real causes.

3.4.19 Ask that man: "What is your interest in this siege?" "The interest of setting an example," he will say, "and of common obedience to the prince. I claim no profit from it whatever; and as for glory, I know how small a share of it can come to a private person like me. I have neither passion nor quarrel here." Yet

16 Philibert de Gramont, husband of Diane d'Andoins, was killed at the siege of La Fère in 1580.

17 "Faire le prestre-martin" was a proverb for playing both parts, after a priest Martin who said Mass and gave the responses himself.

look at him the next day, completely changed, boiling over and red with anger, in his place in the battle line for the assault. It is the gleam of so much steel, and the fire and din of our cannons and drums, that have thrown this new harshness and hatred into his veins. A frivolous cause, you will tell me. What do you mean, cause? None is needed to stir our soul. A fancy without body or subject governs and stirs it. Let me start building castles in Spain, and my imagination forges comforts and pleasures for me there by which my soul is really tickled and gladdened. How many times do we cloud our mind with anger or sadness through such shadows, and throw ourselves into imaginary passions that alter both our soul and our body? What grimaces—astonished, laughing, bewildered—daydreaming calls up in our faces! What starts and agitations of limbs and voice! Doesn't it seem, of this man alone, that he is having false visions of a crowd of other men he is dealing with, or that some inner demon is persecuting him? Ask yourself where the object of this change is. Is there anything in nature but us that emptiness feeds, anything over which it has power? Cambyses, having dreamed in his sleep that his brother was to become king of Persia, put him to death—a brother whom he loved and had always trusted. Aristodemus, king of the Messenians, killed himself over a notion that some howling or other of his dogs was a bad omen. And King Midas did the same, troubled and vexed by some unpleasant dream he had dreamed. To abandon one's life for a dream is to value it at exactly what it is worth. And yet listen to our soul triumphing over the wretchedness of the body, over its weakness, over its being exposed to every injury and change. Truly, it has good reason to talk![18]

> *O luckless earth, first shaped by Prometheus!*
> *He did his work with too little care.*
> *In arranging bodies, his craft gave no thought to the mind;*
> *The soul's path should have been made straight first.*[19]

18 Cambyses II of Persia had his brother Smerdis killed (Herodotus III).
19 Propertius, Elegies III.

III.5 On Some Verses of Virgil

Sur des vers de Virgile
Prompted by Virgil and Lucretius, an aging Montaigne writes frankly about sex, marriage, and the hypocrisy surrounding desire.

3.5.1 The fuller and more solid useful thoughts are, the more cumbersome and burdensome they are too. Vice, death, poverty, illness are weighty subjects, and they weigh us down. The soul must be instructed in the means of bearing and fighting ills, and instructed in the rules of living well and believing well; and it must often be roused and exercised in this fine study. But for a soul of the common sort, this must be done with relaxation and moderation: it goes mad from being too continuously strained. In my youth I needed to warn and urge myself to keep to my duty. Cheerfulness and health, they say, do not go so well with these serious and wise reasonings. I am now in a different state. The conditions of old age warn me only too much; they make me wise and preach to me. From an excess of gaiety I have fallen into an excess of severity, which is more disagreeable. Therefore I now let myself go a little toward license, on purpose, and sometimes occupy my soul with playful, youthful thoughts, where it takes its rest. I am by now only too settled, too heavy and too ripe. The years lecture me every day on coldness and temperance. This body flees disorder and fears it. It is its turn to guide the mind toward reform; it rules in its turn, and more harshly and imperiously. It does not leave me one hour, sleeping or waking, free from lessons on death, patience and penitence. I defend myself against temperance as I once did against pleas-

ure: it pulls me too far back, even to the point of dullness. Now I want to be master of myself in every direction. Wisdom has its excesses, and needs moderation no less than folly does. So, for fear that I may dry up, wither and grow heavy with prudence, in the intervals my ills allow me, *So that my mind may not be forever bent on its ills,* I swerve aside very gently and steal my gaze away from the stormy, cloudy sky that lies before me.[1]

> That sky, thank God, I can contemplate without dread, but not without effort and study. And I keep amusing myself by recalling my bygone youth: *The mind longs for what it has lost,*
>
> *And loses itself entirely in images of the past.* That childhood looks ahead and old age behind—was that not the meaning of Janus' double face? The years may drag me along if they will, but backward. As long as my eyes can make out that lovely season now gone, I turn them toward it by fits and starts. If it escapes from my blood and my veins, at least I will not root out its image from my memory. *This is*
>
> *To live twice: to be able to enjoy one's former life.*[2]

3.5.2 Plato orders old men to attend the exercises, dances and games of the young, so as to delight in others in the suppleness and beauty of body that is no longer in themselves, and to call back to memory the grace and charm of that green age. And he wants them, in these sports, to award the honor of victory to the young man who has most delighted and cheered the greatest number of them. I used to mark the heavy, gloomy days as extraordinary. These are now becoming my ordinary ones; the extraordinary ones are the fine, clear ones. I am on the way to thrilling, as at some new favor, when nothing hurts me. Tickle myself as I may, I can now hardly wring a poor laugh out of this wretched body. I make merry only in fancy and in dreams, to divert by cunning the gloom of old age. But truly it would take

1 Ovid, Tristia IV.
2 Petronius, Satyricon, and Martial, Epigrams X.

some other remedy than a dream. A feeble struggle, art against nature. It is great simplicity to lengthen and anticipate human discomforts, as everyone does. I would rather be old for a shorter time than be old before I am. I seize even the slightest occasions for pleasure I can come across. I know well enough by hearsay several kinds of prudent, strong and glorious pleasures, but opinion has not enough power over me to give me an appetite for them. I do not want them so much magnanimous, magnificent and showy as I want them sweet, easy and ready to hand. *We depart from nature; we give ourselves over to the people, who are a good authority on nothing.* My philosophy is in action, in natural and present use; little in fancy. If only I could take pleasure in playing at cobnuts and spinning tops! *For he did not put rumors before safety.* Pleasure is a quality with little ambition: it considers itself rich enough on its own without mixing in the value of reputation, and prefers to be in the shade. A young man who amused himself by fussing over the taste of wine and sauces ought to be whipped. There is nothing I have known less or valued less. Now I am learning it. I am very ashamed of it, but what can I do?[3] I am even more ashamed and vexed at the reasons that drive me to it. It is for us to daydream and fool around, and for youth to stand on its reputation and keep its dignity. Youth is heading toward the world, toward standing; we are coming back from them. *Let them keep for themselves arms, horses, spears, clubs, balls, swimming and running; and of their many games let them leave us old men knucklebones and dice.* Even the laws send us home. I can do no less for this wretched condition into which my age is pushing me than provide it with toys and playthings, as for childhood; and indeed we fall back into it.[4] Both wisdom and folly will have plenty to do to prop me up and help me, taking turns, in this calamity of age. *Mix a little folly with your counsels.* Likewise I shun the slightest pricks; and those that once would not even have scratched me now pierce me through. My

3 Seneca, Letters 99; the second line is from Ennius on Fabius Maximus, quoted by Cicero in On Old Age.
4 Cicero, On Old Age.

constitution is beginning to take so readily to ailments: *In a frail body every shock is painful. And a sick mind can bear nothing harsh.* I have always been ticklish and sensitive to injuries; I am more tender now, and open on every side. *And the slightest force can break what is already cracked.* My judgment keeps me from kicking and grumbling against the discomforts that Nature orders me to suffer, but not from feeling them.[5] I would run from one end of the world to the other in search of one good year of pleasant, cheerful tranquillity—I who have no other aim than to live and be merry. Gloomy, dull tranquillity I can find enough of, but it puts me to sleep and fogs my head; it does not satisfy me. If there is any person, any good company, in the country or in town, in France or elsewhere, settled or traveling, who likes my temperament and whose temperament I like, they have only to whistle in their palm and I will go and supply them with Essays in flesh and bone.

THE MIND FOLLOWS THE BODY

In old age Montaigne lets his mind play, since it can no longer rise above the body.

3.5.3 Since it is the mind's privilege to recover from old age, I advise it as strongly as I can to do so: let it grow green, let it flourish meanwhile if it can, like mistletoe on a dead tree. I fear it is a traitor. It has bound itself so tightly to the body that it abandons me at every turn to follow the body in its need. I flatter it in private, I work on it to no purpose; it is no use my trying to turn it away from this collusion, and offering it Seneca and Catullus, and the ladies and the royal dances: if its companion has colic, it seems to have it too. Even the faculties that are peculiar and proper to it cannot rise up then; they plainly smell of a chill. There is no liveliness in what it produces unless there is some in the body at the same time.

3.5.4 Our masters are wrong in this: seeking the causes of the extraordinary flights of our mind, besides what they attribute to

5 Horace, Odes IV; then Cicero, On Old Age, and Ovid, Letters from the Black Sea.

divine rapture, to love, to warlike fierceness, to poetry, to wine, they have not given health its share—a boiling, vigorous, full, idle health, such as the greenness of my years and my freedom from care once supplied me with now and then. This fire of gaiety kindles in the mind flashes of lightning, vivid and bright beyond our natural brightness, and among enthusiasms the lustiest, if not the most frenzied. Well then, it is no wonder if a contrary state weighs my mind down, nails it to the ground, and produces a contrary effect. *It rises to no task when it languishes with the body.* And still it wants me to be obliged to it because, as it says, it gives much less to this complicity than is the ordinary way with men. At least while we have a truce, let us drive ills and difficulties out of our company: *While we may, let old age smooth its clouded brow; gloomy things must be sweetened with jests.* I love a gay and sociable wisdom, and I shun harshness of manners and austerity, holding every forbidding face suspect: *And the gloomy arrogance of a grim countenance; / The solemn crowd, too, has its debauchees.* I heartily believe Plato, who says that easy or difficult temperaments are a strong indication of the goodness or badness of the soul. Socrates had a steady face, but serene and smiling.[6] Not disagreeably steady, like old Crassus, whom no one ever saw laugh. Virtue is a pleasant and cheerful quality.

DARING TO SAY IT

Montaigne resolves to say whatever he dares to do, and confesses himself in public.

3.5.5 I know very well that very few people will frown at the license of my writings who do not have more reason to frown at the license of their own thoughts. I suit their hearts well enough, but I offend their eyes. It is a well-ordered temperament indeed that carps at Plato's writings and glides over his alleged dealings with Phaedo, Dion, Stella and Archeanassa. *Let us not be*

6 The quotations are from Maximianus, Horace (Epodes XIII), Sidonius Apollinaris, George Buchanan and Martial.

ashamed to say what we are not ashamed to think. I hate a surly, gloomy mind that slides over the pleasures of its life and seizes on misfortunes and feeds on them—like flies, which cannot hold on to a well-polished, smooth body, and cling to and settle on rough, uneven spots; and like cupping-glasses, which suck in and crave only bad blood.[7]

3.5.6 For the rest, I have ordered myself to dare to say whatever I dare to do; and I am displeased even by thoughts that cannot be made public. The worst of my actions and qualities does not seem to me as ugly as I find it ugly and cowardly not to dare to own it. Everyone is discreet in confession; we ought to be so in action. The boldness of doing wrong is to some extent offset and curbed by the boldness of confessing it. Whoever bound himself to tell everything would bind himself to do nothing of what we are forced to keep quiet. God grant that this excess of license in me may draw our men toward freedom, beyond these cowardly, put-on virtues born of our imperfections; that at the expense of my immoderation I may draw them as far as the point of reason. One must see one's vice and study it in order to tell it. Those who hide it from others usually hide it from themselves, and do not think it well enough covered if they themselves can see it; they withdraw it from their own conscience and disguise it. *Why does no one confess his vices? Because he is still in them; it takes a man awake to tell his dream.* The ills of the body become clearer as they grow. We find that what we were calling a cold or a sprain is gout.[8] The ills of the soul grow darker as they gain strength; the sickest man feels them least. That is why they must often be handled again in daylight with a pitiless hand, opened up and torn out of the hollow of our breast. As with good deeds, so with misdeeds: confession alone is sometimes amends. Is there any ugliness in doing wrong that excuses us from confessing it? I find it painful to dissemble, so much so that I avoid taking other people's secrets into my keeping, not having the heart to deny

7 Love epigrams addressed to these persons were attributed to Plato (Diogenes Laertius III); "Stella" renders the Greek name Aster.
8 Seneca, Letters 53.

what I know. I can keep quiet about it, but deny it I cannot, without effort and displeasure. To be truly secret, one must be so by nature, not by obligation. In the service of princes it is not much to be secret if one is not also a liar. If the man who asked Thales of Miletus whether he should solemnly deny having committed adultery had come to me, I would have answered that he should not do so, for lying seems to me even worse than lechery. Thales advised him quite otherwise: that he should swear it, so as to cover the greater by the lesser. Yet this advice was not so much a choice of vice as a multiplication of it. On which, let us say a word in passing: a man of conscience is let off cheaply when he is offered some difficulty to set against a vice; but when he is shut in between two vices, he is put to a hard choice. As was done to Origen: either he must commit idolatry or let himself be carnally enjoyed by a big, ugly Ethiopian who was brought before him. He submitted to the first condition—and sinfully, they say. And yet, by their own error, those women would not be without taste who protest to us these days that they would rather burden their conscience with ten men than with one Mass.[9]

3.5.7 If it is indiscretion to publish one's faults this way, there is not much danger of its becoming an example and a practice. For Ariston used to say that the winds men fear most are those that uncover them. We must pull back this foolish rag that hides our morals. They send their conscience to the brothel and keep their countenance in good order. Even traitors and assassins espouse the laws of ceremony and fasten their duty there. Still, it is not for injustice to complain of incivility, nor for malice to complain of indiscretion. It is a pity that a wicked man is not also a fool, and that decency should cloak his vice. Such plasterwork belongs only on a good, sound wall that deserves to be preserved and whitewashed.

3.5.8 As a favor to the Huguenots, who condemn our private, whispered confession, I confess myself in public, religiously and purely. Saint Augustine, Origen and Hippocrates published the

9 The women are Protestants of Montaigne's day.

errors of their opinions; I, besides, those of my morals. I am hungry to make myself known, and I do not care to how many, provided it is truly. Or, to put it better, I am hungry for nothing; but I have a mortal fear of being mistaken for someone else by those who happen to know my name. The man who does everything for honor and glory, what does he think he gains by showing himself to the world in a mask, hiding his true being from people's knowledge? Praise a man with a crooked back for his fine figure: he ought to take it as an insult. If you are a coward and people honor you as a valiant man, is it you they are talking about? They take you for someone else. I would as soon see a man take pleasure in the caps doffed to him, thinking he is master of the troop, when he is one of the least in the retinue. As Archelaus, king of Macedon, was passing along the street, someone poured water on him; the bystanders said he ought to punish the man. "Yes, but," said he, "he did not pour the water on me, but on the man he thought I was." Socrates, to someone who told him that people were speaking ill of him: "Not at all," he said, "there is nothing in me of what they say." For my part, if someone praised me for being a good pilot, or very modest, or very chaste, I would owe him no thanks. And likewise, if someone called me a traitor, a thief or a drunkard, I would consider myself just as little offended. Those who do not know themselves can feed on false approval; not I, who see myself and search myself to the very entrails, and know well what belongs to me. I am content to be less praised, provided I am better known. I might be taken for wise in a kind of wisdom that I consider folly. It annoys me that my Essays serve the ladies only as a common piece of furniture, furniture for the drawing room. This chapter will get me into the boudoir. I like their company when it is somewhat private; in public it has neither favor nor flavor. At farewells we feel more than ordinary warmth toward the things we are leaving. I am taking my final leave of the world's games: these are our last embraces.

THE UNSPOKEN ACT

Why the sexual act, so natural and necessary, is the one thing we dare not name.

3.5.9 But let us come to my theme. What has the sexual act, so natural, so necessary and so just, done to men, that they dare not speak of it without shame and exclude it from serious and orderly conversation? We boldly pronounce "kill," "rob," "betray"; and this we would dare to say only between our teeth. Does that mean that the less we breathe of it in words, the more right we have to swell it in our thoughts? For it is a fine joke that the words least used, least written and best kept quiet are the best known and the most widely understood. No age, no manners are ignorant of them, any more than of bread. They imprint themselves on each of us without being expressed, without voice and without shape. And the sex that does it most is charged with keeping most quiet about it. It is an act we have placed in the sanctuary of silence, from which it is a crime to drag it—even in order to accuse and judge it. Nor do we dare to whip it except in roundabout phrases and pictures. A great favor to a criminal, to be so execrable that justice thinks it unjust to touch him or look at him: free and saved by the benefit of the harshness of his condemnation. Isn't it as with books, which become all the more salable and public for being suppressed? For my part, I am going to take Aristotle at his word when he says that bashfulness is an ornament to youth but a reproach to old age.

> These lines are preached in the ancient school, a school to which I hold much more than to the modern one: its virtues seem to me greater, its vices smaller. *Those who strive too hard to flee from Venus*
> *Go as far wrong as those who follow her too much.*
> *You, Goddess, you alone govern the nature of things,*
> *Nor without you does anything rise into the shining shores of light,*
> *Nor is anything made joyful or lovely.*[10]

3.5.10 I do not know who can have set Pallas and the Muses at odds with Venus and made them cool toward love; but I see no deities that suit each other better or owe each other more. Whoever takes amorous imaginings away from the Muses will rob them of the finest subject they have and the noblest matter of their work; and whoever deprives love of the fellowship and service of poetry will strip it of its best weapons. In this way the god of intimacy and goodwill, and the goddesses who protect humanity and justice, are charged with the vice of ingratitude and of failing to acknowledge what they owe. I have not been so long dismissed from the service and train of this god that my memory is not informed of his strength and worth: *I recognize the traces of the old flame.* There is still some remnant of emotion and heat after the fever. *May this warmth not fail me in my wintry years.* Dried up and weighed down as I am, I still feel some lukewarm remains of that past ardor.[11]

10 The French couplet comes from Amyot's translation of Plutarch; the Latin is Lucretius, On the Nature of Things I.
11 Virgil, Aeneid IV, then Johannes Secundus.

As the deep Aegean, though the north or south wind
Has died down that first tossed and shook it all,
Does not grow calm for that, but keeps the roar and motion
Of its waves still stirred and swollen. But from what I understand of it, the strength and worth of this god are found more lively and animated in the painting of poetry than in their own essence. *And verse has fingers.* Poetry conveys some air or other more amorous than love itself. Venus is not so beautiful all naked, alive and panting, as she is here in Virgil: She had spoken; and, as he hesitated, the goddess, flinging her snowy arms around him on either side,
Warms him in a soft embrace.[12]

He suddenly
Caught the familiar flame, and the well-known heat
Entered his marrow and ran through his melting bones,
Just as sometimes, when the thunder bursts, a fiery rift
Runs flashing with light through the storm clouds.
. . . . . Having spoken these words,
He gave her the embraces she longed for, and sought calm sleep
Through his limbs, lying poured out on his wife's lap.

MARRIAGE AND LOVE

A good marriage is built on friendship, not on love, which hates any other bond.

3.5.11 What I find worth noting here is that he paints her as rather too aroused for a married Venus. In this sensible bargain the appetites are not so frolicsome; they are somber and duller. Love hates people to be bound to each other by anything but itself, and takes only a slack part in relationships formed and kept up under some other title, as marriage is. Connections and

12 Tasso, Jerusalem Delivered XII; Juvenal, Satires VI; Virgil, Aeneid VIII, where Venus coaxes her husband Vulcan to forge arms for Aeneas.

means rightly weigh as much there as charms and beauty, or more. We do not marry for ourselves, whatever people say; we marry as much or more for our posterity, for our family. The use and interest of marriage concern our line, far beyond ourselves. That is why I like the practice of having it arranged by a third hand rather than by one's own, and by someone else's sense rather than one's own. How opposite all this is to the conventions of love! And so it is a kind of incest to bring into this venerable and sacred kinship the efforts and extravagances of amorous license, as I think I have said elsewhere. One must, says Aristotle, touch one's wife prudently and soberly, for fear that if she is tickled too lasciviously, pleasure may carry her off the hinges of reason. What he says for conscience's sake, the doctors say for health's sake: that excessively hot, voluptuous and assiduous pleasure alters the seed and hinders conception. They say on the other hand that in a languid coupling, as that one is by nature, if it is to be filled with a proper and fruitful heat, one must present oneself rarely and at considerable intervals: *So that it may seize Venus thirstily and store her deep within.* I see no marriages that fail sooner, or are more troubled, than those that are brought about by beauty and amorous desire. Marriage needs more solid and more constant foundations, and must be approached warily; that boiling ardor is no good for it.[13]

3.5.12 Those who think they honor marriage by joining love to it act, it seems to me, like those who, to do virtue a favor, hold that nobility is nothing other than virtue. These things are related, but there is a great deal of difference between them, and there is no point in mixing up their names and titles. We wrong one or the other by confusing them. Nobility is a fine quality, and introduced for good reason. But since it is a quality that depends on others, and can fall to a vicious and worthless man, it is valued far below virtue. It is a virtue, if it is one at all, that is artificial and visible. It depends on time and fortune, differs in form from country to country, and is living and mortal. Like the river Nile, it has no source. It is genealogical and shared, a matter of suc-

13 Virgil, Georgics III, on the breeding of mares.

cession and resemblance, drawn by inference, and a very weak inference at that. Learning, strength, goodness, beauty, wealth, all other qualities, can be communicated and exchanged. This one is used up in itself, and is of no use in the service of others.[14] One of our kings was offered the choice between two candidates for the same office, one a gentleman and the other not. He ordered that they should choose the one with more merit, without regard to that quality. Only where their worth was entirely equal should nobility be taken into account. That was giving it exactly its proper rank. An unknown young man asked Antigonus for the post of his father, a man of valor who had just died. "My friend," he said, "in granting such favors I do not look so much at my soldiers' nobility as at their prowess."[15] Indeed, it should not be as it was with the officers of the kings of Sparta, the trumpeters, minstrels and cooks. Their children succeeded to their posts, however ignorant they might be, ahead of the most experienced in the trade. The people of Calicut make their nobles a species above the human. Marriage is forbidden to them, and so is every calling but war. They may have their fill of concubines, and the women as many lovers, with no jealousy among them. But it is a capital and unpardonable crime to couple with anyone of a different condition from their own. They consider themselves polluted if such a person merely brushes against them in passing. And, as if their nobility were wonderfully insulted and injured by it, they kill those who have merely come a little too close to them.[16] So the commoners are obliged to call out as they walk, like the gondoliers of Venice at street corners, so as not to collide. The nobles then order them to step aside to whatever side they please. In this way the nobles avoid a disgrace they consider permanent, and the commoners avoid certain death. No length of time, no prince's favor, no office, virtue or wealth can make a commoner noble. They are

14 The source of the Nile was unknown to the ancients.

15 Antigonus I (c. 382–301 BC), one of Alexander's generals and later king; the story is in Plutarch.

16 Calicut (Kozhikode), on the Malabar coast of India; the nobles described are the Nairs.

helped in this by the custom that forbids marriage between one trade and another. A girl from a family of shoemakers may not marry a carpenter. And parents are obliged to train their children for their fathers' calling, precisely that one and no other. By this means the distinction and continuance of their lot is kept up.

3.5.13 A good marriage, if there is such a thing, rejects the company and conditions of love and tries to reproduce those of friendship. It is a sweet partnership in life, full of constancy and trust, and of countless useful and solid services and mutual obligations. No woman who savors its taste, *whom the marriage torch has joined with its longed-for light,* would want to stand as a mistress to her husband. If she is lodged in his affection as a wife, she is lodged there far more honorably and securely.[17] When he plays the smitten and eager lover elsewhere, let him be asked even then which of the two he would rather have suffer some shame, his wife or his mistress. Whose misfortune would grieve him more? For whom does he wish greater advancement? In a sound marriage these questions leave no room for doubt.

3.5.14 That so few good ones are to be seen is a sign of its price and its worth. Well fashioned and rightly taken, there is no finer piece in our society. We cannot do without it, and yet we keep debasing it. What happens with it is what we see with cages: the birds outside despair of getting in, and those inside are just as anxious to get out. Socrates was asked which was better, to take a wife or not. "Whichever you do," he said, "you will regret it." It is an arrangement to which the saying fits very aptly: *man to man* is either *a god* or *a wolf*. Building it takes the meeting of many qualities. In these times it suits simple, ordinary souls better, where luxuries, curiosity and idleness do not trouble it so much. Unruly temperaments like mine, which hate every sort of tie and obligation, are not so well fitted for it. *And to me it is sweeter to live with my neck unyoked.*[18]

3.5.15 Left to my own design, I would have avoided marrying wisdom herself, if she had wanted me. But say what we will, cus-

17 Catullus, LXVI.

tom and the practice of ordinary life carry us along. Most of my actions are guided by example, not by choice. Still, I did not really invite myself to it. I was led to it, carried there by outside circumstances. For not only inconvenient things, but anything at all, however ugly, vicious and avoidable, can become acceptable through some condition or chance, so empty is the human stance. And I was carried there certainly more braced against it then, and more contrary, than I am now that I have tried it. And licentious as I am thought to be, I have in truth kept the laws of marriage more strictly than I had either promised or hoped. It is too late to kick once you have let yourself be hobbled. You must manage your liberty prudently. But once you have submitted to the obligation, you must hold to it under the laws of common duty, or at least try to. Those who enter into this bargain only to conduct themselves in it with hatred and contempt act unjustly, and to their own harm. And there is that fine rule which I see passed from hand to hand among the women like a holy oracle: *Serve your husband as your master, / And guard yourself from him as from a traitor.* That is to say: "Bear yourself toward him with a reverence that is forced, hostile and distrustful" (a war cry and a challenge). It is just as insulting as it is hard. I am too soft for such thorny designs. To tell the truth, I have not reached that perfection of cleverness and gallantry of mind that confuses reason with injustice and laughs at every order and rule that does not suit my appetite. Hating superstition does not make me rush straight into irreligion. If we do not always do our duty, we must at least always love it and acknowledge it. It is treachery to marry without espousing. Let us move on.

3.5.16 Our poet portrays a marriage full of harmony and good understanding, in which, however, there is not much loyalty. Did he mean that it is not impossible to yield to the assaults of love and still keep some duty toward marriage? That one can wound it without breaking it altogether? Many a servant skims off his master without hating him for all that.

18 Maximianus (known in Montaigne's day as Cornelius Gallus), Elegies.

> Beauty, opportunity and destiny have attached her to a stranger, for destiny too has a hand in it: *Fate rules those parts*
> *That the clothing hides: for if the stars desert you,*
> *The unheard-of length of your member will do nothing.* Yet perhaps not so wholly that there cannot remain some bond by which she still holds to her husband. These are two designs that travel separate roads, not one. A woman may give herself to a man she would by no means have wanted to marry. I do not mean because of his fortune, but because of the qualities of the person himself. Few men have married their mistresses without regretting it.[19]

And even in the other world, what a bad household Jupiter keeps with his wife, whom he had first courted and enjoyed in a love affair! That is what the saying calls fouling the basket and then putting it on your head. In my time I have seen love shamefully and dishonorably cured by marriage, in a certain good family. The considerations are too different. We love two different and opposed things without being troubled by it. Isocrates said that the city of Athens pleased people the way ladies do whom men court for love. Everyone liked to come and stroll there and pass the time; no one loved it enough to marry it, that is, to settle there and make it his home. It has made me indignant to see husbands hate their wives simply because they are wronging them. At least we should not love them less for our own fault. Out of repentance and compassion, at least, they ought to be dearer to us for it.

3.5.17 These are different ends, he says, and yet compatible in some way. Marriage has as its share utility, justice, honor and constancy: a flat pleasure, but a more universal one. Love is founded on pleasure alone, and its pleasure is in truth more tickling, livelier and keener, a pleasure stirred up by difficulty. There must be sting and smart in it. It is no longer love if it is

19 Juvenal, Satire IX.

without arrows and without fire. The ladies' generosity is too lavish in marriage and blunts the edge of affection and desire. See what pains Lycurgus and Plato take in their laws to avoid this drawback.

RULES MADE BY MEN

Men demand of women a chastity they neither practice nor make easy.

3.5.18 Women are not entirely wrong when they reject the rules of life that have been introduced into the world, since it is men who made them, without women. There is naturally intrigue and squabbling between them and us. Even the closest agreement we have with them is turbulent and stormy. In our author's opinion, we treat them thoughtlessly in this matter. We have recognized that they are incomparably more capable and ardent than we are in the acts of love. That ancient priest who had been now a man, now a woman, bore witness to it: *Venus of both kinds was known to him.* Besides, we have learned from their own mouths the proof given long ago, in different centuries, by an emperor and an empress of Rome, master craftsmen famous in this work. He did indeed deflower ten Sarmatian virgins, his captives, in one night. But she actually took on twenty-five bouts in one night, changing company as her need and taste required, *Still burning with the stiff tension of her vulva, / She withdrew exhausted by men, but not yet satisfied.* Then there was the dispute that arose in Catalonia. A woman complained of her husband's too frequent efforts. In my opinion this was not so much because they troubled her, for I believe in miracles only in matters of faith. It was rather to curtail, on this pretext, the authority of husbands over their wives, and to curb it in the very act that is fundamental to marriage;[20] and to show that women's sulks and malice go beyond the marriage bed and trample underfoot even the graces and sweetnesses of Venus. To her

20 The priest is Tiresias (Ovid, Metamorphoses III); the emperor is Proculus, and the empress Messalina, described in Juvenal, Satire VI.

complaint the husband, a truly brutish and unnatural man, replied that even on fast days he could not make do with fewer than ten. Then came that notable decree of the Queen of Aragon. After mature deliberation in council, this good queen, to give all ages a rule and example of the moderation and modesty required in a proper marriage, set the number at six a day as the legitimate and necessary limit. In doing so she gave up and relinquished much of the need and desire of her sex, in order, she said, to establish an easy standard, and therefore a lasting and unchangeable one. At which the learned exclaim: what must female appetite and lust be, if their reason, their reform and their virtue are cut to this measure? They are thinking of how differently our own appetites are judged. For Solon, the master of the school of law, rates this conjugal intercourse at only three times a month, so as not to fall short. After believing and preaching all this, I say, we have gone and given them continence as their special portion, and under the last and most extreme penalties.

3.5.19 There is no passion more pressing than this one, and we want them alone to resist it. Not simply as a vice of its own size, but as an abomination and an execration, worse than irreligion and parricide; and meanwhile we give in to it ourselves without guilt or reproach. Even those of us who have tried to master it have admitted readily enough how difficult, or rather impossible, it was to subdue, weaken and cool the body with material remedies. We, on the contrary, want them healthy, vigorous, plump, well fed and chaste all at once, that is to say, both hot and cold. For marriage, which we say has the task of keeping them from burning, brings them little cooling, as our ways go.[21]

21 An allusion to Saint Paul: "it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Corinthians 7:9).

> If they take a man in whom the vigor of youth still boils, he will make it his glory to spend it elsewhere. *Have some shame at last, or let us go to court:*
> *Your member, bought by me for many thousands,*
> *Is not yours, Bassus; you have sold it.* The philosopher Polemon was rightly sued by his wife for going about sowing in a barren field the fruit owed to the field of generation. If they take one of those other, worn-out men, there they are, in full marriage, worse off than virgins and widows. We consider them well provided for because they have a man beside them. In the same way the Romans held that Clodia Laeta, a Vestal, had been violated because Caligula had approached her, though it was proved that he had only approached her.[22]

But on the contrary, this only increases their need, since the touch and company of any male whatever awakens their heat, which would stay quieter in solitude. And it was probably to this end, to make their chastity more meritorious through this circumstance and consideration, that Boleslaus and his wife Kinga, king and queen of Poland, vowed it by common accord. They did so lying together on their very wedding day, and kept it in the teeth of marital opportunities.[23]

3.5.20 We train them from childhood in the business of love. Their grace, their finery, their learning, their speech, all their instruction aims at that one goal. Their governesses imprint nothing on them but the face of love, if only by depicting it to them continually to put them off it. My daughter (she is the only child I have) is at the age at which the laws allow the most hot-blooded girls to marry. She is of a slow-developing constitution, slight and soft, and her mother has brought her up accordingly, in a secluded and private way. So she is only now beginning to shed the innocence of childhood. She was reading a French book in front of me when the word *fouteau* came up, the name of

22 Martial, Epigrams XII.
23 Boleslaus V the Chaste of Poland (1226–1279) and his wife Saint Kinga.

a well-known tree. The woman she has as her governess stopped her short, rather roughly, and made her skip over that bad step. I let her do it, so as not to upset their rules, for I do not meddle in that government at all. Feminine administration has a mysterious way of proceeding; we must leave it to them. But if I am not mistaken, the company of twenty lackeys could not in six months have imprinted on her mind the meaning, the use and all the implications of the sound of those wicked syllables as well as that good old woman did with her reprimand and her prohibition.[24]

> *The ripening maiden loves to be taught Ionian dances,*
> *And makes her limbs supple,*
> *And even now, from her tenderest years,*
> *Dreams of unchaste loves.* Let them drop the ceremony a little and talk freely, and we are mere children compared with them in this science. Listen to them describe our pursuits and our conversations: they make it quite plain that we bring them nothing they have not known and digested without us. Could it be, as Plato says, that they were once dissolute boys? One day my ear happened to be in a place where it could steal some of their talk among themselves without their suspecting. If only I could repeat it![25]

24 *Fouteau* means "beech tree," but sounds like a coarse French verb for sexual intercourse.

25 Horace, Odes III.6. Plato's idea is in the Timaeus, where cowardly men are reborn as women.

> By Our Lady, I said, let us go now and study phrases from Amadis and the stories of Boccaccio and Aretino, to make ourselves clever! We are really putting our time to good use! There is no word, no example, no move that they do not know better than our books. It is a discipline born in their veins, *And Venus herself gave them the mind,* which those good schoolmasters, nature, youth and health, keep breathing into their souls. They do not need to learn it; they generate it. *No dove ever so delighted in her snow-white mate—*
> *Or any creature said to be more wanton—*
> *Always plucking kisses with her biting beak,*
> *As does a woman whose desires are many.*[26]

3.5.21 If this natural violence of their desire had not been held a little in check by the fear and honor they have been given, we men would be disgraced. All the motion of the world resolves itself into this coupling and yields to it. It is a matter infused everywhere, a center toward which all things look. We can still see ordinances of old and wise Rome made for the service of love, and Socrates' precepts for instructing courtesans. *And Stoic pamphlets love / To lie among silken cushions.* Zeno, among his laws, also regulated the spreading of legs and the thrusts of deflowering. What was the drift of the philosopher Strato's book on carnal union? And what did Theophrastus treat in the books he entitled, one The Lover, the other On Love?[27] What did Aristippus treat in his On Ancient Pleasures? What are Plato's long and vivid descriptions of the loves of his time meant to convey? And the book The Lover by Demetrius of Phalerum, and Clinias, or The Lover Forced, by Heraclides of Pontus? And Antisthenes' book On Begetting Children, or On Weddings, and his other one, On the Master, or The Lover? And Aristo's On Amorous Exercises? And Cleanthes' two books, one On Love, the other On the Art of Loving? The amorous dialogues of Sphaerus? And

26 The quotations are from Virgil, Georgics III, and Catullus, LXVIII.
27 Horace, Epodes VIII. Socrates' advice to the courtesan Theodote is in Xenophon, Memorabilia III.

Chrysippus' fable of Jupiter and Juno, shameless beyond all bearing? And his fifty letters, so lascivious? I mean to leave aside the writings of the philosophers who followed the sect of Epicurus, the protector of pleasure.[28] In times past, fifty deities were bound to this office. And there was once a nation where, to lull the lust of those who came to worship, young women were kept in the temples for enjoyment, and it was a ceremonial act to make use of them before attending the service: *Doubtless incontinence is necessary for the sake of continence; a blaze is put out by fire.*

3.5.22 In most of the world, this part of our body was deified. In one and the same province, some flayed it to offer and consecrate a piece of it, while others offered and consecrated their seed. In another, the young men pierced it publicly, opening it in various places between the flesh and the skin. Through these openings they passed skewers, the longest and thickest they could bear, and afterward they burned these skewers as an offering to their gods. Anyone who fainted from the force of that cruel pain was thought to have little vigor and little chastity. Elsewhere the most sacred magistrate was revered and recognized by those parts. In several ceremonies its effigy was carried in procession in honor of various divinities. At the feast of the Bacchanalia, the Egyptian ladies wore one around their necks, exquisitely carved in wood, large and heavy, each according to her strength. Besides this, the statue of their god displayed one that was bigger than the rest of his body. The married women in these parts fashion a figure of it on their foreheads out of their kerchiefs, to glory in the enjoyment they have of it. When they become widows, they lay it back and bury it under their headdress. In Rome the most virtuous matrons were honored to offer flowers and garlands to the god Priapus. And at the time of their weddings, virgins were made to sit on his less decent parts. And I wonder whether I have not seen in my own day some trace of a similar devotion. What was the meaning of that ridiculous piece of our fathers' breeches, which can still be seen on our Swiss?

28 These titles come from Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers.

Why do we now make a display of our parts, shaped, under our breeches, and often, what is worse, larger than their natural size, by falsehood and imposture? I am tempted to believe that this sort of garment was invented in better and more conscientious ages so as not to cheat people, so that each man should give a public account of his case. The simpler nations still wear it in a form that corresponds somewhat to the truth.[29] In those days people were informed of the workman's capacity as one is by measuring an arm or a foot. That good man who, in my youth, castrated so many fine ancient statues in his great city, so as not to corrupt the eye, followed the advice of that other good man of antiquity: *It is the beginning of vice to bare bodies among citizens.* He should have reflected that, just as in the mysteries of the Good Goddess every masculine semblance was shut out, he was getting nowhere unless he also had horses and asses castrated, and in the end nature itself.[30]

> *So it is that every race on earth, of men and beasts,*
> *The race of the sea, the flocks and the painted birds,*
> *Rush into this fury and fire.* The gods, says Plato, have furnished us with a disobedient and tyrannical member, which, like a furious animal, tries by the violence of its appetite to bring everything under its sway. In the same way, women's member is like a greedy and ravenous animal. If it is refused food in its season, it goes mad, impatient of delay, and breathes its rage into their bodies. It blocks the passages and stops the breathing, causing a thousand kinds of ills, until it has drunk in the fruit of the common thirst and abundantly watered and sown the depths of their womb.

3.5.23 Now my lawgiver should also have considered that it may be a more chaste and fruitful practice to let them know the living thing early than to leave them to guess at it according to the

29 The codpiece.
30 Probably Pope Paul IV, in Rome; the line is Ennius, quoted by Cicero, Tusculan Disputations IV. Men were excluded from the rites of the Bona Dea, the "Good Goddess."

freedom and heat of their fancy. In place of the real parts, they substitute, through desire and hope, others three times as extravagant. And a man I know ruined his chances by revealing his in a situation where it was not yet proper to put them to their most serious use. What harm those enormous drawings do, which boys scatter over the passages and staircases of royal houses! From them women get a cruel contempt for our natural capacity. Who knows whether Plato did not have this in mind when, following other well-ordered republics, he ordained that men and women, old and young, should present themselves naked to one another's view in his gymnastics? The Indian women, who see men in the raw, have at least cooled the sense of sight. Then there are the women of that great kingdom of Pegu. Below the waist they have nothing to cover themselves with but a cloth slit in front, and so narrow that, whatever ceremonious decency they try for, they can be seen entirely at every step. They say it is a device invented to draw men to them and away from males, to whom that nation is wholly given over. Whatever they may say, it could be argued that they lose more by it than they gain, and that a total hunger is sharper than one that has been satisfied, if only by the eyes. So Livia said that to a virtuous woman a naked man is no more than a statue.[31] The Spartan women, more virginal as wives than our girls are, saw the young men of their city every day, stripped for their exercises. They themselves were not very particular about covering their thighs as they walked, considering themselves, as Plato says, covered enough by their virtue without a farthingale. But those Saint Augustine speaks of attributed a marvelous power of temptation to nakedness. They questioned whether women, at the Last Judgment, will rise again in their own sex and not rather in ours, so as not to tempt us even in that holy state. In short, we lure them and goad them on by every means. We ceaselessly heat and stir up their imagination, and then we cry out against the belly.[32] Let us confess the

31 Livia was the wife of the emperor Augustus.

32 The French plays on *vertu* (virtue) and *vertugade* (farthingale, a hooped petticoat). Augustine discusses the question in The City of God XXII.

truth. There is hardly one of us who does not fear the shame that comes to him from his wife's vices more than from his own. Hardly one who does not take more care (wonderful charity!) of his good wife's conscience than of his own. Hardly one who would not rather be a thief and a committer of sacrilege, and have his wife a murderess and a heretic, than have her be no more chaste than her husband. An unjust valuation of vices! Both we and they are capable of a thousand corruptions more harmful and unnatural than lasciviousness. But we create and weigh vices not according to nature but according to our interest. That is why they take on so many unequal forms.

3.5.24 The harshness of our decrees makes women's devotion to this vice harsher and more vicious than its nature warrants, and leads it to consequences worse than their cause. They would willingly offer to go to the law courts to seek gain, and to war to seek reputation, rather than have to keep so difficult a guard in the midst of idleness and pleasures. Do they not see that there is no merchant, no attorney, no soldier who does not leave his work to run to this other business? And the porter and the cobbler too, however harassed and worn out they are with labor and hunger?

Would you exchange all that rich Achaemenes possessed,
Or the Mygdonian wealth of fertile Phrygia,
For a lock of Licymnia's hair,
Or the full houses of the Arabs,
While she bends her neck toward your burning kisses,
Or with easy cruelty refuses
What she would rather have snatched from her than asked for,
And sometimes is the first to snatch? I do not know whether the exploits of Caesar and Alexander surpass in toughness the resolution of a beautiful young woman. She has been brought up in our fashion, in the light and company of the world, assailed by so many contrary examples, and yet keeps herself intact in the midst of a thousand continual and strong pursuits. There is no doing more thorny, or more active, than this not doing. I find it easier to wear a suit of armor all one's life than a virginity.

And the vow of virginity is the noblest of all vows, as being the hardest. *The devil's strength is in the loins,* says Saint Jerome.

3.5.25 Certainly we have handed over to the ladies the most arduous and vigorous of human duties, and we leave them the glory of it. That ought to serve them as a singular spur to persist in it. It is a fine occasion for them to defy us and trample underfoot that empty pre-eminence in valor and virtue that we claim over them. They will find, if they take note, that it will make them not only highly esteemed but also more loved. A gallant man does not abandon his pursuit because he is refused, provided it is a refusal of chastity, not of choice. We may swear and threaten and complain all we like: we are lying; we love them the better for it. There is no lure like virtue, so long as it is not harsh and scowling. It is stupidity and cowardice to persist against hatred and contempt. But to persist against a virtuous and constant resolution mingled with a grateful will is the exercise of a noble and generous soul. They may acknowledge our services up to a certain point and let us feel, decently, that they do not disdain us. For that law which commands them to abom-

inate us because we adore them, and to hate us because we love them, is certainly cruel, if only because it is so hard. Why should they not listen to our offers and our requests, so long as they keep within the bounds of modesty? Why go guessing that inwardly they hear some freer meaning? A queen of our time used to say, ingeniously, that refusing these approaches is a sign of weakness and an admission of one's own easiness, and that a lady who has not been tempted cannot boast of her chastity. The limits of honor are not cut so very short. It has room to relax; it can take some liberties without forfeiting itself. At the edge of its frontier there is a stretch that is free, indifferent and neutral. Whoever has managed to chase it and drive it by force right into its corner and its stronghold is a clumsy fellow if he is not satisfied with his luck. The prize of victory is measured by its difficulty. Do you want to know what impression your devotion and your merit have made on her heart? Measure it by her character. One woman may give more who does not give as much. The obligation created by a benefit depends entirely on the will of the giver; the other circumstances that attend the giving are mute, dead and accidental. That little costs her more to give than her all costs her companion. If rarity is a ground for esteem in anything, it must be in this. Look not at how little it is, but at how few have had it. The value of a coin changes with the stamp and mark of the place. Whatever spite and indiscretion may make some men say in the excess of their discontent, virtue and truth always regain the advantage. I have seen women whose reputation had long been damaged by slander win back the universal approval of men by their constancy alone, without effort and without artifice. Everyone repents and retracts what he had believed of them. From being girls under some suspicion, they hold the first rank among ladies of honor. Someone said to Plato, "Everyone speaks ill of you." "Let them talk," he said. "I will live in such a way that I make them change their tune." Besides the fear of God and the prize of so rare a glory, which should incite them to preserve themselves, the corruption of this age forces them to it. And if I were in their place, there is nothing I would

not do sooner than entrust my reputation to such dangerous hands. In my time, the pleasure of telling about it (a pleasure hardly less sweet than that of the act itself) was permitted only to those who had a single faithful friend. Nowadays the ordinary talk at gatherings and at table is all boasting about favors received and the secret generosity of ladies. Truly it is too abject and base-hearted to let those tender, dainty sweetnesses be so fiercely persecuted, kneaded and plundered by people so ungrateful, indiscreet and fickle.

JEALOUSY

Jealousy, the most futile of passions, makes cuckoldry worse and cannot be cured.

3.5.26 This immoderate and illegitimate exasperation of ours against this vice is born of the most futile and stormy malady that afflicts human souls, which is jealousy. *Who forbids taking light from a light set beside it? / Though they give constantly, nothing is lost by it.* Jealousy and its sister envy seem to me among the most foolish of the troop. Of envy I can hardly speak: that passion, painted as so strong and powerful, has kindly found no way into me. As for the other, I know it, at least by sight. Animals feel it. The shepherd Cratis fell in love with a she-goat, and while he slept her billy goat came out of jealousy and butted his head with its own, and crushed it.[33] We have raised the excess of this fever after the example of certain barbarous nations. The best-disciplined nations have been touched by it, which is reasonable, but not carried away by it: *No adulterer, pierced by a husband's sword, / Has dyed the waters of the Styx with his crimson blood.* Lucullus, Caesar, Pompey, Antony, Cato and other brave men were cuckolds and knew it, without making a commotion about it. In those days there was only one fool, Lepidus, who died of anguish over it. Ah![34]

33 Ovid, The Art of Love III.
34 Johannes Secundus, Elegies. Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, consul in 78 BC.

then, poor wretch, of evil fate,
With your legs pulled apart and the door wide open,
Mullets and radishes will run you through! *And our poet's god, when he caught one of his companions with his wife, was content to put them to shame:* And one of the gods, not among the gloomy ones, wishes
He might be so disgraced. *Yet he still warms to the soft caresses she offers him, and complains that she has come to distrust his affection on that account:* Why seek reasons from so far back? Where, goddess,
Has your trust in me gone? *She even makes a request of him for an illegitimate son of hers,* Arms I ask, a mother for her son, *which he generously grants. And Vulcan speaks of Aeneas with honor:* Arms must be made for a valiant man. A humanity, in truth, more than human.[35]

And this excess of goodness I agree to leave to the gods: *Nor is it right to compare men with gods.*

3.5.27 As for the confusion of children, the gravest lawgivers ordain and favor it in their republics. Besides, it does not concern women, in whom this passion is, I know not how, even more firmly seated. *Often even Juno, greatest of the heaven-dwellers, / Has blazed with anger at her husband's daily faults.* When jealousy seizes these poor souls, weak and without resistance, it is pitiful to see how cruelly it pulls them about and tyrannizes them. It creeps in under the name of affection. But once it possesses them, the very causes that served as the foundation of goodwill serve as the foundation of mortal hatred. Of all the diseases of the mind, it is the one that the most things feed and the fewest things cure.[36] The husband's virtue, health, merit and reputation are the firebrands of their spite and their rage. *No enmities are bitter but those of love.* This fever disfigures and corrupts all that is otherwise fine and good in them. In a jealous

35 Catullus, XV. Vulcan caught his wife Venus with Mars; the lines are from Ovid, Metamorphoses IV, and Virgil, Aeneid VIII.
36 Plato's Republic prescribes that children be held in common. The verse is from Catullus, LXVIII.

woman, however chaste and however good a housekeeper she may be, there is no action that does not smack of sourness and nagging. It is a frenzied agitation that throws them to an extreme wholly contrary to its cause. A fine example was one Octavius in Rome. He had lain with Pontia Postumia, and his affection grew through enjoyment, so that he pressed her with all urgency to marry him. Unable to persuade her, this extreme love drove him headlong into acts of the cruelest and deadliest enmity: he killed her.[37] Likewise, the usual symptoms of this other amorous malady are internal hatreds, cabals and conspiracies, *And it is known what a raging woman can do,* and a rage that gnaws at itself all the more for being forced to excuse itself under the pretext of goodwill.

3.5.28 Now the duty of chastity covers a lot of ground. Is it the will that we want them to rein in? That is a very supple and active piece, far too quick to be stopped. What then, if dreams sometimes engage them so deeply that they cannot disown them? It is not in their power, nor perhaps in the power of Chastity herself, since she is female, to defend themselves against lusts and desiring. If their will alone concerns us, where are we? Imagine the great crush of men competing for the privilege of being carried, fully winged, with no eyes and no tongue, to each woman at the moment she would accept him. The Scythian women put out the eyes of all their slaves and prisoners of war, so as to make use of them more freely and secretly. Oh, what a tremendous advantage opportunity is! If anyone asked me what comes first in love, I would answer: knowing how to seize the moment. The second thing likewise, and the third as well. It is a point that can do everything. I have often lacked luck, but sometimes also enterprise. God keep from harm anyone who can still laugh at that! In this age it takes more boldness, which our young men excuse on the pretext of ardor. But if women looked at it closely, they would find that it comes rather from contempt. I was superstitiously afraid of giving offense, and I gladly respect what I love. Besides, in this traffic, take

37 Propertius, Elegies II. The story of Octavius is in Tacitus, Annals XIII.

away reverence and you rub off its luster. I like a man to play the child a little in it, the timid one, the servant. If not altogether in this, then in other respects I have something of that foolish bashfulness Plutarch speaks of, and it has wounded and stained the course of my life in various ways. It is a quality that fits very badly with my general make-up. But then, what are we but sedition and discord? My eyes are as tender at bearing a refusal as at giving one. And it weighs on me so much to be a weight on others that when duty forces me to test someone's willingness in a doubtful matter that costs him something, I do it sparingly and reluctantly.[38] But if it is for my own sake (though Homer truly says that in a needy man shame is a foolish virtue), I usually hand the task to a third party, who blushes in my place. And I turn down those who call on my services with the same difficulty, so that it has sometimes happened that I had the will to refuse but not the strength.[39]

3.5.29 It is folly, then, to try to bridle in women a desire so burning and so natural to them. And when I hear them boast that their will is so virginal and so cold, I laugh at them. They draw back too far. If it is a toothless, decrepit old woman, or a young one who is dried up and consumptive, then even if it is not quite believable, at least they have some plausibility in saying it. But those who still move and breathe only make their bargain worse, since rash excuses serve as accusations. Take a gentleman, a neighbor of mine, who was suspected of impotence: *whose little dagger, hanging limper than a tender beet, / never once rose as high as the middle of his tunic.* Three or four days after his wedding he went and swore quite boldly, to clear himself, that he had ridden twenty stages the night before. This was later used to convict him of sheer ignorance and to unmarry him. Besides, such talk is worth nothing. For there is neither continence nor virtue if there is no effort to the contrary. "It is true," they should say, "but I am not ready to surrender." Even the

38 Plutarch's essay "On Compliancy" (or "On False Shame").
39 Homer, Odyssey XVII.

saints talk like this.[40] I mean those who boast in earnest of their coldness and insensibility and want to be believed with a straight face. When it is with an affected face, where the eyes give the lie to their words, and in the jargon of their profession, which hits home by working against the grain, I find it fine. I am a great devotee of naturalness and freedom; but there is no help for it: unless it is altogether simple or childlike, it is inept and unbecoming to ladies in these dealings, and it swerves at once into impudence. Their disguises and figures of speech deceive only fools. Lying there holds the place of honor: it is a detour that leads us to the truth by a back door. If we cannot restrain their imagination, what do we want from them? Deeds? There are plenty that escape any outside knowledge, by which chastity can be corrupted. *She often does it—the thing she does without a witness.* And the deeds we fear least are perhaps the most to be feared. Their silent sins are the worst. *A more open adulteress offends me less.* There are acts by which they can lose their chastity without unchastity, and what is more, without their knowledge. *A midwife, testing a certain virgin's integrity by hand, whether through malice, clumsiness or accident, destroyed it while examining it.* One woman has lost her virginity by looking for it; another has killed it by toying with it. We could never precisely mark out for them the actions we forbid them.[41] We have to frame our law in general and vague terms. The very idea we forge of their chastity is ridiculous. For among the most extreme models of it that I know are Fatua, wife of Faunus, who after her marriage never let herself be seen by any male whatever; and the wife of Hiero, who did not notice that her husband's breath stank, thinking it a quality common to all men. They must become insensible and invisible to satisfy us.[42]

3.5.30 Now let us admit that the crux in judging this duty lies chiefly in the will. There have been husbands who suffered this

40 The Latin is from Catullus.

41 The first two quotations are from Martial; the prose passage is from Saint Augustine, City of God.

42 Fatua was an old Roman goddess, wife of the rustic god Faunus; Hiero was a tyrant of Syracuse in the 5th century BC.

mishap not only without reproaching or resenting their wives, but with singular gratitude and praise for their virtue. Some woman who loved her honor more than her life has prostituted it to the frenzied appetite of a mortal enemy to save her husband's life, and has done for him what she would never have done for herself. This is not the place to expand on these examples: they are too lofty and too rich to be shown in this light. Let us keep them for a nobler setting. But for examples of a more ordinary light: are there not women among us every day who lend themselves out solely for their husbands' profit, and by their express order and arrangement? And in ancient times Phaulius of Argos offered his wife to King Philip out of ambition; just as, out of courtesy, that Galba who had given a supper for Maecenas, seeing his wife and his guest begin to conspire with glances and signs, let himself slide down onto his cushion, playing a man heavy with sleep, to give their love affair a helping hand.[43] He owned up to this with rather good grace: for at that point, when a servant made bold to lay hands on the vessels on the table, he cried out to him quite frankly: "What, you rascal? Can't you see I am only sleeping for Maecenas?" One woman whose morals are loose may have a more reformed will than another who conducts herself with an orderly appearance. Just as we see some women complain of having been vowed to chastity before the age of discretion, I have also seen some complain, truthfully, of having been vowed to debauchery before the age of discretion. The vice of the parents may be the cause, or the force of need, which is a harsh counselor. In the East Indies, though chastity was held in singular esteem, custom nevertheless allowed a married woman to give herself to anyone who presented her with an elephant, and that with some glory at having been valued at so high a price. Phaedo the philosopher, a man of good family, after his homeland, Elis, was captured, made a trade of prostituting the beauty of his youth, as long as it lasted, to anyone who wanted it, for money, in order to live. And Solon was the first in Greece, they say, to give women by his

43 Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander.

laws the freedom to provide for their livelihood at the expense of their chastity—a custom that Herodotus says had been accepted before him in several states. And then, what comes of all this painful anxiety?[44] For whatever justice there may be in this passion, we should still see whether it carries us anywhere useful. Is there anyone who thinks he can lock them up by his own ingenuity? *Put on a bolt, keep her confined; but who will guard / the guards themselves? Your wife is crafty and begins with them.* What opportunity is not enough for them, in so knowing an age?[45]

3.5.31 Curiosity is a vice everywhere, but here it is pernicious. It is folly to want to get to the bottom of an ill for which there is no medicine that does not worsen and aggravate it; whose shame is increased and made public chiefly by jealousy; whose revenge wounds our children more than it heals us. You wither and die in pursuit of so obscure a verification. How pitifully those in my time who succeeded in it have fared! If the informer does not offer the remedy and his help at the same time, his warning is an insult, and deserves a dagger thrust more than being called a liar does. People laugh no less at the man who goes to the trouble of remedying it than at the man who knows nothing about it. The mark of cuckoldry is indelible: once it is attached to a man, it stays with him forever. The punishment shows it more than the fault does. It is a fine sight, to drag our private misfortunes out of shadow and doubt and trumpet them on tragic stages—misfortunes that sting only by being reported. For a good wife and a good marriage are so called not when they are so, but when nobody talks about them. We must be clever at avoiding this distressing and useless knowledge. The Romans had the custom, when returning from a journey, of sending someone ahead to the house to let their wives know they were coming, so as not to surprise them. And that is why a certain nation introduced the practice that the priest opens the way for the bride on the wedding day, to spare the groom the doubt and

44 Phaedo of Elis was a disciple of Socrates.
45 Juvenal, Satires.

the curiosity of trying to find out, in this first trial, whether she comes to him a virgin or wounded by another's love.

3.5.32 "But people talk about it." I know a hundred honorable men who are cuckolds, honorably and with little indecency. A gallant man is pitied for it, not thought less of. See to it that your virtue smothers your misfortune; that good men curse the occasion of it; that the man who wrongs you trembles merely to think of it. And then, who is not talked of in this way, from the least to the greatest? *He who commanded so many legions, / and was a better man than you, scoundrel, in many ways.* When you see so many honorable men implicated in this reproach in your presence, consider that you are not spared elsewhere either. "But even the ladies will laugh at it." And what do they laugh at more readily these days than a peaceful and well-ordered marriage?[46] Each of you has made someone a cuckold; and nature deals entirely in like for like, in compensation and turn about. The frequency of this mishap must by now have tempered its bitterness: it will soon have passed into custom.

3.5.33 A wretched passion, which has this further feature: that it cannot be shared. *Fortune has even begrudged ears to our complaints.* For what friend do you dare confide your grievances to, who, if he does not laugh at them, will not use them as a lead and a lesson for taking his own share of the spoils? The bitternesses of marriage, like its sweetnesses, are kept secret by the wise. And among the other troublesome conditions found in it, this one, for a talkative man like me, is among the chief: that custom makes it indecent and harmful to tell anyone all that one knows and feels about it.[47]

3.5.34 As for giving advice to the women themselves, to wean them from jealousy, that would be time lost. Their essence is so steeped in suspicion, vanity and curiosity that we must not hope to cure them by legitimate means. They often recover from this affliction through a kind of health much more to be feared than the illness itself. For as there are spells that can remove an ail-

46 Adapted from Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.
47 Catullus.

ment only by loading it onto someone else, so they readily throw this fever back onto their husbands when they lose it. Yet, to tell the truth, I do not know whether one can suffer anything worse from them than jealousy. It is the most dangerous of their conditions, as the head is of their members. Pittacus said that everyone had his defect, and that his was his wife's bad head; apart from that, he would think himself happy in every respect. It is a very heavy affliction, if so just, so wise, so valiant a personage felt the whole state of his life altered by it. What are we little manikins to do? The Senate of Marseille was right to grant the request of the man who asked permission to kill himself to escape his wife's storms. For it is an ill that is never removed except by removing the whole piece, and that admits of no settlement worth anything but flight or endurance—though both are very hard.[48] He knew what he was talking about, it seems to me, who said that a good marriage was made of a blind wife and a deaf husband.

3.5.35 Let us also take care that this great and violent harshness of obligation that we impose on them does not produce two effects contrary to our purpose: namely, that it whets the pursuers and makes the women readier to surrender. As to the first point, by raising the value of the fortress we raise the value of the conquest and the desire for it. Might it not be Venus herself who so cleverly raised the price of her wares through the pimping of the laws, knowing what a silly pastime it is unless fancy and costliness give it value? In the end it is all pork, varied only by the sauce, as Flamininus's host used to say. Cupid is a treacherous god. His game is to wrestle with devotion and justice.[49] It is his glory that his power clashes with every other power, and that all other rules give way to his. *And he goes after the occasion of his own offense.* As to the second point: would we not be cuckolded less if we were less afraid of it, given the temperament of women? For prohibition incites and invites them. *Where you will,*

48 Pittacus, ruler of Mytilene, was one of the Seven Sages of Greece.

49 The story is in Plutarch: a host at Chalcis served the Roman general Flamininus a feast of many dishes, all made from pork.

they won't; where you won't, they want to of their own accord. / They are ashamed to go by the permitted road. What better interpretation could we find for the case of Messalina? At first she cuckolded her husband on the sly, as is done; but since she managed her affairs too easily, thanks to his stupidity, she suddenly scorned that practice. There she was, making love in the open, acknowledging her lovers, keeping them and favoring them in everyone's sight.[50] She wanted him to feel it. When the beast could not be roused for all that, and made her pleasures soft and insipid by this too lax indulgence, by which he seemed to authorize and legitimize them, what did she do? Wife of an emperor alive and in good health, in Rome, the theater of the world, at high noon, amid public feast and ceremony, she married Silius, whom she had long been enjoying, one day when her husband was out of the city. Does it not seem that she was on her way to becoming chaste through her husband's indifference? Or that she was looking for another husband who would whet her appetite by his jealousy, and spur her on by resisting her? But the first difficulty she met was also the last. The beast woke with a start. One often gets the worst of the bargain with these sleepy deaf fellows. I have seen by experience that this extreme forbearance, when it comes to break loose, produces the harshest revenges. For catching fire all at once, with anger and fury heaped into one, it bursts out with all its force at the first charge. *And he lets loose all the reins of his wrath.* He put her to death, along with a great number of those in her confidence—even one who could not help it, and whom she had summoned to her bed with lashes of the whip.[51]

50 The quotations are from Ovid, Terence and Lucan.
51 Virgil, Aeneid.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE POETS

Virgil and Lucretius show how vigor of thought makes words full and living.

3.5.36 What Virgil says of Venus and Vulcan, Lucretius had said more fittingly of a stolen enjoyment between her and Mars. *Mars, mighty in arms, governs the fierce works*
of war; often he flings himself back into your lap,
bound by the eternal wound of love;
gazing open-mouthed at you, goddess, he feeds his greedy eyes with love,
and as he lies back his breath hangs upon your lips.
As he reclines upon your holy body, goddess,
pour yourself around him from above, and pour sweet words
from your lips. When I ruminate on that *reiicit, pascit, inhians, molli, fouet, medullas, labefacta, pendet, percurrit*, and that noble *circumfusa*, mother of the fine *infusus*, I disdain those petty conceits and verbal plays that were born since. These good people had no need of sharp and subtle wit.[52]

Their language is wholly full and pregnant with a natural and steady vigor. They are all epigram: not the tail only, but the head, the stomach and the feet. There is nothing strained, nothing dragging: everything moves at the same pace. *The whole texture is manly; they are not busy with little flowers.* It is not a soft eloquence, merely inoffensive: it is sinewy and solid, and it does not so much please as fill and ravish; and it ravishes the strongest minds most. When I see these splendid ways of expressing oneself, so lively, so deep, I do not say "this is speaking well," I say "this is thinking well." It is the vigor of the imagination that lifts and swells the words.[53] *It is the heart that makes one eloquent.* Our people call judgment "language" and full con-

52 The words listed come from this passage of Lucretius and from Virgil's scene of Venus and Vulcan in Aeneid VIII, which Montaigne has quoted earlier in this essay.
53 Seneca, Letters.

ceptions "fine words." This painting is guided not so much by dexterity of hand as by having the object more vividly imprinted on the mind. Gallus speaks simply because he conceives simply. Horace is not content with a superficial expression; it would betray him. He sees more clearly and further into things; his mind picks the locks of the whole storehouse of words and figures and ferrets through it to express itself; and he needs them beyond the ordinary, as his conception is beyond the ordinary. Plutarch says that he learned the Latin language through things. It is the same here: the sense illuminates and produces the words—words no longer of wind, but of flesh and bone.[54] They signify more than they say. Even the feeble get some glimpse of this. For in Italy I said what I pleased in ordinary conversation, but in serious discussion I would not have dared trust myself to an idiom that I could not bend or turn beyond its common gait. I want to be able to put something of my own into it.

3.5.37 It is the handling and use by fine minds that give value to a language: not so much by innovating as by filling it out with more vigorous and varied services, stretching and bending it. They do not bring words to it, but they enrich their own words, give weight and depth to their meaning and use, and teach the language unaccustomed movements—but prudently and ingeniously. How little this is granted to everyone can be seen in so many French writers of this century. They are bold and scornful enough not to follow the common road; but lack of invention and discretion ruins them. All one sees is a wretched affectation of strangeness, cold and absurd disguises which, instead of raising the subject matter, bring it down. So long as they can strut in novelty, they care nothing for effectiveness. To seize on a new word they abandon the ordinary one, which is often stronger and more sinewy.

3.5.38 In our language I find plenty of material, but a slight lack of fashioning. For there is nothing that could not be made out of the jargon of our hunting and our warfare, which is a generous

54 Quintilian. Gallus is Cornelius Gallus, a Roman love poet of the 1st century BC.

ground to borrow from. And forms of speech, like plants, improve and grow stronger by being transplanted. I find our language abundant enough, but not pliable and vigorous enough. It usually gives way under a powerful conception. If you are going at full stretch, you often feel it flag and buckle beneath you, and when it fails you, Latin comes to your aid, and Greek to others. In some of the words I have just picked out, we perceive their force less easily because use and frequency have somewhat cheapened their grace and made it common. Just so, in our everyday speech there are excellent phrases and metaphors whose beauty has withered with age and whose color has been tarnished by too common handling. But that takes nothing away from their savor for those who have a good nose, nor does it detract from the glory of those ancient authors who, very likely, first brought these words into such luster.

3.5.39 The sciences treat things too subtly, in an artificial way, different from the common and natural one. My page makes love and understands it. Read him Leo Hebraeus and Ficino: they talk about him, his thoughts and his actions, and yet he understands nothing of it. I do not recognize in Aristotle most of my ordinary emotions. They have been covered and dressed in another robe for the use of the schools. God grant them success! If I were in the trade, I would naturalize art as much as they artify nature. Let us leave Bembo and Equicola aside.[55]

3.5.40 When I write, I prefer to do without the company and memory of books, for fear they may interfere with my form. Also because, in truth, good authors humble me too much and dash my courage. I gladly play the trick of that painter who, having painted roosters wretchedly, forbade his apprentices to let any real rooster into his shop. And to give myself a little luster, I would rather need the device of the musician Antinonydes, who, when he had to perform, arranged for his audience to be plied,

55 Leo Hebraeus (Judah Abravanel), Marsilio Ficino, Pietro Bembo and Mario Equicola were Italian Renaissance writers on the philosophy of love.

before or after him, with some other bad singers.[56] But I can less easily rid myself of Plutarch. He is so universal and so full that on every occasion, however eccentric the subject you have taken up, he thrusts himself into your work and holds out to you a generous hand, inexhaustible in riches and embellishments. It vexes me that he is so exposed to plunder by those who frequent him. I cannot have the slightest dealings with him without making off with a leg or a wing.

3.5.41 For this design of mine, it also suits me to write at home, in wild country, where no one helps me or sets me right; where I do not usually associate with anyone who understands the Latin of his Paternoster, and French a little less. I would have done it better elsewhere, but the work would have been less mine; and its principal end and perfection is to be exactly mine. I would gladly correct an accidental error, of which I am full, since I run on carelessly; but the imperfections that are ordinary and constant in me—it would be treachery to remove them. When I have been told, or have told myself, "You are too thick with figures of speech. Here is a word of Gascon growth. Here is a risky phrase" (I reject none of those used in the streets of France; those who would fight usage with grammar are not serious), "Here is an ignorant piece of reasoning. Here is a paradoxical one. Here is one too foolish. You are often joking; people will think you mean in earnest what you say in jest"—"Yes," I say, "but I correct the faults of inadvertence, not those of habit. Isn't this how I speak everywhere? Do I not portray myself to the life? Enough. I have done what I wanted: everyone recognizes me in my book, and my book in me."

3.5.42 Now I have an apish, imitative disposition. When I dabbled in writing verse (and I never wrote any but Latin), it plainly betrayed the poet I had last been reading. And some of my first essays smell a little of other people. In Paris I speak a somewhat different language than at Montaigne. Anyone I look at attentively easily imprints something of his on me. Whatever

56 Antinonydes is Montaigne's form of Antigenidas, a Theban musician mentioned by Plutarch.

I observe, I appropriate: a foolish bearing, an unpleasant grimace, a ridiculous way of speaking. Vices even more: because they prick me, they cling to me and will not go away unless shaken off. I have more often been seen to swear by imitation than by temperament. A murderous imitation, like that of the apes, horrible in size and strength, that King Alexander came upon in a certain region of India. They would otherwise have been hard to overcome. But they supplied the means through their inclination to mimic everything they see done. For by this the hunters learned to put on shoes in their sight, tying them with many knots of laces; to rig themselves out in headgear fitted with running nooses; and to pretend to smear their eyes with birdlime. Thus these poor beasts imprudently turned their apish nature to their own harm: they stuck themselves in lime, tangled themselves in halters and trussed themselves up. That other faculty, of deliberately and cleverly reproducing another person's gestures and words, which often brings pleasure and admiration, is no more in me than in a tree stump. When I swear in my own way, it is only "by God," which is the most straightforward of all oaths. They say that Socrates swore by the dog; Zeno by the same interjection the Italians use nowadays, "Cappari"; Pythagoras by water and air. I am so apt to take on these superficial impressions without thinking that if I have had "Sire" or "Highness" in my mouth three days running, a week later they slip out of me in place of "Excellency" or "Lordship." And what I have taken to saying in fooling and mockery, I will say the next day in earnest.[57] That is why, in writing, I am more reluctant to take up well-worn subjects, for fear of treating them at someone else's expense. Any subject is equally fertile for me. I take them up from a fly. And God grant that the one I have in hand here was not taken up at the command of a will just as flighty! Let me begin with whichever I please, for subjects are all linked to one another in a chain.

3.5.43 But my mind displeases me in that it usually produces its deepest musings, its maddest and those I like best, unexpectedly

57 "Cappari" means "capers," a mild oath.

and when I am least looking for them; and they vanish at once, since I have nothing on the spot to fasten them to. On horseback, at table, in bed—but most on horseback, where my thoughts range widest. My speech is somewhat delicately jealous of attention and silence, if I am speaking in earnest: whoever interrupts me stops me. When traveling, the very demands of the road break off conversation. Besides, I more often travel without company suited to these sustained conversations; so I take all the leisure I want to converse with myself. It is the same with these as with my dreams. While dreaming, I commend them to my memory (for I often dream that I am dreaming); but the next day I can picture their color well enough, as it was, gay or sad or strange, but as for what they were otherwise, the more I labor to find it, the deeper I plunge it into oblivion. So too with the chance thoughts that drop into my head: all that stays in my memory is a vague image, just enough to make me fret and chafe in fruitless pursuit of them.

THE RIDICULOUS ACT

Love is mere appetite, and its absurd motions show that the gods made man their plaything.

3.5.44 So then, leaving books aside and speaking more materially and simply: I find, after all, that love is nothing but the thirst for this enjoyment in a desired object, and Venus nothing but the pleasure of discharging one's vessels, like the pleasure nature gives us in discharging other parts; which becomes vicious through either immoderation or indiscretion. For Socrates, love is the appetite for generation through the mediation of beauty. And considering many times the ridiculous titillation of this pleasure; the absurd, giddy, harebrained motions with which it shakes a Zeno or a Cratippus; that reckless frenzy, that face inflamed with fury and cruelty in the sweetest act of love; and then that grave, severe and ecstatic solemnity in so mad an action; and that our delights and our filth should have been lodged pell-mell together; and that the supreme pleasure should

have something of swooning and moaning about it, like pain—I believe it is true, as Plato says, that man was made by the gods as their plaything.[58]

> *What cruelty*
> *in jest is this?* And that it is in mockery that Nature has left us the most disorderly of our actions as the most common, to make us equal by it and pair off fools and wise men, and us and the beasts. The most contemplative and prudent man, when I imagine him in that position, I consider an impostor for playing the prudent and contemplative man. It is the peacock's feet that bring down its pride. *To tell the truth while laughing—*
> *what forbids it?* Those who refuse serious opinions in the midst of play are like, as someone says, the man who is afraid to worship the statue of a saint if it has no loincloth.[59]

We eat and drink just as the beasts do, but these are not actions that hinder the functions of our soul. In them we keep our advantage over the beasts. This one brings every other thought under the yoke, and by its imperious authority stupefies and brutalizes all the theology and philosophy there is in Plato; and yet he does not complain of it. Everywhere else you can keep some decency; all other operations allow rules of propriety. This one cannot even be imagined except as vicious or ridiculous. Just try to find a wise and discreet way of going about it. Alexander said that he knew himself to be mortal chiefly by this act and by sleep. Sleep stifles and suppresses the faculties of our soul; this business likewise absorbs and dissipates them. Certainly it is a mark not only of our original corruption but also of our vanity and deformity.

3.5.45 On the one hand Nature drives us to it, having attached to this desire the noblest, most useful and most pleasant of all her functions; and on the other she leaves us to condemn it and

58 Cratippus was a Peripatetic philosopher; with Zeno he stands here for the gravest of sages.
59 The quotations are from Claudian and Horace, Satires.

shun it as insolent and indecent, to blush at it and recommend abstinence. Are we not real brutes to call brutish the act that makes us? Peoples in their religions have agreed on many points —sacrifices, lamps, incense, fasts, offerings—and, among others, on condemning this act. All opinions come round to it, not to mention the widespread practice of circumcision. We are perhaps right to blame ourselves for making so foolish a product as man; to call the act shameful, and shameful the parts that serve it (at present mine are truly shameful). The Essenes, of whom Pliny speaks, kept themselves going for several centuries without wet nurses or swaddling clothes, through the arrival of strangers who, following this fine humor, kept joining them; a whole nation preferred to risk extinction rather than engage in a woman's embrace, and to lose the succession of men rather than forge one. They say that Zeno had to do with a woman only once in his life, and that it was out of politeness, so as not to seem to disdain the sex too obstinately. Everyone shuns seeing a man born; everyone runs to see him die. To destroy him we seek a spacious field in broad daylight; to construct him we hide in a dark hole, as cramped as can be.[60] It is our duty to hide in order to make him, and it is glory, and the birth of many virtues, to know how to unmake him. The one is an offense, the other a favor: for Aristotle says that "to do someone good," in a certain expression of his country, means to kill him. The Athenians, to put the disfavor of these two actions on an equal footing, when they had to purify the island of Delos and justify themselves to Apollo, forbade within its precincts all burials and all childbirths alike. *We are ashamed of ourselves.*[61]

3.5.46 There are nations that cover themselves while eating. I know a lady, one of the greatest, who holds this same opinion, that chewing is an unpleasant sight which greatly detracts from women's grace and beauty; and she does not willingly appear in public with an appetite. And I know a man who cannot bear to see people eat, or to be seen eating, and who shuns all onlookers

60 The Essenes were a celibate Jewish sect of antiquity.
61 Terence, Phormio.

more when he is filling himself than when he is emptying himself. In the Turkish empire one sees a great number of men who, to outdo the others, never let themselves be seen when they take their meals; who take only one a week; who slash and cut their faces and limbs; who never speak to anyone. Fanatical people, who think they honor their nature by denaturing themselves; who prize themselves for their self-contempt, and improve themselves by making themselves worse. What a monstrous animal, that horrifies itself, whose pleasures weigh on it, that regards itself as a misfortune! There are some who hide their life, *And exchange their homes and sweet thresholds for exile,* and steal it from the sight of other men; who avoid health and cheerfulness as hostile and harmful qualities. Not only many sects but many peoples curse their birth and bless their death. There are some where the sun is abhorred and darkness worshiped. We are ingenious only at mistreating ourselves; that is the true quarry of our mind's power—a dangerous tool when it runs out of control.[62] *O wretches, whose joys are counted a crime!* Ah, poor man, you have enough unavoidable ills without adding to them by your own invention; you are wretched enough by condition without being so by art. You have real and essential ugliness enough without forging imaginary ones. Do you find yourself too comfortable unless half your comfort vexes you? Do you find you have fulfilled all the necessary duties to which Nature binds you, and that she is idle in you, unless you bind yourself to new duties? You are not afraid to offend her universal and indubitable laws, and you pride yourself on your own partisan and fanciful ones; and the more particular, uncertain and disputed they are, the more effort you put into them.[63] The man-made ordinances of your parish bind you; those of the world do not touch you. Run through a few examples of this reflection: your whole life is made of them.

62 Virgil, Georgics.
63 From an elegy then attributed to Cornelius Gallus.

CONCEALMENT AND DESIRE

Veiled poetry and slow, measured favors make desire keener than frankness.

3.5.47 The verses of these two poets, treating lasciviousness with as much reserve and discretion as they do, seem to me to reveal it and light it up more closely. Ladies cover their bosoms with a net, priests cover many sacred things, painters shade their work to give it more luster. And they say that the force of the sun and wind strikes harder by reflection than directly. The Egyptian gave a wise answer to the man who asked him, "What are you carrying hidden under your cloak?" "It is hidden under my cloak so that you will not know what it is." But there are certain other things that are hidden in order to show them. Listen to this one, who is more open: *And I pressed her naked body to my own.* I feel as if he were gelding me.[64] Let Martial hitch up Venus's skirts as he pleases, he does not succeed in showing her so completely. He who says everything gluts us and puts us off. He who is afraid to express himself leads us to imagine more than there is. There is treachery in this sort of modesty, especially when, like these two, it half opens so fine a road for the imagination. Both the act and its depiction should have a whiff of theft about them.

3.5.48 The love of the Spaniards and the Italians, more respectful and timid, more coy and covert, pleases me. Someone in ancient times, I forget who, wished for a throat as long as a crane's neck, to savor longer what he swallowed. That wish is more apt for this quick and hasty pleasure, especially for natures like mine, which have the fault of suddenness. To check its flight and spin it out in preambles, everything among them serves as favor and reward: a glance, a bow, a word, a sign. If someone could dine on the smoke of the roast, would he not make a fine saving? It is a passion that mixes with very little solid substance a great deal more vanity and feverish dreaming;

64 Ovid, Amores. "These two poets" are Virgil and Lucretius.

it must be paid and served in the same coin. Let us teach ladies to make themselves valued, to esteem themselves, to keep us dangling and to lure us on. We make our final charge first: there is always some French impetuosity in it. If they spin out their favors and display them piece by piece, everyone, even into wretched old age, will find some scrap of the hem, according to his means and merit. He who finds enjoyment only in the enjoyment, who wins only with the highest throw, who likes the hunt only in the kill, has no business joining our school. The more steps and stairs there are, the more height and honor in the topmost seat. We should be glad to be led there, as one is in magnificent palaces, through various porticoes and passages, long and pleasant galleries, and many windings. This arrangement would work to our advantage: we would linger there and love longer. Without hope and without desire, we are no longer good for much. Our mastery and full possession is something they have infinite reason to fear. Once they have surrendered entirely to the mercy of our faith and constancy, they are running quite a risk. Those are rare and difficult virtues: as soon as they are ours, we are no longer theirs. *Once the lust of the eager mind is sated, / they fear nothing of their words, care nothing for their perjuries.* And Thrasonides, a young Greek, was so in love with his love that, having won a mistress's heart, he refused to enjoy her, so as not to deaden, sate and enfeeble through enjoyment that restless ardor in which he gloried and on which he fed.[65]

65 Catullus.

3.5.49 Costliness gives food its relish. See how the form of greeting peculiar to our nation, by its very easiness, debases the grace of kisses, which Socrates says are so powerful and dangerous for stealing our hearts. It is an unpleasant custom, and insulting to the ladies, to have to lend their lips to any man with three footmen in his train, however disagreeable he may be: *From whose dog-like nostrils hangs a livid icicle, and whose beard is stiff with frost: I would rather meet a hundred lickers of backsides.* And we ourselves gain little by it: for as the world is divided, for three pretty women we have to kiss fifty ugly ones. And to a delicate stomach, such as men of my age have, one bad kiss is too high a price for a good one.[66]

3.5.50 In Italy they play the suitor and the lovesick swain even with women who are for sale. They defend themselves this way: there are degrees of enjoyment, and by their attentions they want to obtain for themselves the most complete kind. Those women sell only the body. The will cannot be put up for sale; it is too free and too much its own. So these men say it is the will they are setting out to win, and they are right. It is the will that must be served and courted. I am horrified to imagine as mine a body without affection. And it seems to me that this frenzy is close to that of the boy who, out of love, went and mounted the beautiful statue of Venus that Praxiteles had made.[67] Or that of the frenzied Egyptian who was inflamed with lust for the corpse of a dead woman he was embalming and shrouding. He gave occasion for the law later made in Egypt that the bodies of beautiful young women, and of women of good family, should be kept for three days before being handed over to those whose task was to prepare their burial. Periander did something more astonishing: he extended his conjugal affection, which is more regulated and lawful, to the enjoyment of his dead wife Melissa. Does it not seem a lunatic whim of the Moon that, unable to

66 Martial.

67 Praxiteles, the Athenian sculptor of the 4th century BC, made the famous Aphrodite of Cnidus.

enjoy Endymion, her darling, in any other way, she went and put him to sleep for several months, and feasted on the enjoyment of a boy who moved only in his dreams?[68] I say likewise that one loves a body without a soul when one loves a body without its consent and without its desire. Not all enjoyments are alike. There are consumptive and languid enjoyments. A thousand causes other than goodwill can win us this grant from the ladies. It is not sufficient evidence of affection. There may be treachery in it, as anywhere else: sometimes they go at it with only one buttock; *As if they were preparing incense and wine: / you would think her absent, or made of marble.* I know some who would rather lend that than their coach, and who give themselves only that way. You must look to see whether your company pleases them for some other purpose too, or only for that one, as with a strapping stable-boy; at what rank and at what value you are lodged there, *whether to you alone / she grants the days she marks with a whiter stone.* What if she is eating your bread with the sauce of a more pleasing fancy? *She holds you, but sighs for other, absent loves.* What? Have we not seen someone in our own day use this act for a horrible revenge, to kill and poison by this means, as he did, an honorable woman?

3.5.51 Those who know Italy will never find it strange if, on this subject, I look nowhere else for examples. For that nation can be called the teacher of the rest of the world in this matter. They commonly have more beautiful women and fewer ugly ones than we do; but in rare and excellent beauties I reckon we are even. And I judge the same of minds: of the ordinary sort they have far more, and obviously so. Brutishness is incomparably rarer there; but in singular souls of the highest rank, we owe them nothing. If I had to extend this comparison, it seems to me I could say of valor that, on the contrary, compared with them it is common among us, and natural; but one sometimes sees it in their hands so full and so vigorous that it surpasses all the sternest examples we have.

68 Periander was tyrant of Corinth (7th–6th century BC); Endymion was the shepherd whom the Moon loved and cast into endless sleep.

3.5.52 Marriages in that country limp in this respect. Their custom commonly lays down so harsh and servile a law for women that the most distant acquaintance with a stranger is as much a capital offense for them as the closest. This law makes every approach necessarily substantial. And since it all comes to the same reckoning for them, they have an easy choice. And once they have broken through those partitions? Believe me, they catch fire: *Lust, like a wild beast, first provoked by its very chains, then let loose.* You must slacken the reins on them a little. *I saw lately a horse fighting stubbornly against its bit / rush off like a thunderbolt, its mouth resisting.* The desire for company is dulled by allowing it some freedom. It is a fine custom of our nation that our children are received into good houses to be brought up and trained there as pages, as in a school of nobility. And it is a discourtesy and an insult, they say, to refuse a gentleman this. I have noticed (for there are as many different styles and ways as there are houses) that the ladies who have tried to give the girls in their train the most austere rules have had no better luck for it. Moderation is needed here. A good part of their conduct must be left to their own discretion; for, one way or another, there is no discipline that could curb them on every side. But it is quite true that the girl who has come out of a free schooling unscathed inspires much more confidence in herself than the one who comes out sound from a strict, prison-like school.

3.5.53 Our fathers trained their daughters' bearing to shame and fear (hearts and desires being always the same); we train it to self-assurance. We understand nothing about it. That is a matter for the Sarmatian women, who are not allowed to sleep with a man until they have killed another with their own hands in war. For me, who have no rights there except through my ears, it is enough if they keep me on as counsel, according to the privilege of my age. So I counsel them, and us too, abstinence; but if this age is too hostile to it, at least discretion and modesty.[69] For, as the story goes of Aristippus, speaking to some young men who blushed to see him go into a courtesan's house: "The vice is in

69 Herodotus tells this of the Sauromatian women, neighbors of the Scythians.

not coming out, not in going in." Let her who will not keep her conscience clear keep her name clear; if the substance is not worth much, let the appearance hold firm.

3.5.54 I commend gradualness and slowness in the dispensing of their favors. Plato shows that in every kind of love, easiness and promptness are forbidden to the defenders. To surrender like that, rashly, wholesale and in a rush, is a mark of greed, which they must hide with all their art. By conducting themselves in an orderly and measured way in dispensing their favors, they lure our desire far better and conceal their own. Let them always flee before us—I mean even those who intend to let themselves be caught. They beat us better by fleeing, like the Scythians. In truth, by the law Nature gives them, it is not properly their part to will and desire; their role is to submit, obey, consent. That is why Nature has given them a perpetual capacity, and us a rare and uncertain one. They always have their hour, so that they may always be ready for ours: *born to be passive*. And whereas she wanted our appetites to have a prominent display and declaration, she made theirs hidden and internal; and she furnished them with parts unsuited for display, made simply for defense. We must leave to Amazonian license strokes like this one. When Alexander was passing through Hyrcania, Thalestris, queen of the Amazons, came to find him with three hundred warriors of her sex, well mounted and well armed, having left the rest of a large army that followed her beyond the neighboring mountains.[70] And she told him aloud, in public, that the fame of his victories and his valor had brought her there to see him and to offer him her means and her power in support of his enterprises; and that, finding him so handsome, young and vigorous, she, who was perfect in all her qualities, advised that they sleep together, so that from the most valiant woman in the world and the most valiant man then living there might be born something great and rare for the future. Alexander thanked her for the rest; but to give time for the fulfillment

70 Hyrcania was a region on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea; the story of Thalestris is told by Quintus Curtius and others.

of her last request he stayed thirteen days in that place, which he celebrated as merrily as he could in honor of so courageous a princess.

3.5.55 We are almost everywhere unfair judges of their actions, as they are of ours. I admit the truth when it hurts me just as when it serves me. It is an ugly disorder that drives them so often to change and prevents them from fixing their affection firmly on any object whatever, as we see with that goddess to whom so many changes and lovers are attributed. But it is true, all the same, that it is against the nature of love not to be violent, and against the nature of violence to be constant. And those who are amazed at this, who cry out against it and seek the causes of this malady in women as something unnatural and incredible—why do they not see how often they harbor it in themselves without alarm and without marvel? It would perhaps be stranger to find any stability in it. It is not simply a bodily passion. If there is no limit to be found in avarice and ambition, there is none in lechery either. It lives on even after satiety; no constant satisfaction and no end can be prescribed for it; it always goes beyond what it possesses. And yet inconstancy is perhaps somewhat more pardonable in them than in us. They can plead, as we can, the inclination we share for variety and novelty; and they can plead secondly, as we cannot, that they buy a cat in a sack. Joanna, queen of Naples, had Andrew, her first husband, strangled at the bars of her window with a cord of gold and silk woven by her own hand, because in the labors of marriage she found neither his parts nor his efforts answering to the hope she had conceived of them on seeing his stature, his beauty, his youth and his vigor, by which she had been taken in and deceived. They can plead too that the active part takes more effort than the passive: so that on their side, at least, the need is always provided for, whereas on ours it may turn out otherwise.[71]

For this reason Plato wisely provides in his Laws that before any marriage, to decide whether it is suitable, the judges should see the young men who seek it stark naked, and the girls naked only to the waist. When they try us out, they may find us unworthy of their choice: *Having tried his loins, and found his groin just like a sodden strap,*
unable to stand even when urged by her tired hand,
she deserts the unwarlike marriage bed. It is not enough for the will to go straight. Weakness and incapacity lawfully break a marriage: *And she would have to look elsewhere for something more sinewy,*
able to untie a virgin's girdle. Why not, then, and in her own measure, a love affair more licentious and more active? *if he cannot last out the sweet labor.*

3.5.56 But is it not great impudence to bring our imperfections and weaknesses to a place where we wish to please, and to leave a good opinion and recommendation of ourselves behind? For the little I need nowadays, *limp after a single bout,* I would not want to trouble a person whom I must revere and fear. *Have no suspicion of a man whose age has hurried on*
to close its eleventh lustrum. Nature should have been content to make this age miserable without making it ridiculous as well. I hate to see it, for an inch of puny vigor that heats it three times a week, bustle and swagger with as much eagerness as if it had some great and lawful battle in its belly: a real fire of straw.[72]

And I marvel at its heat, so lively and frisky, being in a moment so heavily frozen and snuffed out. This appetite ought to belong only to the flower of a fine youth. Just trust it, and see,

71 Joanna I of Naples; her husband Andrew of Hungary was murdered at Aversa in AD 1345.
72 Horace, Odes II.4; a lustrum is five years, so the speaker is fifty-five, about Montaigne's age at the time.

to second that tireless, full, constant and magnanimous ardor that is in you: it will leave you stranded halfway, I promise you.

> Rather send it off boldly to some soft, bewildered and ignorant girlhood that still trembles under the rod and blushes at it, *As when someone stains Indian ivory with blood-red purple, or when white lilies blush, mixed with many roses.* The man who can wait for the next day without dying of shame, for the disdain of those lovely eyes that witnessed his slackness and ineptitude, *And yet her silent face reproached me,* has never felt the satisfaction and pride of having left them heavy and dim from the vigorous exercise of an obliging and active night. When I have seen a woman grow tired of me, I have not straightaway blamed her fickleness; I have wondered whether I had not better reason to blame Nature instead.
>
> Certainly she has treated me unfairly and unkindly, *If the penis is not long enough, not thick enough: no doubt matrons too know what's what, and look on a small penis with displeasure:* and with the grossest of losses. Each of my parts is as much mine as any other. And no other makes me more properly a man than this one.[73]

MY PORTRAIT, ALL OF IT

Montaigne defends his frankness and owns his conduct as a lover.

3.5.57 I owe the public my portrait, complete. The wisdom of my teaching lies wholly in truth, in freedom, in essence. It disdains to put on the list of its true duties these petty rules, feigned, customary, provincial. It is wholly natural, constant, universal. Civility and ceremony are its daughters, but spurious ones. We shall get the better of the vices of appearance once we have got the better of those of essence. When we have done with these,

73 The Latin is from the Priapea, ancient poems about the god Priapus. "Lésion énorme" was a legal term for grossly unfair loss in a bargain, grounds for annulling it.

we will fall upon the others, if we find that we must. For there is a danger that we invent new duties to excuse our neglect of the natural ones, and to confuse them. That this is so can be seen from the fact that in places where faults are crimes, crimes are only faults. And that in nations where the laws of propriety are fewer and looser, the primary laws of common reason are better observed, since the countless multitude of so many duties smothers our care, making it languid and scattering it. Attention to trivial things draws us away from the proper ones. Oh, what an easy and plausible road these superficial men take, compared with ours! These are shadows with which we plaster ourselves over and pay one another. But we do not pay with them; rather, we add to our debt toward that great Judge who lifts our flaps and rags from around our shameful parts, and does not hesitate to see us all over, down to our most intimate and secret filth. A useful decency, that maidenly modesty of ours, if it could forbid him this discovery. In short, whoever cured man of so scrupulous a verbal superstition would do the world no great harm. Our life is partly folly, partly prudence. Whoever writes of it only reverently and by the rules leaves more than half of it out. I do not make excuses to myself; and if I did, it would be for my excuses that I would excuse myself, rather than for any other fault of mine. I make my excuses to certain temperaments, which I reckon to be more numerous than those on my side. For their sake I will say this too (for I wish to satisfy everyone, a hard thing nonetheless, *for one man to adapt himself to so great a variety of manners, speech and inclinations*): that they have no cause to blame me for what I make authorities say that have been accepted and approved for many centuries; and that it is not reasonable, just because I do not write in rhyme, to refuse me the license that even churchmen, some of our own, enjoy in this age. Here are two, and from some of the proudest crests: *May I perish if your little slit is more than a single line. / A friend's member pleases her and treats her well.* And what of so many others? I love modesty; and it is not by judgment that I have chosen this scandalous way of speaking: it is Nature that chose it for

me.[74] I do not praise it, any more than any other ways contrary to accepted usage; but I excuse it, and by circumstances both general and particular I lighten the charge. Let us go on.

3.5.58 Likewise, where can it come from, this usurpation of sovereign authority that you assume over the women who favor you at their own expense, *If she has given stolen little gifts in the dark of night,* so that you at once take on the rights, the coolness and the authority of a husband? It is a free agreement: why do you not hold yourselves to it as you want to hold them? No rights can be acquired by prescription in things done voluntarily. It is against the fashion, but it is true nonetheless, that in my time I conducted this bargain, as far as its nature allows, as conscientiously as any other bargain, and with some semblance of justice; that I showed them no more affection than I felt, and represented to them plainly its decline, its vigor and its birth, its fits and its lulls. One does not always go at the same pace. I was so sparing in my promises that I think I have kept more than I promised or owed. They found me faithful, even to the point of serving their inconstancy. I mean an inconstancy openly admitted, and sometimes multiplied. I never broke with them as long as I was still attached, even if only by the end of a thread. And whatever cause they gave me, I never broke off to the point of contempt and hatred. For such intimacies, even when obtained by the most shameful agreements, still bind me to some goodwill. I have sometimes shown them anger and somewhat indiscreet impatience over their tricks and evasions, and over our quarrels. For by my constitution I am subject to sudden emotions that often harm my dealings, though they are light and brief. If they wanted to test the freedom of my judgment, I did not hesitate to give them fatherly and biting advice, and to pinch them where it smarted. If I have left them any cause to complain of me, it is rather that they found in me a love that was, by modern standards, foolishly conscientious. I kept my word in mat-

74 The first Latin is from the Handbook on Electioneering ascribed to Quintus Cicero; the two lines are by the Calvinist theologian Théodore de Bèze and the court poet and royal almoner Mellin de Saint-Gelais.

ters where I would easily have been released from it. They sometimes surrendered then with their reputation intact, and on terms of capitulation that they readily allowed the victor to break. More than once I have made pleasure, at its very height, strike sail before the interest of their honor. And where reason pressed me, I armed them against me, so that they conducted themselves more safely and strictly by my rules, once they had freely put themselves in my hands, than they would have by their own. As far as I could, I took on myself alone the risk of our assignations, to relieve them of it; and I always arranged our meetings by the hardest and least expected way, to be less suspected and also, in my opinion, more accessible. People are open chiefly at the points they consider covered by themselves. Things less feared are less defended and watched. You can more easily dare what no one thinks you will dare, which becomes easy by its very difficulty.

Never did a man make his approaches more ineptly genital. This way of loving is more in keeping with the rules. But how ridiculous it is to our people, and how ineffective, who knows better than I? Yet I shall not come to repent of it. I have nothing more to lose there: *The sacred wall, by its votive tablet,*
shows that I have hung up my dripping
garments to the mighty god
who rules the sea. Now is the time to speak of it openly.

But just as I might perhaps say to another: "My friend, you are dreaming; love in your day has little to do with good faith and integrity; *If you expect to make these things*
certain by reason, you will achieve no more
than if you tried to go mad by reason"—so, on the other hand, if it were up to me to begin again, it would certainly be the same way and by the same steps, however fruitless it might prove for me. Incompetence and foolishness are praiseworthy in a blameworthy action. The further I move from their temperament in this, the closer I come to my own.

LOVE IN OLD AGE

Moderate love would revive an aging man, but he has little left to offer in return.

3.5.59 Besides, in this business I did not let myself go entirely. I enjoyed it, but I did not forget myself; I kept intact the little sense and discretion that Nature has given me, for their service and for mine: a little excitement, but no delirium. My conscience was engaged in it too, as far as debauchery and dissoluteness, but as far as ingratitude, treachery, malice and cruelty, no. I did not buy the pleasure of this vice at any price, and was content with its own simple cost. *No vice is confined to itself.* I hate almost equally a stagnant, sleepy idleness and a thorny, painful busyness. The one pricks me, the other puts me to sleep. I like wounds as much as bruises, and cutting blows as much as blunt ones. In this business, when I was more fit for it, I found a just moderation between these two extremes. Love is a wakeful, lively and cheerful agitation. I was neither troubled nor afflicted by it, but I was warmed by it, and stirred as well: that is where one must stop. It is harmful only to fools. A young man asked the philosopher Panaetius whether it would become a wise man to be in love. "Let us leave the wise man aside," he answered, "but you and I, who are not wise, let us not get involved in something so agitated and violent, which enslaves us to another and makes us contemptible to ourselves." He spoke truly: one should not entrust so headlong a thing to a soul that has not the means to withstand its assaults, and to refute in practice the saying of Agesilaus, that prudence and love cannot go together. It is a vain occupation, it is true: unseemly, shameful and illegitimate. But conducted in this way, I consider it healthy, fit to rouse a sluggish mind and body. And as a doctor I would prescribe it to a man of my build and condition as willingly as any other prescription, to wake him up and keep him vigorous well on into his years, and to put off the grip of old age.

> While we are only in its outskirts, while the pulse still beats, *While my white hair is new, while old age is fresh and upright,*
> *while Lachesis still has thread to spin, and I carry myself*
> *on my own feet, with no staff to prop my right hand,* we need to be roused and tickled by some biting agitation like this one. See how much youth, vigor and gaiety it gave back to the wise Anacreon.[75]

And Socrates, who was older than I am, said of an object of his love: "As I leaned my shoulder against his, and brought my head close to his while we were looking at a book together, I felt, truly, a sudden sting in my shoulder, like the bite of some animal; and for more than five days afterward it tingled, and a continual itch flowed into my heart." A touch, and an accidental one, and by a shoulder, to heat and stir a soul cooled and enfeebled by age, and the foremost of all human souls in reforming itself! And why not, indeed? Socrates was a man, and wanted neither to be nor to seem anything else.[76] Philosophy does not struggle against natural pleasures, provided measure goes with them; it preaches moderation in them, not flight. The force of its resistance is used against foreign and spurious ones. It says that the appetites of the body must not be increased by the mind. And it warns us ingeniously not to try to wake our hunger by surfeit; not to stuff the belly instead of filling it; to avoid every enjoyment that leaves us in want, and every food and drink that makes us thirsty and hungry. So in the service of love it bids us take an object that simply satisfies the body's need and does not stir the soul, which must not make this its business, but merely follow and assist the body. But am I not right to think that these precepts, which in my view are rather rigorous anyway, concern a body that does its job; and that for a body that is run down, like a prostrate stomach, it is excusable to warm it and prop it up by art, and by means of the imagination

75 Anacreon wrote of love and wine into old age.
76 The story comes from Xenophon's Symposium.

to bring back its appetite and liveliness, since of itself it has lost them?

3.5.60 May we not say that there is nothing in us, during this earthly prison, that is purely either bodily or spiritual, and that it is wrong to dismember a living man; and that it seems reasonable for us to treat the enjoyment of pleasure at least as favorably as we treat pain? Pain, for example, was vehement to the point of perfection in the souls of the saints through penitence. The body naturally had a share in it by right of their union, and yet could have had little share in the cause; still, they were not content that it should merely follow and assist the afflicted soul. They afflicted the body itself with atrocious pains of its own, so that, vying with each other, soul and body might plunge the man into pain, all the more salutary for being harsher. In the same case, with bodily pleasures, is it not unjust to chill the soul toward them and to say that it must be dragged to them as to some constrained and servile obligation and necessity? It is rather for the soul to brood over and foster them, to present itself and invite itself to them, since the charge of ruling belongs to it. Just as it is also, in my opinion, for the soul, in the pleasures proper to it, to inspire and infuse into the body all the feeling its nature can bear, and to strive to make them sweet and wholesome for it. For it is quite right, as they say, that the body should not follow its appetites to the harm of the mind. But why is it not also right that the mind should not follow its own to the harm of the body?

3.5.61 I have no other passion to keep me on my toes. What avarice, ambition, quarrels and lawsuits do for others who, like me, have no assigned occupation, love would do more agreeably. It would give me back watchfulness, sobriety, grace, care of my person. It would steady my bearing, so that the grimaces of old age, those deformed and pitiable grimaces, might not come to spoil it. It would bring me back to sound and wise studies, by which I might make myself more esteemed and more loved, freeing my mind from despair of itself and of its use, and reconciling it with itself. It would divert me from a thousand distress-

ing thoughts, a thousand melancholy cares with which idleness and the poor state of our health burden us at such an age. It would warm again, at least in dreams, this blood that nature is abandoning. It would hold up the chin, and stretch a little the sinews, and the vigor and gaiety of life, for this poor man who is heading full tilt toward his ruin. But I fully understand that it is a convenience very hard to come by. Through weakness and long experience, our taste has become more delicate and more refined. We ask more when we bring less. We want to choose most when we least deserve to be accepted. Knowing ourselves to be such, we are less bold and more distrustful: nothing can assure us that we are loved, given our condition and theirs. I am ashamed to find myself among this green and ebullient youth, *whose sinew, in his untamed groin, stands firmer / than a young tree rooted on the hills.* Why should we go and display our misery amid all this gaiety?

> *So that the hot-blooded young men may see,*
> *not without much laughter,*
> *the torch crumbled into ashes.* They have strength and reason on their side; let us make way for them; we have nothing left to hold on to. And this bud of nascent beauty does not let itself be handled by such numb hands, or won by purely material means. For, as that ancient philosopher answered the man who mocked him for failing to win the favor of a young thing he was pursuing: "My friend, the hook won't bite into such fresh cheese." Now this is a commerce that requires relationship and reciprocity. The other pleasures we receive can be repaid with rewards of a different kind; but this one is paid only in coin of the same kind.[77]

Truly, in this sport, the pleasure I give tickles my imagination more sweetly than the pleasure I am given. Now there is nothing generous in a man who can receive pleasure where he gives none; it is a mean soul that wants to owe everything, and likes to

77 Diogenes Laertius attributes this reply to the philosopher Bion of Borysthenes.

keep up dealings with people to whom it is a burden. There is no beauty, no grace, no intimacy so exquisite that a gentleman should desire it at that price. If they can do us good only out of pity, I would much rather not live at all than live on alms. I would like to have the right to ask it of them in the style I have seen beggars use in Italy: *Do good for your own sake*; or in the way Cyrus exhorted his soldiers: "Whoever loves me, follow me." "Take up with women of your own condition," someone will tell me, "whom the company of a common lot will make easier for you." Oh, what a stupid and insipid compromise! *I do not want / to pluck the beard of a dead lion.* Xenophon brings it as an objection and charge against Meno that in his love he took up with objects past their bloom. I find more pleasure in merely seeing the right and sweet blending of two young beauties, or merely contemplating it in imagination, than in making the second party myself in a sad and shapeless blending.[78]

I leave this fanciful appetite to the Emperor Galba, who went only for tough old flesh, and to this poor wretch: *O, may the gods grant that I might see you thus,*
and kiss your dear lips beneath your changed hair,
and hold in my arms your body, no longer plump! And among the chief uglinesses I count artificial and forced beauties. Hemon, a young lad from Chios, thinking to acquire by fine adornments the beauty that nature denied him, came before the philosopher Arcesilaus and asked him whether a wise man could fall in love. "Yes indeed," the other replied, "provided it is not with a decked-out and adulterated beauty like yours." The ugliness of an avowed old age is less old and less ugly, to my taste, than another that is painted and smoothed over.[79]

78 Meno of Thessaly was one of the Greek generals in Xenophon's Anabasis.
79 Galba was Roman emperor in AD 68–69.

> Shall I say it, provided no one grabs me by the throat for it? Love seems to me properly and naturally in season only in the age close to childhood: *If you set him in a chorus of girls,*
> *the subtle difference would deceive a thousand*
> *shrewd strangers, with his flowing*
> *hair and ambiguous face.* And beauty likewise. For as to Homer extending it until the chin begins to be shadowed, Plato himself remarked on this as rare. And the reason is well known why the sophist Dion called the downy hairs of adolescence Aristogeitons and Harmodiuses. In manhood I find it already somewhat out of its proper place, let alone in old age.[80]

For he flies rudely past the withered / oaks. And Marguerite, queen of Navarre, like a woman, stretches the advantage of women a long way, decreeing that at thirty it is time for them to exchange the title of "beautiful" for "good." The shorter the hold we give love over our lives, the better off we are. Look at its bearing. It has a boy's chin. Who does not know how, in its school, everything proceeds against all order? Study, exercise and practice are roads to incompetence; novices are the masters there. *Love knows no order.* Certainly its conduct has more grace when mixed with heedlessness and confusion; mistakes and setbacks give it spice and charm. Provided it is keen and hungry, it matters little whether it is prudent.[81] See how it goes staggering, stumbling and frolicking. You put it in the stocks when you guide it by skill and wisdom. And you constrain its divine freedom when you subject it to those bearded and calloused hands.

3.5.62 Moreover, I often hear them describe this relationship as wholly spiritual, and disdain to take into account the part the senses play in it. Everything plays its part there. But I can say that I have often seen us excuse the weakness of their minds for the sake of their bodily beauty; whereas I have not yet seen

80 The joke is that the first beard frees a youth from the tyranny of his lovers, as Harmodius and Aristogeiton freed Athens.
81 "Love knows no order" comes from a letter of Saint Jerome.

them willing, for the sake of the mind, however settled and mature it may be, to lend a hand to a body that is falling even slightly into decline. Why does it not occur to some woman to make that noble Socratic exchange of body for mind, buying at the price of her thighs a philosophical and spiritual understanding and offspring—the highest price she could get for them? Plato ordains in his Laws that whoever has performed some signal and useful exploit in war may not be refused, for the duration of that campaign, regardless of his ugliness or his age, a kiss or other amorous favor from whomever he wants it. What he finds so just as a reward for military valor, can it not be just also as a reward for some other kind of valor?

> And why does it not occur to some woman to win, ahead of her companions, the glory of this chaste love? Chaste, I say advisedly: *For if ever it comes to battle,*
> *his ardor rages in vain, like a great fire in stubble,*
> *without strength.* The vices that are stifled in thought are not the worst.

THE SAME MOLD

Men and women are cast in the same mold; custom and education make the difference.

3.5.63 To finish this notable commentary, which has escaped me in a flood of chatter—a flood sometimes violent and harmful: *As an apple, sent as a secret gift by her betrothed, rolls out of a maiden's chaste lap:*
the poor girl had forgotten it, tucked under her soft gown,
and when she jumps up at her mother's arrival it is shaken out, and goes rolling headlong down;
a guilty blush spreads over her sad face. I say that males and females are cast in the same mold; except for education and custom, the difference is not great. Plato invites both alike to share in all studies, exercises, offices and occupations, in war and in peace, in his Republic. And the philosopher Antisthenes removed all distinction between their virtue and ours.

It is much easier to accuse one sex than to excuse the other. It is as the saying goes: the poker mocks the shovel.

III.6 Of Coaches

Des Coches

From the pomp of royal coaches and spectacles, Montaigne turns to the Spanish conquest of the New World and condemns its cruelty.

3.6.1 It is very easy to verify that great authors, when writing about causes, use not only those they consider true but also those they do not believe, provided they have some inventiveness and beauty. They speak truly and usefully enough if they speak ingeniously. We cannot be sure of the master cause, so we pile up several, to see whether by chance it will be found among them: *For it is not enough to state one cause, / but several, of which one, however, is the true one.*[1]

3.6.2 Do you ask me where this custom comes from of blessing those who sneeze? We produce three kinds of wind. The one that goes out below is too dirty; the one that goes out through the mouth carries some reproach of gluttony; the third is the sneeze, and because it comes from the head and is blameless, we give it this courteous welcome. Do not laugh at this subtlety; it is, they say, Aristotle's.

3.6.3 I seem to remember seeing in Plutarch an explanation of the queasiness that comes over people traveling by sea. (Of all the authors I know, he is the one who has best blended art with nature, and judgment with learning.) He says it happens to them out of fear, having found some reason by which he proves that fear can produce such an effect. I am very prone to it, and I

1 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things.

know well that this cause does not apply to me. And I know it not by argument but by unavoidable experience. I will not cite what I have been told, that the same thing often happens to animals, especially pigs, without any apprehension of danger. Nor will I cite what an acquaintance of mine told me of himself: he was very prone to it, yet two or three times the urge to vomit left him when he found himself gripped by terror in a great storm. It was the same with that ancient: *I was too badly shaken for the danger to cross my mind.* I have never been afraid on the water. Nor have I had a fear elsewhere that troubled or dazzled me, though just causes for one have offered themselves often enough, if death is one. Fear sometimes springs from a lack of judgment, as well as from a lack of heart. All the dangers I have seen, I have seen with my eyes open and my sight free, sound and whole.[2] Even fearing takes courage. It once served me well, compared with others, in conducting my flight and keeping it in order, so that it was, if not without fear, at least without terror and without being stunned. It was stirred, but not dazed or distraught. Great souls go much further and display flights that are not only composed and sound, but proud. Let us cite the one Alcibiades tells of Socrates, his comrade in arms: "I found him," he says, "after our army was routed, him and Laches, among the last of the fugitives. I watched him at my ease and in safety, for I was on a good horse and he was on foot, and that is how we had fought.[3] I noticed first how much more presence of mind and resolution he showed than Laches. Then I noticed the boldness of his gait, not at all different from his ordinary walk, and his gaze, steady and measured, considering and judging what was going on around him. He looked now at some, now at others, friends and enemies, in a way that encouraged the one side and signified to the other that he was ready to sell his blood and his life very dear to anyone who tried to take it from him. And so they got away; for people do not readily attack men like these;

2 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius 53.

3 Alcibiades' account of the retreat after the Athenian defeat at Delium (424 BC) is in Plato's Symposium; Laches was an Athenian general.

they run after the frightened." That is the testimony of this great captain. It teaches us what we experience every day: that nothing throws us into danger so much as a thoughtless hunger to get ourselves out of it. *The less fear there is, the less danger, as a rule.* Our common people are wrong to say "that man fears death" when they mean that he thinks about it and foresees it. Foresight applies equally to what concerns us for good and for ill. To consider and judge danger is, in a way, the opposite of being stunned by it. I do not feel strong enough to withstand the blow and the violence of this passion of fear, or of any other vehement one.[4] If I were once overcome and floored by it, I would never get up again quite whole. Whatever had made my soul lose its footing would never set it back upright in its place. My soul probes and searches itself too keenly and too deeply, and so it would never let the wound that had pierced it close and heal. It has been lucky for me that no illness has yet put it out of joint. At every attack that comes at me, I stand up and oppose it in full array. So the first one that carried me away would leave me without recourse. I have no second line. Wherever the flood broke through my dike, there I would be, laid open and drowned beyond remedy. Epicurus says that the wise man can never pass into a contrary state. I hold something like the reverse of this maxim: that whoever has once been thoroughly a fool will never at any other time be thoroughly wise. God sends me the cold according to my coat, and sends me passions according to the means I have to bear them. Nature, having left me uncovered on one side, has covered me on the other; having disarmed me of strength, she has armed me with insensibility and with a measured, or dull, apprehension.

COACHES AND SEASICKNESS

Montaigne cannot bear coaches or boats, and recalls coaches used in war and pageantry.

3.6.4 Now, I cannot endure coach, litter or boat for long, and I endured them with more difficulty in my youth; I hate any conveyance but a horse, in town and in the country. But I can stand a litter less than a coach; and for the same reason I can stand a rough tossing on the water, which produces fear, more easily than the motion felt in calm weather. With that light jerk the oars give, stealing the vessel out from under us, I feel my head and stomach scrambled, I do not know how, just as I cannot bear a shaky seat under me. When the sail or the current carries us along evenly, or when we are towed, that smooth motion does not bother me at all. It is an interrupted movement that upsets me, and all the more when it is sluggish. I cannot describe its form any other way. The doctors have prescribed that I bind my lower belly and strap it tight with a cloth to remedy this trouble. I have not tried it, being accustomed to wrestle with the defects I have and to tame them by myself.

3.6.5 If my memory were sufficiently stocked on the subject, I would not begrudge the time to recount here the infinite variety the histories show us in the use of coaches in the service of war. It differed according to nations and to ages, and was of great effect, it seems to me, and of great necessity—so much so that it is a wonder we have lost all knowledge of it. I will say only this. Quite recently, in our fathers' time, the Hungarians put them to very good use against the Turks. In each one there was a shield-bearer and a musketeer, and a number of harquebuses lined up, ready and loaded, the whole thing covered with a pavisade, in the manner of a galliot.[5] They placed three thousand such coaches at the front of their battle line. After the cannon had played, they had the coaches fire and made the enemy swallow

4 Livy, History of Rome XXII.

5 A pavisade was a screen of large shields; a galliot was a small galley.

that volley before tasting the rest, which was no slight advantage. Or else they let fly these coaches into the enemy squadrons to break them and open a gap. They could also use them to flank troops marching across open country at a ticklish spot, or to cover a camp in haste and fortify it. In my time a gentleman on one of our frontiers, who was unwieldy in his person and could find no horse able to bear his weight, had a feud and used to travel about the country in a coach of this same design, and did very well with it. But let us leave these war coaches. As if their sloth were not well enough known by better tokens, the last kings of our first dynasty traveled about the country in a cart drawn by four oxen. Mark Antony was the first who had himself drawn through Rome by lions harnessed to a coach, with a minstrel girl beside him. Heliogabalus later did the same, calling himself Cybele, mother of the gods; he also had himself drawn by tigers, impersonating the god Bacchus. Sometimes he harnessed two stags to his coach, another time four dogs, and again four naked girls, having himself drawn by them in pomp, stark naked himself. The emperor Firmus had his coach drawn by ostriches of marvelous size, so that he seemed to be flying rather than rolling.[6]

THE SPENDING OF PRINCES

Lavish display and liberality are weak virtues in a king, who gives what is not his own.

3.6.6 The strangeness of these inventions puts another notion into my head: that it is a kind of faintheartedness in monarchs, and a sign that they do not sufficiently feel what they are, to labor to make themselves valued and conspicuous by excessive expenditure. It would be excusable in a foreign country; but among his own subjects, where he can do anything, a king draws from his dignity the very highest degree of honor he can attain. In the same way, for a gentleman, it seems to me super-

6 The last Merovingian kings, the so-called "do-nothing kings," traveled in ox carts. Firmus was a third-century AD usurper in Egypt.

fluous to dress elaborately at home: his house, his household and his kitchen answer well enough for him. The advice Isocrates gives his king does not seem to me unreasonable: that he be splendid in furniture and utensils, since that is a lasting expense that passes on to his successors, and that he avoid all magnificence that slips away at once from both use and memory. I liked to dress up when I was a young man, for lack of other adornment, and it suited me. There are some on whom fine clothes weep. We have marvelous accounts of the frugality of our kings in their persons and in their gifts—kings great in reputation, in valor and in fortune. Demosthenes fights tooth and nail against the law of his city that assigned public funds to the pomp of the games and of their festivals.[7] He wants their greatness to show itself in a quantity of well-equipped ships and good, well-supplied armies. And people are right to blame Theophrastus, who in his book on wealth set forth a contrary opinion and maintained that this kind of expenditure is the true fruit of opulence. These are pleasures, says Aristotle, that touch only the lowest common sort, that vanish from memory as soon as one has had one's fill of them, and that no judicious and serious man can hold in esteem.[8] Spending would seem to me much more royal, as being more useful, just and lasting, if it went to ports, harbors, fortifications and walls; to sumptuous buildings, churches, hospitals, colleges, and the improvement of streets and roads. In this Pope Gregory XIII will leave a memory to be commended for a long time; and in this our Queen Catherine would bear witness for many years to her natural liberality and munificence, if her means were equal to her desire. Fortune has done me a great disservice in interrupting the fine structure of the Pont Neuf in our great city and taking from me the hope of seeing it in use before I die.[9]

7 Isocrates' advice is in To Nicocles; Demosthenes attacked the Athenian festival fund in his Olynthiacs.

8 Montaigne follows Cicero, On Duties II, which reports Aristotle's criticism of Theophrastus.

9 Gregory XIII was pope 1572–1585; Catherine de' Medici was the queen mother. Work on the Pont Neuf in Paris, begun in 1578, was halted by the civil wars in 1588.

3.6.7 Besides, the subjects who watch these triumphs feel that they are being shown their own riches and feasted at their own expense. For peoples readily presume of kings what we presume of our servants: that they should take care to lay on for us in abundance everything we need, but should not touch any of it themselves. And so the Emperor Galba, having enjoyed a musician during his supper, had his money box brought to him and with his own hand gave the man a fistful of crowns that he fished out of it, with these words: "This is not from the public purse; it is from my own."[10] Be that as it may, it most often happens that the people are right, and that their eyes are fed with what should have fed their bellies.

3.6.8 Liberality itself does not show to best advantage in a sovereign hand; private persons have more right to it. For, strictly speaking, a king has nothing that is properly his own; he owes his very self to others. Jurisdiction is not granted for the benefit of the judge but for the benefit of the judged. A superior is never made for his own profit, but for the profit of the inferior; and a doctor for the patient, not for himself. Every magistracy, like every art, has its end outside itself. *No art is concerned with itself.* Therefore the tutors of princes in childhood who make it a point to imprint on them this virtue of largesse—who preach to them never to know how to refuse anything and to think nothing so well spent as what they give away (a teaching I have seen much in favor in my time)—either have their own profit more in view than their master's, or misunderstand whom they are talking to. It is too easy to imprint liberality on someone who has the means to supply it as freely as he likes at others' expense. And since its worth is reckoned not by the size of the gift but by the size of the means of the one who practices it, it comes to nothing in such powerful hands.[11] Princes turn out prodigal before they are liberal. So it earns little praise compared with the other royal virtues—and it is the only one, as the tyrant Dionysius used to say, that gets along well with tyranny itself. I would

10 Galba was notorious for his stinginess (Suetonius).
11 Cicero, On Ends V.

rather teach a prince this line of the ancient farmer, *One must sow with the hand, not with the whole sack*: that whoever wants to reap a harvest must sow by hand, not pour from the sack; the grain must be scattered, not spilled. And having to give, or rather, to pay and repay so many people according to what they have deserved, he must be a loyal and prudent dispenser. If a prince's liberality is without discretion and without measure, I would rather he were miserly.[12]

3.6.9 Royal virtue seems to consist most of all in justice. And of all the parts of justice, the one that best marks out kings is the one that goes with liberality; for they have reserved it especially to their own office, whereas all other justice they readily exercise through others. Immoderate largesse is a weak means of winning them goodwill, for it repels more people than it wins over: *The more people you have used it on, the fewer you will be able to use it on. And what is more foolish than to see to it that what you like doing you can no longer do for long?* And if it is bestowed without regard to merit, it shames the one who receives it, and is received without gratitude.[13] Tyrants have been sacrificed to the people's hatred by the hands of the very men they had unjustly advanced. Men of that kind think they can secure possession of goods unduly received by showing contempt and hatred for the man they had them from, and by siding with common judgment and opinion in this.

3.6.10 The subjects of a prince who is excessive in gifts become excessive in demands; they cut their cloth not by reason but by example. There is certainly often cause to blush at our impudence. In justice we are overpaid when the reward equals our service; for do we owe our princes nothing by natural obligation? If he bears our expenses, he does too much; it is enough that he helps with them. The surplus is called a benefaction, which cannot be demanded; for the very name of liberality sounds of liberty. In our fashion, it is never done; what has been received no longer counts; we love only liberality to come. So

12 The Greek proverb is quoted by Plutarch, who attributes it to the poet Corinna.
13 Cicero, On Duties II.

the more a prince exhausts himself in giving, the poorer he grows in friends. How could he sate desires that grow as fast as they are filled? A man whose thoughts are on taking no longer thinks of what he has taken. Nothing is so characteristic of covetousness as ingratitude.

3.6.11 The example of Cyrus will not be out of place here. It can serve the kings of our time as a touchstone for telling whether their gifts are well or ill bestowed, and show them how much more happily that emperor placed his than they do. Because of their poor giving, they are reduced afterward to borrowing from subjects they do not know, and rather from those they have harmed than from those they have benefited; and they receive no aid from them in which there is anything free but the name. Croesus reproached Cyrus for his largesse, and calculated what his treasure would amount to if he had been more tight-fisted.[14] Cyrus wanted to justify his liberality. He sent messengers in every direction to the great men of his realm whom he had particularly advanced, and asked each of them to help him with as much money as he could for a need of his, and to send him a written statement of it. When all these accounts were brought to him, each of his friends, thinking it not enough to offer him only as much as he had received from his munificence, had added a great deal of his own; and it turned out that the sum came to much more than Croesus's reckoning of his savings. Whereupon Cyrus said: "I am no less in love with riches than other princes, and am, if anything, a better manager of them. You see at how little outlay I have acquired the inestimable treasure of so many friends, and how much more faithful treasurers they are to me than hired men would be, without obligation and without affection. And my wealth is better lodged with them than in coffers, which would call down on me the hatred, envy and contempt of other princes."

3.6.12 The emperors excused the superfluity of their games and public shows on the grounds that their authority depended to some extent, at least in appearance, on the will of the Roman

14 The story is from Xenophon, The Education of Cyrus VIII.

people, who had always been accustomed to being flattered by that kind of spectacle and excess. But it was private individuals who had fostered this custom of gratifying their fellow citizens and companions, chiefly out of their own purse, with such profusion and magnificence. It had quite another taste when it was the masters who came to imitate it. *The transfer of money from its rightful owners to strangers should not be regarded as liberality.* Because his son was trying to win the goodwill of the Macedonians with presents, Philip rebuked him in a letter, in this manner: "What?[15] do you want your subjects to take you for their purse-bearer, not their king? Do you want to win them over? Win them with the benefits of your virtue, not the benefits of your coffer."

ROMAN SPECTACLES

The marvels of the Roman arena show how inventive those ages were.

3.6.13 It was a fine thing, though, to have a great number of big trees brought and planted in the arena, all branching and all green, representing a great shady forest laid out in fine symmetry; and on the first day to throw into it a thousand ostriches, a thousand stags, a thousand wild boars and a thousand fallow deer, abandoning them to the people to plunder; the next day to have a hundred big lions, a hundred leopards and three hundred bears slaughtered in his presence; and for the third day to have three hundred pairs of gladiators fight to the death—as the Emperor Probus did.[16]

15 Cicero, On Duties I. Philip II of Macedon's letter to his son Alexander is quoted by Cicero, On Duties II.

16 Probus, emperor AD 276–282; Montaigne follows the Historia Augusta.

It was also a fine thing to see those great amphitheaters encrusted with marble on the outside, worked with carvings and statues, the inside gleaming with rare embellishments: *Look, the belt studded with gems; look, the colonnade coated with gold.* All the sides of that great hollow were filled and surrounded, from the bottom to the top, with sixty or eighty rows of steps, also of marble, covered with cushions—*"Let him leave," he says, "if he has any shame, and get up from the knights' cushion, whose property falls short of what the law requires"*—where a hundred thousand men could sit at their ease.[17]

And the floor at the bottom, where the games were played: first to have it artfully opened and split into crevasses representing caves that spewed out the beasts destined for the show; then, second, to flood it with a deep sea carrying many sea monsters and laden with armed ships to represent a naval battle; third, to level it and dry it again for the gladiators' combat; and for the fourth arrangement, to strew it with vermilion and storax instead of sand, to set up a solemn banquet for that whole countless multitude of people—the last act of a single day. How often have we seen part of the arena sink

down, and from a chasm torn open in the earth
wild beasts emerge, and often from those same lairs
golden trees spring up with saffron bark!

17 Calpurnius Siculus, Eclogues VII; then Juvenal, Satires III, on the law reserving the front seats for knights of sufficient wealth.

/ Nor was it only woodland monsters that we were given to see: I have watched sea calves with bears fighting them, and a beast that deserves the name of horse, but a misshapen one. Sometimes they made a high mountain rise up there, full of fruit trees and green trees, sending a stream of water from its summit as from the mouth of a living spring. Sometimes they paraded a great ship through it, which opened and came apart by itself, and after spewing four or five hundred fighting beasts from its belly, closed up again and vanished without any help. At other times, from the floor of that place, they made jets and threads of water shoot up, which spurted upward and, at that infinite height, went sprinkling and perfuming that infinite multitude.[18]

To shelter themselves from the weather, they had that immense space covered, sometimes with purple awnings worked with the needle, sometimes with silk of one color or another, and they drew them forward and back in a moment, as the fancy took them: *Though the spectators swelter in no small sun,*
the awnings are drawn back when Hermogenes comes. The nets, too, that were set in front of the people to protect them from the violence of the beasts let loose, were woven of gold: *The nets too gleam,*
twisted with gold.[19]

OUR NARROW KNOWLEDGE

We see only a sliver of the world's past and present, and judge everything by it.

3.6.14 If there is anything excusable in such excesses, it is where invention and novelty, not expense, supply the wonder. Even in

18 Calpurnius Siculus again; the misshapen "horse" is the hippopotamus, the river horse.
19 Martial, Epigrams XII, where Hermogenes is a thief who makes off with any cloth in sight; then Calpurnius Siculus.

these vanities we discover how fertile those ages were in minds of another kind than ours. It is with this sort of fertility as with all the other productions of Nature. That is not to say that she then made her utmost effort. We do not go forward; rather, we wander about and turn this way and that; we walk back over our own steps. I fear that our knowledge is weak in every direction. We see neither very far ahead nor very far behind. It embraces little and lives little: it is short both in extent of time and in extent of matter.

> *Many brave men lived before Agamemnon,*
> *but all of them, unwept,*
> *unknown, are crushed by the long*
> *night.*
> *And beyond the Trojan War and the fall of Troy,*
> *many other poets have sung of other things.* And Solon's account of what he had learned from the priests of Egypt about the long life of their state, and about their way of learning and preserving the histories of other countries, does not seem to me testimony to be rejected on this point.[20]

If we could see the boundless extent of regions and of ages in every direction, into which the mind, plunging and straining, travels so far and wide that it sees no farthest shore on which it can stop, then in that infinite immensity there would appear a multitude of countless forms. Even if everything that has come down to us by report of the past were true and known by someone, it would be less than nothing compared with what is unknown. And of this very image of the world, which flows by while we are in it, how wretched and cramped is the knowledge of even the most curious![21] Not only of particular events, which Fortune often makes exemplary and weighty, but of the state of great governments and nations, a hundred times more escapes us than comes to our knowledge. We cry out at the miracle of our invention of

20 Horace, Odes IV.9; then Lucretius, On the Nature of Things V. Solon's conversation with the Egyptian priests is told in Plato's Timaeus.
21 Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods I.

artillery and of printing; other men, at another end of the world, in China, enjoyed them a thousand years earlier. If we saw as much of the world as we do not see, we would perceive, it is likely, a perpetual multiplication and alternation of forms. There is nothing unique and rare with regard to Nature, only with regard to our knowledge—which is a wretched foundation for our rules, and readily presents us with a very false image of things.

> Just as we vainly conclude today that the world is declining and decrepit, from arguments we draw from our own weakness and decay—*So worn out already is our age, and so worn out the earth*—so that other man vainly concluded that it was newborn and young, from the vigor he saw in the minds of his time, abounding in novelties and inventions in various arts: *But, as I think, the whole is new, and fresh*
>
> *is the nature of the world, nor did it begin long ago:*
> *that is why some arts are even now being refined,*
> *even now are growing; now there have been added to ships*
> *many things.*[22]

THE NEW WORLD

A child world, as able as ours, was conquered by trickery and ruined for pearls and pepper.

3.6.15 Our world has just discovered another—and who can guarantee that it is the last of its brothers, since the Daemons, the Sibyls and we ourselves knew nothing of this one until now?—no less big, full and well-limbed than itself, yet so new and so childlike that it is still being taught its ABCs. Not fifty years ago it knew neither letters, nor weights, nor measures, nor clothes, nor wheat, nor vines. It was still quite naked, in its mother's lap, and lived only on what its nursing mother provided. If we are right to conclude that our end is near, and that poet right about the youth of his age, this other world will only be coming into

22 Both quotations are from Lucretius, On the Nature of Things (II and V).

the light when ours is leaving it. The universe will fall into paralysis: one limb will be withered, the other in full vigor. I greatly fear that we will have greatly hastened its decline and ruin by our contagion, and that we will have sold it our opinions and our arts very dear. It was a child world; yet we have not whipped it and subjected it to our discipline by the advantage of our valor and natural strength, nor won it over by our justice and goodness, nor subjugated it by our magnanimity. Most of their replies, and of the negotiations conducted with them, show that they owed us nothing in natural clarity of mind and pertinence. Consider the stupendous magnificence of the cities of Cusco and Mexico, and, among many such things, the garden of that king in which all the trees, the fruits and all the plants were excellently fashioned in gold, in the order and size they have in a garden; and likewise in his cabinet all the animals born in his state and in his seas; and the beauty of their works in jewelry, in featherwork, in cotton and in painting. All this shows that they did not yield to us in skill either. But as for devotion, observance of the laws, goodness, liberality, loyalty and frankness, it served us well to have less of them than they did. They were lost by that advantage; they sold and betrayed themselves.[23]

3.6.16 As for boldness and courage, as for firmness, constancy and resolution against pain, hunger and death, I would not be afraid to set the examples I could find among them against the most famous examples of antiquity in the records of our world over here. For as for those who subjugated them, take away the ruses and tricks they used to deceive them, and the justified astonishment those nations felt at seeing the unexpected arrival of bearded men, different in language, religion, shape and bearing, from a part of the world so remote that they had never known there was any habitation there at all; men mounted on great unknown monsters, against people who had never seen a horse, nor indeed any animal at all trained to carry a man or any other load; men equipped with a shiny, hard skin and a sharp, gleaming weapon; against people who, for the marvel of the

23 Cusco was the capital of the Inca empire.

gleam of a mirror or a knife, would trade great riches in gold and pearls, and who had neither the knowledge nor the material by which, even at leisure, they could pierce our steel. Add to this the lightning and thunder of our cannon and harquebuses, enough to disturb Caesar himself had he been surprised by them with as little experience; and then, against peoples who were naked, except where the invention of some cotton fabric had reached them, with no other weapons at most than bows, stones, sticks and wooden shields; peoples taken by surprise under color of friendship and good faith, through curiosity to see strange and unknown things—take away from the conquerors, I say, this disparity, and you take away from them the whole occasion of so many victories. When I look at the indomitable ardor with which so many thousands of men, women and children came forward and threw themselves again and again into inevitable dangers in defense of their gods and their liberty; at that noble obstinacy in suffering all extremities and hardships, and death, more willingly than submit to the domination of those who had so shamefully deceived them; and at some who, when captured, chose rather to let themselves waste away from hunger and fasting than accept food from the hands of their enemies, so basely victorious—I foresee that anyone who had attacked them on equal terms of weapons, experience and numbers would have found it as dangerous as any other war we see, and more so.

3.6.17 Why did not so noble a conquest fall to Alexander, or to those ancient Greeks and Romans? Why did not so great a transformation and alteration of so many empires and peoples fall into hands that would gently have polished and cleared whatever was wild there, and would have strengthened and promoted the good seeds that Nature had produced there, mixing not only the arts of our side of the world with the cultivation of the land and the adornment of cities, insofar as they were needed there, but also mixing the Greek and Roman virtues with those native to the country? What a reparation it would have been, and what an improvement to that whole fabric, if the

first examples and conduct of ours that appeared over there had called those peoples to the admiration and imitation of virtue, and had established between them and us a brotherly fellowship and understanding? How easy it would have been to make good use of souls so fresh, so hungry to learn, and having for the most part such fine natural beginnings? On the contrary, we took advantage of their ignorance and inexperience to bend them more easily toward treachery, lust, avarice and every kind of inhumanity and cruelty, after the example and pattern of our own ways. Who ever set such a price on the service of commerce and trade? So many cities razed, so many nations exterminated, so many millions of people put to the sword, and the richest and most beautiful part of the world turned upside down for the traffic in pearls and pepper. Base, tradesmen's victories. Never did ambition, never did public enmities drive men against one another into such horrible hostilities and such miserable calamities.

3.6.18 Some Spaniards, sailing along the coast in search of their mines, landed in a fertile, pleasant and well-populated region, and made their customary declarations to its people. They said that they were peaceful men, come from distant voyages, sent on behalf of the King of Castile, the greatest prince of the habitable earth, to whom the Pope, representing God on earth, had given sovereignty over all the Indies; and that if the people were willing to be his tributaries, they would be very kindly treated. They asked them for provisions to feed themselves, and for gold for the needs of a certain medicine. They also expounded to them belief in one God and the truth of our religion, which they advised them to accept, adding some threats.[24] The reply was this. As for being peaceful, they did not look it, if they were. As for their king, since he was asking, he must be poor and needy; and the man who had made him that allotment must be fond of strife, to go giving a third party something that was not his own,

24 The formal summons the Spaniards read to native peoples rested on Pope Alexander VI's grants of 1493. Montaigne's source is López de Gómara's General History of the Indies.

so as to set him at odds with its ancient possessors. As for provisions, they would supply them. Of gold they had little, and it was a thing they held in no esteem, since it was useless for the service of their life, whereas all their care was only to pass their life happily and pleasantly; however, whatever of it they could find, except what was used in the service of their gods, the Spaniards were welcome to take. As for one God, the account of him had pleased them; but they did not want to change their religion, having made such good use of it for so long; and they were not accustomed to take advice from anyone but their friends and acquaintances. As for the threats, it was a sign of poor judgment to go threatening people whose nature and means were unknown. So the Spaniards should make haste to leave their land, for they were not accustomed to take in good part the civilities and admonitions of armed men and strangers; otherwise they would be dealt with like those others—and they showed them the heads of some executed men around their town. There is an example of the babbling of this infancy. But the fact remains that neither in that place nor in several others where the Spaniards did not find the goods they were looking for did they stop or undertake anything, whatever other advantages there might be: witness my Cannibals.[25]

TWO KINGS

The Spaniards' treachery toward the kings of Peru and Mexico, who meet it with royal constancy.

3.6.19 As for the two most powerful monarchs of that world, and perhaps of this one, kings over so many kings, the last ones they drove from power: the king of Peru had been taken in a battle and held to a ransom so excessive that it surpasses all belief, and he had paid it faithfully; in his dealings he had given signs of a frank, liberal and steadfast courage and of a clear and well-ordered understanding. Yet the victors, after extracting from him one million three hundred twenty-five thousand five hun-

25 See "Of Cannibals" (I.31).

dred weight of gold, besides silver and other things that amounted to no less (so that their horses went shod with nothing but solid gold), were seized with the desire to see as well, at the cost of whatever treachery, what the rest of this king's treasures might be, and to enjoy freely what he had stored away.[26] A false charge and false evidence were rigged up against him: that he was plotting to make his provinces rise so as to set himself free. Whereupon, by the fine judgment of the very men who had contrived this treachery against him, he was condemned to be publicly hanged and strangled, having been made to buy off the torment of being burned alive by the baptism they gave him at the very place of execution. A horrible and unheard-of event, which he nevertheless bore without belying himself either in countenance or in word, with a truly royal bearing and gravity. And then, to lull the peoples, stunned and paralyzed by so strange a thing, they feigned great mourning for his death and ordered sumptuous funeral rites for him.

3.6.20 The other, the king of Mexico, had long defended his besieged city and shown in that siege all that endurance and perseverance can do, if ever prince and people showed it. His misfortune delivered him alive into the hands of the enemy, under terms of surrender that he would be treated as a king; and in prison he showed them nothing unworthy of that title. After this victory the victors did not find all the gold they had promised themselves; so when they had turned everything over and searched everything, they set about seeking news of it by the harshest tortures they could devise, on the prisoners they held.[27] But having gained nothing, finding courage stronger than their torments, they finally came to such a frenzy that, against their word and against all law of nations, they condemned the king himself and one of the chief lords of his court to torture in each other's presence. This lord, overcome by the pain and sur-

26 Atahualpa, Inca ruler captured by Francisco Pizarro in 1532 and executed in 1533.

27 Cuauhtémoc, last Aztec emperor, captured by Cortés in 1521 and hanged in 1525.

rounded by burning braziers, at last turned his eyes piteously toward his master, as if to ask his pardon because he could bear no more. The king, fixing his eyes proudly and sternly on him in reproach for his cowardice and faintheartedness, said only these words to him, in a harsh, firm voice: "And I—am I in a bath? Am I any more at ease than you?" The lord soon afterward succumbed to the pain and died on the spot. The king, half roasted, was carried away from there—not so much out of pity (for what pity ever touched souls so barbarous that, on dubious information about some golden vessel to plunder, they would have a man grilled before their eyes, let alone a king so great in fortune and in merit), but because his constancy made their cruelty more and more shameful. They hanged him later, after he had bravely attempted to free himself by arms from so long a captivity and subjection; and there he made an end worthy of a great-souled prince.

3.6.21 Another time they burned alive, at one stroke and in the same fire, four hundred and sixty men: the four hundred from the common people, the sixty from among the chief lords of a province—simply prisoners of war. We have these accounts from the men themselves, for they do not merely admit these things; they boast of them and proclaim them. Could it be as a testimony to their justice, or to their zeal for religion? Certainly these are ways too contrary and too hostile to so holy an end. If they had set out to spread our faith, they would have considered that it grows not by possession of lands but by possession of men. They would have been more than content with the killings that the necessity of war brings, without adding indiscriminately a butchery, as if on wild beasts—universal, as far as fire and sword could reach—deliberately sparing only as many as they wanted to make into wretched slaves for the work and service of their mines. So much so that several of the leaders have been put to death in the lands of their conquest by order of the kings of Castile, justly offended by the horror of their conduct, and almost all of them have been held in disrepute and ill will. God has deservedly allowed these great plunders to be swal-

lowed up by the sea as they were being shipped, or by the civil wars in which they devoured one another; and most of them were buried on the spot, without any fruit from their victory.

3.6.22 Why does the revenue, even in the hands of a thrifty and prudent prince, fall so far short of the hopes held out to his predecessors, and of that first abundance of riches found on reaching these new lands? For although a great deal is drawn from them, we see that it is nothing compared with what was to be expected. The reason is that the use of money was entirely unknown there. Consequently their gold was found all gathered in one place, serving no purpose but show and display, like a piece of furniture handed down from father to son by several powerful kings. These kings kept draining their mines to make that great heap of vessels and statues to adorn their palaces and temples. Our gold, by contrast, is all in use and in trade.[28] We cut it up small and change it into a thousand forms; we spread it about and scatter it. Imagine our kings heaping up in the same way all the gold they could find over several centuries, and keeping it idle.

THE FIVE SUNS

The Mexicans' belief in five ages of the world, and the great road of the Incas.

3.6.23 The people of the kingdom of Mexico were somewhat more civilized and more skilled in the arts than the other nations over there. So they also judged, as we do, that the universe was near its end, and they took the desolation we brought upon them as a sign of it. They believed that the existence of the world is divided into five ages, the lives of five successive suns. Four of these suns had already run their course, and the one that gave them light was the fifth. The first perished, along with all other creatures, in a universal flood of waters. The second perished when the sky fell upon us and smothered every living thing. To this age they assign the giants, and they showed the Spaniards

28 The prince is Philip II of Spain (reigned 1556–1598).

some of their bones; by their proportions, those men must have stood twenty palms high. The third sun perished by fire, which set everything ablaze and consumed it. The fourth perished by a commotion of air and wind that beat down even several mountains. Men did not die of it, but they were changed into apes. (What impressions will the pliancy of human belief not take!) After the death of this fourth sun, the world lay twenty-five years in perpetual darkness. In the fifteenth of these years a man and a woman were created, and they remade the human race. Ten years later, on a certain one of their days, the sun appeared, newly created, and they have counted their years from that day ever since. On the third day after its creation the old gods died; the new ones have been born since, from day to day. What they think about the way this last sun will perish, my author learned nothing. But their reckoning of this fourth change coincides with that great conjunction of the stars which, some eight hundred years ago by the astrologers' estimate, produced many great alterations and novelties in the world.[29]

3.6.24 As for pomp and magnificence, which is where I began this subject: neither Greece, nor Rome, nor Egypt can compare any of its works with the road to be seen in Peru, whether for usefulness, difficulty or nobility. The kings of that country built it from the city of Quito to the city of Cusco, a distance of three hundred leagues. It is straight, level, twenty-five paces wide and paved. On either side it is lined with fine, high walls, and along them, on the inside, run two ever-flowing streams bordered with beautiful trees that they call molly. Where they came upon mountains and rocks, they cut through them and leveled them, and they filled the hollows with stone and lime.[30] At the end of each day's journey there are fine palaces stocked with provisions, clothing and arms, for travelers as well as for the armies that have to pass that way. In judging this work I have taken the difficulty into account, which is especially considerable in that

29 Montaigne's author is Francisco López de Gómara, whose General History of the Indies (1552) he read in French translation.
30 The molly, or molle, is the Peruvian pepper tree.

place. They built with no stones smaller than ten feet square. They had no other means of carrying than the strength of their arms, dragging their loads, and they did not even have the skill of scaffolding. The only trick they knew was to pile earth up against the building as it rose, and to remove it afterward.

3.6.25 Let us fall back on our coaches. Instead of coaches, or any other conveyance, they had themselves carried by men, on their shoulders. That last king of Peru, on the day he was taken, was being carried in this way on golden poles, seated in a golden chair, in the midst of his army. As fast as the Spaniards killed his bearers to bring him down (for they wanted to take him alive), other bearers, vying with one another, took the places of the dead. So he could never be brought down, however many of those people were slaughtered, until a horseman went and seized him bodily and pulled him to the ground.

III.7 Of the Disadvantage of Greatness

De l'incommodité de la grandeur
Montaigne argues that greatness is easy to forgo and that rank isolates princes from honest judgment and real competition.

3.7.1 Since we cannot attain it, let us take our revenge by speaking ill of it. And yet finding faults in something is not altogether speaking ill of it; faults are found in all things, however beautiful and desirable they may be. In general, greatness has this evident advantage: it can lower itself when it pleases, and it has more or less the choice of either condition. For one does not fall from every height; there are more heights from which one can come down without falling. It does seem to me that we rate it too highly. We also rate too highly the resolve of those whom we have seen, or heard tell of, despising it or giving it up of their own accord.[1] Its nature is not so evidently advantageous that one cannot refuse it without a miracle. I find it a hard effort to endure ills; but to be content with a moderate measure of fortune, and to shun greatness, I find there is very little to it. It is a virtue, it seems to me, that even I, who am only a silly gosling, could attain without much strain. What, then, of those who would also take into account the glory that goes with this refusal? There may be more ambition in it than in the very desire for greatness and the enjoyment of it. For ambition never follows its own bent better than by an out-of-the-way and unusual path.

3.7.2 I sharpen my courage toward patience; I weaken it toward desire. I have as much to wish for as anyone else, and I leave my

wishes as much freedom and recklessness. And yet it has never happened to me to wish for empire or royalty, or for the eminence of those lofty, commanding fortunes. I do not aim in that direction: I love myself too much. When I think of growing, it is in a lowly way, with a constrained and timid growth, suited strictly to me: in resolution, in prudence, in health, in good looks, and in wealth too. But that standing, that so powerful authority, crushes my imagination. And quite the opposite of that other man, I would perhaps rather be second or third in Périgueux than first in Paris; at least, to tell no lie, rather third in Paris than first in office. I want neither to be a wretched nobody wrangling with a doorkeeper, nor to have crowds part in adoration wherever I pass. I am suited to a middle station, by my lot and by my taste alike. And I have shown, in the conduct of my life and my undertakings, that I have shunned rather than sought to step over the degree of fortune in which God placed my birth. Every natural constitution is equally just and easy.[2] My soul is so cowardly that I do not measure good fortune by its height; I measure it by its ease.

3.7.3 But if my heart is not big enough, it is correspondingly open, and it bids me boldly publish its weakness. Suppose someone gave me two lives to compare. On the one hand, the life of L. Thorius Balbus: a fine man, handsome, learned, healthy, understanding, and abounding in every kind of comfort and pleasure; he led a tranquil life entirely his own, his soul well prepared against death, superstition, pain and the other encumbrances of human necessity; and he died at last in battle, weapon in hand, in defense of his country. On the other hand, the life of M.[3] Regulus, as great and lofty as everyone knows it to be, and his admirable end. The one is without name or dignity; the other is exemplary and wonderfully glorious. I would certainly say of them what Cicero says, if I could speak as well as

1 "It" is greatness, the subject named in the essay's title.

2 Julius Caesar is said to have declared, passing a small Alpine village, that he would rather be first there than second in Rome.

3 Cicero contrasts the Epicurean Lucius Thorius Balbus with Regulus, tortured to death by the Carthaginians, in On Ends II.63–65.

he. But if I had to measure them against my own life, I would also say this: the first is as much within my reach, and in line with my desire, which I fit to my reach, as the second is far beyond it. The latter I can approach only by veneration; the former I would gladly approach by practice.

THE BURDEN OF KINGS

Montaigne wants no mastery and pities kings, cut off from honest rivalry and true praise.

3.7.4 Let us return to our worldly greatness, from which we set out. I am disgusted with mastery, both active and passive. Otanes, one of the seven who had a right to claim the kingdom of Persia, took a course that I would gladly have taken. He gave up to his companions his right to attain the throne by election or by lot, on condition that he and his family should live in that empire free of all subjection and mastery, except that of the ancient laws, and should enjoy every liberty that did not prejudice those laws. He was as impatient of commanding as of being commanded.[4]

3.7.5 The harshest and most difficult trade in the world, in my opinion, is to play the king worthily. I excuse more of kings' faults than people commonly do, in consideration of the horrible weight of their office, which stuns me. It is hard to keep measure with a power so beyond measure. And yet, even for those of a less excellent nature, it is a singular spur to virtue to be placed where you can do no good that is not put on record and on account; where the least good deed bears on so many people; and where your ability, like a preacher's, is addressed chiefly to the people, a judge not very exacting, easy to fool, easy to satisfy. There are few things on which we can give a sincere judgment, because there are few in which we do not have some private interest. Superiority and inferiority, mastery and subjection, are bound to natural envy and rivalry; they must perpetually plunder each other. I believe neither of them about the

4 The story is told by Herodotus (Histories III.83).

rights of its partner. Let reason speak on the matter, which is inflexible and dispassionate, when we can get hold of it. Not a month ago I was leafing through two Scottish books fighting over this subject. The one for the people makes the king worse off than a carter; the one for monarchy sets him some fathoms above God in power and sovereignty.[5]

3.7.6 Now the inconvenience of greatness that I have undertaken to note here, prompted by an occasion that has just reminded me of it, is this. There is perhaps nothing more pleasant in human company than the trials we make against one another out of rivalry in honor and prowess, whether in exercises of body or of mind. In these, sovereign greatness has no true share. Indeed, it has often seemed to me that out of sheer respect, princes are treated in them disdainfully and insultingly. In my childhood I was infinitely offended when those who competed with me held back from trying in earnest, because they thought me unworthy of their effort. That is what we see happen to princes every day: everyone thinks himself unworthy to exert himself against them. If anyone notices that they have the least desire for victory, there is no one who does not strive to hand it to them, and who would not rather betray his own glory than offend theirs. People put in only as much effort as serves their honor. What part do they have in a fray in which everyone is on their side? I seem to see those paladins of olden times presenting themselves at jousts and combats with enchanted bodies and arms. Brisson, running a race against Alexander, slackened his pace on purpose. Alexander scolded him for it, but he ought to have had him whipped. For this reason Carneades used to say that the sons of princes learn nothing properly except how to manage horses. In every other exercise everyone bends before them and lets them win; but a horse, which is neither a flatterer nor a courtier, throws the king's son to the ground just as it would the son of a porter.[6]

5 Probably George Buchanan's On the Right of Kingship among the Scots (1579) and Adam Blackwood's reply, Apology for Kings (1581).

6 Plutarch tells this story of the runner Crisso of Himera.

3.7.7 Homer was obliged to let Venus, so sweet and delicate a divinity, be wounded in the fighting at Troy, in order to give her courage and boldness, qualities that in no way belong to those who are exempt from danger. The gods are made to grow angry, to fear, to flee, to be jealous, to grieve and to be swept by passion, in order to honor them with the virtues that among us are built out of these imperfections. Whoever has no share in the risk and difficulty can claim no interest in the honor and pleasure that follow hazardous actions. It is a pity to be so powerful that everything gives way before you. Your fortune thrusts society and company too far from you; it plants you too far apart. This ease, this slack facility of making everything bow beneath you, is the enemy of every kind of pleasure. That is sliding, not walking; it is sleeping, not living! Imagine a man attended by omnipotence: you sink him in an abyss. He must beg you for hindrance and resistance as for alms. His being and his good are in want.

3.7.8 Their good qualities are dead and lost, for qualities are felt only by comparison, and kings are put out of reach of comparison. They know little of true praise, battered as they are by such continual and uniform approval. Do they have to deal with the stupidest of their subjects? They have no way of getting the better of him. He has only to say, "It is because he is my king," and he thinks he has made it plain enough that he lent a hand to his own defeat. This quality smothers and consumes their other true and essential qualities; these are sunk in royalty. It leaves them nothing to show off but the actions that touch it directly and serve it: the duties of their office. This is being king to such a degree that he exists only through it. That borrowed glow surrounding him hides him and steals him from us; our sight is broken and scattered by it, being filled and stopped by that strong light. The Senate awarded the prize for eloquence to Tiberius. He refused it, thinking he could take no satisfaction from a judgment so little free, even had it been true.

3.7.9 Just as all the advantages of honor are yielded to them, so their defects and vices are encouraged and sanctioned, not only

by approval but also by imitation. Each of Alexander's followers carried his head tilted to one side, as he did. And the flatterers of Dionysius bumped into one another in his presence, and knocked over and upset whatever lay at their feet, to show that they were as short-sighted as he. Ruptures, too, have at times served as a recommendation and a source of favor. I have seen deafness put on for affectation. And because the master hated his wife, Plutarch saw the courtiers repudiate their own wives, whom they loved. What is more, lechery has been seen to come into fashion this way, and every kind of debauchery; and likewise disloyalty, blasphemy, cruelty; and heresy, superstition, irreligion, softness, and worse, if there is worse. This is an example even more dangerous than that of Mithridates' flatterers. Because their master aspired to the honor of being a good physician, they brought him their limbs to cut and cauterize. These others let their souls be cauterized, a more delicate and noble part.

3.7.10 But to end where I began: the Emperor Hadrian was debating with the philosopher Favorinus over the interpretation of some word, and Favorinus soon conceded him the victory. When his friends complained to him, he said, "You must be joking. Would you have him not be more learned than I, he who commands thirty legions?" Augustus wrote verses against Asinius Pollio. "And I," said Pollio, "keep silent: it is not wise to write in rivalry with a man who can proscribe." And they were right. For Dionysius, because he could not equal Philoxenus in poetry and Plato in reasoning, condemned the one to the quarries and sent the other to be sold as a slave on the island of Aegina.

III.8 Of the Art of Conversation

De l'art de conferer
Montaigne praises vigorous, frank debate as the best exercise for the mind and admits his own faults as a warning to others.

3.8.1 It is a practice of our justice to condemn some people as a warning to others. To condemn them because they have done wrong would be stupidity, as Plato says, for what is done cannot be undone. It is done so that they will not do wrong in the same way again, or so that others will shun the example of their fault. We do not correct the man we hang; we correct others through him. I do the same. My errors are by now natural, incorrigible and irremediable. But the good that decent men do the public by getting themselves imitated, I shall perhaps do by getting myself avoided. Do you not see how badly Albius' son lives, and how / Barrus is in want?[1] A great lesson to anyone tempted to squander / his inheritance. By my publishing and accusing my imperfections, someone will learn to fear them. The qualities I most esteem in myself gain more honor from accusing me than from commending me. That is why I fall back on accusation and dwell on it more often. But when all is reckoned, one never speaks of oneself without loss. Self-condemnation is always believed, and then some; self-praise is disbelieved. There may be some people of my temperament who, like me, learn better by contrast than by likeness, by shunning than by following. This is the kind of discipline the elder Cato had in mind when he

1 Montaigne's word conferer means to discuss or argue face to face. The verses are from Horace, Satires I.4.

said that the wise have more to learn from fools than fools from the wise. So too that ancient lyre player who, as Pausanias relates, used to make his pupils go and hear a bad player who lived opposite him, so that they would learn to hate his discords and false rhythms. The horror of cruelty throws me further into clemency than any model of clemency could draw me. A good riding master does not straighten my seat as much as an attorney or a Venetian on horseback does. And a bad way of speaking reforms mine better than a good one. Every day someone else's foolish bearing warns and advises me. What stings touches and rouses us better than what pleases. Our age is fit to mend us backward: by disagreement more than by agreement, by difference rather than by accord. Being little taught by good examples, I make use of bad ones, whose lesson is everywhere. I have striven to make myself as agreeable as I saw others disagreeable, as firm as I saw others weak, as gentle as I saw others harsh, as good as I saw others wicked. But I set myself unbeatable standards.

CONVERSATION, THE BEST EXERCISE

Montaigne prizes vigorous argument with strong minds above the study of books.

3.8.2 The most fruitful and natural exercise of our mind is, in my opinion, conversation. I find its practice sweeter than that of any other action of our life. That is why, if I were now forced to choose, I would sooner consent, I think, to lose my sight than my hearing or my speech. The Athenians, and the Romans too, held this exercise in great honor in their Academies. In our time the Italians retain some vestiges of it, to their great profit, as can be seen by comparing our minds with theirs. The study of books is a languid, feeble activity that gives off no heat; whereas conversation teaches and exercises us at one stroke. If I converse with a strong mind and a tough jouster, he presses on my flanks and pricks me left and right; his ideas launch mine. Rivalry, glory and contention drive me on and lift me above myself. And

unison is an altogether tiresome quality in conversation. But just as our mind is strengthened by contact with vigorous and well-ordered minds, it is impossible to say how much it loses and degenerates through continual dealings and association with low and sickly minds. No contagion spreads like that one. I know from enough experience exactly what it costs. I love to argue and discuss, but with few men, and for my own sake. For to serve as a spectacle for the great, and to show off one's wit and one's chatter in competition with others, I find a most unbecoming trade for a man of honor.

3.8.3 Stupidity is a bad quality. But to be unable to bear it, to be vexed and eaten up by it, as happens to me, is another sort of disease, hardly less of a nuisance than stupidity. And that is what I now want to accuse in myself. I enter into conversation and dispute with great freedom and ease, inasmuch as opinion finds me poor soil to penetrate and put down deep roots in. No propositions stun me, no belief wounds me, however contrary it may be to mine. There is no notion so frivolous and so extravagant that it does not seem to me quite a fitting product of the human mind. We who deny our judgment the right to hand down rulings look mildly on differing opinions; if we do not lend them our judgment, we readily lend them our ear. Where one pan of the scales is completely empty, I let the other waver under an old woman's dreams. And I think I may be excused if I prefer an odd number; Thursday over Friday; if I would rather be twelfth or fourteenth at table than thirteenth; if, when I travel, I would rather see a hare running alongside my path than crossing it; and if I offer my left foot to be shod before my right. All such fancies, which are in credit around us, deserve at least a hearing. For me, they outweigh only emptiness; but they do outweigh it. Even so, common and chance opinions have some weight; in nature they are something other than nothing. And whoever will not let himself go that far may well fall into the vice of obstinacy while avoiding that of superstition.

3.8.4 Contradictory judgments, then, neither offend me nor upset me; they only rouse and exercise me. We flee correction;

we ought to come forward and offer ourselves to it, especially when it comes in the form of conversation, not of schoolmastering. At each objection we do not consider whether it is just, but how, rightly or wrongly, we can get rid of it. Instead of opening our arms to it, we put out our claws. I would put up with being roughly jostled by my friends: "You are a fool, you are dreaming." Among gentlemen I like people to speak out boldly, and words to go where the thought goes. We must toughen our hearing and harden it against this tenderness for the ceremonious sound of words. I like a strong, manly fellowship and familiarity, a friendship that delights in the sharpness and vigor of its dealings, as love does in bites and bloody scratches. It is not vigorous and generous enough if it is not quarrelsome, if it is civilized and artful, if it fears clashes and moves with a constrained gait. *For there can be no discussion without contradiction.* When I am contradicted, it rouses my attention, not my anger. I go toward the man who contradicts me: he is instructing me. The cause of truth ought to be the common cause of both sides. What will he answer? The passion of anger has already struck down his judgment; turmoil has seized it before reason could.[2] It would be useful to settle our disputes by wager, so that there would be a material mark of our losses, and we would keep account of them, and my valet could tell me: "Last year, on twenty occasions, being ignorant and stubborn cost you a hundred crowns." I welcome and embrace truth in whatever hands I find it. I surrender to it cheerfully and hold out my vanquished arms to it as soon as I see it approaching in the distance. And provided it is not done with too imperiously schoolmasterly a face, I enjoy being reproved. I often accommodate myself to my accusers more for the sake of civility than for the sake of amendment, because I like to gratify and foster people's freedom to admonish me by yielding readily.

3.8.5 Yet it is hard to draw the men of my time into this. They lack the courage to correct, because they lack the courage to endure being corrected. And they always speak with dissimula-

2 Cicero, On Ends I.8.

tion in one another's presence. I take such great pleasure in being judged and known that it is almost indifferent to me in which of the two ways it is done. My own imagination so often contradicts and condemns itself that it is all one to me if someone else does so, especially since I give his reproof only the authority I choose. But I break off with a man who carries himself so high-handedly, like one I know who regrets having given his advice if it is not believed, and takes it as an insult if anyone balks at following it. As for Socrates, who always welcomed with a smile the objections raised against his arguments, one could say that his strength was the cause of it: since the advantage was sure to fall to his side, he accepted them as material for a fresh victory. Yet we see, on the contrary, that nothing makes us so touchy here as a belief in our own superiority and contempt for our opponent. And by rights it is rather for the weak to accept with good grace the objections that set him straight and mend him. In truth I seek out the company of those who handle me roughly more than of those who fear me. It is an insipid and harmful pleasure to deal with people who admire us and make way for us. Antisthenes commanded his children never to be grateful or obliged to any man who praised them. I feel much prouder of the victory I win over myself when, in the very heat of combat, I make myself bow beneath the force of my opponent's reasoning, than I feel pleased with a victory I win over him through his weakness. In short, I accept and acknowledge every kind of thrust that comes straight, however weak; but I am far too impatient of those delivered without form.

ORDER IN DEBATE

He cares less who wins than that a dispute keeps order; muddled wrangling makes him rude.

3.8.6 I care little about the subject matter. Opinions are all one to me, and which side wins on the point at issue is nearly indifferent. I will argue peaceably for a whole day if the debate is conducted in an orderly way. It is not so much force and subtlety

that I ask for as order: the order seen every day in the squabbles of shepherds and shop boys, never among us. If they go off the rails, it is into rudeness; and so do we, indeed. But their tumult and impatience do not turn them away from their theme; their talk follows its course. If they jump in ahead of one another, if they do not wait for one another, at least they understand one another. Anyone answers me only too well if he answers what I say. But when the dispute is muddled and disorderly, I abandon the matter and fasten on the form, with vexation and lack of restraint. I fall into a stubborn, spiteful and imperious way of arguing that I have to blush for afterward. It is impossible to deal in good faith with a fool. At the hands of so impetuous a master, it is not only my judgment that is corrupted, but my conscience too.

3.8.7 Our disputes ought to be forbidden and punished like other verbal crimes. What vice do they not rouse and heap up, ruled and commanded as they always are by anger? We become hostile first to the reasons and then to the men. We learn to dispute only in order to contradict; and with everyone contradicting and being contradicted, the result is that the fruit of disputing is to lose and annihilate the truth. Thus Plato, in his Republic, forbids this exercise to inept and ill-endowed minds. Why set out in quest of what is with someone whose pace and gait are worth nothing? We do the subject no wrong when we leave it to see about the right means of treating it. I do not mean a scholastic, artful means; I mean the natural means of a sound understanding. What will it come to in the end? One goes east, the other west. They lose the main point and scatter it in the throng of side issues. After an hour of storm they do not know what they are looking for: one is low, another high, another off to the side. One fastens on a word and a comparison. Another no longer even feels the objections made to him, so caught up is he in his own course; he is thinking of following himself, not you. Another, finding himself weak in the loins, fears everything, refuses everything, muddles and confuses the issue from the start. Or else, at the height of the debate, he mutinies and falls

flatly silent, out of spiteful ignorance, affecting a proud contempt, or out of a foolishly modest avoidance of contention. This one, provided he strikes, does not care how much he exposes himself. That one counts his words and weighs them as if they were reasons. Another relies only on the power of his voice and his lungs. Here is one who reaches a conclusion against himself, and here another who deafens you with useless prefaces and digressions. Yet another arms himself with sheer insults and picks a quarrel over nothing, to escape the company and conversation of a mind that presses his own too hard. This last one sees nothing in reason, but he keeps you besieged within the dialectical enclosure of his clauses and the formulas of his art.

LEARNING WITHOUT JUDGMENT

Logic and learning make no one wiser; in a weak soul knowledge is a fool's bauble.

3.8.8 Now who does not grow distrustful of learning, and doubt whether any solid fruit can be drawn from it for the needs of life, considering the use we make of it? *Letters that cure nothing.* Who has gained understanding from logic? Where are its fine promises? *Neither for living better nor for reasoning more aptly.* Is there more muddle in the chatter of fishwives than in the public disputations of the men of this profession? I would rather my son learned to talk in taverns than in the schools of talkery.[3] Take a master of arts and converse with him. Why does he not make us feel that artful excellence of his, and ravish women and ignorant people like us with admiration for the firmness of his reasons and the beauty of his order? Why does he not dominate us and persuade us as he wishes? A man with such an advantage in matter and method, why does he mix insults, indiscretion and rage into his fencing? Let him take off his hood, his gown and his Latin; let him stop battering our ears with Aristotle pure and raw: you will take him for one of us, or worse. This intricacy

3 The first quotation is from Seneca, Letters 59; the second from Cicero, On Ends I.19.

and interlacing of language with which they press us seems to me like the work of conjurers: their sleight of hand fights and overpowers our senses, but it does not shake our belief in the least. Apart from this juggling, they do nothing that is not common and mean. Being more learned does not make them any less inept. I love and honor knowledge as much as those who have it. And in its true use it is the noblest and most powerful acquisition of mankind. But there are those, and there are countless people of this kind, who base their fundamental ability and worth on it; who refer from their understanding to their memory, *hiding in another's shadow*, and can do nothing except out of a book. In them I hate it, if I dare say so, a little more than stupidity. In my country and in my time, learning improves purses well enough, but souls not at all. If it meets dull souls, it weighs them down and smothers them, a raw and undigested mass; if keen ones, it readily purifies, clarifies and refines them to the point of emptiness. It is a thing of nearly indifferent quality: a very useful accessory to a well-born soul, pernicious and harmful to another.[4] Or rather, it is a thing of very precious use, which does not let itself be possessed at a low price. In one hand it is a scepter; in another, a fool's bauble.

3.8.9 But let us go on. What greater victory can you expect than to teach your enemy that he cannot fight you? When you gain the advantage for your proposition, it is truth that wins; when you gain the advantage through order and method, it is you who win. It seems to me that in Plato and Xenophon, Socrates argues more for the sake of the arguers than for the sake of the argument, and more to teach Euthydemus and Protagoras their own ineptitude than the ineptitude of their art. He seizes on the first subject that comes along, like a man with a more useful aim than clarifying it: namely, to clarify the minds he takes in hand to work on and exercise. Stirring up and chasing the game are properly our business. We are not excusable if we conduct the chase badly and ineptly; missing the catch is another matter. For we are born to seek the truth; to possess it belongs to a

4 Seneca, Letters 33.

greater power. It is not, as Democritus said, hidden in the depths of the abyss, but rather raised to an infinite height in divine knowledge. The world is nothing but a school of inquiry. The question is not who will spear the ring, but who will run the finest courses. The man who speaks the truth can play the fool as well as the man who speaks falsely, for we are concerned with the manner of speaking, not the matter. My temperament is to look at the form as much as at the substance, at the advocate as much as at the cause, as Alcibiades directed people to do. And every day I amuse myself reading authors without caring about their learning, looking for their manner, not their subject. In the same way I seek the company of some famous mind, not so that he may teach me, but so that I may know him, and, knowing him, imitate him if he is worth it. Any man can speak truly; but to speak with order, prudence and competence, few men can. So falsehood that comes from ignorance does not offend me; ineptitude does. I have broken off several bargains that would have been useful to me because of the senseless wrangling of those I was bargaining with. I am not upset once a year by the faults of those over whom I have authority. But over the stupidity and obstinacy of their assertions, excuses and defenses, asinine and brutish as they are, we are at each other's throats every day. They understand neither what is said nor why, and they answer accordingly: it is enough to drive one to despair. My head is never roughly jarred except by another head. And I come to terms with my people's vices sooner than with their rashness, their importunity and their stupidity. Let them do less, provided they are capable of doing. You live in hope of firing their will. But from a block of wood there is nothing worth hoping for or enjoying.

AGAINST MY OWN IMPATIENCE

Irritation at others' folly is itself folly, and our reproaches usually turn back on ourselves.

3.8.10 But what if I take things otherwise than they are? That may be. And so I blame my impatience. First, I hold that it is just as faulty in the one who is right as in the one who is wrong. For it is always a tyrannical sourness to be unable to endure a way different from one's own. Second, there is truly no greater folly, nor any more persistent, than to be stirred and stung by the follies of the world, nor any more bizarre. For it sets us chiefly against ourselves; and that philosopher of old would never have lacked occasion for his tears so long as he considered himself.[5] Myson, one of the Seven Sages, whose temperament was like Timon's and Democritus's, was asked what he was laughing at all alone. "At the fact that I am laughing alone," he answered. How many foolish things do I say and answer every day, by my own reckoning; and so, very likely, how many more by other people's? If I bite my lips over them, what must others do? In short, we must live among the living and let the river flow under the bridge without our concern, or at least without our getting upset. Indeed, why is it that we meet someone with a crooked, ill-made body without being disturbed, yet cannot bear to meet a disordered mind without flying into a rage? This faulty harshness has more to do with the judge than with the fault.[6] Let us always have on our lips this saying of Plato: "If I find something unsound, is it not because I myself am unsound? Am I not myself at fault? Can my rebuke not be turned back against me?" A wise and divine refrain, which lashes the most universal and common error of mankind. Not only the reproaches we make to one another, but also our reasons, our arguments and the matters we dispute can usually be turned back against us; and we run ourselves through with our own weapons. Antiquity has left

5 The philosopher is Heraclitus, traditionally said to weep at human folly.
6 Democritus was known as the laughing philosopher.

me plenty of weighty examples of this. It was cleverly and aptly said by whoever invented it: *Everyone's own dung smells sweet.* Our eyes see nothing behind us.[7] A hundred times a day we mock ourselves in mocking our neighbor, and detest in others the defects that are more plainly in ourselves, and marvel at them with astonishing impudence and heedlessness. Only yesterday I happened to see a man of understanding mocking, as amusingly as justly, the foolish manner of another who bores everyone to death with the register of his genealogies and family alliances, more than half of them false (those whose titles are the most dubious and least secure are the readiest to launch into such silly talk); and yet he, had he looked back at himself, would have found himself hardly less immoderate and tiresome in spreading abroad and vaunting the distinction of his wife's family. What troublesome presumption, with which the wife finds herself armed by her husband's own hands! If he understood Latin, one would have to tell him: *Go on! If she is not mad enough of her own accord, egg her on.* I do not say that no one should accuse unless he is clean, for then no one would accuse; nor even unless he is clean of the same kind of stain. But I mean that our judgment, when it bears down on another who is then in question, should not spare us from an inner and severe jurisdiction. It is a duty of charity that one who cannot remove a vice in himself should nonetheless try to remove it in another, where it may have a less malignant and stubborn seed.[8] Nor does it seem to me a fitting reply, to someone who points out my fault, to say that he has it too. What of it? The warning is still true and useful. If we had a good nose, our own filth ought to stink more to us, since it is ours. And Socrates holds that anyone who found himself, his son and a stranger guilty of some violence and wrong should begin with himself, presenting himself for the sentence of justice and imploring the help of the executioner's hand to purge himself; next he should do so for his son; and last for the stranger. If this precept pitches its tone a little too high, at least

7 A Latin proverb, collected by Erasmus in his Adages.
8 Terence, The Woman of Andros.

he ought to present himself first for the punishment of his own conscience.[9]

THE CREDIT OF RANK

Gowns, fortune and silence lend weight to foolish men, and offices go by luck more than merit.

3.8.11 The senses are our own and first judges, and they perceive things only through their external accidents. So it is no wonder if, in every part of the workings of our society, there is so perpetual and universal a mixture of ceremonies and superficial appearances, to the point that the best and most effective part of government consists in them. It is always with man that we have to deal, and his condition is wonderfully corporeal. Let those who in recent years have tried to build us a form of worship so contemplative and immaterial not be astonished if some people think it would have slipped away and melted between their fingers, had it not held its ground among us as a mark, a title and an instrument of division and faction, more than by itself.[10] So it is in conversation. The gravity, the gown and the fortune of the speaker often lend credit to empty and foolish remarks. No one would suppose that a great gentleman, so attended, so feared, has no ability within him beyond the ordinary; or that a man given so many commissions and offices, so disdainful and so haughty, is not more capable than that other man who bows to him from so far off and whom nobody employs. Not only the words but even the grimaces of such people are weighed and taken into account, everyone setting himself to give them some fine and solid interpretation. If they stoop to ordinary conversation and are offered anything other than approval and reverence, they club you with the authority of their experience: they have heard, they have seen, they have done; you are buried under examples. I would gladly tell them that the fruit of a surgeon's experience is not the history of his cases, nor remember-

9 Plato, Gorgias.
10 An allusion to the Protestant Reformed churches of France.

ing that he has cured four plague victims and three gout sufferers, if he cannot draw from that practice the means to form his judgment, and cannot make us feel that he has grown wiser in the practice of his skill. Just as in a concert of instruments we do not hear a lute, a spinet and the flute: we hear a harmony as a whole, the union and fruit of the whole ensemble. If travels and offices have improved them, it is for the products of their understanding to show it. It is not enough to count up experiences; they must be weighed and sorted, and they must have been digested and distilled, to draw from them the reasons and conclusions they contain. There were never so many historians. It is always good and useful to listen to them, for they supply us with plenty of fine and commendable lessons from the storehouse of their memory—certainly a great asset for the help of life. But that is not what we are looking for at present; we are asking whether these narrators and collectors are themselves praiseworthy.

3.8.12 I hate every kind of tyranny, both of words and of deeds. I readily brace myself against those empty trappings that cheat our judgment through the senses; and keeping watch on these extraordinary eminences, I have found that for the most part they are men like any others: *For common sense is generally rare in that high / Station.* Perhaps we judge them and see them as less than they are because they undertake more and show themselves more: they do not measure up to the burden they have taken on. There must be more vigor and strength in the bearer than in the load.[11] The man who has not used his full strength leaves you guessing whether he has more strength still beyond it, and whether he has been tested to his utmost. The man who sinks under his load reveals his measure and the weakness of his shoulders. That is why one sees so many inept souls among the learned, more than among others. They would have made good householders, good merchants, good craftsmen: their natural vigor was cut to that size. Learning is a thing of great weight; they collapse under it. To display and dispense this rich

11 Juvenal, Satires.

and powerful material, to use it and profit from it, their wits have neither enough vigor nor enough dexterity.

> Learning has power only in a strong nature, and such natures are very rare. And the weak, says Socrates, corrupt the dignity of philosophy by handling it. It looks both useless and harmful when it is badly housed. That is how they spoil themselves and make themselves ridiculous. *Like an ape, that mimic of the human face,*
> *Whom a laughing boy has dressed in costly silk,*
> *Leaving its buttocks and its back bare,*
> *A joke for the dinner table.* Likewise, for those who rule and command us, who hold the world in their hand, it is not enough to have an ordinary understanding, to be able to do what we can do. They are far below us if they are not far above. As they promise more, so they owe more.[12]

3.8.13 And so silence is for them not only a bearing that commands respect and gravity, but often also a source of profit and economy. For Megabyzus, having gone to see Apelles in his studio, stood a long time without saying a word, and then began to hold forth about his works. For this he received the following rebuke: "As long as you kept silent you seemed something great, because of your chains and your pomp; but now that you have been heard speaking, there is not even a boy in my workshop who does not despise you." Those magnificent ornaments, that great state, did not allow him to be ignorant with a common ignorance and to talk nonsense about painting. He should have preserved that outward and presumed competence by keeping mute.[13] For how many foolish souls in my time has a cold and taciturn air served as a title to wisdom and ability?

3.8.14 Honors and offices are necessarily handed out more by fortune than by merit, and people are often wrong to blame kings for it. On the contrary, it is a wonder that they have such luck at it, having so little skill: *The greatest virtue of a prince is to*

12 Claudian, Against Eutropius.
13 Megabyzus was a Persian noble; Apelles was the most celebrated Greek painter of the fourth century BC.

know his own people. For nature has not given them sight that can extend over so many people to discern who excels, and to pierce our breasts, where the knowledge of our will and of our best worth is lodged. They have to sort us by guesswork and groping: by family, wealth, learning, popular report—very weak evidence.[14] Whoever could find a way for us to be judged justly and for men to be chosen by reason would, by that single stroke, establish a perfect form of government.

FORTUNE AND OUTCOMES

Success is a poor witness of ability, since chance governs most human affairs.

3.8.15 "Yes, but he brought that great business to a successful end." That is saying something, but it is not saying enough. For this maxim is rightly accepted: that plans should not be judged by their outcomes. The Carthaginians punished the bad counsels of their generals even when they had been set right by a happy outcome. And the Roman people often refused a triumph for great and very useful victories because the commander's conduct did not match his good luck. We commonly observe in the world's affairs that Fortune—to teach us how much power she has in all things, and taking pleasure in humbling our presumption—having been unable to make the inept wise, makes them lucky, in rivalry with virtue. And she readily takes a hand in favoring those enterprises whose web is most purely her own. Hence we see every day that the simplest among us carry through very great tasks, both public and private. And as Siramnes the Persian replied to those who were amazed that his affairs turned out so badly when his words were so wise—that he alone was master of his words, but Fortune was master of the success of his affairs—these people can make the same reply, but from the opposite angle. Most things in the world happen by themselves. *The Fates find a way.* The outcome often lends authority to very inept conduct. Our intervention is hardly more

14 Martial, Epigrams.

than routine, and more commonly a matter of habit and example than of reason.[15] Struck by the greatness of some achievement, I once learned from those who had carried it through what their motives and methods had been; I found nothing in them but ordinary notions. And the most ordinary and familiar are perhaps also the surest and handiest in practice, if not for show. What if the flattest reasons are the best grounded, and the lowest, the loosest and the most hackneyed suit affairs best? To preserve the authority of kings' councils, there is no need for the uninitiated to take part in them and see further in than the first barrier. Whoever wants to sustain their reputation must revere them on trust and wholesale. My deliberation roughs out the matter a little and considers it lightly by its first appearances; the main and hardest part of the work I am accustomed to resign to heaven: *Leave the rest to the gods.*[16]

3.8.16 Good luck and bad luck are, to my mind, two sovereign powers. It is imprudence to think that human prudence can play the part of Fortune. And vain is the undertaking of the man who presumes to embrace both causes and consequences and to lead the progress of his affair by the hand—vain above all in deliberations of war. There was never more military circumspection and caution than is sometimes seen among us. Could it be that people are afraid of getting lost along the way, and are saving themselves for the final act of this play? I say further that our very wisdom and deliberation for the most part follow the lead of chance.

15 Virgil, Aeneid.
16 Horace, Odes.

> My will and my reasoning move now one way, now another, and many of these movements govern themselves without me. My reason has daily and accidental impulses and stirrings: *The moods of minds are changed, and breasts conceive*
> *Now one impulse, now another, as the wind*
> *Drives on the clouds.* Look at who are the most powerful in the cities and who do best in their business: you will usually find that they are the least capable. Little women, children and madmen have happened to rule great states as well as the ablest princes. And, says Thucydides, the dull succeed at it more often than the subtle. We attribute the effects of their good fortune to their prudence.[17]

As each man makes use of Fortune, / So he excels; and so we all say he is wise. Therefore I say, in every way, that outcomes are poor witnesses of our worth and ability.[18]

3.8.17 Now I was on this point: that we need only see a man raised to high rank, and even if we had known him three days before as a man of little account, an image of greatness and ability steals imperceptibly into our opinions, and we persuade ourselves that, having grown in retinue and credit, he has grown in merit. We judge him not by his worth but, as with counters, by the privilege of his position. Let the luck turn, let him fall back and mingle with the crowd, and everyone asks in amazement what it was that had hoisted him so high. "Is that him?" they say. "Didn't he know anything more than that when he was up there? Are princes satisfied with so little? We were in good hands indeed!"[19] It is something I have often seen in my time. Indeed, even the mask of greatness that is represented in plays touches us somewhat and deceives us. What I myself worship in kings is the crowd of their worshipers. All bowing and

17 Virgil, Georgics.
18 Plautus, Pseudolus.
19 Counting tokens, whose value depended on the place where they were set on the counting board.

submission is due to them, except that of the understanding. My reason is not trained to bend and bow; my knees are. Melanthius, asked what he thought of Dionysius's tragedy, said: "I have not seen it, it is so obscured by language." So too most of those who judge the speeches of the great ought to say: "I did not understand what he said, it was so obscured by gravity, grandeur and majesty."[20] Antisthenes one day urged the Athenians to order that their donkeys be used to plow the fields just as the horses were. He was told in reply that this animal was not born for such service. "It makes no difference," he answered; "it depends only on your order. For the most ignorant and incapable men you appoint to command in your wars nonetheless become at once most worthy of it, simply because you appoint them." This bears on the custom of so many peoples who canonize the king they have made from among themselves, and are not content to honor him unless they worship him. The people of Mexico, once the ceremonies of his coronation are completed, no longer dare look him in the face. Rather, as if they had deified him by making him king, among the oaths they make him swear—to maintain their religion, their laws, their liberties, and to be valiant, just and kindly—he also swears to make the sun move in its accustomed light, to make the clouds drain their rain at the proper time, to make the rivers run their courses, and to make the earth bear all things needful for his people.

3.8.18 I differ from this common way: I distrust ability the more when I see it accompanied by great fortune and popular esteem. We must take note how much it counts to speak when one pleases, to pick one's moment, to break off the conversation or change it with magisterial authority; to fend off other people's objections with a nod of the head, a smile or a silence, before an audience trembling with reverence and respect. A man of prodigious fortune, adding his opinion to some light conversation that was idly going on at his table, began exactly like this: "Only a liar or an ignoramus would say otherwise than," etc. Pursue that philosophical point—with a dagger in your hand.

20 Dionysius the Elder wrote tragedies.

TESTING BORROWED WIT

A fine saying from a fool must be probed to see how far he understands it.

3.8.19 Here is another piece of advice from which I get great use. It is that in disputes and conversations, not every remark that seems good to us should be accepted straightaway. Most men are rich with borrowed ability. A man may well happen to say a fine thing, a good reply or maxim, and put it forward without knowing its force. That we do not truly hold everything we borrow can perhaps be verified by me myself. We must not always yield to it, whatever truth or beauty it has. Either we must fight it in earnest, or draw back on the pretext of not understanding it, so as to probe from every side how it is lodged in its author. It may happen that we run onto the blade and help the blow beyond its reach. In the need and heat of combat, I have sometimes used counterthrusts that went through further than I intended or hoped. I delivered them only by count; they were received by weight. Just so, when I argue with a vigorous man, I like to anticipate his conclusions; I spare him the trouble of explaining himself; I try to forestall his idea while it is still incomplete and just being born; the order and pertinence of his understanding warn and threaten me from afar. With these others I do just the opposite: we must understand nothing except through them, and presuppose nothing.

3.8.20 If they judge in general terms—"This is good, that is not"—and they hit the mark, see whether it is Fortune that hits it for them. Let them circumscribe and narrow their verdict a little: why it is so, in what respect it is so. These sweeping judgments, which I see so commonly, say nothing. They come from people who greet a whole population in a mass and a crowd. Those who really know it greet each person and pick them out by name and individually. But that is a risky undertaking. Hence I have seen it happen more often than every day that poorly grounded minds, trying to show their cleverness by pointing out, as they

read some work, where its beauty lies, fix their admiration on so bad a choice that instead of teaching us the excellence of the author they teach us their own ignorance. This exclamation is safe: "That is beautiful!" after hearing a whole page of Virgil. That is how the shrewd get by. But to undertake to follow him bit by bit, and, with explicit and discriminating judgment, try to point out where a good author surpasses himself, weighing the words, the phrases, the inventions and his various excellences one after another—stay clear of that! *We must consider not only what each man says, but also what he thinks, and even why he thinks it.*[21]

3.8.21 Every day I hear fools say things that are not foolish. They say a good thing: let us find out how far they understand it, let us see by what end they hold it. We help them make use of that fine phrase and that fine argument which they do not own—they only have it in safekeeping; they will have brought it out by chance and groping; we give it credit and value for them. You lend them a hand. What for? They are not in the least grateful to you, and they become sillier for it. Don't back them up; let them go on. They will handle that material like people afraid of scalding themselves; they dare not change its position or its light, nor go deeper into it. Shake it ever so little and it slips from them; they surrender it to you, strong and beautiful as it is. They are fine weapons, but badly hafted. How often have I seen this proved? Now if you go on to clarify and support them, they at once seize and steal from you the advantage of your interpretation: "That was what I meant; that is exactly my idea; if I didn't express it that way, it was only for want of words." Puff away! We must use even malice to correct this proud stupidity. The doctrine of Hegesias, that we should neither hate nor accuse, but instruct, has reason in it elsewhere. But here it is injustice and inhumanity to rescue and set right someone who has no use for it and is the worse for it. I like to let them get bogged down and entangled even more than they are, and so deeply, if possible, that in the end they recognize themselves.

21 Cicero, On Duties.

3.8.22 Stupidity and a disordered mind are not curable by a stroke of admonition. And we may fitly say of this kind of repair what Cyrus answers to the man who urges him to exhort his army on the point of battle: that men are not made brave and warlike on the spot by a good speech, any more than one becomes a musician at once by hearing a good song. These are apprenticeships that have to be served beforehand, through long and steady education. We owe this care to our own people, and this diligence in correction and instruction; but to go preaching to the first passerby and lecturing the ignorance or foolishness of the first person we meet is a practice I strongly dislike.[22] I rarely do it, even in conversations held with me, and I would rather give up altogether than resort to these magisterial lessons that go back to first principles. My temperament is not suited to speaking, any more than to writing, for beginners. But as for things said in company or among others, however false and absurd I judge them, I never throw myself in the way, by word or by sign.

3.8.23 For the rest, nothing vexes me so much about stupidity as that it is more pleased with itself than any reason can reasonably be. It is a misfortune that prudence forbids you to be satisfied with yourself and to trust yourself, and always sends you away discontented and fearful, whereas obstinacy and rashness fill their hosts with joy and assurance. It is the least capable who look down on other men over their shoulder, always coming back from the fight full of glory and gladness. And most often, too, this arrogance of speech and cheerfulness of face wins them the day with the audience, which is commonly weak and incapable of judging well and discerning the real advantages.

BANTER AMONG FRIENDS

Sharp, playful teasing is a useful kind of conversation; rough horseplay is not.

Obstinacy and heat of opinion are the surest proof of stupidity. Is there anything as certain, resolute, disdainful, contemplative, serious and grave as the donkey? May we not include under the heading of conversation and exchange the sharp, clipped banter that high spirits and intimacy bring in among friends, teasing and joking with one another pleasantly and briskly? It is an exercise for which my natural gaiety makes me fairly well suited. And if it is not as taut and serious as that other exercise I have just spoken of, it is no less keen and clever, nor less profitable, as Lycurgus thought.[23] For my part, I bring to it more freedom than wit, and I have more luck at it than invention; but I am perfect at taking it, for I endure retaliation—not only sharp but even tactless—without getting upset. And when I am attacked, if I have nothing to retort smartly on the spot, I do not waste my time pursuing the point with a tedious, feeble wrangle that verges on obstinacy. I let it pass, and, cheerfully lowering my ears, I put off getting even until some better hour. No merchant always makes a profit. Most people change their face and their voice when their strength fails them, and by an unseasonable anger, instead of getting their revenge, they betray their weakness and their impatience together. In this playfulness we sometimes pluck the secret strings of our imperfections, which we cannot touch in a calmer mood without giving offense; and we usefully warn one another of our faults.

3.8.24 There are other games of horseplay, tactless and rough, in the French manner, which I hate mortally: I have a tender, sensitive skin. In my lifetime I have seen two princes of our royal

22 Xenophon, The Education of Cyrus.

23 Plutarch reports that Lycurgus encouraged banter among the Spartans.

blood buried because of them. It is an ugly thing to come to blows in fun.[24]

JUDGING A MAN'S WORK

He asks writers what they think best in their work, and doubts his own judgment of the Essays.

3.8.25 Moreover, when I want to judge someone, I ask him how far he is satisfied with himself, how much his speech or his work pleases him. I want to avoid those fine excuses: "I did it for fun"; *This work was taken from the anvil half-finished*; "I wasn't at it for an hour"; "I haven't looked at it since." Well then, I say, let us leave those pieces aside; give me one that represents you whole, one by which you would like to be measured. And then: what do you find finest in your work? Is it this part or that one? The grace, or the matter, or the invention, or the judgment, or the learning? For I usually notice that people err as much in judging their own work as in judging other people's.[25] Not only because of the affection they mix into it, but because they lack the ability to know it and to distinguish its parts. A work, by its own force and fortune, can second the workman and outstrip him beyond his invention and knowledge. For my part, I judge the worth of no one else's work more obscurely than my own; and I place the Essays now low, now high, very inconstantly and doubtfully. There are many books that are useful by reason of their subjects, from which the author gains no credit; and there are good books, as there are good works, that put the workman to shame. I will write about the fashion of our banquets and of our clothes, and write about it gracelessly; I will publish the edicts of my time and the letters of princes that pass into public hands; I will make an abridgment of a good book (and every abridgment of a good book is a foolish abridgment), which book will then come to be lost; and things like that. Posterity will derive singular use

24 One was probably François de Bourbon, Count of Enghien, killed in 1546 when a chest was thrown from a window during a mock snowball battle.
25 Ovid, Tristia.

from such compositions; but what honor will there be for me, except for my good luck? A good many famous books are of this kind.

3.8.26 When I read Philippe de Commynes several years ago—a very good author, certainly—I noted in him this saying as uncommon: that one must take good care not to do one's master so much service that one prevents him from finding a fitting reward for it. I should have praised the idea, not him. I came across it in Tacitus not long ago: *Benefits are welcome so long as they seem repayable; when they go far beyond that, hatred is returned instead of gratitude.* And Seneca, vigorously: *For he who thinks it shameful not to repay does not want there to be anyone to repay.* Q. Cicero, from a slacker angle: *Whoever thinks he cannot repay you can in no way be your friend.* The subject, depending on what it is, may make a man seem learned and gifted with a good memory; but to judge the qualities in him that are most his own and most worthy, the strength and beauty of his soul, we must know what is his and what is not; and, in what is not his, how much we owe him for the choice, arrangement, ornament and language he has supplied. What if he has borrowed the matter and spoiled the form, as often happens?[26] Those of us who have little familiarity with books are in this difficulty: when we see some fine idea in a new poet, some strong argument in a preacher, we still dare not praise them for it until we have learned from some scholar whether this piece is their own or borrowed. Until then I always stay on my guard.

READING TACITUS

A verdict on Tacitus: his judgment, his style, his view of Pompey and his reports of prodigies.

3.8.27 I have just read straight through Tacitus's history (which hardly ever happens to me: it is twenty years since I spent a single hour at a stretch on a book), and I did so at the urging of a gentleman whom France holds in high esteem, both for his own

26 Quintus Cicero, brother of the orator, in his Handbook on Electioneering.

worth and for a constant form of ability and goodness that is seen in the several brothers that they are. I know of no author who mixes into a public record so much consideration of private manners and inclinations. And I think the opposite of what he thinks: that, having in particular to follow the lives of the emperors of his time, so strange and extreme in every sort of way, and so many notable actions that their cruelty above all produced in their subjects, he had stronger and more attractive material to discuss and narrate than if he had had to tell of battles and general upheavals. So much so that I often find him barren, running over those fine deaths as if he feared to weary us with their number and length. This form of history is by far the most useful. Public movements depend more on the guidance of Fortune, private ones on our own. It is a judgment rather than a narration of history; there are more precepts than stories in it; it is not a book to read, it is a book to study and learn. It is so full of maxims that they are scattered everywhere, right and left: it is a nursery of ethical and political reflections, for the supply and adornment of those who hold some rank in the management of the world. He always pleads with solid and vigorous reasons, in a pointed and subtle manner, following the affected style of the age. They loved so much to puff themselves up that where they found no point or subtlety in things, they borrowed it from words. His writing is not unlike Seneca's. He seems to me meatier, Seneca sharper. His service is better suited to a troubled and sick state, such as ours is at present: you would often say he is painting us and pinching us.

3.8.28 Those who doubt his good faith give themselves away well enough as bearing him ill will for other reasons. His opinions are sound, and he leans to the right side in Roman affairs. I do complain a little, though, that he judged Pompey more harshly than the opinion of the good men who lived and dealt with him warrants, and thought him altogether like Marius and Sulla, except that he was more secretive. Pompey's intentions in the government of affairs have not been held free of ambition, nor of vengeance; and even his friends feared that victory would

have carried him beyond the bounds of reason—but not to so unbridled a degree.[27] There is nothing in his life that threatened us with such outright cruelty and tyranny. Besides, suspicion must not be weighed against evidence; so I do not believe Tacitus on this. That his narratives are artless and straightforward could perhaps be argued from this very fact: that they do not always fit exactly the conclusions of his judgments, which he follows according to the bent he has taken, often beyond the material he shows us, and that material he has not deigned to tilt in the slightest. He needs no excuse for having approved the religion of his time, according to the laws that commanded him, and for having been ignorant of the true one. That is his misfortune, not his defect.

3.8.29 I have chiefly considered his judgment, and I am not entirely clear about it throughout. Take these words from the letter that Tiberius, old and ill, sent to the Senate: "What shall I write to you, sirs, or how shall I write to you, or what shall I not write to you at this time? May the gods and goddesses destroy me worse than I feel myself perishing every day, if I know." I do not see why he applies them so confidently to a stinging remorse tormenting Tiberius's conscience. At least when I was reading it, I did not see it.

3.8.30 It also seemed to me a little weak that, having had to mention that he had held a certain honorable magistracy in Rome, he goes on to excuse himself, saying that it was not out of ostentation that he said so. This trait seems to me shabby for a soul of his kind. For not daring to speak plainly of oneself betrays some lack of heart. A firm and lofty judgment, one that judges soundly and surely, uses its own examples on every occasion just as it would something foreign, and testifies frankly about itself as about a third party. We must pass over these common rules of civility in favor of truth and freedom. I dare not only to speak of myself, but to speak only of myself. I go astray when I write of anything else, and slip away from my subject. I do not love

27 Marius and Sulla, rival leaders of the first century BC, each carried out bloody purges in Rome.

myself so indiscreetly, and am not so bound up and mingled with myself, that I cannot distinguish myself and consider myself apart, as a neighbor, as a tree. It is equally an error not to see how far one's worth extends, or to say more of it than one sees. We owe more love to God than to ourselves, and we know him less, and yet we talk of him to our heart's content.

3.8.31 If his writings reflect anything of his character, he was a great personage, upright and courageous, not with a superstitious virtue but with a philosophical and generous one. He may be found bold in his testimony. As where he maintains that a soldier carrying a load of wood had his hands stiffen with cold and stick to his burden, so that they stayed fastened there, dead, having come away from his arms. In such matters I am accustomed to bow to the authority of such great witnesses.

3.8.32 As for what he also says, that Vespasian, by the favor of the god Serapis, healed a blind woman in Alexandria by anointing her eyes with his spittle, and some other miracle or other: he does it following the example and the duty of all good historians. They keep records of important events, and among public occurrences are also popular rumors and opinions. It is their role to report common beliefs, not to regulate them. That part belongs to the theologians, and to the philosophers who direct consciences. Therefore very wisely did that fellow historian of his, a great man like him, say: *Indeed I transcribe more than I believe; for I can neither bring myself to affirm what I doubt, nor withhold what I have been told*; and the other: *These things are worth neither affirming nor refuting; we must abide by report.* And writing in an age when belief in prodigies was beginning to decline, he says that he nevertheless does not want to fail to include in his annals, and to give a footing to, a thing accepted by so many good men and with such great reverence for antiquity. That is very well said. Let them give us history more as they receive it than as they judge it. I, who am king of the matter I treat and owe no one an account of it, nevertheless do

not wholly believe myself about it.[28] I often venture sallies of my mind that I distrust, and certain verbal subtleties at which I shake my ears; but I let them take their chance. I see that people take pride in such things; it is not for me alone to judge them. I present myself standing and lying down, front and back, right and left, and in all my natural folds. Minds, even when equal in strength, are not always equal in application and taste. That is what my memory presents to me about him, broadly and rather uncertainly. All broad judgments are loose and imperfect.

28 The first quotation is from Quintus Curtius, historian of Alexander the Great; the second, and the remark on prodigies, are from Livy.

III.9 Of Vanity

De la vanité

Montaigne ranges over writing, travel, household cares, and public duty, defending his love of wandering and his Roman citizenship.

3.9.1 There is perhaps no more obvious vanity than to write about it so vainly. What the Divinity has so divinely expressed to us on this subject ought to be meditated carefully and continually by people of understanding. Who does not see that I have taken a road along which I shall go on, without stopping and without effort, as long as there is ink and paper in the world? I cannot keep a record of my life by my actions: Fortune sets them too low. I keep it by my notions. Yet I have seen a gentleman who communicated his life only through the workings of his belly. At his house you would see on display a row of chamber pots, seven or eight days' worth. That was his study, his conversation. Every other topic stank to him.[1] Here, a little more politely, are the excrements of an old mind: hard at times, at times loose, and always undigested. And when shall I ever finish portraying the continual agitation and change of my thoughts, whatever subject they fall on, since Diomedes filled six thousand books with the subject of grammar alone? What must babbling produce, since the stammering and first loosening of the tongue smothered the world under so horrible a load of volumes? So many words, for the sake of words alone! O Pythagoras, why did you not conjure away this storm? A Galba of olden times was

1 The "Divinity" alludes to Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

accused of living idly. He replied that each man must give an account of his actions, not of his leisure.[2] He was wrong: for justice also takes notice of those who sit idle, and punishes them. But there ought to be some legal restraint against inept and useless writers, as there is against vagabonds and idlers. Both I and a hundred others would be banished from our people's hands. This is no joke. Scribbling seems to be a kind of symptom of an unruly age. When did we ever write so much as since our troubles began? When did the Romans, as at the time of their ruin? Besides the fact that sharpening minds does not make them wiser in a state, this idle busyness comes from each man applying himself slackly to the duty of his calling, and straying from it. The corruption of the age is made up of the particular contribution of each of us. Some contribute treachery, others injustice, irreligion, tyranny, avarice, cruelty, according to how powerful they are; the weaker bring folly, vanity, idleness—and I am one of these. It seems to be the season for vain things when harmful ones press upon us. In a time when doing wickedly is so common, to do only what is useless is almost praiseworthy. I console myself that I shall be among the last to be laid hold of. While the more pressing cases are being dealt with, I shall have time to mend my ways. For it seems to me that it would be against reason to prosecute petty nuisances when great ones are plaguing us. As the physician Philotimus said to a man who held out his finger for him to dress, and in whom he recognized, by his face and his breath, an ulcer of the lungs: "My friend, this is no time to be fussing over your fingernails."[3]

3.9.2 Yet on this subject I saw, some years ago, a personage whose memory I hold in singular esteem go and publish, in the midst of our great ills, when there was neither law nor justice nor magistrate doing its duty—any more than there is now—I

2 Montaigne probably means Didymus, the Alexandrian grammarian said by Seneca to have written four thousand books. Pythagoras imposed years of silence on his disciples.

3 Philotimus was a Greek physician; the anecdote comes from Plutarch.

know not what paltry reforms concerning clothes, cooking and legal chicanery. These are toys with which a mistreated people is fed, to show that it has not been wholly forgotten. Those others do the same who insist with all urgency on forbidding certain ways of speaking, dances and games to a people abandoned to every sort of execrable vice. It is no time to wash and scrub yourself when you are in the grip of a good fever. Only the Spartans would set about combing and dressing their hair at the very moment they were about to hurl themselves into some extreme peril of their lives. As for me, I have this other, worse habit: if one of my slippers is on crooked, I leave my shirt and my cloak crooked too; I disdain to mend myself by halves. When I am in a bad way, I throw myself into the ill. I abandon myself in despair and let myself slide toward the fall, and throw, as they say, the handle after the axe. I persist in getting worse, and no longer think myself worth my own care. Either all good or all bad. It is a favor to me that the desolation of this state coincides with the desolation of my age. I more readily accept that my ills should be added to by it than I would if my goods had been disturbed by it. The words I utter in misfortune are words of spite. My heart bristles instead of lying flat. And contrary to others, I find myself more devout in good fortune than in bad, following the precept of Xenophon, if not his reasoning. And I more readily make sweet eyes at heaven to thank it than to petition it. I take more care to increase my health when it smiles on me than to restore it when I have lost it.[4] Prosperity serves me as discipline and instruction, as adversity and the rod serve others. As if good fortune were incompatible with a good conscience, men become good only in bad fortune. Good luck is a singular spur to me toward moderation and modesty. Entreaty wins me, threats repel me; favor bends me, fear stiffens me. Among human traits this one is fairly common: to be more pleased with other people's things than with our own, and to love movement and change. *The daylight itself delights us with its welcome draught for*

4 In the Cyropaedia Xenophon advises praying to the gods in prosperity so as to be heard by them in adversity.

this reason, / that the hour comes round with changed horses. I have my share of it.[5] Those who follow the other extreme—being pleased with themselves, valuing what they possess above all else, and recognizing no form more beautiful than the one they see—if they are not wiser than we are, they are in truth happier. I do not envy their wisdom, but I do envy their good fortune. This temperament, greedy for new and unknown things, does much to feed in me the desire to travel; but plenty of other circumstances contribute to it. I readily turn away from managing my household. There is some satisfaction in commanding, even if only in a barn, and in being obeyed by one's own people. But it is too monotonous and languid a pleasure. And then it is necessarily mixed with many vexing thoughts.

> Now it is the poverty and oppression of your people, now a quarrel between your neighbors, now their encroachments on you, that afflict you: *Or vines beaten down by hail,*
> *and the farm that betrays its promise, the trees blaming now the rains,*
> *now the stars that scorch*
> *the fields, now the cruel winters.* And the fact that in six months God will scarcely send one season that fully satisfies your steward, or one that, if it is good for the vines, does not harm the meadows: *Either the sun in the heavens scorches with excessive heat,*
> *or sudden rains and icy frosts destroy,*
> *and blasts of wind harry with violent whirlwinds.* Add to this the new, well-made shoe of that man of olden times, which pinches your foot.[6]

And the fact that outsiders do not understand how much it costs you, and how much you contribute, to keep up the appear-

5 Petronius.

6 The verses are from Horace, Odes, and Lucretius, On the Nature of Things. The shoe is that of the Roman in Plutarch who, divorcing his wife, said that no one but the wearer knows where a fine shoe pinches.

ance of the order seen in your household; and that perhaps you pay too dear for it.

RUNNING A HOUSEHOLD

Montaigne dislikes managing his estate, whose small domestic thorns sting him more than great ills.

3.9.3 I took up household management late. Those whom Nature had caused to be born before me relieved me of it for a long time. I had already taken another bent, more in keeping with my constitution. Still, from what I have seen of it, it is an occupation more bothersome than difficult. Anyone capable of anything else will very easily be capable of that. If I were seeking to grow rich, this road would seem too long to me. I would have served kings, a more profitable trade than any other. Since I aim to acquire only the reputation of having acquired nothing, nor squandered anything either—in keeping with the rest of my life, unfit for doing either good or ill of any account—and since I seek only to get by, I can do it, thank God, without much attention. At worst, always run ahead of poverty by cutting expenses. That is what I am counting on: to reform myself before it forces me to. Besides, I have set up in my soul enough steps for doing with less than I have. I mean doing with it contentedly. *It is not by the assessment of one's property but by one's way of living and keeping that the measure of wealth is fixed.* My real need does not take up all my property so exactly that Fortune has nowhere to bite me without cutting to the quick. My presence, ignorant and disdainful as it is, lends great support to my domestic affairs. I apply myself to them, but grudgingly. Besides, in my house it is so arranged that, for all I burn the candle at my own end, the other end is not spared in the least.[7]

3.9.4 Travel hurts me only through the expense, which is great and beyond my means, since I am used to traveling with a retinue that is not only necessary but also respectable. So I must make my journeys all the shorter and less frequent, and I spend

7 Cicero, Paradoxes of the Stoics.

on them only the skimmings and my reserve, waiting and postponing according as it comes in. I do not want the pleasure of roaming to spoil the pleasure of retirement. On the contrary, I intend them to nourish and favor each other. Fortune has helped me in this: since my principal profession in this life was to live it softly, and lazily rather than busily, she has spared me the need to multiply my riches to provide for a multitude of heirs. As for my one heir: if he does not have enough of what I have had so plentifully enough of, so much the worse for him. His imprudence will not deserve my wishing him more. And everyone, following the example of Phocion, provides sufficiently for his children who provides for them insofar as they are not unlike him. I would by no means approve of what Crates did. He left his money with a banker on this condition: if his children were fools, he was to give it to them; if they were capable, he was to distribute it among the biggest fools of the people. As if fools, being less able to do without riches, were more able to use them. Be that as it may, the damage that comes from my absence does not seem to me to warrant, as long as I have the means to bear it, my refusing the opportunities that come up to get away from this tiresome attendance.

3.9.5 There is always some piece going awry. Business, now from one house, now from another, tugs at you. You see everything from too close. Your sharp-sightedness harms you here, as it does often enough elsewhere. I slip away from occasions for vexation, and turn away from knowing about things that are going badly. And yet I cannot manage it so well that at every hour I do not bump into something at home that displeases me. And the knaveries most hidden from me are the ones I know best. There are some that, to make things less bad, you must help to hide yourself. Vain stings—vain at times, but always stings. The smallest and slenderest hindrances are the most piercing. And just as small print tires the eyes more, so small matters sting us more: a throng of petty ills offends more than the violence of one, however great. The thicker and finer these domestic thorns are, the more sharply they bite us, and

without warning, easily catching us unawares. I am not a philosopher. Ills crush me according to their weight; and they weigh according to their form as well as their matter, and often more. I see into them more keenly than ordinary people do, and yet I also have more patience. In short, if they do not wound me, they weigh on me. Life is a tender thing, and easily disturbed. Once my face is turned toward vexation—*for no one resists himself once he has begun to be pushed*—however silly the cause that brought me there, I provoke my temper in that direction, and afterward it feeds itself and grows exasperated by its own motion, drawing in and heaping up one material on another to feed on. *The falling of drops hollows the stone.* These ordinary drippings eat away at me and ulcerate me. Ordinary troubles are never light. They are continual and irreparable, especially when they arise from members of the household, who are continual and inseparable. When I consider my affairs from afar and as a whole, I find—perhaps because I do not remember them very exactly—that up to now they have gone on prospering beyond my reckonings and calculations.[8] I get more out of them, it seems to me, than there is in them: their good luck deceives me. But when I am inside the work, and see all these little parts moving—*Then indeed our mind is pulled apart into every care*—a thousand things there make me wish and fear. To abandon them altogether is very easy for me; to take them on without fretting, very hard. It is a pitiful thing to be in a place where everything you see keeps you busy and concerns you. And I seem to enjoy the pleasures of another man's house more gaily, and to bring to them a freer and purer taste. Diogenes answered as I would to the man who asked him what kind of wine he found best: "Someone else's," he said.[9]

3.9.6 My father loved building at Montaigne, where he was born; and in all this administration of domestic affairs I like to follow his example and his rules, and I shall bind my successors to them as far as I can. If I could do better for him, I would. I take pride that his will still operates and acts through me. God

8 Seneca, Letters, and Lucretius.
9 Virgil, Aeneid.

forbid that I should let fail in my hands any image of life that I can give back to so good a father. Whatever I have taken it upon myself to do in finishing some old section of wall, or putting in order some badly hewn part of the building, has certainly been more out of regard for his intention than for my own satisfaction.[10] And I blame my idleness for not having gone further and completed what he began in his house—all the more since I am very likely to be the last owner of it of my line, and to put the last hand to it. For as for my own inclination, neither this pleasure of building, which they say is so attractive, nor hunting, nor gardens, nor the other pleasures of the retired life can amuse me much. That is something I hold against myself, as I do all my other opinions that are inconvenient to me. I do not care so much to have them vigorous and learned as I care to have them easy and convenient for living. They are true and sound enough if they are useful and agreeable. Those who, hearing me speak of my incompetence in household matters, come whispering in my ear that it is disdain, and that I neglect to know the tools of farming, its seasons, its order, how my wines are made, how grafting is done, and to know the names and forms of the plants and fruits, and the preparation of the foods I live on, the names and prices of the cloth I dress in, because I have set my heart on some higher science—they are the death of me. That is foolishness, and stupidity rather than glory. I would rather be a good horseman than a good logician. *Why not rather set about weaving at least something that need requires, / out of osiers and soft rushes?* We encumber our thoughts with the general, and with universal causes and workings, which run perfectly well without us; and we leave behind our own business, and Michel, who touches us even more closely than man does.

3.9.7 Now I do stay at home most of the time, but I would like to take more pleasure in it than anywhere else. *Would that it might be the home of my old age,*
the end for one weary of sea and roads
and soldiering! I do not know whether I shall manage it. I wish that, instead of some other part of his estate, my father had handed down to me the passionate love he bore for his household in his old age. He was very happy to bring his desires down to the level of his fortune, and to know how to be pleased with what he had. Political philosophy may condemn the lowliness and barrenness of my occupation all it likes, if I can once acquire a taste for it, as he did.

I am of the opinion that the most honorable calling is to serve the public and be useful to many. *For the fruits of talent, of virtue and of every excellence are most fully reaped when they are bestowed on those nearest us.* For my part, I hold back from it: partly out of conscience (for just as I see the weight that bears on such callings, I also see how little means I have to meet it; and Plato, a master craftsman in all political government, nonetheless abstained from it), partly out of cowardice. I am content to enjoy the world without bustling about in it; to live a life that is merely excusable, and that merely does not burden either me or anyone else.

3.9.8 Never did a man let himself go more completely and more limply into the care and governance of someone else than I would, if I had someone to do it. One of my wishes at present would be to find a son-in-law who could comfortably feed my old age and lull it to sleep; into whose hands I might deposit, in full sovereignty, the management and use of my property; let him do with it what I do, and gain from me what I gain from it, provided he brought to it a truly grateful and friendly heart. But what can you do? We live in a world where loyalty is unknown even in one's own children.

10 Pierre Eyquem enlarged and rebuilt the family house.

TRUSTING SERVANTS

He lets others keep his purse and prefers not knowing to suspicion and constant accounting.

3.9.9 Whoever keeps my purse when I travel has it entirely and without audit; he could cheat me in his reckoning anyway. And unless he is a devil, I oblige him to behave well by so unreserved a trust. *Many have taught others to deceive by fearing to be deceived, and by suspecting them have given them the right to do wrong.* The commonest security I take with my people is not knowing. I do not presume vices until I have seen them, and I trust the young more, thinking them less spoiled by bad example. I would rather hear at the end of two months that I have spent four hundred crowns than have my ears battered every evening with three, five, seven. And yet I have been robbed in this way as little as anyone. It is true that I lend a hand to my own ignorance. I deliberately keep my knowledge of my money somewhat muddled and uncertain. Up to a certain point I am content to be able to doubt it. You must leave a little room for your servant's dishonesty or carelessness. If on the whole we have enough left to do what we need, let us leave this surplus of Fortune's liberality to run a little more at her mercy. The gleaner's share. After all, I do not prize my people's honesty as much as I make light of the wrongs they do me. Oh, what a vile and stupid study, to study one's money, to take pleasure in handling it and counting it over! it is by that path that avarice makes its approaches.

3.9.10 In the eighteen years I have been managing property, I have never been able to bring myself to look at either the title deeds or my principal affairs, which must necessarily pass through my knowledge and my care. It is not a philosophical contempt for transitory and worldly things: my taste is not so refined, and I value them at least at what they are worth. No, it is certainly an inexcusable and childish laziness and negligence. What would I not do rather than read a contract? Rather than go shaking out those dusty papers, a slave to my own business? Or,

worse still, to other people's, as so many do for money? Nothing costs me as dear as care and trouble, and I seek only to grow slack and idle. I was better suited, I believe, to live on someone else's fortune, if that could be done without obligation and without servitude. And yet, looking at it closely, I do not know whether, given my temperament and my lot, what I have to put up with from my affairs, my servants and my household does not involve more abjection, importunity and bitterness than following in the train of a man born greater than I, who would guide me a little at my ease. *Servitude is the obedience of a broken and abject spirit that lacks a will of its own.* Crates did worse: he threw himself into the freedom of poverty to rid himself of the indignities and cares of a household. That I would not do. I hate poverty as much as pain. But I would indeed exchange this kind of life for another less grand and less busy.

3.9.11 When I am away, I strip myself of all such thoughts, and I would then feel the collapse of a tower less than I feel, when present, the fall of a slate. My mind disentangles itself easily when it is apart, but on the spot it suffers like a vinedresser's. A rein crooked on my horse, an end of stirrup leather flapping against my leg, will keep me out of sorts a whole day. I can raise my courage well enough against misfortunes; my eyes, I cannot. *O senses! O gods above, the senses!*

3.9.12 At home I am answerable for everything that goes wrong. Few masters—I mean those of middling station like mine, and if there are any, they are luckier—can rely so much on a deputy that a good part of the burden does not remain on them. This tends to take something away from my manner in receiving visitors; and I may perhaps have kept someone there more by my cooking than by my graciousness, as tiresome people do; and it takes away much of the pleasure I ought to have at home from the visits and gatherings of my friends. The silliest figure a gentleman can cut in his own house is to be seen preoccupied with running his establishment, whispering in one servant's ear, threatening another with his eyes. It should all flow imperceptibly and look like the ordinary course of things. And I find it

unseemly to entertain one's guests with talk of how they are being treated, whether to excuse it or to boast of it. I love order and cleanliness—*and the tankard and the dish / show me myself*—rather than abundance; and at home I look carefully to what is necessary, little to show. If a servant gets into a fight in someone else's house, if a dish is upset, you only laugh; you sleep while the master of the house goes over his arrangements with his steward for your entertainment the next day. I speak for myself. Not that I fail, in general, to recognize what a sweet pastime a peaceful, prosperous household, run in an orderly way, is for certain natures. Nor do I want to pin my own failings and inconveniences on the thing itself. Nor to contradict Plato, who considers the happiest occupation for each person to be conducting his own affairs without injustice.

3.9.13 When I travel, I have only myself to think about, and the use of my money; that is settled by a single precept. Amassing requires too many qualities: I know nothing about it. Spending I understand a little, and letting my spending be seen—which is in truth its principal use. But I go about it too ambitiously, which makes it uneven and misshapen, and moreover immoderate in both directions. If it shows, if it serves, I let myself go indiscreetly; and I tighten up just as indiscreetly if it does not shine and does not smile on me. Whatever it is, art or nature, that has stamped on us this condition of living by reference to others, it does us much more harm than good. We cheat ourselves of our own advantages to shape appearances to common opinion. We care less what our being is in ourselves and in reality than what it is in public knowledge. Even the goods of the mind, and wisdom, seem fruitless to us if they are enjoyed only by ourselves, if they are not displayed to the sight and approval of others. There are some whose gold flows in great streams through underground channels, imperceptibly; others beat it all out into plates and leaves. So that for some, farthings pass for crowns, and for others the reverse, since the world judges use and value by show. All overcareful attention to riches smacks of avarice. Even giving them out, and a liberality that is too regulated and

contrived—riches are not worth painful heed and anxiety. Whoever wants to make his spending exactly right makes it narrow and constrained. Keeping and spending are in themselves indifferent, and take on the color of good or evil only according to how our will applies them.

LIVING AMONG CIVIL WARS

The corruption of the age is another reason to travel; yet societies hold together despite their vices.

3.9.14 The other cause that invites me on these outings is my disagreement with the present morals of our state. I would easily console myself for this corruption as far as the public interest is concerned—*Ages worse than the times of iron,*
for whose wickedness nature herself has found no
name, nor named it after any metal—but as far as my own is concerned, no. It presses too hard on me personally. For in my neighborhood we have by now, through the long license of these civil wars, grown old in so unruly a form of state—*where right and wrong are turned upside down*—that it is truly a wonder it can hold together.[11]

They work the land in arms, and always delight / in carrying off fresh plunder and living on what they seize. In short, I see by our example that human society holds and is stitched together at whatever cost. In whatever position you lay men down, they pile up and sort themselves out by shifting and crowding together, as ill-matched objects stuffed into a bag without order find by themselves the way to fit together and settle in among one another, often better than art could have arranged them. King Philip gathered together the most wicked and incorrigible men he could find and lodged them all in a city he had built for them, which bore their name.[12] I suppose that out of their very

11 Juvenal, Satires.
12 Philip II of Macedon; according to Plutarch the city was called Poneropolis, "City of the Wicked."

vices they built a political structure among themselves, and a convenient and just society. I see, not one action, or three, or a hundred, but morals in common and accepted use, so ferocious—in inhumanity above all, and in treachery, which is for me the worst kind of vice—that I have not the heart to think of them without horror; and I marvel at them almost as much as I detest them. The practice of these signal wickednesses bears the mark of vigor and strength of soul as much as of error and disorder. Necessity puts men together and assembles them. This chance stitching later takes shape as laws. For there have been laws as wild as any human opinion could give birth to, which nonetheless kept their bodies politic in as much health and length of life as those of Plato and Aristotle could have done. And certainly all those descriptions of government invented by art prove ridiculous and unfit to put into practice.

3.9.15 These great and long disputes about the best form of society, and about the most convenient rules to bind us, are disputes fit only for exercising our minds—just as in the arts there are many subjects whose essence lies in agitation and dispute, and which have no life outside them. Such a picture of government would be in place in a new world; but we take a world already made and shaped to certain customs. We do not engender it as Pyrrha or Cadmus did. By whatever means we may have the right to straighten it and reorder it, we can hardly twist it out of its accustomed bend without breaking everything.[13] Solon was asked whether he had given the Athenians the best laws he could: "Yes indeed," he replied, "the best of those they would have accepted." Varro excuses himself in a similar vein: if he were writing about religion afresh, he would say what he believes about it; but since it is already accepted, he will speak of it according to usage rather than according to nature.[14]

13 After the Flood, Pyrrha and Deucalion repopulated the earth by throwing stones that became people; Cadmus sowed dragon's teeth from which armed men sprang.

14 Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BC), Roman scholar, quoted by Augustine in The City of God.

AGAINST INNOVATION

The best government is the one a nation already has; overturning a state to cure it usually kills it.

3.9.16 Not in opinion but in truth, the excellent and best government for each nation is the one under which it has preserved itself. Its form and essential advantage depend on usage. We are readily displeased with our present condition. But I hold nonetheless that to go about wishing for rule by the few in a popular state, or for another kind of government in a monarchy, is vice and folly. *Love the state such as you see it to be:*
if it is royal, love royalty;
if it is rule by the few, or else a commonwealth,
love it too, for God had you born there. So said the good Monsieur de Pibrac, whom we have just lost: so fine a mind, such sound opinions, such gentle manners.[15]

This loss, and the one we suffered at the same time in Monsieur de Foix, are serious losses to our crown. I do not know whether France has anything left with which to replace them by another pair like these two Gascons, in sincerity and ability, for the councils of our kings. They were souls beautiful in different ways, and certainly, for this age, rare and beautiful, each in its own form. But who had lodged them in this age, so ill-suited and so out of proportion to our corruption and our storms?[16]

3.9.17 Nothing weighs on a state like innovation: change alone gives shape to injustice and tyranny. When some piece comes loose, it can be propped up; we can prevent the alteration and corruption natural to all things from carrying us too far from our beginnings and principles. But to undertake to recast so great a mass, and to change the foundations of so great a building, is for those who wipe out in order to clean; who want to

15 Guy du Faur de Pibrac (1529–1584), magistrate and poet, author of moral Quatrains.
16 Paul de Foix (1528–1584), archbishop of Toulouse and diplomat.

amend particular defects by universal confusion, and cure diseases by death: *eager not so much to change things as to overturn them.* The world is incapable of curing itself. It is so impatient of whatever oppresses it that it aims only at getting rid of it, without considering at what cost. We see by a thousand examples that it usually cures itself at its own expense: relief from the present ill is no cure unless there is a general improvement of condition. The surgeon's aim is not to kill the bad flesh; that is only the path toward his cure. He looks beyond, to making the natural flesh grow again and restoring the part to its proper state. Whoever proposes only to remove what is gnawing at him falls short, for good does not necessarily follow evil: another evil may follow it, and a worse one. So it happened to Caesar's killers, who threw the commonwealth into such a state that they had cause to repent of having meddled with it. The same has happened to many since, down to our own times. We French of today know well what to say about it. All great changes shake the state and throw it into disorder.

3.9.18 Anyone who aimed straight at the cure, and deliberated about it before setting to work, would be inclined to lose his enthusiasm for putting his hand to it. Pacuvius Calavius corrected the flaw in this way of proceeding by a notable example. His fellow citizens had risen against their magistrates. He, a man of great authority in the city of Capua, found a way one day to shut the Senate up in the palace; and, summoning the people to the square, told them that the day had come when, in full liberty, they could take revenge on the tyrants who had oppressed them so long, and whom he held at his mercy, alone and unarmed.[17] He advised that they be drawn out by lot, one after another, and that a decision be made on each one individually, whatever was decreed being carried out on the spot—provided also that at the same time they took care to install some good man in the place of the condemned one, so that the post would not be left without an officer. No sooner had they heard the name of one senator than a cry of universal discontent rose up against him. "I see,"

17 Pacuvius Calavius, chief magistrate of Capua in 216 BC; the story is from Livy.

said Pacuvius, "this one must be removed: he is a wicked man. Let us have a good one in exchange." There was a sudden silence, everyone finding himself much at a loss in the choice. When the first and most brazen of them named his man, there was an even greater consensus of voices to reject that one. A hundred imperfections, and just reasons for turning him down. These contradictory humors having grown heated, it went even worse with the second senator, and the third. As much discord over the election as agreement over the removal. Having worn themselves out uselessly in this turmoil, they begin, some this way, some that, to slip away little by little from the assembly, each carrying away in his soul this resolution: that the older and better-known ill is always more bearable than the new and untried one.

3.9.19 Though we see ourselves pitiably tossed about—for what have we not done? *Alas! we are ashamed of our scars and our crime*
and of our brothers. What have we, a hardened
age, shrunk from? What wickedness have we left
untouched? From what has our youth held back its hands
for fear of the gods? What
altars has it spared?—I do not hastily conclude that *Even if Salvation herself wished it,*
she could not possibly save this household. Yet perhaps we have not reached our final period. The preservation of states is something that very probably surpasses our understanding. A civil polity, as Plato says, is a powerful thing and hard to dissolve; it often holds out against mortal internal diseases: against the harm of unjust laws, against tyranny, against the excesses and ignorance of magistrates, the license and sedition of the people.[18]

In all our fortunes we compare ourselves with what is above us, and look toward those who are better off. Let us measure

ourselves against what is below: there is no one so wretched that he cannot find a thousand examples to console himself with. It is our failing that we look at what is above us with more displeasure than we look at what is below us with pleasure. Solon used to say that if someone made a heap of all ills together, there is no one who would not rather take back home the ills he has than come to a lawful division of that heap with all other men and take his share. Our government is in poor health. Yet there have been sicker ones that did not die. The gods play ball with us and toss us about every which way: *the gods indeed treat us men as their balls.*[19]

ROME AND THE SURVIVAL OF STATES

Rome outlasted worse disorders, and a great state holds together by more than one nail.

3.9.20 The stars have fatefully destined the Roman state to be the model of what they can do in this kind. It contains within it all the forms and adventures that can befall a state: all that order can do, and disorder, and good fortune and misfortune. Who should despair of his condition, seeing the shocks and upheavals by which that state was shaken, and which it withstood? If extent of dominion is the health of a state—which I do not at all believe (and I like Isocrates, who teaches Nicocles to envy not the princes who have wide dominions but those who know how to keep the ones that have fallen to them)—that state was never so healthy as when it was most sick.

18 Horace, Odes I.35; Terence, The Brothers; Salus was the Roman goddess of safety and welfare.
19 Plautus, The Captives.

> The worst of its forms was the most fortunate for it. One can scarcely recognize the image of any government under the first emperors: it is the most horrible and dense confusion one can conceive. Yet it bore it and endured in it, preserving not a monarchy confined within its borders but so many nations, so diverse, so distant, so ill-disposed, so disorderly governed and unjustly conquered. *Nor to any nations*
> *does Fortune lend her enmity against the people mighty*
> *over land and sea.* Not everything that totters falls. The fabric of so great a body holds by more than one nail.[20]

It holds even by its age, like old buildings whose footings time has worn away, without plaster and without cement, which nevertheless live and hold up by their own weight: *No longer clinging by strong roots, / it is safe by its own weight.*

3.9.21 Moreover, it is not a sound procedure to reconnoiter only the flank and the moat. To judge how secure a stronghold is, you must see by what way it can be approached and what condition the attacker is in. Few ships founder under their own weight, without violence from outside. Now let us turn our eyes in every direction: everything is crumbling around us. In all the great states we know, whether in Christendom or elsewhere, take a look: you will find an evident threat of change and ruin. *They too have their own troubles, and the same storm / hangs over all.* The astrologers have an easy game warning us, as they do, of great alterations and changes close at hand. Their divinations are present and palpable; there is no need to go to the heavens for that. From this universal fellowship in ill and in menace we should draw not only consolation but also some hope for the survival of our state, since, naturally, nothing falls where everything falls. Universal sickness is individual health. Conformity is a quality hostile to dissolution.[21] For my part, I do not fall into despair over it, and I think I can see roads by which we

20 Lucan, Pharsalia.
21 Adapted from Virgil, Aeneid XI.

may be saved. *Perhaps God, by a kindly turn, / will restore these things to their place.* Who knows whether God will have it turn out as with bodies that purge themselves and are restored to a better state by long and grievous illnesses, which give them back a health more complete and cleaner than the one they took away? What weighs on me most is that, when I count the symptoms of our sickness, I see as many that are natural, sent to us by heaven and properly its own, as those that our disorder and human imprudence contribute. It seems that the very stars decree that we have lasted long enough, and beyond the ordinary limits.[22] And this too weighs on me: that the nearest ill threatening us is not an alteration in the whole, solid mass, but its dissipation and tearing apart—the extreme of our fears.

MEMORY AND PUBLIC SPEAKING

His failing memory makes him avoid prepared speeches and formal occasions.

3.9.22 Even in these ramblings here I fear the treachery of my memory, that through inadvertence it may have made me record something twice. I hate going back over myself, and I never re-handle, except reluctantly, what has once escaped me. Now, I bring nothing here that is newly learned. These are common notions; having perhaps conceived them a hundred times, I am afraid I have already entered them on the roll. Repetition is tedious everywhere, even in Homer. But it is ruinous in things that have only a superficial and passing show. I dislike having things hammered in, even useful things, as in Seneca. And I dislike the habit of his Stoic school of repeating on every subject, at full length and breadth, the principles and presuppositions that apply in general, and of always bringing out anew the common and universal arguments and reasons.

3.9.23 My memory grows cruelly worse every day: *As if, with parched throat, I had drained cups / that bring the sleep of Lethe.* From now on (for, thank God, no failure has come of it so far),

22 Horace, Epodes XIII.

whereas others look for time and occasion to think about what they have to say, I shall have to avoid preparing myself, for fear of binding myself to some obligation on which I would have to depend. Being bound and obliged throws me off, and so does depending on so feeble an instrument as my memory. I never read this story without being stung by it, with a feeling that is personal and natural to me.[23] Lyncestes, accused of conspiracy against Alexander, was brought before the army on the appointed day, according to custom, to be heard in his defense. He had a studied speech in his head, of which, hesitating and stammering, he delivered a few words. As he grew more and more confused, while he wrestled with his memory and groped through it, there he was, set upon and killed with pike thrusts by the soldiers nearest him, who took him as convicted. His bewilderment and his silence served them as a confession. Since he had had so much leisure in prison to prepare himself, it was no longer, in their opinion, his memory that failed him: it was his conscience that bridled his tongue and took away his strength.[24] Truly, that is well said! The place stuns us, the audience, the expectation, even when nothing more is at stake than the ambition to speak well. What can one do when the speech has one's life riding on it?

3.9.24 For my part, the very fact that I am bound to what I have to say serves to shake me loose from it. When I have committed and entrusted myself entirely to my memory, I lean on it so heavily that I overwhelm it: it takes fright at its burden. The more I rely on it, the more I am thrown out of myself, to the point of putting my composure to the test. And I have found myself at times hard put to hide the servitude in which I was shackled. For my aim, when I speak, is to display a deep nonchalance of tone and expression, and movements that are casual and unpremeditated, as if born of the present occasion. I would just as soon say nothing worth hearing as show that I came pre-

23 Horace, Epodes XIV. Lethe was the river of forgetfulness in the underworld.
24 Alexander of Lyncestis, executed for conspiracy in 330 BC; the story is told by Quintus Curtius.

pared to speak well—a thing unbecoming, above all, in people of my profession, and too great a commitment for one who cannot retain much. Preparation raises more hopes than it delivers. People often foolishly strip down to their doublet only to jump no better than they would in their coat.[25] *Nothing is so damaging to those who want to please as expectation.* It has been recorded of the orator Curio that when he announced the division of his speech into three or four parts, or the number of his arguments and reasons, he would often either forget one of them or add one or two more. I have always taken care to avoid falling into that trouble, having hated such announcements and outlines, not only from distrust of my memory but also because that form smacks too much of the professional. *Simpler things suit soldiers.* Enough: I have now promised myself never again to take on the task of speaking on a formal occasion.[26] For as for speaking by reading out one's text, besides being most inept, it is a great disadvantage to those who by nature had some gift for delivery. And as for throwing myself on the mercy of my improvisation of the moment, even less: mine is heavy and muddled, unable to meet sudden and important demands.

I ADD BUT DO NOT CORRECT

Montaigne explains why he adds to his book without revising what is already printed.

3.9.25 Reader, let this further essay run its course too, this third extension made of the remaining pieces of my portrait. I add, but I do not correct. First, because when a man has mortgaged his work to the world, it seems reasonable to me that he should have no more right in it. Let him say it better elsewhere, if he can, and not spoil the goods he has sold. From such people one should buy nothing until after their death. Let them think it over

25 Montaigne means the nobility, whose profession was arms.
26 The first quotation is from Cicero, Academica II; Gaius Scribonius Curio (1st century BC) is described in Cicero's Brutus; the second quotation is from Quintilian.

well before they bring themselves before the public. Who is hurrying them? My book is always one and the same. Except that, as people set about issuing it anew, so that the buyer may not go away entirely empty-handed, I allow myself to attach to it (since it is only a badly joined marquetry) some extra emblem.[27] These are only makeweights, which do not condemn the original form but give some particular value to each of the later ones, by a little ambitious subtlety. From this, however, it will easily happen that some transposition of chronology gets mixed in, my stories taking their place according to their timeliness, not always according to their age.

3.9.26 Second, because for my own part I fear losing in the exchange. My understanding does not always go forward; it goes backward too. I distrust my notions hardly less for being second or third than first, or present than past. We often correct ourselves as foolishly as we correct others. I have grown older by a good number of years since my first publications, which were in the year 1580. But I doubt that I have grown an inch wiser. Myself now and myself a while ago are indeed two; but which is better, I cannot say. It would be a fine thing to be old if we were marching only toward improvement. It is the movement of a drunkard, staggering, dizzy, shapeless; or of rushes that the wind tosses at random as it pleases. Antiochus had written vigorously in favor of the Academy; in his old age he took the other side. Whichever of the two I followed, would I not always be following Antiochus? After establishing doubt, to want to establish the certainty of human opinions—was that not establishing doubt, not certainty? And was it not promising that, had he been given another lifetime, he would still be in a state of fresh agitation, not so much better as different?[28]

3.9.27 Public favor has given me a little more boldness than I hoped. But what I fear most is to surfeit. I would rather prick than weary, as a learned man of my time has done. Praise is

27 The third book was added in the edition of 1588.

28 Antiochus of Ascalon (1st century BC) abandoned the skepticism of the New Academy for a dogmatic philosophy.

always pleasant, from whomever and for whatever reason it comes. Yet to be rightly pleased with it, one must know its cause. Even imperfections have their way of recommending themselves. Common, popular esteem is seldom happy in its choices; and in my time, unless I am mistaken, the worst writings are those that have caught the popular wind. Certainly I give thanks to the decent men who deign to take my feeble efforts in good part. Nowhere do faults of workmanship show so much as in a subject that has nothing to recommend it in itself. Do not blame me, reader, for those that slip in here through the whims or carelessness of others: each hand, each workman, brings his own. I do not concern myself with spelling—I only order them to follow the old one—nor with punctuation; I am little expert in either. Where they break the sense altogether, I take little trouble over it, for at least they relieve me of responsibility. But where they substitute a false one, as they so often do, and twist me to their own conception, they ruin me. However, when a sentence is not as strong as I would make it, a decent man ought to refuse it as mine. Anyone who knows how little industrious I am, how much I am made in my own fashion, will easily believe that I would sooner dictate as many Essays again than subject myself to going back over these for such childish correction.

SAFETY IN A LAWLESS COUNTRY

His open house has escaped pillage, but he hates owing his safety to others' favor.

3.9.28 I was saying, then, a little while ago, that being planted in the deepest mine of this new metal, I am not only deprived of close familiarity with people of ways other than mine, and of other opinions, by which they hold together with a knot that overrides every other knot. I am also not without danger among those to whom everything is equally permitted, and most of whom can no longer make their bargain with our justice any worse—whence arises the extreme degree of license. Counting

all the particular circumstances that concern me, I find no man on our side whom the defense of the laws costs more than me, both in profits forgone and in losses incurred, as the lawyers say. And some make a great show of bravado with their zeal and harshness who, weighed in a fair balance, do much less than I. My house, having always been open, easy of access, and obliging to everyone (for I have never let myself be induced to make it an instrument of war, which I prefer to go and seek where it is farthest from my neighborhood), has earned a good deal of popular affection, and it would be very hard to bully me on my own dunghill. And I consider it a marvelous masterpiece, and an exemplary one, that it is still virgin of blood and pillage under so long a storm, with so many changes and upheavals close by. For, to tell the truth, it was possible for a man of my temperament to escape from one constant and continuous state of affairs, whatever it might be. But the contrary invasions and incursions, and the alternations and vicissitudes of fortune around me, have so far exasperated rather than softened the temper of the region, and they heap upon me dangers and insurmountable difficulties.

3.9.29 I escape. But it displeases me that it is more by luck, and even by my own prudence, than by justice; and it displeases me to be outside the protection of the laws and under some safeguard other than theirs. As things stand, I live more than half by the favor of others, which is a hard obligation. I do not want to owe my safety either to the kindness and benevolence of the great, who approve of my respect for the law and my freedom, or to the easygoing ways of my predecessors and my own: for what if I were different? If my conduct and the frankness of my dealings put my neighbors or my kin under obligation, it is cruel that they can discharge it by letting me live, and that they can say: "We grant him the free continuation of divine service in the chapel of his house, when all the churches around have been laid waste by us; and we grant him the use of his goods and his life, since he shelters our wives and our cattle in time of need." For a long time now my house has had a share in the praise

given to Lycurgus the Athenian, who was the general depositary and guardian of his fellow citizens' purses. Now I hold that one must live by right and by authority, not by reward or by favor.[29]

THE BURDEN OF OBLIGATION

He would rather pay money than owe gratitude, and avoids being bound to anyone.

How many gallant men have preferred to lose their lives rather than owe them? I shun submitting myself to any kind of obligation, but above all to the kind that binds me by a duty of honor. I find nothing so costly as what is given to me, and for which my will remains mortgaged by right of gratitude. And I more willingly accept services that are for sale. No wonder: for these I give only money; for the others, I give myself.

3.9.30 The bond that holds me by the law of honor seems to me much tighter and heavier than that of civil constraint. A notary ties me up more gently than I tie myself. Is it not reasonable that my conscience should be far more engaged in what has simply been entrusted to it? Elsewhere my word owes nothing, for nothing has been lent to it. Let people make do with the trust and security they have taken from outside me. I would much rather break out of the prison of a wall and of the laws than out of my word. I am scrupulous to the point of superstition in keeping my promises, and in every matter I readily make them uncertain and conditional. To those that have no weight I give weight by my jealous regard for my rule: it torments me and burdens me with its own interest. Yes, even in undertakings that are entirely my own and free, if I state my intention, it seems to me that I prescribe it to myself, and that to let another know of it is to preordain it for oneself. It seems to me that I promise it when I say it. So I air my plans very little. The sentence I pass on myself is sharper and stiffer than that of the judges, who see me only in the light of common obligation; the grip of my con-

29 Lycurgus, Athenian orator and statesman of the 4th century BC, famed for his honest management of public funds.

science is tighter and more severe. I perform sluggishly the duties to which I would be dragged if I did not go of my own accord. *Even what is rightly done is just only if it is voluntary.* If an action does not have some luster of freedom, it has neither grace nor honor. *What duty compels me to do, they will hardly get from my good will.* Where necessity pulls me, I like to let my will go slack. *For whatever is compelled by command is credited more to the one who exacts it than to the one who performs it.* I know some who follow this bent to the point of injustice: they would rather give than repay, rather lend than pay, and they do good more stingily to the one to whom they are bound to do it. I do not go that far, but I come close.[30]

3.9.31 I so love to unburden myself and be released from obligation that I have sometimes counted as profit the ingratitude, offenses, and indignities I had received from those to whom, by nature or by accident, I owed some duty of friendship, taking the occasion of their fault as so much acquittance and discharge of my debt. Although I go on paying them the outward courtesies that public reason requires, I nevertheless find it a great saving to do out of justice what I used to do out of affection, and to relieve myself a little of the inner attention and solicitude of my will. *A prudent man should rein in the onrush of goodwill as he would a race in full career.* In me it is too urgent and pressing where I give myself to it—at least for a man who does not want to be under any pressure at all.[31] And this economy gives me some consolation for the imperfections of those close to me. I am truly sorry that they are worth less for them; but the fact remains that I also save something of my application and commitment toward them. I approve of the man who loves his child less for being scabby or hunchbacked—and not only when he is ill-natured, but also when he is unfortunate and ill-formed from birth (God himself has docked that much from his value and natural esteem), provided he conducts himself in this cooling

30 Cicero, On Duties; Terence, The Brothers; Valerius Maximus.
31 Cicero, On Friendship.

with moderation and exact justice. In me, nearness does not lighten faults; rather, it aggravates them.

3.9.32 After all, as far as I understand the science of benefit and gratitude, which is a subtle science and of great use, I see no one freer and less in debt than I am up to this hour. What I owe, I owe simply to the common and natural obligations. There is no one more cleanly quit of everything else. *Nor do I know the gifts / of the powerful.* Princes give me plenty if they take nothing from me, and do me enough good when they do me no harm: that is all I ask of them.[32] Oh, how beholden I am to God that it has pleased him that I should receive all I have directly from his grace, and that he has kept all my debt particularly to himself! How earnestly I beg his holy mercy that I may never owe anyone a thank-you that really matters! Blessed freedom, which has brought me so far! May it see me to the end. I try to have no express need of anyone. *All my hope is in myself.* This is something everyone can do within himself, but more easily those whom God has sheltered from natural and pressing necessities. It is a very pitiful and hazardous thing to depend on another. We ourselves, who are the most rightful and the surest recourse, are not sure enough of ourselves.[33] I have nothing of my own but myself; and even my possession of that is partly defective and borrowed. I cultivate myself both in courage, which is the strongest, and also in fortune, so as to find there enough to satisfy me should everything else abandon me. Hippias of Elis furnished himself not only with learning, so that in the lap of the Muses he could, if need be, cheerfully withdraw from all other company; nor only with knowledge of philosophy, to teach his soul to be content with itself and to do without, manfully, the comforts that come to it from outside, when fate so orders. He was so eager as to learn also to do his own cooking and his own hair, and to make his robes, his shoes, his breeches, so as to rest on himself as far as he could and free himself from outside help. One enjoys borrowed goods much more freely and more cheer-

32 Virgil, Aeneid XII.
33 Terence, The Brothers.

fully when the enjoyment is not bound and constrained by need, and when one has, both in one's will and in one's fortune, the strength and the means to do without them. I know myself well. But it is hard for me to imagine any liberality toward me so pure, any hospitality so frank and free, that it would not seem to me graceless, tyrannical, and tinged with reproach if necessity had haltered me to it. As giving is a quality of ambition and prerogative, so accepting is a quality of submission. Witness the insulting and quarrelsome refusal Bajazet made of the presents Temir sent him. And those that were offered on behalf of the Emperor Suleiman to the Emperor of Calicut put him in such a rage that he not only refused them rudely, saying that neither he nor his predecessors were in the habit of taking, and that it was their office to give, but also had the ambassadors sent for the purpose thrown into a dungeon. When Thetis, says Aristotle, flatters Jupiter, when the Spartans flatter the Athenians, they do not go about refreshing their memory of the benefits they have done them, which is always odious, but of the benefits they have received from them. Those whom I see so freely making use of everyone and putting themselves in debt would not do so if they savored as I do the sweetness of pure freedom, and if they weighed the burden of an obligation as heavily as a wise man should. It may be paid off sometimes, but it is never dissolved. A cruel shackle for one who likes to give his freedom elbow room in every direction.[34] Those who know me, both above and below me, know whether they have ever seen anyone less given to soliciting, requesting, entreating, or less of a burden on others. If I am so beyond any modern example, it is no great wonder, since so many parts of my character contribute to it: a little natural pride; impatience at refusal; the narrowness of my desires and plans; ineptitude for any kind of business; and my most favored qualities, idleness and independence. Through all this I have taken a mortal hatred to being beholden either to anyone else or through anyone but myself. I very vigorously use every means I can to do without, before I make use of another's beneficence,

34 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics IV.

on any occasion or need whatever, light or weighty. My friends annoy me extraordinarily when they ask me to ask a third party. And it seems to me hardly less costly to release someone who owes me by making use of him than to put myself in debt to someone who owes me nothing. With that condition removed, and this other one, that they do not want from me anything that involves business and worry (for I have declared mortal war on all care), I am comfortably easy and ready to meet anyone's need. But I have shunned receiving even more than I have sought to give; and indeed that is much easier, according to Aristotle. My fortune has allowed me little opportunity to do good to others, and what little it has allowed, it has placed rather poorly. If it had had me born to hold some rank among men, I would have been ambitious to make myself loved, not to make myself feared or admired. Shall I put it more insolently? I would have looked as much to pleasing as to being of use. Cyrus, very wisely, and through the mouth of a very good captain and a still better philosopher, values his kindness and his benefactions far above his valor and his warlike conquests. And the first Scipio, wherever he wants to show his worth, rates his gentleness and humanity above his boldness and his victories, and always has on his lips this glorious saying: that he had left his enemies as much reason to love him as his friends.[35] What I mean, then, is that if one must owe something in this way, it should be by a more legitimate title than the one I am speaking of, to which the law of this wretched war binds me; and not so great a debt as that of my entire preservation: it crushes me.

DANGER AT HOME

Expecting attack at night, he grows used to danger; he knows what he flees, not what he seeks.

3.9.33 A thousand times I have gone to bed in my own house imagining that I would be betrayed and murdered that very night,

35 Cyrus speaks in Xenophon's Cyropaedia; the first Scipio is Scipio Africanus, victor over Hannibal.

bargaining with Fortune that it should be without terror and without lingering. And after my Paternoster I have cried out: *Shall some godless soldier possess these well-tilled fields?* What remedy is there? It is the place where I was born, and most of my ancestors; they have set their affection and their name on it. We harden ourselves to whatever we grow used to. And for a wretched condition such as ours, habit has been a most favorable gift of Nature, lulling our feelings into enduring many ills.[36]

> Civil wars are worse than other wars in this: they put each of us on sentry duty in his own house. *How wretched to guard one's life with gate and wall,*
> *and to be scarcely safe in the strength of one's own house!* It is a great extremity to be harried right into one's household and domestic rest. The place where I live is always the first and the last to be battered in our troubles, and where peace never shows its whole face. *Even when there is peace, they tremble in fear of war.*
> *Whenever Fortune breaks the peace,*
> *this is the road wars take. Better, Fortune, had you given us*
> *a home beneath the eastern sky, or under the frozen Bear,*
> *and wandering dwellings.* I sometimes draw the means to steel myself against these thoughts from indifference and slackness.[37]

They also bring us, in some measure, to resolution. It often happens that I imagine mortal dangers with a certain pleasure, and await them. I plunge headlong, stupidly, into death, without considering or reconnoitering it, as into a silent, dark abyss that swallows me in one leap and smothers me in an instant in a powerful sleep, full of insipidity and painlessness. And in these short and violent deaths, the consequence I foresee gives me more consolation than the event gives me fear. They say that just as life is not the better for being long, death is the better for not being long. I do not keep my distance from being dead so

36 Virgil, Eclogues I.
37 The first two quotations are from Ovid, Tristia; the last is from Lucan, Pharsalia I.

much as I make friends with dying. I wrap myself up and crouch down in this storm, which must blind me and carry me off in its fury with a swift, unfelt assault. Again, if it were true, as some gardeners say, that roses and violets grow more fragrant near garlic and onions because these suck up and draw into themselves whatever bad smell is in the soil—if likewise these depraved natures were to suck up all the venom of my air and climate, and make me that much better and purer by their proximity—then I would not lose everything. That is not so; but there may be something in this: that goodness is more beautiful and more attractive when it is rare, and that contrariety and diversity stiffen and concentrate good conduct within itself, and inflame it by the jealousy of opposition and by glory. The robbers, thanks to their kindness, bear me no particular grudge. Nor do I them: I would have to bear one against too many people. Similar consciences lodge under different sorts of robes. Similar cruelty, disloyalty, robbery—and all the worse for being more cowardly, more secure, and more hidden, under the shadow of the laws. I hate injury less when it is open than when it is treacherous, less when warlike than when peaceful and judicial. Our fever has come upon a body that it has hardly made worse. The fire was there; the flame has caught. The noise is greater; the harm, only a little. To those who ask me the reason for my travels, I usually answer that I know well what I am fleeing, but not what I am seeking. If I am told that among foreigners there may be just as little health, and that their ways are no cleaner than ours, I answer, first, that this is unlikely: *So many are the faces of crime!* Second, that it is always a gain to exchange a bad condition for an uncertain one. And that the ills of others should not sting us as our own do.[38]

38 Virgil, Georgics I.

PARIS AND THE WORLD

He loves Paris, his one bond to France, and counts all men his compatriots.

3.9.34 I do not want to forget this: that I am never so rebellious against France that I do not look on Paris with a kindly eye. She has had my heart since my childhood. And it has gone with me as with excellent things: the more other beautiful cities I have seen since, the more the beauty of this one gains power over my affection and wins it. I love her for herself, and more in her own being than loaded with foreign pomp. I love her tenderly, down to her warts and blemishes. I am French only through this great city: great in population, great in the happiness of her situation, but above all great and incomparable in the variety and diversity of her amenities; the glory of France and one of the noblest ornaments of the world. May God drive our divisions far from her! Whole and united, I find her protected against any other violence. I warn her that of all the parties, the worst will be the one that sets her at odds with herself. And I fear for her only from herself. And I fear for her, truly, as much as for any other part of this state. As long as she lasts, I shall not lack a refuge where I can turn at bay, one sufficient to make me lose regret for any other refuge.

3.9.35 Not because Socrates said it, but because it is truly my temperament, and perhaps not without some excess, I consider all men my compatriots, and I embrace a Pole as I do a Frenchman, putting this national bond below the universal and common one. I am hardly smitten with the sweetness of my native air. Acquaintances entirely new and entirely my own seem to me well worth those other common, chance acquaintances of the neighborhood. Friendships that are purely of our own acquiring usually prevail over those to which a shared climate or blood joins us.[39] Nature has put us into the world free and

39 Plutarch reports Socrates calling himself a citizen not of Athens but of the world.

unbound; we imprison ourselves in certain narrow confines, like the kings of Persia, who bound themselves never to drink any water but that of the river Choaspes, foolishly renounced their right to use all other waters, and dried up, as far as they were concerned, the whole rest of the world. What Socrates did at the end of his life, judging a sentence of exile against himself worse than a sentence of death—I shall never, I think, be so broken down or so narrowly attached to my country as to do that. These heavenly lives offer enough images that I embrace by esteem more than by affection.[40] And they also offer some so lofty and extraordinary that I cannot embrace them even by esteem, since I cannot conceive them. That was a very tender feeling in a man who held the world to be his city. It is true that he disdained travel and had scarcely ever set foot outside the territory of Attica. What of the fact that he begrudged his friends' money to buy back his life, and refused to leave prison through the intervention of others, so as not to disobey the laws at a time when they were otherwise so badly corrupted? These examples are of the first kind, for me. Of the second kind are others that I could find in this same person. Several of these rare examples are beyond the strength of my action; but some are beyond even the strength of my judgment.

THE PLEASURES OF TRAVEL

Travel exercises the mind with variety; he rides for hours and minds no weather.

3.9.36 Besides these reasons, traveling seems to me a profitable exercise. The soul is continually exercised in noticing things unknown and new; and I know no better school, as I have often said, for shaping life than to set before it constantly the diversity of so many other lives, notions, and ways, and to give it a taste of so perpetual a variety of the forms of our nature. The body is neither idle nor overworked, and this moderate agitation keeps it in good wind. I stay on horseback without dismounting, sub-

40 The Choaspes flowed past Susa, a Persian royal residence (Herodotus).

ject to the colic though I am, and without wearying of it, for eight and ten hours, *Beyond the strength and lot of old age.* No season is my enemy except the harsh heat of a scorching sun.[41] For the parasols that Italy has used since the ancient Romans burden the arms more than they relieve the head. I would like to know what ingenuity the Persians had, so long ago and at the very birth of luxury, to make cool breezes and shade for themselves at will, as Xenophon says. I love rain and mud as ducks do. Change of air and climate does not affect me at all; every sky is the same to me. I am buffeted only by the internal alterations I produce in myself, and those come over me less when I travel. I am hard to get moving; but once on my way, I will go as far as you like. I balk as much at small undertakings as at great ones, and at equipping myself for a day's ride to visit a neighbor as for a real journey. I have learned to make my day's journeys in the Spanish manner, in one stretch: long but reasonable stages. And in extreme heat I ride them by night, from sunset to sunrise. The other way, stopping to eat on the road, in confusion and haste, for the midday meal, especially on the short days, is inconvenient. My horses are the better for it. No horse that could do the first day's stage with me has ever failed me. I water them everywhere, and only make sure they have enough road left to work off their water. My laziness about getting up gives those who follow me time to eat their dinner at their ease before setting out. As for me, I never eat too late: my appetite comes while I am eating, and not otherwise; I am never hungry except at table.

3.9.37 Some complain that I have chosen to keep up this exercise though married and old. They are wrong. The better time to leave one's house is when one has set it going so that it can carry on without us, when one has left in it an order that does not belie its former shape. It is far more imprudent to go far away leaving one's house in the care of a less faithful guardian, one less concerned to provide for your needs.

3.9.38 The most useful and honorable science and occupation for the mother of a family is the science of household manage-

41 Virgil, Aeneid VI.

ment. I see some who are stingy; good managers, very few. This is her master quality, the one that should be sought before any other, as the only dowry that serves to ruin or save our houses. Let no one argue with me about it: as experience has taught me, I require of a married woman, above every other virtue, the virtue of economy. I give her full scope for it, leaving the whole government in her hands while I am away. I see with vexation, in many households, monsieur coming home around noon, morose and all out of sorts from the bustle of business, while madame is still busy doing her hair and dressing up in her private room. That is for queens to do—and even then I am not sure. It is ridiculous and unjust that the idleness of our wives should be maintained by our sweat and toil. It shall not happen, if I can help it, that anyone has freer use of his goods than I do, more tranquil and more clear of debt. If the husband supplies the matter, Nature herself wills that the wives supply the form.

MARRIAGE AND ABSENCE

Absence does not harm married love or friendship, since the imagination embraces what it lacks.

3.9.39 As for the duties of married love, which people think this absence harms: I do not believe it. On the contrary, it is a bond that readily cools with too constant attendance, and that unbroken presence wounds. Every woman who is not our own seems to us a decent woman. And everyone knows from experience that seeing each other all the time cannot match the pleasure we feel in parting and coming together again by fits and starts. These interruptions fill me with a fresh love for my family and give me back the enjoyment of my home more sweetly. The alternation sharpens my appetite, first for one side, then for the other. I know that friendship has arms long enough to hold on and reach from one corner of the world to the other. This is especially true of this kind, where there is a constant exchange of services that reawaken its obligation and its memory. The Stoics say, indeed, that there is so close a bond and connection

among the wise that a man who dines in France feeds his companion in Egypt. If he merely stretches out his finger, wherever he may be, all the wise men on the habitable earth feel themselves helped by it. Enjoyment and possession belong chiefly to the imagination. It embraces what it goes in search of more warmly and more constantly than what we touch. Count up your daily amusements: you will find that you are most absent from your friend when he is present. His presence slackens your attention and leaves your thought free to wander off at any hour and on any pretext. From Rome I keep and govern my house and the comforts I left there. I see my walls, my trees and my income grow, and shrink, to within two fingers' breadth, just as when I am there: *Before my eyes my house hovers, and the look of the places.* If we enjoy only what we touch, farewell to our money when it is in our coffers, and to our children when they are out hunting. We want them nearer. Is the garden far? Half a day's journey?[42]

> What about ten leagues: is that far or near? If it is near, what about eleven, twelve, thirteen? And so on, step by step. Truly, if a wife can tell her husband at which step near ends and at which step far begins, I suggest she stop him halfway between. *Let a fixed limit put an end to quarrels.*
>
> *I take what is allowed, and like hairs from a horse's tail*
> *I pluck them out little by little, taking away one, and then another,*
> *Until he falls, foiled by the reasoning of the dwindling heap.* And let them boldly call philosophy to their aid.[43]

Though someone might reproach philosophy that, since it sees neither end of the joint between too much and too little, long and short, light and heavy, near and far, and since it knows neither the beginning nor the end, it judges the middle very uncertainly. *Nature has given us no knowledge of limits.* Are they not still the wives and friends of the dead, who are not at the far end of this world but in the other? We embrace both those who

42 Ovid, Tristia.

43 Horace, Epistles; the last lines allude to the ancient paradox of the heap (the sorites).

have been and those who are not yet, not just the absent.[44] When we married, we did not strike a bargain to stay forever coupled tail to tail, like certain little animals we see, or like the bewitched folk of Karenty, in doglike fashion. And a wife ought not to keep her eyes so greedily fixed on her husband's front that she cannot see his back when need be. But might not this saying of that excellent painter of their temperaments fit here, to show the cause of their complaints?[45]

> *If you are late, your wife thinks that you are making love or being loved,*
> *Or drinking, or following your fancy,*
> *And that all goes well with you alone while all goes badly with her.* Or might it rather be that opposition and contradiction in themselves keep them going and feed them, and that they are comfortable enough provided they make you uncomfortable?[46]

3.9.40 In true friendship, in which I am an expert, I give myself to my friend more than I draw him to me. I do not merely prefer doing him good to having him do good to me. I would even rather he did good to himself than to me: he does me the most good when he does it to himself. And if absence is pleasant or useful to him, it is far sweeter to me than his presence. Nor is it really absence when there is a way of keeping each other informed. In the past I drew use and benefit from our being apart.[47] We filled out and stretched our possession of life the better by separating. He lived, he enjoyed, he saw for me, and I for him, as fully as if he had been there himself. When we were together, one part of us lay idle: we merged into one. Separation in place made the union of our wills richer. This insatiable hunger for bodily presence betrays a certain weakness in the enjoyment of souls.

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44 Cicero, Academica.
45 Karenty: Karenz, a town on the Baltic island of Rügen, where, according to old chronicles, couples were bewitched into sticking together like dogs.
46 Terence, The Brothers.
47 The friend is La Boétie.

TRAVELING IN OLD AGE

He travels for the journey itself and would rather die on horseback, far from weeping friends.

3.9.41 As for old age, which people bring up against me: it is the reverse. It is for youth to enslave itself to common opinion and to restrain itself for the sake of others. Youth can provide for both, for the public and for itself; we have only too much to do for ourselves alone. As natural comforts fail us, let us prop ourselves up with artificial ones. It is unjust to excuse youth for following its pleasures and forbid old age to look for any. When I was young, I hid my playful passions under prudence; now that I am old, I dispel my gloomy ones with revelry. Plato's laws, it is true, forbid travel abroad before forty or fifty, to make travel more useful and instructive. I would more readily agree to the other, second article of the same laws, which forbids it after sixty.[48] But at that age you will never come back from so long a road. What do I care? I undertake it neither to come back from it nor to complete it. I undertake only to keep myself moving while moving pleases me, and I walk for the sake of walking. Those who run after a benefice or a hare are not really running. The ones who run are those who play prisoner's base, running for the exercise of it. My plan can be broken off anywhere; it is not founded on great hopes; each day's journey is an end in itself. And the journey of my life goes the same way. Yet I have seen plenty of faraway places where I would have liked to be kept. Why not, if Chrysippus, Cleanthes, Diogenes, Zeno, Antipater, so many wise men of the sternest sect, left their country without any cause to complain of it, merely to enjoy another air? Certainly the greatest displeasure of my travels is that I cannot bring to them the resolve to settle wherever I please, and that I must always plan to come back, to fit in with common temperaments.[49]

48 Plato, Laws, Book XII.

49 Stoic philosophers; this Diogenes is Diogenes of Babylon, not the Cynic.

3.9.42 If I feared dying anywhere but where I was born, if I thought I would die less at ease far from my family, I would hardly leave France; I would not step outside my parish without dread. I feel death constantly pinching my throat or my kidneys. But I am made otherwise: it is all one to me everywhere. Yet if I had to choose, it would be, I think, on horseback rather than in a bed, away from my house and far from my family. There is more heartbreak than comfort in taking leave of one's friends. I willingly neglect this duty of our social manners. For of all the offices of friendship, this is the only unpleasant one, and so I would gladly forget to say that great and eternal farewell. If any advantage comes from having people around you, a hundred disadvantages come with it. I have seen many men die very pitifully, besieged by all that train: the crowd smothers them. It is against duty, and a sign of little affection and little care, to let you die in peace. One torments your eyes, another your ears, another your mouth; there is no sense or limb they do not batter. Your heart is wrung with pity at hearing your friends' laments, and perhaps with vexation at hearing other laments, feigned and masked. A man who has always had delicate sensibilities has them still more when he is weakened. In so great a need, he wants a gentle hand, attuned to what he feels, to scratch him exactly where it itches—or else let no one scratch him at all. If we need a midwife, a "wise woman," to bring us into the world, we surely need an even wiser man to get us out of it. Such a man, and a friend besides, would be worth buying very dearly for service on such an occasion. I have not reached that disdainful vigor which fortifies itself within itself, which nothing helps or troubles; I am a notch lower. I try to go to ground and slip away from this passage, not out of fear, but by skill. It is not my idea to make this act a proof or display of my constancy. For whom? At that point all my right and interest in reputation will cease. I am content with a death withdrawn into itself, quiet and solitary, entirely my own, befitting my retired and private life. This is the reverse of the Roman superstition, by which a man was thought unfortunate who died without

speaking and without his nearest kin to close his eyes. I have enough to do consoling myself without having to console others; enough thoughts in my head without circumstances bringing me new ones; and enough matter to occupy me without borrowing any. This part does not belong to the role of society: it is a play with a single character. Let us live and laugh among our own; let us go and die and scowl among strangers. For money you can find someone to turn your head and rub your feet, who will press you only as much as you wish, showing you an indifferent face, letting you manage yourself and complain in your own way.

3.9.43 Every day, by reasoning, I rid myself of that childish and inhuman temperament which makes us want our ills to stir compassion and grief in our friends. We inflate our troubles beyond their measure to draw their tears. And the firmness we praise in everyone else in bearing ill fortune, we blame and reproach in our family when the ill fortune is ours. We are not content that they should feel our ills unless they are also distressed by them. We should spread joy, but cut back sadness as much as we can. Whoever has himself pitied without reason is a man who will not be pitied when there is reason. Always complaining is the way never to be pitied: by playing the pitiable so often, one becomes pitiable to no one. Whoever plays dead while alive is liable to be taken for alive while dying. I have seen some take offense because people found their complexion fresh and their pulse steady, stifle their laughter because it betrayed their recovery, and hate their health because it was not to be pitied. What is more, these were not women. I describe my illnesses, at most, as they are, and avoid words of ill omen and studied exclamations. If not cheerfulness, at least a composed bearing in those present is fitting beside a wise invalid. Because he sees himself in the contrary state, he does not quarrel with health. He likes to contemplate it, strong and whole, in others, and to enjoy it at least by keeping it company. Because he feels himself sinking, he does not wholly reject thoughts of life, nor shun ordinary conversation. I want to study illness while I am

healthy; when it is here, it makes its impression real enough without my imagination helping it. We prepare ourselves beforehand for the journeys we undertake, and have made up our minds to them; the hour when we must mount our horse we give to those around us, and for their sake we stretch it out.

THE BOOK AS A RULE OF LIFE

Publishing his ways keeps him true to them, and he hoped it might bring him a friend.

3.9.44 I find this unexpected profit in publishing my ways: it serves me, in some measure, as a rule. Sometimes a certain concern comes over me not to betray the story of my life. This public declaration obliges me to keep to my road and not to belie the picture of my character—which is generally less disfigured and contradicted than the malice and sickness of present-day judgments would have it. The uniformity and simplicity of my ways do produce a face that is easy to read; but because its style is a little new and out of use, it gives slander too fine an opening. Yet it is true that anyone who wants to attack me fairly will, it seems to me, find quite enough to bite on in my avowed and known imperfections, and enough to gorge himself on, without skirmishing at the wind. If, because I forestall him in accusing and exposing myself, he thinks I am drawing the teeth of his bite, it is reasonable that he should take his due by way of exaggeration and extension. Offense has its rights beyond justice. Let him swell into trees the vices whose roots I show him in me. Let him bring in not only those that possess me but also those that merely threaten me—injurious vices, both in quality and in number. Let him beat me with those. I would gladly follow the example of the philosopher Dion.[50] Antigonus wanted to taunt him about his origins. He cut him short. "I am," he said, "the son of a slave, a butcher, a branded man, and of a prostitute whom my father married because of the lowness of his fortune. Both were punished for some misdeed. An orator bought me as a

50 Montaigne means Bion, whose reply is reported by Diogenes Laertius.

child, finding me handsome and pleasing, and on his death left me all his goods. Having brought them to this city of Athens, I took up philosophy. Let historians not trouble themselves to look for news of me: I will tell them what there is." A generous and free confession takes the sting out of reproach and disarms insult. Be that as it may, all things considered, it seems to me that I am as often praised beyond reason as disparaged beyond reason.[51] Just as it also seems to me that since childhood I have been given a place in rank and degree of honor above rather than below what is my due. I would be better off in a country where these orders were either regulated or disregarded. Among men, once a dispute over precedence in walking or sitting goes beyond three replies, it is uncivil. I am not afraid to yield or go ahead unfairly to escape so tiresome a contest. And no man has ever wanted precedence over me without my giving it up to him.

3.9.45 Besides this profit I draw from writing about myself, I have hoped for another: that if my temperament happened to please and suit some decent man before my death, he would seek to meet me. I have given him a great deal of ground already won. For all that long acquaintance and familiarity could have gained him in many years, he has seen in three days in this register, and more surely and exactly. A comic notion: many things I would not want to say to any one person, I say to the public. And for my most secret knowledge or thoughts I send my most faithful friends to a bookseller's shop: *I give my inmost heart to be searched.* Had I learned by such clear signs of someone who suited me, I would certainly have gone a very long way to find him. For to my mind the sweetness of fitting and agreeable company cannot be bought dearly enough. Oh, what a thing a friend is! How true is that ancient saying, that the use of one is more necessary and sweeter than that of the elements of water and fire![52]

51 Antigonus II Gonatas, king of Macedonia.
52 Persius, Satires; the ancient saying is from Cicero, On Friendship.

DYING AWAY FROM HOME

A long decline should not be laid on one's family; he would die quietly among strangers.

3.9.46 To return to my subject. There is not much harm, then, in dying far away and apart. After all, we think it our duty to withdraw for natural acts less unsightly than this one, and less hideous. But further, those who have come to the point of dragging out a long stretch of life in languishing should perhaps not wish to encumber a large family with their misery. That is why the Indians in a certain province thought it just to kill anyone who had fallen into such a state. In another of their provinces they left him alone to save himself as best he could. To whom do such people not become burdensome and unbearable in the end? Ordinary duties do not stretch that far. You perforce teach cruelty to your best friends, hardening wife and children by long habit until they no longer feel and pity your ills. The groans of my colic no longer upset anyone. And even if we did draw some pleasure from their company (which does not always happen, because of the difference in conditions, which easily breeds contempt or envy toward anyone at all), is it not too much to abuse it for a whole lifetime? The more I saw them willingly constrain themselves for me, the more I would pity their trouble. We are allowed to lean on others, not to lie so heavily on them and prop ourselves up by their ruin. Like the man who had little children's throats cut to use their blood to cure an illness of his. Or that other man who was supplied with tender young girls to warm his old limbs at night and mingle the sweetness of their breath with his own sour, heavy breath. Decrepitude is a solitary quality. I am sociable to excess. Yet it seems reasonable to me that from now on I should withdraw my tiresomeness from the sight of the world and brood over it alone; that I should huddle up and draw into my shell like the tortoises; that I should learn to see men without clinging to them. I would be doing

them an injury on so steep a slope. It is time to turn my back on the company.[53]

3.9.47 But on these journeys you will be stuck miserably in some hovel where you will lack everything. Most necessary things I carry with me. And besides, we cannot escape Fortune if she sets out to attack us. I need nothing out of the ordinary when I am ill. What Nature cannot do in me, I do not want a pill to do. At the very beginning of my fevers and of the illnesses that lay me low, while I am still whole and close to health, I reconcile myself with God by the last Christian offices. And I feel freer and lighter for it, and it seems to me I have all the better of the illness. I need a notary and counsel less than physicians. Whatever I have not settled in my affairs while in good health, let no one expect me to settle when ill. What I want to do in the service of death is always done. I would not dare to put it off a single day. And if nothing has been done, it means either that doubt has delayed my choice—for sometimes not choosing is choosing well—or that I wanted to do nothing at all.

3.9.48 I write my book for few men and for few years. If it had been a subject meant to last, I would have had to entrust it to a firmer language. Given the continual change our language has undergone up to now, who can hope that its present form will still be in use fifty years from now? It slips through our fingers every day, and in my lifetime it has changed by half. We say it is now perfect. Every century says as much of its own. I am far from holding it to be so while it keeps slipping away and changing shape as it does. It is for good and useful writings to nail it fast to themselves, and its credit will follow the fortune of our state. That is why I am not afraid to put in many private matters whose use is confined to men living today, and which touch the particular knowledge of certain people, who will see further into them than common understanding can. After all, I do not want people to go around arguing, as I often see the memory of the dead stirred up: “He judged this way, he lived this way; he

53 The second example recalls King David, given the young Abishag to warm him in his old age (1 Kings 1).

wanted this; if he had spoken at the end he would have said, he would have given; I knew him better than anyone." Now, as far as decency allows, I make my inclinations and affections felt here. But I do so more freely and more willingly by word of mouth to anyone who wishes to know them. In any case, if you look closely at these memoirs, you will find that I have said everything, or pointed to everything. What I cannot express, I point at with my finger. *But for a keen mind these small tracks are enough, / By which you can recognize the rest for yourself.* I leave nothing about me to be wished for or guessed at. If people are to talk about me, I want it to be truly and justly. I would gladly come back from the other world to give the lie to anyone who made me out to be other than I was, even if it were to honor me. Even of the living, I find, people always speak otherwise than they are. And if I had not defended with all my strength a friend I have lost, they would have torn him apart into a thousand contrary faces.[54]

3.9.49 To finish telling my weaknesses: I confess that when traveling I hardly ever reach a lodging without wondering whether I could be ill there, and die there, at my ease. I want to be lodged in a place that is quite private to me, without noise, not dingy, smoky or stuffy. I try to flatter death with these trivial circumstances—or rather, to rid myself of every other encumbrance, so that I need attend to nothing but death, which will probably weigh on me enough without any further load. I want it to share in the ease and comfort of my life. It is a large piece of it, and an important one, and I hope from now on that it will not belie the past. Some forms of death are easier than others, and death takes on different qualities according to each person's fancy. Among natural deaths, the one that comes from weakening and heaviness seems to me soft and gentle. Among violent ones, I find a fall from a cliff harder to imagine than a collapsing building that crushes me, and a cutting sword stroke harder than a arquebus shot. I would rather have drunk the potion of Socrates than stabbed myself like Cato. And though it is all one, my ima-

54 Lucretius, On the Nature of Things. The lost friend is La Boétie.

gination feels as great a difference as between death and life between throwing myself into a blazing furnace and into the channel of a calm river. So foolishly does our fear look more to the means than to the outcome.[55] It is only an instant; but it weighs so much that I would gladly give several days of my life to get through it in my own way. Since each man's fancy finds more or less bitterness in it, and since each has some choice among the ways of dying, let us try a little further to find one free of all unpleasantness. Could we not even make it pleasurable, like Antony and Cleopatra's companions in death? I leave aside the harsh and exemplary efforts produced by philosophy and religion. But among men of little account there have been some, like a Petronius and a Tigellinus in Rome, who, compelled to take their own lives, lulled death to sleep, as it were, by the softness of their preparations.[56] They let it flow and glide by amid the idle ease of their usual pastimes. Among girls and boon companions: no talk of consolation, no mention of a will, no ambitious show of constancy, no reasoning about their future condition, but games, feasts, jokes, ordinary popular conversation, music and love poems. Could we not imitate this resolve with a more decent bearing? Since there are deaths good for fools and deaths good for the wise, let us find some good for those in between. My imagination shows me death with an easy face, and, since we must die, a desirable one. The Roman tyrants thought they were giving a criminal his life when they gave him the choice of his death. But was not Theophrastus, so refined, so modest, so wise a philosopher, forced by reason to dare to speak this line, which Cicero put into Latin? *Fortune, not wisdom, rules our life.* Fortune makes the bargain of my life easier, having placed it at such a point that it is now neither needed by my family nor a hindrance to them. That is a condition I would have accepted at any season of my life; but on this occasion, when I

55 Socrates drank hemlock in 399 BC; Cato the Younger stabbed himself at Utica in 46 BC.

56 Plutarch tells that Antony and Cleopatra formed a club of "those who will die together," given over to feasting. Petronius was forced to kill himself by Nero, Tigellinus by Otho.

am packing up my odds and ends and folding my baggage, I take special pleasure in bringing them neither pleasure nor displeasure by my death. Fortune has, by an artful compensation, arranged that those who may expect some material gain from my death will at the same time suffer a material loss from another quarter.[57] Death often grows heavier for us because it weighs on others; it touches us with their interest almost as much as with our own, and sometimes more, and sometimes entirely.

3.9.50 In the comfortable lodging I look for, I do not include pomp and size—I rather hate them—but a certain simple neatness, which is found more often in places where there is less art and which Nature honors with some grace all her own. *A meal not lavish but neat. More wit than expense.* And besides, it is for those whom business drags through the Grisons in the dead of winter to be caught on the road in such straits. I, who most often travel for pleasure, do not steer so badly. If the weather is foul on the right, I take the left; if I find myself unfit to ride, I stop.[58] And doing this, I truly see nothing that is not as pleasant and comfortable as my own house. It is true that I always find superfluity superfluous, and I notice encumbrance even in refinement and abundance. Have I left something unseen behind me? I go back to it: it is always on my way. I trace no fixed line, straight or curved. Do I not find, where I go, what I had been told? Since others' judgments often do not agree with mine, and I have most often found them false, I do not regret my trouble: I have learned that what people said was there is not.

57 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations.

58 The first phrase is quoted by the Latin grammarian Nonius, the second is from Cornelius Nepos, Life of Atticus. The Grisons: the Alpine region of eastern Switzerland.

FOREIGN WAYS

He welcomes foreign food and customs and mocks the French who cling to their own.

3.9.51 I have as free a constitution and as accommodating a palate as any man in the world. The difference in ways from one nation to another touches me only through the pleasure of variety. Each custom has its reason. Plates of pewter, wood or earthenware; boiled or roast; butter, or walnut or olive oil; hot or cold—it is all one to me. So much so that, as I grow old, I blame this generous capacity, and would need refinement and choice to check the indiscretion of my appetite and sometimes give my stomach some relief. When I have been outside France and people, to be courteous, have asked me whether I wanted to be served in the French style, I have laughed at it and always thrown myself at the tables most crowded with foreigners. I am ashamed to see our countrymen drunk with that foolish temperament that makes them shy away from ways contrary to their own. They seem to be out of their element when they are out of their village. Wherever they go, they cling to their own ways and loathe foreign ones. If they come upon a compatriot in Hungary, they celebrate the event: there they are, rallying and huddling together, condemning all the barbarous customs they see. Why not barbarous, since they are not French? And even these are the cleverest ones, who have at least noticed those customs, if only to speak ill of them. Most go only in order to come back. They travel muffled and closed up, with a silent, uncommunicative caution, guarding themselves against the contagion of an unknown air. What I say of them reminds me of something similar I have sometimes noticed in some of our young courtiers. They keep only to men of their own kind and look at us as people from another world, with disdain or pity. Take away their talk of the mysteries of the court, and they are off their hunting ground—as green and awkward in our eyes as we are in theirs. It is truly said that a decent man is a man of many parts.

I, on the contrary, travel thoroughly sick of our ways. I do not go looking for Gascons in Sicily; I have left enough of them at home. I look rather for Greeks, and Persians. I get to know them, I observe them; that is where I lend myself and apply myself. And what is more, I seem to have met with hardly any manners that are not as good as ours. I am not staking much, for I have hardly lost sight of my weathervanes. For the rest, most of the chance company you meet on the road brings more trouble than pleasure. I do not attach myself to it, all the less now that old age sets me somewhat apart and cuts me off from common ways. Either you suffer for others, or others suffer for you. Both drawbacks are heavy, but the second seems to me even harsher.

3.9.52 It is a rare stroke of fortune, but a relief beyond price, to have a decent man of firm understanding and ways that match your own, who likes to go along with you. I have sorely missed one on all my travels. But such company must have been chosen and won at home. No pleasure has any savor for me without someone to share it. Not even a lively thought comes into my mind without my being vexed at having produced it alone, with no one to offer it to. *If wisdom were given me on condition that I keep it shut up and not speak it, I would refuse it.* The other writer had raised this a tone higher.[59]

59 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius; the other writer is Cicero.

If the wise man were granted such a life that, with an abundance of all things, he could consider and contemplate at his leisure everything worth knowing, yet if his solitude were so great that he could never see a human being, he should depart from life. I like the opinion of Archytas, that it would be unpleasant even in heaven, and to wander among those great and divine celestial bodies, without a companion beside him. But it is still better to be alone than in tedious and foolish company. Aristippus liked to live as a stranger everywhere. *If the fates allowed me to lead my life As I wished,* I would choose to spend it with my backside in the saddle: *Eager to go and see*
Where the fires rage and revel,
Where the mists and the rainy dews hold sway.[60]

IS TRAVEL VANITY?

An imagined critic says he carries his trouble with him; Montaigne admits his love of variety.

3.9.53 Have you no easier pastimes? What do you lack? Is your house not in a fine, healthy setting, well enough furnished, and more than spacious enough? Royal majesty in all its pomp has been received there more than once. Does your family not leave more families below it in good order than it has above it in eminence? Is there some local worry that ulcerates you, out of the ordinary, impossible to digest? *That now burns and torments you, lodged in your breast?* Where do you think you can be free of hindrance and disturbance? *Fortune never grants her favors unmixed.* So you see that no one hinders you but yourself; you will follow yourself everywhere, and complain everywhere. For there is no satisfaction here below except for souls that are either brutish or divine.[61] If a man finds no contentment with so good a reason for it, where does he think to find it? For how

60 Cicero, On Duties. The verses are from Virgil, Aeneid, and Horace, Odes.
61 Henry of Navarre stayed at Montaigne in 1584 and 1587. The verse is from Ennius, quoted by Cicero; the maxim is from Quintus Curtius.

many thousands of men does a condition like yours mark the limit of their wishes? Just reform yourself: in that you can do everything, whereas with Fortune you have no right but patience. *There is no calm repose but the one that reason has composed.*[62]

3.9.54 I see the reason for this advice, and see it very well. But it would have been quicker, and more to the point, to tell me in one word: Be wise. This resolution lies beyond wisdom; it is wisdom's work and its product. That is what the physician does who goes shouting at some poor languishing patient to cheer up; his advice would be a little less foolish if he told him: Be well. As for me, I am only a man of the common sort. It is a wholesome precept, certain and easy to understand: Be content with what is yours—that is, with reason. Yet carrying it out is no more within the reach of the wisest than within mine. It is a common saying, but its scope is tremendous. What does it not include? Everything comes down to discretion and qualification. I know very well that, taken literally, this pleasure in traveling is a sign of restlessness and irresolution. And indeed those are our master qualities, our ruling ones. Yes, I confess it: I see nothing, even in dreams and wishes, on which I could take a stand. Variety alone satisfies me, and the possession of diversity—if anything satisfies me at all. In traveling, what nourishes me is precisely that I can stop without loss and that I have places where I can comfortably turn aside. I love private life because I love it by my own choice, not from unfitness for public life, which perhaps suits my constitution just as well. I serve my prince all the more gladly because I do it by the free choice of my judgment and my reason, without particular obligation, and because I am not cast out or forced into it by being unacceptable and unwelcome to every other party. And so with the rest. I hate the portions that necessity carves for me. Any advantage on which alone I had to depend would have me by the throat: *Let one oar*

62 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius.

sweep the waters, the other the sands. A single rope never holds me fast enough.[63]

PRECEPTS BEYOND OUR REACH

Moral rules demand more than anyone performs, and laws would hang every man ten times.

3.9.55 There is vanity, you say, in this amusement. But where is there not? These fine precepts are vanity, and all wisdom is vanity. *The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.* These exquisite subtleties are fit only for the pulpit. They are arguments that would send us all into the other world with our pack-saddles on. Life is a material and bodily movement, an action imperfect and unruly by its very essence. I make it my business to serve it on its own terms. *Each of us suffers his own shade. We must act so as never to strive against universal nature; yet, while respecting it, let us follow our own.* What use are these lofty peaks of philosophy, on which no human being can settle, and these rules that exceed our practice and our strength?[64]

3.9.56 I often see people hold up to us patterns of life which neither the speaker nor the listeners have any hope of following, nor, what is more, any wish to. From the very paper on which he has just written the sentence condemning an adulterer, the judge tears off a scrap to write a love note to his colleague's wife. The woman you have just been rubbing against unlawfully will presently, in your very presence, cry out against a like fault in her friend more harshly than Portia would. And many a man condemns others to death for crimes he does not think are faults at all.[65] In my youth I saw a fine gentleman offer the public with one hand verses excellent in both beauty and licentiousness, and with the other, at the same moment, the most quarrelsome theological reformation the world has breakfasted on in a long

63 Propertius, Elegies.
64 Psalm 94, quoted by Saint Paul (1 Corinthians 3); then Virgil, Aeneid, and Cicero, On Duties.
65 Portia, daughter of Cato and wife of Brutus, a model of Roman wifely virtue.

time. That is how men go. We let laws and precepts go their way; we take another. Not only out of loose morals, but often out of opinion and contrary judgment. Listen to a philosophical discourse being read: the invention, the eloquence, the aptness strike your mind at once and move you. Nothing tickles or stings your conscience; it is not your conscience that is being addressed. Is that not true?[66] So Ariston said that neither a bath nor a lesson is of any use unless it cleans and scrubs. One may linger over the bark, but only after the pith has been drawn out —just as, after drinking the good wine from a fine cup, we look at its engravings and workmanship. In every chamber of ancient philosophy you will find the same workman publishing rules of temperance and at the same time publishing writings on love and debauchery. And Xenophon, in the lap of Clinias, wrote against Aristippean virtue. It is not that some miraculous conversion sweeps over them in gusts.[67] It is rather that Solon presents himself now as himself, now in the guise of a lawgiver; now he speaks for the crowd, now for himself. For himself he takes free and natural rules, confident of firm and sound health. *Let those who are dangerously ill be treated by the greatest physicians.* Antisthenes allows the wise man to love and to do in his own way what he finds fitting, without regard to the laws, since he has better judgment than they and more knowledge of virtue. His disciple Diogenes said to set reason against the passions, confidence against Fortune, nature against the laws. Delicate stomachs need strict and artificial regimens. Good stomachs simply follow what their natural appetite prescribes.[68] So do our physicians, who eat melon and drink cool wine while they keep their patient bound to syrup and bread soup. "I do not know about books," said the courtesan Lais, "or wisdom, or philosophy; but those people knock at my door as often as anyone else." Because our license always carries us beyond what is law-

66 Probably Theodore Beza, whose youthful Latin love poems (1548) preceded his career as a leading Calvinist theologian.

67 Diogenes Laertius reports Xenophon's love for Clinias.

68 Juvenal, Satires. The disciple is Diogenes the Cynic.

ful and permitted, the precepts and laws of our life have often been narrowed beyond universal reason. *Nobody thinks it enough to sin only as far / As you permit.* It would be desirable for there to be more proportion between command and obedience. A target that cannot be reached seems unjust.[69] There is no man so good that, if he submitted all his actions and thoughts to the scrutiny of the laws, he would not deserve hanging ten times in his life—even a man whom it would be a very great loss and very unjust to punish and destroy. *Olus, what is it to you / What he or she does with their own skin?* And another man might never offend the laws who would not deserve the praise of a virtuous man, and whom philosophy would very justly have whipped. So muddled and uneven is this relationship. We are far from being good men by God's standard; we cannot even be so by our own. Human wisdom has never yet reached the duties it had prescribed for itself.[70] And if it had reached them, it would prescribe itself others beyond them, toward which it would always aspire and strive. So hostile is our condition to constancy. Man ordains for himself that he must necessarily be at fault. It is not very clever of him to cut his obligation to the measure of a being other than his own. To whom does he prescribe what he expects no one to do? Is it unjust of him not to do what it is impossible for him to do? The laws that condemn us to be unable condemn us for what we are unable to do.

3.9.57 At worst, let this misshapen freedom of presenting oneself in two places, actions one way and words another, be allowed to those who tell of things. But it cannot be allowed to those who tell of themselves, as I do: I must go with my pen as I go on my feet. Life in common must bear some relation to other people's lives. Cato's virtue was vigorous beyond the measure of his age. For a man who took it upon himself to govern others, and who was destined for public service, it might be said that his was a justice that was, if not unjust, at least vain and out of season.

69 Juvenal, Satires. Lais was a famous Greek courtesan of Corinth.
70 Martial, Epigrams.

UNFIT FOR PUBLIC LIFE

His plain virtue proved useless in public affairs, which demand bending and compromise.

Even my own ways, which differ from those now current by scarcely the breadth of a thumb, nevertheless make me somewhat aloof from my age, and unsociable. I do not know whether I am disgusted without reason with the world I frequent. But I know well that it would be without reason if I complained that it was disgusted with me, since I am disgusted with it. The virtue assigned to the affairs of the world is a virtue with many folds, corners and elbows, so that it can fit and join itself to human weakness: mixed and artificial, not straight, clean, constant, or purely innocent. The annals still reproach one of our kings to this day for having too simply let himself be led by the conscientious persuasions of his confessor. Affairs of state have bolder precepts. *Let him leave the court / who wishes to be righteous.*[71]

3.9.58 I once tried to employ in the service of public dealings the opinions and rules of living that I had, just as rough, new, unpolished, or unpolluted, as they were when they were born in me or brought back from my upbringing, and which I use in private, if not so conveniently, at least safely: a schoolroom, novice virtue. I found them inept and dangerous there. Whoever goes into a crowd must swerve, keep his elbows in, step back or forward, even leave the straight road, according to what he meets. He must live not so much according to himself as according to others; not according to what he proposes to himself but according to what is proposed to him; according to the times, the men, the business at hand. Plato says that whoever escapes from managing the world with his breeches clean escapes by a miracle. He also says that when he appoints his philosopher head of a government, he does not mean a corrupt government like that of Athens, and still less one like ours, in the face of which wisdom itself would be at its wits' end. And a good plant

71 Lucan, Pharsalia.

transplanted into soil very different from its nature much sooner conforms itself to the soil than reforms the soil to itself. I feel that if I had to train myself entirely for such occupations, I would need a great deal of change and patching up. Even if I could do that to myself (and why could I not, with time and care?), I would not want to. From the little I have tried myself in this occupation, I have been all the more disgusted with it. At times I feel some temptations toward ambition smoking up in my soul; but I brace myself and hold out against them: *But you, Catullus, be stubborn and hold firm.* I am hardly ever called to it, and I invite myself just as little. Freedom and idleness, which are my ruling qualities, are diametrically opposed to that trade. We do not know how to distinguish men's faculties. They have divisions and boundaries that are delicate and hard to pick out. To infer from ability in private life some ability for public use is to infer badly.[72] One man conducts himself well who does not conduct others well, and produces Essays who could not produce results. One man lays a siege well who would draw up a battle badly, and reasons well in private who would make a bad speech to a people or a prince. Indeed, it is perhaps rather a sign, in a man who can do the one, that he cannot do the other, than the reverse. I find that lofty minds are hardly less unfit for low things than low minds are for lofty ones. Was it to be believed that Socrates gave the Athenians matter for laughter at his expense because he never managed to count the votes of his tribe and report them to the council?[73] Certainly the veneration in which I hold that man's perfections deserves that his fortune should furnish so magnificent an example to excuse my own principal imperfections. Our ability is cut up into small pieces. Mine has no breadth, and it is paltry in number as well. Saturninus said to those who had conferred all command upon

72 Catullus, Poems 8.
73 The story is told in Plato's Gorgias.

him: "Comrades, you have lost a good captain to make a bad general."[74]

3.9.59 Whoever boasts, in a sick time like this one, of employing a natural and sincere virtue in the world's service, either does not know what it is, since opinions grow corrupt along with morals (indeed, listen to them describe it, listen to most of them glory in their conduct and lay down their rules: instead of portraying virtue, they portray sheer injustice and vice, and present it thus falsified for the education of princes); or, if he does know it, he boasts wrongly, and whatever he may say, he does a thousand things for which his conscience accuses him. I would gladly take Seneca's word for the experience he had of it in a similar situation, provided he were willing to speak to me about it with an open heart.[75] The most honorable mark of goodness in such a necessity is to acknowledge freely one's own fault and other people's; to resist and hold back with all one's power the slide toward evil; to follow that slope reluctantly; to hope better and desire better. In these dismemberments of France and the divisions into which we have fallen, I see everyone laboring to defend his cause, but even the best of them with disguise and lies. Whoever wrote about it frankly would write rashly and wrongly. The most just party is still, even so, a member of a worm-eaten, maggoty body. But in such a body the least diseased member is called healthy, and rightly so, since our qualities have their title only by comparison. Civic innocence is measured according to places and times. I would very much like to see in Xenophon such praise as this of Agesilaus. Being asked by a neighboring prince, with whom he had once been at war, to let him pass through his lands, he granted it, giving him passage across the Peloponnese; and not only did he not imprison or poison him when he had him at his mercy, but he received him courteously, in keeping with the obligation of his promise, without doing him any harm. To people of that temperament

74 Saturninus, a Roman officer proclaimed emperor by his troops in the 3rd century AD, as told in the Augustan History.

75 Seneca was tutor and minister to the emperor Nero.

this would be saying nothing. Elsewhere and in another time, the frankness and magnanimity of such an action will be made much of. Those caped baboons would have laughed at it. So little does Spartan innocence resemble French. We do not lack virtuous men; but they are virtuous by our standards.[76]

> Whoever has his ways settled by a rule above his age, let him either twist and blunt his rules, or (what I would rather advise him) withdraw to one side and not meddle with us. What would he gain by it? *If I see a man outstanding and holy, I compare this prodigy to a two-bodied child, to fish turned up beneath the startled plow, and to a mule in foal.* One may regret better times, but not flee the present ones; one may wish for other magistrates, but one must nonetheless obey these. And perhaps there is more merit in obeying the bad than the good. As long as the image of the received and ancient laws of this monarchy shines in some corner, there I stand planted.[77]

If by misfortune they come to contradict and obstruct one another, and to produce two sides with a doubtful and difficult choice between them, my choice will readily be to escape and steal away from that storm. Nature may lend me a hand in the meantime, or the hazards of war. Between Caesar and Pompey I would have declared myself openly. But among those three robbers who came after, one would have had either to hide or to follow the wind. Which I consider permissible when reason no longer guides. *Where are you wandering off to?* This stuffing is a little off my theme. I stray, but rather by license than by inadvertence. My notions follow one another, but sometimes from far off; and they look at each other, but with a sidelong glance.[78]

76 Xenophon wrote a eulogy of Agesilaus. "Capettes" were the poor students of the Collège de Montaigu in Paris, named for their short capes.
77 Juvenal, Satires XIII.
78 The three robbers are Octavian, Antony and Lepidus, the Second Triumvirate (43 BC). The Latin is from Virgil, Aeneid V.

ON MY WANDERING STYLE

Like Plato and Plutarch he lets his matter wander; the careless reader, not he, loses the thread.

I have glanced through a certain dialogue of Plato's, split into a fantastic motley: the front part about love, the whole lower part about rhetoric. They are not afraid of these changes, and have a marvelous grace in letting themselves be rolled along by the wind like that, or in seeming to. The titles of my chapters do not always embrace their matter; often they only indicate it by some token, like those other titles, the Andria, the Eunuch, or these: Sulla, Cicero, Torquatus. I love the poetic gait, all leaps and gambols. It is an art, as Plato says, light, flighty, daemonic. There are works in Plutarch where he forgets his theme, where the subject of his argument turns up only incidentally, all smothered in foreign matter.[79] Look at his ways in The Daemon of Socrates. O God, what beauty there is in these lively escapades, this variation, and all the more the more careless and fortuitous it seems! It is the inattentive reader who loses my subject, not I. There will always be some word about it in a corner, which is still sufficient, though it is tightly packed. I go off on a fresh scent indiscriminately and tumultuously; my style and my mind go wandering alike. A man must have a little folly if he does not want to have more stupidity: so say the precepts of our masters, and still more their examples.[80] A thousand poets drag along and languish in a prosaic way; but the best ancient prose (and I sow it here indiscriminately as if it were verse) shines everywhere with poetic vigor and boldness, and conveys some air of poetry's frenzy. We must certainly concede to poetry mastery and preeminence in speech. The poet, says Plato, seated on the tripod of the Muses, pours out in a frenzy whatever comes into his mouth, like the spout of a fountain, without chewing it over

79 The dialogue is the Phaedrus; the Andria and the Eunuch are comedies by Terence.

80 A dialogue by Plutarch.

or weighing it; and things escape him of different colors, of contrary substance, and in a broken flow. And the old theology is all poetry, say the learned, and so was the first philosophy. It is the original language of the gods. I intend my matter to mark its own divisions. It shows clearly enough where it changes, where it concludes, where it begins, where it resumes, without my interlacing it with words of linkage and stitching brought in for the benefit of weak or careless ears, and without my glossing myself. Who would not rather not be read at all than be read by someone dozing or hurrying off? *Nothing is so useful that it can be of profit in passing.* If taking up books were taking them in, and seeing them were looking at them, and running through them were grasping them, I would be wrong to make myself out quite as ignorant as I say. Since I cannot hold the reader's attention by weight, *it is not so bad* if I happen to hold it by my muddle.[81] "Yes, but he will be sorry afterward that he spent his time on it." Quite so; but he will have spent his time on it all the same. And then there are temperaments of that kind, for whom understanding brings disdain, who will think the better of me for not knowing what I am saying: they will infer the depth of my meaning from its obscurity. Obscurity, to speak in earnest, I hate very much, and I would avoid it if I knew how to avoid myself. Aristotle boasts somewhere of affecting it. A vicious affectation. Because the very frequent cutting up of chapters that I practiced at the start seemed to me to break attention before it was born and to dissolve it, since it disdains to settle down for so little and collect itself, I have taken to making them longer, so that they require purpose and leisure set aside for them. In such an occupation, if you will not give it a single hour, you will not give it anything. And you do nothing for someone for whom you do something only while doing something else. Besides, perhaps I have some particular obligation to say things only by halves, to say them confusedly, to say them discordantly. So I bear a grudge against this killjoy reason. And as for these extravagant projects that torment our lives, and these very subtle opinions,

81 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius.

if they have truth in them, I find it too costly and too inconvenient. On the contrary, I make it my business to give value to vanity itself, and to asininity, if it brings me pleasure. And I let myself follow my natural inclinations without checking them so closely.

LOVE OF ANCIENT ROME

Montaigne explains his devotion to Rome and copies out the bull making him a Roman citizen.

3.9.60 I have seen ruined houses elsewhere, and statues, and sky and earth: it is always just men. All that is true; and yet, however often I revisit the tomb of that city, so great and so mighty, I cannot help admiring and revering it. The care of the dead is commended to us. Now I have been brought up from childhood with these people. I knew the affairs of Rome long before I knew those of my own house. I knew the Capitol and its layout before I knew the Louvre, and the Tiber before the Seine. I have had the circumstances and fortunes of Lucullus, Metellus and Scipio more in my head than those of any men of our own time. They are long dead. So too is my father, as completely as they; and he has gone as far from me and from life in eighteen years as they have in sixteen hundred. Yet I do not cease to embrace and cultivate his memory, his friendship and his company, in a perfect and very lively union. Indeed, by temperament I make myself more serviceable to the dead. They can no longer help themselves; so, it seems to me, they need my help all the more. That is where gratitude is in its true luster. A benefit is less richly placed where it comes back and is returned. Arcesilaus, visiting Ctesibius when he was ill and finding him in a poor state, quietly slipped under his pillow the money he was giving him.[82] And by hiding it from him, he also gave him a release from having to be grateful for it. Those who have earned friendship and gratitude from me have never lost them by no longer being here: I have repaid them better and more carefully when they

82 Montaigne's father died in 1568.

were absent and unaware. I speak more affectionately of my friends when there is no longer any way for them to know it. Now I have taken up a hundred quarrels in defense of Pompey and for the cause of Brutus. That acquaintance between us still lasts. Even present things we hold only by imagination. Finding myself useless to this age, I throw myself back on that other one. And I am so besotted with it that the condition of that old Rome, free, just and flourishing (for I love neither its birth nor its old age), interests me and stirs my passion. And so, however often I revisit the site of their streets and their houses, and those ruins that reach down to the Antipodes, I cannot help lingering over them. Is it by nature, or by an error of imagination, that the sight of places we know to have been frequented and inhabited by people whose memory is held in esteem moves us somewhat more than hearing the account of their deeds or reading their writings? Such is the power of association that lies in places![83] And in this city it is infinite: wherever we walk, we set our foot on some piece of history. *I like to consider their faces, their bearing and their clothes. I chew those great names over between my teeth and make them ring in my ears.* I venerate them, and always rise to my feet at such great names. Of things that are in some part great and admirable, I admire even the common parts. I would gladly see these men converse, walk and dine. It would be ingratitude to despise the relics and images of so many decent and valiant men, whom I have seen live and die, and who give us so many good lessons by their example, if only we knew how to follow it.[84]

3.9.61 And then this same Rome that we see deserves to be loved: allied for so long and by so many titles to our crown; the only common and universal city. The sovereign magistrate who commands there is recognized elsewhere as well: it is the metropolitan city of all Christian nations. Spaniard and Frenchman, each is at home there. To be one of the princes of that state, one need only belong to Christendom, wherever it may be. There is

83 Cicero, On Ends V.
84 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius.

no place here below that heaven has embraced with such an influence of favor and such constancy. Even its ruin is glorious and grand. *All the more precious for its praiseworthy ruins.* Even in the tomb it still keeps marks and images of empire.[85] *So that it is plain that in this one place nature has delighted in her own work.* Some might blame themselves, and rebel inwardly, at feeling tickled by so vain a pleasure. Our fancies are not too vain if they give us pleasure. Whatever they may be, if they constantly satisfy a man capable of common sense, I could not have the heart to pity him.[86]

3.9.62 I owe much to Fortune, in that up to now she has done nothing outrageous against me beyond what I can bear. Might it not be her way to leave in peace those who do not pester her? *The more a man denies himself, the more he will receive from the gods. Stripped bare, I seek the camp of those who desire nothing; those who ask for much lack much.* If she goes on like this, she will send me off well content and satisfied. *I importune the gods for nothing more.* But beware the crash. There are a thousand who are wrecked in port. I console myself easily for what will happen here when I am no longer here.[87]

Present things keep me busy enough: *The rest I leave to Fortune.* Nor do I have that strong bond that is said to attach men to the future through children who bear their name and their honor. And perhaps I should wish for them all the less if they are so desirable. I am attached only too much to the world and to this life by myself. I am content to be in Fortune's grip through the circumstances strictly necessary to my existence, without extending her jurisdiction over me in other ways. And I have never thought that being without children was a defect that should make life less complete and less contented. The

85 Sidonius Apollinaris, Poems.
86 Pliny the Elder, Natural History III.
87 Horace, Odes III.16 and II.18.

sterile state has its advantages too.[88] Children are among the things that have little to make them desirable, especially at this time, when it would be so difficult to make them good. *Nothing good can even be born now, so corrupted are the seeds.* And yet they give just cause for regret to those who lose them after having had them.[89]

3.9.63 The man who left my house in my charge predicted that I would ruin it, considering my temperament, so little inclined to stay at home. He was wrong: here I am as I was when I came into it, if not a little better off. Without office, however, and without benefice. As for the rest, if Fortune has done me no violent and extraordinary injury, neither has she done me any favor. Whatever there is of her gifts in our house was there before me, and more than a hundred years before. I have no essential and solid good of my own that I owe to her liberality. She has done me some windy favors, honorary and titular, without substance. And in truth she has not granted them to me but offered them;[90] offered them, God knows, to me, who am entirely material, who will be paid only in reality, and pretty solid reality at that; and who, if I dared confess it, would find avarice hardly less excusable than ambition, nor pain less to be avoided than shame, nor health less desirable than learning, or wealth than nobility.

3.9.64 Among her vain favors there is none that so pleases that silly temperament in me which feeds on them as an authentic bull of Roman citizenship, which was granted me when I was last there, pompous with seals and gilt lettering, and granted with all gracious liberality. And because these are issued in different styles, more or less favorable, and because before I had seen one I would have been glad to be shown a specimen, I want, to satisfy anyone who may be sick with a curiosity like mine, to transcribe it here in its exact form. *As to the report that*

88 Ovid, Metamorphoses II.
89 Tertullian.
90 That is, his father.

Horatius Maximus, Martius Cecius and Alexander Mutus, Conservators of the bountiful[91]

3.9.65 City, made to the Senate concerning the conferring of Roman citizenship on the most illustrious Michel de Montaigne, Knight of the Order of Saint Michael and Gentleman of the Chamber of the Most Christian King, the Senate and People of Rome decreed on this matter as follows. WHEREAS, by ancient custom and practice, those who, excelling in virtue and nobility, had been or might one day be of great use and ornament to our Republic, have always been eagerly and zealously welcomed among us, We, moved by the example and authority of our ancestors, decree that this noble custom ought to be imitated and preserved by us. Therefore, since the most illustrious Michel de Montaigne, Knight of Saint Michael and Gentleman of the Chamber of the Most Christian King, most devoted to the Roman name, is, by the renown and splendor of his family and by the merits of his own virtues, most worthy to be admitted into Roman citizenship by the supreme judgment and favor of the Senate and People of Rome, it pleases the Senate and People of Rome that the most illustrious Michel de Montaigne, adorned with every distinction and most dear to this renowned people, be enrolled, himself and his descendants, in Roman citizenship, and be graced with all the rewards and honors enjoyed by those who were born citizens and patricians of Rome or were made so by the best of rights. In which the Senate and People of Rome consider that they are not so much bestowing the right of citizenship on him as paying what is due, nor so much conferring a favor as receiving one from him, who, by accepting this gift of citizenship, has conferred singular distinction and honor upon the City itself. The said Conservators have caused this decree of the Senate to be entered in the records by the clerks of the Senate and People of Rome and kept in the Senate house of the Capitol, and this charter to be drawn up and sealed with the customary seal of the City. In the year 2331 from the founding of the City, 1581 after the birth of Christ, on the third day before the

91 The Latin of the bull is given here in English.

Ides of March. Horatius Fuscus, clerk of the sacred Senate and People of Rome.[92] / Vincentius Martholus, clerk of the sacred Senate and People of Rome.

3.9.66 Not being a citizen of any city, I am very glad to be a citizen of the noblest city that ever was or ever will be. If others looked at themselves attentively, as I do, they would find themselves, as I do, full of inanity and nonsense. I cannot get rid of it without getting rid of myself. We are all steeped in it, one as much as another. But those who are aware of it are a little better off—and yet I do not know.

LOOK INTO YOURSELF

The Delphic command turns our gaze inward, where we find only emptiness and vanity.

3.9.67 This common opinion and practice of looking elsewhere than at ourselves has served our turn well. We are an object full of discontent; we see in it nothing but misery and vanity. So as not to dishearten us, Nature has very aptly thrown the action of our sight outward. We go forward with the current; but to turn our course back toward ourselves is a painful movement: the sea too grows turbid and churns when it is driven back on itself. Look, says everyone, at the motions of the heavens; look at public affairs, at this man's quarrel, at that man's pulse, at that other man's will; in short, always look up or down, or to the side, or in front of you, or behind you. It was a paradoxical command that the god at Delphi gave us long ago: Look into yourselves, know yourselves, keep to yourselves. Bring back into itself your mind and your will, which are being spent elsewhere; you are draining away, you are scattering yourselves; gather yourselves together, hold yourselves up; you are being betrayed, dispersed, stolen from yourselves. Do you not see that this world keeps its gaze all turned inward, and its eyes open to contemplate itself? It is always vanity for you, within and without; but it is less vanity when it is less extended. Except for you, O man, said that

92 That is, 13 March 1581.

god, each thing studies itself first, and has, according to its need, limits to its labors and desires.[93] There is not one so empty and needy as you, who embrace the universe. You are the investigator without knowledge, the magistrate without jurisdiction, and, when all is said and done, the clown in the farce.

93 "Know yourself" was inscribed on Apollo's temple at Delphi.

III.10 Of Husbanding Your Will

De mesnager sa volonté
Recalling his years as mayor of Bordeaux, Montaigne argues for lending yourself to public duties without giving yourself away.

3.10.1 Compared with most men, few things touch me, or, to put it better, hold me. For it is reasonable that things should touch us, provided they do not possess us. I take great care to increase by study and reasoning this privilege of insensibility, which is naturally well advanced in me. Consequently there are few things I espouse and feel passionate about. My sight is clear, but I fix it on few objects; my feeling is delicate and tender, but my grasp and application are tough and dull. I commit myself with difficulty. As much as I can, I employ myself entirely on myself. And even in this subject I would still gladly bridle and hold back my affection, so that it does not plunge into it too wholly, since it is a subject I possess at the mercy of others, and over which Fortune has more right than I have. So that even health, which I value so highly, I ought not to desire and give myself up to so furiously as to find illnesses unbearable. We should moderate ourselves between hatred of pain and love of pleasure; and Plato prescribes a middle course of life between the two. But the affections that distract me from myself and attach me elsewhere, those I certainly oppose with all my strength.[1] My opinion is that we should lend ourselves to others and give ourselves only to ourselves. If my will found it easy to mortgage and commit

1 Plato, Laws.

itself, I would not last. I am too tender, both by nature and by habit: *Shunning affairs, and born for carefree leisure.* Hotly contested and stubborn disputes that ended by giving my opponent the advantage, an outcome that made my heated pursuit shameful, might perhaps gnaw at me quite cruelly. If I bit into things as deeply as others do, my soul would never have the strength to bear the alarms and emotions that pursue those who embrace so much. It would at once be dislocated by this internal agitation.[2] If I have sometimes been pushed into managing other people's affairs, I have promised to take them in hand, not into my lungs and liver; to take them on, not to incorporate them; to take care of them, yes; to be passionate about them, not at all. I watch over them, but I do not brood on them. I have enough to do in arranging and ordering the domestic throng I have in my bowels and in my veins, without lodging a foreign throng there and getting crushed by it. And I am concerned enough with my own essential, proper and natural affairs without inviting others in from outside. Those who know how much they owe themselves, and by how many duties they are bound to themselves, find that Nature has given them a commission quite full enough, and by no means idle. You have plenty to do at home; do not go far away.

3.10.2 Men hire themselves out. Their faculties are not for themselves; they are for those to whom they enslave themselves; it is their tenants who are at home in them, not they. This common temperament does not please me. We must husband the freedom of our soul and mortgage it only on just occasions, which are very few in number if we judge soundly. Look at people who have learned to let themselves be carried away and seized: they do it everywhere, in small things as in great, in what does not concern them as in what does. They thrust themselves in indiscriminately wherever there is work to be done, and they are lifeless when they are without tumultuous agitation. *They are busy for the sake of being busy.* They seek work only to keep themselves busy. It is not so much that they want to go as that they cannot

2 Ovid, Tristia III.

keep still: just like a stone set rolling as it falls, which does not stop until it comes to rest. For a certain kind of people, being occupied is a mark of ability and dignity. Their mind seeks its rest in motion, like children in the cradle. They may call themselves as serviceable to their friends as they are troublesome to themselves. No one gives away his money to others; everyone gives away his time and his life. There is nothing we are so prodigal with as those things in which alone avarice would be useful and praiseworthy.[3] My constitution is quite different. I keep myself to myself. And usually what I desire I desire mildly, and I desire little; I occupy and busy myself in the same way, rarely and calmly. Whatever they want and undertake, they do with all their will and vehemence. There are so many bad passes that, to be safest, we must skim over this world a little lightly and on the surface, and slide over it, not sink into it. Even pleasure is painful in its depths. *You are walking over fires / hidden beneath treacherous ash.*[4]

MAYOR OF BORDEAUX

Montaigne recounts his election and tells the citizens plainly what to expect of him.

3.10.3 The gentlemen of Bordeaux elected me mayor of their city while I was far from France, and still farther from any such thought. I excused myself. But I was told that I was wrong, the king's command also intervening. It is an office that should seem all the finer for having no pay or gain other than the honor of performing it. It lasts two years, but it can be extended by a second election, which happens very rarely. It happened to me, and had happened only twice before: some years earlier to Monsieur de Lansac, and recently to Monsieur de Biron, Marshal of France, whom I succeeded; and I left my place to Monsieur de

3 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius.
4 Horace, Odes II.1.

Matignon, also Marshal of France.[5] Proud of such noble company. *Both good servants in peace and in war.* Fortune wanted a share in my promotion through this particular circumstance, which she contributed on her own account. Not altogether vain. For Alexander scorned the Corinthian ambassadors who offered him the citizenship of their city; but when they went on to explain to him that Bacchus and Hercules were also on that register, he thanked them graciously.[6]

3.10.4 On my arrival I deciphered myself to them faithfully and conscientiously, exactly as I feel I am: without memory, without vigilance, without experience and without vigor; also without hatred, without ambition, without avarice and without violence; so that they would be informed and instructed about what they had to expect from my service. And because it was knowledge of my late father alone that had moved them to this, and the honor of his memory, I added very clearly that I would be very sorry if anything whatever made as much impression on my will as their affairs and their city had once made on his, while he was governing it, in the very place to which they had called me.[7] I remembered having seen him in my childhood, an old man, his soul cruelly agitated by this public turmoil, forgetting the sweet air of his home, to which the weakness of age had long since attached him, and his household, and his health; and truly despising his life, which he nearly lost through it, committed on their behalf to long and painful journeys. That is how he was; and this temperament came from a great goodness of nature. There was never a more charitable and public-spirited soul. This course, which I praise in others, I do not like to follow. And I am not without excuse. He had heard it said that one must forget oneself for one's neighbor, that the individual counted for nothing compared with the general. Most of the world's rules and precepts take this course: they push us out of ourselves and

5 Montaigne was elected in 1581 while traveling in Italy, reelected in 1583, and served until 1585.

6 Adapted from Virgil, Aeneid XI.

7 Pierre Eyquem was mayor of Bordeaux from 1554 to 1556.

drive us into the public square, for the use of public society. They thought they would achieve a fine effect by turning us away and distracting us from ourselves, presupposing that we cling to ourselves only too much, and with too natural a bond; and they have spared no words to that end. For it is nothing new for the wise to preach things as they serve, not as they are. Truth has its obstacles, inconveniences and incompatibilities with us. We must often be deceived so that we may not deceive ourselves, and have our sight blindfolded and our understanding stunned in order to straighten and correct them. *For it is the ignorant who judge, and they must often be deceived on this very point, so that they may not err.* When they order us to love three, four and fifty grades of things before ourselves, they imitate the skill of archers who, to hit the mark, take their aim a great distance above the target. To straighten a crooked stick, you bend it back the other way.[8]

3.10.5 I believe that in the temple of Pallas, as we see in all other religions, there were outward mysteries to be shown to the people, and other mysteries, more secret and higher, to be shown only to those who were initiated into them. It is likely that in these is found the true point of the friendship that each man owes himself. Not a false friendship that makes us embrace glory, learning, riches and such things with a principal and immoderate affection, as if they were members of our being; nor a soft and indiscriminate friendship, in which there happens what we see with ivy, which corrupts and ruins the wall it clings to; but a wholesome and well-ordered friendship, equally useful and pleasant. Whoever knows its duties and practices them truly belongs to the inner chamber of the Muses; he has reached the summit of human wisdom and of our happiness. Such a man, knowing exactly what he owes himself, finds in his part that he must apply to himself the use of other men and of the world, and to do so must contribute to public society the duties and services that fall to him. He who in no way lives for others hardly lives for himself. *Know that he who is a friend to*

8 Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory.

himself is a friend to all. The principal charge we have is, for each of us, his own conduct. And that is what we are here for.[9] Just as anyone who forgot to live well and holily, and thought he had discharged his duty by guiding and training others to do so, would be a fool, so likewise anyone who gives up living healthily and cheerfully in his own person in order to serve others with it makes, to my mind, a bad and unnatural choice.

3.10.6 I do not want anyone to refuse to the charges he takes on his attention, his steps, his words, his sweat, and his blood if need be: *Not himself afraid to die / for dear friends or for his country.* But this is by way of loan and incidentally, the mind keeping itself always in repose and in health: not without action, but without vexation, without passion. Simply acting costs it so little that it acts even in sleep. But it must be set in motion with discretion. For the body receives the burdens laid on it exactly as they are; the mind often extends them and makes them heavier at its own expense, giving them whatever measure it pleases. We do the same things with different efforts and different strains of will.[10] The one goes perfectly well without the other. For how many people risk themselves every day in wars that mean nothing to them, and press into the dangers of battles whose loss will not trouble their next night's sleep? Meanwhile another man at home, out of this danger, which he would not have dared to look at, is more passionate about the outcome of the war, and has his soul more tormented by it, than the soldier who spends his blood and his life in it. I have been able to take part in public offices without departing from myself by the breadth of a fingernail, and to give myself to others without taking myself away from myself. This harshness and violence of desire hinders more than it helps in carrying out what we undertake. It fills us with impatience toward events that are adverse or slow, and with bitterness and suspicion toward those we are dealing with. We never conduct well a thing by which we are possessed and conducted. *Everything is badly handled / by impetuosity.* He who

9 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius.
10 Horace, Odes IV.9.

brings only his judgment and his skill to it proceeds more cheerfully: he feints, he bends, he postpones, entirely at his ease, as occasions require; he misses his stroke without torment and without affliction, ready and whole for a new undertaking; he always walks with the bridle in his hand. In the man who is drunk with this violent and tyrannical purpose, one necessarily sees much imprudence and injustice. The impetuosity of his desire carries him away.[11] These are rash movements, and, unless Fortune contributes a great deal, of little fruit. Philosophy wants us to remove anger from the punishment of offenses we have received: not so that the vengeance should be less, but on the contrary so that it should be all the better aimed and heavier. To which, in its view, this impetuosity is an obstacle. Not only does anger confuse, but of itself it also tires the arms of those who punish. This fire stuns them and consumes their strength. As in precipitation, *haste is slow*. Hastiness trips itself up, hobbles itself and brings itself to a stop. *Speed entangles itself.* For example: from what I see in ordinary experience, avarice has no greater hindrance than itself.[12] The more taut and vigorous it is, the less fruitful it is. Usually it catches riches more quickly when masked with an image of liberality.

3.10.7 A gentleman of great worth, and a friend of mine, nearly unsettled his mind through too passionate an attention and devotion to the affairs of a prince, his master. This master once described himself to me in these terms: he sees the weight of misfortunes as well as anyone, but for those that have no remedy he resigns himself at once to enduring them. For the others, he orders the necessary measures, which he can do quickly thanks to the liveliness of his mind, and then waits calmly for whatever may follow. And indeed I have watched him at it, keeping a great unconcern and freedom in his actions and in his face through some very great and very thorny affairs.[13] I find him greater and more capable in bad fortune than in good. His

11 Statius, Thebaid X.
12 Quintus Curtius, History of Alexander; Seneca, Letters to Lucilius.
13 The prince is generally taken to be Henry of Navarre.

losses do him more honor than his victories, and his mourning more than his triumph.

3.10.8 Consider how even in actions that are idle and frivolous—at chess, at tennis and the like—this sharp and ardent engagement of an impetuous desire at once throws mind and limbs into rashness and disorder. We dazzle ourselves; we trip ourselves up. The man who takes winning and losing more moderately is always in command of himself. The less he gets nettled and worked up over the game, the more advantageously and surely he plays it.

NATURE'S NEEDS AND HABIT'S

Nature asks little; habit becomes a second nature he will not change in old age.

3.10.9 For the rest, we hinder the soul's grip and hold by giving it so many things to seize. Some things need only be presented to it, others fastened to it, others made part of it. It can see and feel all things, but it should feed only on itself. And it should be taught what properly concerns it, what is properly its own possession and its own substance. The laws of Nature teach us exactly what we need. The sages tell us that by Nature's standard no one is poor, and by opinion's standard everyone is; then they subtly distinguish the desires that come from Nature from those that come from the disorder of our fancy.

> Those whose end we can see are hers; those that flee before us and whose end we can never reach are ours. Poverty of goods is easy to cure; poverty of soul, impossible. *For if what is enough for a man could be enough for him, that would suffice; but since it is not, how can we believe that any riches could ever fill my soul?* Socrates, seeing a great quantity of riches, jewels and precious furnishings carried in procession through his city, said: "How many things I do not desire!" Metrodorus lived on twelve ounces of food a day, Epicurus on less. Metrocles slept among the sheep in winter, and in summer in the cloisters of the churches.[14]

Nature is sufficient for what she demands. Cleanthes lived by the work of his hands, and boasted that Cleanthes, if he wished, could feed yet another Cleanthes.[15]

3.10.10 Suppose that what Nature strictly and originally asks of us for the preservation of our being is too little. (And indeed how little it is, and how cheaply our life can be kept going, cannot be better expressed than by this consideration: it is so little that its very smallness puts it beyond the grip and the blows of Fortune.) Then let us allow ourselves something more. Let us also call nature the habits and condition of each of us; let us rate ourselves and treat ourselves by that measure; let us stretch our belongings and our accounts that far. For that far, it seems to me, we have some excuse. Habit is a second nature, and no less powerful. Whatever my habit lacks, I consider that I lack. And I would almost as soon have my life taken from me as have it pared down and cut back far below the state in which I have lived it for so long. I am no longer in a condition for any great change, or for throwing myself into a new and unaccustomed way of life—not even toward improvement. It is too late to become someone else. And just as I would complain of some great stroke of luck that fell into my hands now, because it had

14 The verses are from the Roman satirist Lucilius. Metrocles was a Cynic philosopher.

15 Seneca, Letters.

not come at a time when I could enjoy it—*What good is fortune to me, if I am not allowed to use it?*—so I would complain of any inner gain. It is almost better never to become a decent man than to become one so late, and to understand how to live when there is no more life left.[16] I, who am on my way out, would readily hand over to someone just arriving whatever wisdom I am learning for dealing with the world. Mustard after dinner. I have no use for a good that I can do nothing with. What is knowledge to a man who no longer has a head? It is an insult and an unkindness of Fortune to offer us gifts that fill us with a just resentment for having failed us in their season. Guide me no longer: I can no longer walk. Of all the parts that make up ability, patience is enough for us. Give the voice of a superb treble to a singer whose lungs are rotten! Or eloquence to a hermit banished to the deserts of Arabia! Falling needs no skill. The end comes of itself at the close of every task. My world is over, my form has run its course. I belong wholly to the past, and I am bound to sanction it and to make my exit conform to it. Let me say this by way of example: the recent eclipse of ten days by the Pope caught me so late in life that I cannot really adjust to it. I belong to the years when we counted otherwise. So ancient and long a usage claims me and calls me back to itself. In this I am forced to be something of a heretic, incapable of novelty, even corrective novelty. My imagination, in spite of myself, keeps leaping ten days ahead or ten days behind, and grumbles in my ears. This rule concerns those who are yet to be.[17] If health itself, so sweet, comes back to me now and then in fits and starts, it is to give me regret for it rather than possession of it. I no longer have anywhere to lodge it. Time is leaving me, and without time nothing is possessed. Oh, how little I would think of those great elective dignities I see in the world, which are given only to men about to depart! In them people look not so much at how properly the holder will exercise them as at how briefly; from the

16 Horace, Epistles.

17 The Gregorian reform of the calendar in 1582 removed ten days, 15 October following directly on 4 October.

moment of entry they have their eye on the exit. In short: here I am, finishing off this man, not making another. By long usage this form of mine has turned into substance, and fortune into nature.[18]

3.10.11 I say, then, that each of us feeble creatures is excusable for considering his own whatever falls within this measure. But beyond these limits there is nothing but confusion. This is the widest extent we can grant to our rights. The more we enlarge our needs and possessions, the more we expose ourselves to the blows of Fortune and adversity. The course of our desires should be circumscribed and restricted to a short limit, to the nearest and most adjoining comforts. Moreover, their course should run not in a straight line that ends somewhere else, but in a circle whose two ends hold together and terminate in ourselves after a short sweep. Actions carried on without this bending back—I mean a close and essential bending back upon ourselves—such as those of the avaricious, the ambitious and so many others who run straight ahead, whose course always carries them on in front of themselves, are erroneous and sickly actions.

THE MAYOR AND MONTAIGNE

We must play our part in the world without mistaking the mask for the face.

3.10.12 Most of our occupations are farcical. *The whole world plays a part.* We must play our part properly, but as the part of a borrowed character. We must not make the mask and the appearance into a real essence, nor what is foreign into what is our own. We cannot tell the skin from the shirt. It is enough to whiten our face with flour without whitening our breast. I see some who transform and transubstantiate themselves into as many new shapes and new beings as the offices they take on; who are prelates right down to the liver and bowels, and drag their office with them even onto the privy. I cannot teach them to distinguish the bows and doffed caps meant for them from

18 He is thinking chiefly of the papacy, frequently conferred on elderly men.

those meant for their commission, or their retinue, or their mule.[19] *They give themselves up so far to fortune that they even unlearn nature.* They swell and puff up their soul and their natural reasoning to match the height of their magisterial seat. The Mayor and Montaigne have always been two, very clearly separated. If one is a lawyer or a financier, one must not ignore the trickery there is in such callings. A decent man is not accountable for the vice or folly of his trade, and need not refuse to practice it on that account. It is the custom of his country, and there is profit in it. We must live by the world and make use of it as we find it. But the judgment of an emperor should stand above his empire, and see and consider it as an external accident.[20] And he should know how to enjoy himself apart, and to show himself as plain Jack or Peter—to himself, at least.

JUDGING ONE'S OWN PARTY

In civil war he sees the merits of opponents and the faults of his own side.

3.10.13 I do not know how to commit myself so deeply and so entirely. When my will gives me to a party, it is not with so violent a bond that my understanding is infected by it. In the present troubles of this state, my interest has not made me blind either to the praiseworthy qualities in our adversaries or to the blameworthy ones in those I have followed. They adore everything on their own side; I do not even excuse most of the things on mine. A good work does not lose its graces for pleading against me. Outside the heart of the dispute, I have kept myself in equanimity and pure indifference. *Nor do I bear any special hatred beyond the necessities of war.* For this I congratulate myself, all the more since I commonly see people err the other way. Those who stretch their anger and hatred beyond the matters at issue, as most do, show that it springs from elsewhere, from some private cause—just as when a man is cured of his

19 The Latin is attributed to Petronius.
20 Quintus Curtius, History of Alexander.

ulcer and the fever still remains, it shows that the fever had another, more hidden origin. The fact is that they have nothing against the cause as a common cause, insofar as it injures the interest of all and of the state; they hold it against it only insofar as it galls them in private. That is why they are stung by it with a private passion, beyond justice and public reason. *It was not so much that they all found fault with everything as that each found fault with what concerned himself.* I want the advantage to be on our side, but I do not go mad if it is not. I hold firmly to the soundest of the parties, but I do not seek to be singled out as an enemy of the others beyond what general reason requires. I strongly condemn this vicious way of judging: "He is of the League, for he admires the grace of Monsieur de Guise." "The King of Navarre's energy amazes him: he is a Huguenot." "He finds this to criticize in the King's conduct: he is seditious at heart." And I did not grant even to the magistrate that he was right to condemn a book for having placed a heretic among the best poets of this century.[21] May we not say of a thief that he has a shapely leg? If she is a prostitute, must she also have foul breath? In wiser ages, did they revoke the proud title of Capitolinus formerly given to Marcus Manlius as preserver of religion and public liberty? Did they smother the memory of his generosity, his feats of arms and the military rewards granted to his valor, because he later aspired to kingship, to the detriment of his country's laws? If they have taken a dislike to a lawyer, by the next day he has lost his eloquence for them. I have touched elsewhere on the zeal that drove good men into similar errors. For my part, I can quite well say: "He does that wickedly, and this virtuously."[22] Likewise, in forecasts or in ill turns of affairs, they want each man in his own party to be blind or dull-witted, and our convictions and judgment to serve not the truth but the design of our desire. I would rather err toward the other

21 Livy. Henri, Duke of Guise, led the Catholic League. The book is probably the Essays themselves, faulted by the papal censors in 1581 for naming heretic poets.
22 Marcus Manlius saved the Capitol from the Gauls in 390 BC and was later executed for aiming at tyranny.

extreme, so much do I fear that my desire may suborn me. Besides, I am a little tenderly distrustful of the things I wish for.

3.10.14 In my time I have seen marvels in the indiscriminate and prodigious readiness of peoples to let their belief and their hope be led and handled wherever it pleased and suited their leaders —despite a hundred disappointments one on top of another, despite phantoms and dreams. I am no longer amazed at those who were hoodwinked by the antics of Apollonius and Muhammad. Their sense and understanding are entirely smothered in their passion. Their discernment no longer has any choice but what smiles on them and comforts their cause. I had noticed this to the highest degree in the first of our feverish parties. This other one, born since, imitates it and outdoes it. From which I gather that it is a quality inseparable from popular errors.[23] Once the first opinion sets off, the others push one another along with the wind, like waves. You are not of the body if you can take back what you said, if you do not drift along with the common course. But surely we wrong just parties when we try to help them with frauds. I have always spoken against it. This method works only on sick heads. With healthy ones there are surer ways, and not merely more honest ones, of keeping up people's courage and explaining away setbacks.

3.10.15 Heaven has never seen so weighty a discord as that between Caesar and Pompey, nor ever will. Yet I seem to recognize in those fine souls a great moderation toward each other. It was a rivalry for honor and command that did not carry them away into furious and reckless hatred; it was without malice and without disparagement. In their bitterest exploits I discover some remnant of respect and goodwill. And so I judge that, had it been possible, each of them would have wished to achieve his aim without ruining his comrade rather than by ruining him. How differently it went with Marius and Sulla: take note of it.

23 The two parties are the Huguenots and the Catholic League.

STOPPING PASSIONS AT THE START

It is easier to keep out of passions and quarrels than to master them once begun.

3.10.16 We must not rush so headlong after our affections and interests. When I was young, I resisted the progress of love when I felt it gaining too much ground on me, and took pains that it should not become so pleasant to me as to overpower me in the end and hold me captive entirely at its mercy. I do the same on all other occasions where my will takes hold with too much appetite. I lean the opposite way from its inclination when I see it plunging in and getting drunk on its own wine. I avoid feeding its pleasure so far that I can no longer get it back without bloody loss. Souls that through dullness see things only by halves enjoy this good fortune: harmful things wound them less. It is a spiritual leprosy that has some look of health—and such health as philosophy does not wholly despise. But even so it is not right to call it wisdom, as we often do. And in this vein someone in ancient times mocked Diogenes, who in the dead of winter went about stark naked hugging a figure of snow to test his endurance. Coming upon him in this posture, the man said: "Are you very cold right now?" "Not at all," answered Diogenes. "Then," the other went on, "what do you think you are doing that is difficult or exemplary by standing there?" To measure fortitude, one must necessarily know the suffering.

3.10.17 But souls that are to see adverse events and the injuries of Fortune in all their depth and harshness, that are to weigh and taste them in their natural bitterness and weight, should use their skill to keep from getting caught up in their causes, and should block the approaches to them. What did King Cotys do? He paid generously for the beautiful and rich tableware that had been presented to him; but because it was exceptionally fragile, he broke it all himself at once, to rid himself in good time of so ready an occasion for anger against his servants.[24] In the

24 Cotys, a king of Thrace; the story is in Plutarch.

same way I have gladly avoided having my affairs entangled, and have not sought to have my property adjoin that of my relatives and of those with whom I must be joined in close friendship; that is where occasions for estrangement and separation usually arise. I used to love games of chance with cards and dice. I gave them up long ago, for this reason alone: however good a face I put on my losses, I still felt the sting of them inside. A man of honor, who is bound to feel being given the lie or an insult to the quick, and who is not one to accept a poor excuse as payment and consolation, should keep contentious arguments from going any further. I flee gloomy temperaments and surly men as I would the plague-stricken. And in discussions that I cannot handle without personal interest and emotion, I do not get involved unless duty forces me. *They will do better not to begin than to have to stop.* The safest way, then, is to prepare oneself before the occasions arise.[25]

3.10.18 I know well that some sages have taken another path, and have not been afraid to grapple and engage themselves to the quick with many objects. These men are sure of their strength, under which they take cover against every kind of hostile outcome, making their ills wrestle with the vigor of their endurance: *Like a cliff that juts out into the vast sea,*

facing the fury of the winds and exposed to the waves,
it bears all the violence and threats of sky and sea,
itself remaining unmoved.[26]

3.10.19 Let us not take on these examples; we would never reach them. They persist in watching, resolutely and unperturbed, the ruin of their country, which possessed and commanded their whole will. For our common souls there is too much effort and too much harshness in that. Cato gave up for it the noblest life that ever was. We little folk must flee the storm from further off; we must take measures against feeling, not rely on endurance,

25 Seneca, Letters.
26 Virgil, Aeneid.

and dodge the blows we could not parry. Zeno, seeing Chremonides, a young man he loved, approaching to sit beside him, rose at once. And when Cleanthes asked him the reason, he said: "I understand that physicians prescribe rest above all and forbid agitation for all swellings." Socrates does not say: "Do not yield to the attractions of beauty; stand up to it, strive against it." "Flee it," he says, "run out of its sight and out of its way, as from a powerful poison that darts out and strikes from afar." And his good disciple, inventing or recounting—but in my opinion recounting rather than inventing—the rare perfections of the great Cyrus, shows him distrusting his strength to withstand the attractions of the divine beauty of the illustrious Panthea, his captive, and entrusting the visiting and guarding of her to another who had less freedom than he. And the Holy Spirit likewise: *lead us not into temptation*.[27] We do not pray that our reason may not be fought and overcome by concupiscence, but that it may not even be tested by it; that we may not be led into a state where we have even to suffer the approaches, solicitations and temptations of sin; and we beseech our Lord to keep our conscience tranquil, fully and perfectly delivered from all dealings with evil.

3.10.20 Those who say they are in the right in their vindictive passion, or in some other kind of painful passion, often speak the truth—as things are, but not as they were. They speak to us when the causes of their error have been fed and advanced by themselves. But go further back, trace these causes to their origin: there you will catch them off guard. Do they want their fault to be the smaller for being older, and the sequel of an unjust beginning to be just? Whoever wishes his country well, as I do, without getting ulcers or growing thin over it, will be grieved, but not paralyzed, to see it threatened either with ruin or with a survival no less ruinous. Poor ship, which waves, winds and pilot pull toward such contrary aims! *So differently do the helmsman, / the wind and the wave pull.* Whoever does not gape after the favor of princes as after something he could not do without

27 The disciple is Xenophon; Panthea was the captive wife of the king Abradatas.

is not much stung by the coldness of their welcome and their looks, nor by the inconstancy of their will. Whoever does not brood over his children or his honors with a slavish attachment does not cease to live comfortably after losing them. Whoever does good chiefly for his own satisfaction is hardly upset to see men judge his actions contrary to his merit. A quarter of an ounce of patience takes care of such inconveniences. I do well with this recipe, buying myself off at the beginnings as cheaply as I can; and I feel that by this means I have escaped a great deal of trouble and difficulty. With very little effort I stop this first stirring of my emotions, and I drop the subject that is beginning to weigh on me, before it carries me away. He who does not stop the start will hardly stop the race. He who cannot shut the door on them will not drive them out once they are in. He who cannot master the beginning will not master the end. Nor will he withstand the fall who could not withstand the first shock.

> *For they drive themselves on once reason has been left behind; weakness indulges itself, is carried unawares out into the deep, and finds no place to stand.* I feel in time the little winds that come to probe me and murmur within me, forerunners of the storm: *As when the first gusts, caught in the woods, roar and roll their blind murmurs, betraying to sailors the coming winds.*[28]

3.10.21 How many times have I done myself a quite evident injustice to avoid the risk of receiving a worse one from the judges, after an age of vexations and of filthy, base practices more hostile to my nature than torture and fire? *It is fitting to shrink from lawsuits as much as one may, and perhaps even a little more than one may; for it is not only generous but sometimes even profitable to give up a little of one's rights now and then.* If we were really wise, we should rejoice and boast, as I once heard a child of a great house, quite artlessly, celebrating to everyone that his mother had just lost her lawsuit—as if she had lost her cough,

28 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations; the verses are from Virgil's Aeneid.

her fever, or something else troublesome to keep.[29] Even the favors Fortune may have given me—kinship and acquaintance with those who have sovereign authority in such matters—I have done my utmost, in conscience, to avoid using to the prejudice of others, and I have not raised my rights above their true value. In short, I have managed so well in my day—may I say it without tempting fate—that here I am still a virgin of lawsuits, though they have more than once offered themselves to my service on very good grounds, had I cared to listen. And a virgin of quarrels. I have now spent a long life without any serious offense, suffered or given, and without having been called anything worse than my own name. A rare grace of heaven.

3.10.22 Our greatest agitations have ridiculous springs and causes. How much ruin our last Duke of Burgundy brought on himself over a quarrel about a cartload of sheepskins! And the engraving of a seal—was that not the first and principal cause of the most horrible collapse this machine has ever suffered? For Pompey and Caesar are only the offshoots and sequel of those other two. And in my time I have seen the wisest heads of this kingdom assembled with great ceremony and at public expense for treaties and agreements whose real decision meanwhile depended, in complete sovereignty, on the chatter of the ladies' chamber and the inclination of some little woman.[30] The poets understood this well, who put Greece and Asia to fire and sword for an apple. Look at why that man is off to risk his honor and his life with his sword and dagger; let him tell you the source of the dispute—he cannot do it without blushing, so idle and frivolous is the occasion.[31]

3.10.23 Getting into it takes only a little forethought; but once you are embarked, all the ropes pull. Great provisions are needed then, much more difficult and important. How much easier it is not to go in than to get out! Now we must do the

29 Cicero, On Duties.

30 Charles the Bold's fatal war with the Swiss arose from a dispute over sheepskins; the seal is the one on which Sulla had Jugurtha's surrender engraved, which inflamed his quarrel with Marius.

31 The golden apple awarded by Paris, which led to the Trojan War.

opposite of the reed, which at first shoots up a long, straight stem; but afterward, as if it had grown languid and out of breath, it starts making frequent thick knots, like pauses, which show that it no longer has its first vigor and steadiness. We should rather begin gently and coolly, and save our breath and our vigorous bursts for the thick of the task and its completion. We guide affairs in their beginnings and hold them at our mercy; but afterward, once they are set in motion, it is they that guide us and carry us away, and we have to follow them.

3.10.24 This is not to say that this counsel has relieved me of all difficulty, or that I have not often had to curb and bridle my passions. They do not always govern themselves by the measure of the occasions, and even their onsets are often harsh and violent. Still, a fine saving and profit come of it—except for those who in doing good are content with no profit if reputation is missing. For in truth such an outcome counts only for each man within himself. You are more content, but not more esteemed, having reformed yourself before you joined the dance and before the matter came into view. And yet, not in this alone but in all the other duties of life, the path of those who aim at honor is very different from the one taken by those who set themselves order and reason as their goal. I find some who rush into the lists recklessly and furiously, and slow down in the race. Plutarch says that those who through the vice of false shame are soft and easy in granting whatever is asked of them are easy afterward in breaking their word and going back on it; in the same way, whoever enters lightly into a quarrel is apt to leave it just as lightly. That same difficulty which keeps me from starting one would spur me to hold firm once I was stirred and heated. That is a bad way to go about it. Once you are in, you must go on or burst. "Undertake coolly," said Bias, "but pursue ardently." From want of prudence we fall into want of courage, which is still less bearable.

3.10.25 Most of the settlements of our quarrels nowadays are shameful and lying. We seek only to save appearances, and meanwhile we betray and disavow our true intentions. We

plaster over the fact. We know how we said it and in what sense; the bystanders know it, and so do our friends, to whom we wanted to make our advantage felt. It is at the expense of our frankness and of the honor of our courage that we disavow our thought and look for rabbit holes in falsehood in order to come to terms. We give ourselves the lie to save a lie we have given another. You must not look to see whether your act or your word can bear another interpretation; it is your true and sincere interpretation that you must uphold from now on, whatever it costs you. It is your virtue and your conscience that are being addressed; these are not parts to be put behind a mask. Let us leave these base means and expedients to the chicanery of the law courts. The excuses and reparations I see made every day to purge an indiscretion seem to me uglier than the indiscretion itself. It would be better to offend your adversary once more than to offend yourself by making him such amends. You defied him when moved by anger, and now you go and appease and flatter him in your cool and better sense: thus you abase yourself further than you had advanced. I find no saying so wrong in a gentleman as unsaying seems to me shameful for him—when it is an unsaying wrung from him by authority; for obstinacy is more excusable in him than faintheartedness. The passions are as easy for me to avoid as they are hard for me to moderate. *They are more easily cut out of the soul than tempered.* Whoever cannot attain that noble Stoic impassibility, let him take refuge in the lap of this common dullness of mine. What those men did by virtue, I train myself to do by temperament.

> The middle region houses the storms; the two extremes, philosophers and country folk, meet in tranquility and happiness. *Happy the man who has been able to know the causes of things,*
> *and has trampled underfoot all fears and inexorable fate*
> *and the roar of greedy Acheron!*
> *Fortunate too is he who knows the gods of the countryside,*
> *Pan, and old Silvanus, and the sister Nymphs!*[32]

32 Virgil, Georgics.

3.10.26 The births of all things are weak and tender. Therefore we must keep our eyes open at the beginnings; for just as at that stage, in its smallness, we do not discover the danger, so once it has grown we no longer discover the remedy. In the course of ambition I would have met a million obstacles every day, harder to digest than it has been hard for me to check the natural inclination that drew me toward it. *Rightly have I dreaded / to raise my head to be seen far and wide.*

HIS RECORD AS MAYOR

Critics say his term left no trace; he answers that keeping the peace was the task.

3.10.27 All public actions are subject to uncertain and varied interpretations, for too many heads judge them. Some say of this municipal office of mine (and I am glad to say a word about it—not that it is worth it, but to serve as a sample of my ways in such things) that I conducted myself in it like a man too sluggish to be stirred, with a languid zeal; and they are not altogether wide of the appearances. I try to keep my soul and my thoughts at rest. *Always quiet by nature, and now also by age.* And if they sometimes break loose under some rough and piercing impression, it is, in truth, without my consent.[33] From this natural languor, however, one should not draw any proof of incapacity—for want of care and want of sense are two different things—and still less of unawareness or ingratitude toward this people, who used all the most extreme means in their power to gratify me, both before they knew me and after, and did far more for me in giving me my office again than in giving it to me the first time. I wish them every possible good. And certainly, had the occasion arisen, there is nothing I would have spared in their service. I bestirred myself for them as I do for myself. They are a good people, warlike and generous, yet capable of obedience and discipline and of serving some good purpose if well led. They also say that this term of mine passed without mark or trace. Very

33 Quintus Cicero, Handbook of Electioneering.

well. They accuse me of inaction at a time when almost everybody was guilty of doing too much. I have an impatient, foot-stamping way of acting where my will carries me along. But that keenness is hostile to perseverance. Whoever wants to make use of me in accordance with myself, let him give me affairs that call for vigor and freedom, that have a straight and short course, and even a risky one: there I may be able to do something. If the course must be long, subtle, laborious, artful and tortuous, he would do better to turn to someone else. Not all important offices are difficult. I was prepared to set to work a little more roughly if there had been great need. For it is in my power to do somewhat more than I do, and than I like to do. I did not omit, so far as I know, any action that duty seriously required of me. I easily forgot those that ambition mixes with duty and covers with its title. It is these that most often fill people's eyes and ears and satisfy them. Not the thing but the appearance pays them. If they hear no noise, it seems to them that we are asleep. My temperament is the opposite of noisy temperaments. I could well stop a disturbance without being disturbed, and punish a disorder without losing my composure. Do I need anger and fire? I borrow them and wear them as a mask. My manners are blunt, insipid rather than harsh. I do not blame a magistrate who sleeps, provided those under his hand sleep along with him: the laws sleep likewise. For my part, I commend a life that glides along, obscure and silent, *neither abject and groveling nor self-exalting.* My fortune wills it so. I was born of a family that has flowed along without brilliance and without tumult, and within long memory particularly ambitious of integrity. Our men are so shaped to agitation and ostentation that goodness, moderation, evenness, constancy and such quiet and obscure qualities are no longer felt. Rough bodies are felt; smooth ones are handled imperceptibly. Sickness is felt; health little or not at all —nor are the things that salve us felt, compared with those that stab us. It is acting for one's reputation and private profit, not for the common good, to put off doing in the public square what can be done in the council chamber, and at broad noon what could

have been done the night before, and to insist jealously on doing oneself what one's colleague does just as well. That is how some surgeons in Greece performed the operations of their art on platforms in view of passers-by, to gain more practice and custom. They judge that good regulations cannot be appreciated except to the sound of the trumpet. Ambition is not a vice for petty fellows and for efforts like ours. People said to Alexander: "Your father will leave you a great dominion, easy and peaceful." This boy was envious of his father's victories and of the justice of his government; he would not have wanted to enjoy the empire of the world softly and peacefully. Alcibiades, in Plato, would rather die young, handsome, rich, noble, learned—all of it to the highest degree—than stop at the state he had reached. This sickness is perhaps excusable in a soul so strong and so full.[34] When these dwarfish, puny little souls go about making monkeys of themselves, and think they will spread their name for having judged a case rightly or kept up the rota of the guards at a city gate, the more they hope to raise their head, the more they show their backside. This petty well-doing has neither body nor life. It vanishes in the first mouth that tells it, and travels only from one street corner to the next. By all means talk about it to your son and your valet. Like that man of old who, having no other audience for his praises and no other witness to his worth, swaggered before his chambermaid, crying: "O Perrette, what a gallant and able man of a master you have!" At worst, talk about it to yourself. Like a councilor I know who, having disgorged a boatload of paragraphs with extreme effort and equal ineptitude, and having withdrawn from the council chamber to the urinal of the Palace of Justice, was heard muttering most conscientiously between his teeth: *Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory.* Whoever cannot get paid elsewhere pays himself out of his own purse.[35]

3.10.28 Fame does not prostitute herself at so cheap a rate. The rare and exemplary actions to which it is due would not put up

34 Plato, First Alcibiades.
35 Psalm 115 (113 in the Vulgate).

with the company of that countless crowd of petty everyday actions. Marble will raise your titles as high as you please for having had a stretch of wall patched or a public gutter cleaned out; but men of sense will not. Renown does not follow every good deed unless difficulty and strangeness are joined to it. Indeed, according to the Stoics, not even simple esteem is due to every action that has no virtue in it. And they will not have us even feel grateful to the man who, out of temperance, abstains from a bleary-eyed old woman. Those who knew the admirable qualities of Scipio Africanus deny him the glory that Panaetius attributes to him of having refused gifts, as a glory not so much his as his age's. We have the pleasures that suit our fortune; let us not usurp those of greatness. Ours are more natural, and all the more solid and secure for being lower. Since it is not out of conscience, let us at least out of ambition refuse ambition. Let us disdain this hunger for fame and honor, base and beggarly, which makes us go begging for it from all sorts of people—*What sort of praise is this, that can be sought in the market?*—by abject means and at whatever vile price. It is dishonor to be honored in this way.[36] Let us learn to be no greedier for glory than we are capable of it. Puffing oneself up over every useful and innocent action is for people to whom such action is extraordinary and rare: they want to value it at the price it cost them. The more dazzling a good deed is, the more I deduct from its goodness, because of the suspicion I come to have that it was done more to dazzle than to be good. Put on display, it is half sold. Far more graceful are those actions that slip from the workman's hand carelessly and without noise, and that some decent man later picks out and raises from the shadows to push them into the light—for their own sake. *To me, indeed, all things seem more praiseworthy that are done without ostentation and without the people as witness,* says the most vainglorious man in the world. I had only to preserve and endure, which are quiet, imperceptible achievements. Innovation has great luster; but it is forbidden in

36 This is Scipio Aemilianus (Africanus the Younger), Panaetius' friend. The Latin is Cicero, On Ends II.15.

these times, when we are hard pressed and have nothing to defend ourselves against but novelties. Refraining from doing is often as noble as doing, but it is less in the open; and what little I am worth is almost all of this kind. In short, the occasions in this office have suited my constitution, for which I am most grateful to them. Is there anyone who wishes to be ill so as to see his physician at work?[37] And should we not whip the physician who wished the plague on us so as to put his skill into practice? I have never had that unjust and rather common temper of wishing that the disorder and sickness of this city's affairs would exalt and honor my administration. I have gladly put my shoulder to making them easy and smooth. Whoever will not give me credit for the order, the gentle and silent tranquility that accompanied my conduct of office, cannot at least deprive me of the share of it that belongs to me by right of my good fortune. And I am so made that I like being lucky as much as being wise, and owing my successes purely to the grace of God as much as to the agency of my own work. I had proclaimed to the world eloquently enough my incompetence in such public dealings. I have something still worse than incompetence: it hardly displeases me, and I hardly try to cure it, given the course of life I have planned for myself. Nor did I satisfy myself in this undertaking. But I have arrived at roughly what I had promised myself, and I have far surpassed what I had promised those I had to deal with; for I readily promise a little less than I can do and than I hope to deliver. I am sure I left behind neither offense nor hatred.

> As for leaving behind regret and a desire for me, I know at least this much: that I did not much aim at it. *I, trust this monster?*
>
> *I, not know the look of the calm salt sea and the quiet waves*
> *For what they are?*[38]

37 The Latin is Cicero, Tusculan Disputations II.26.

38 Virgil, Aeneid V.849–51: the helmsman Palinurus refusing to trust a calm sea.

III.11 Of the Lame

Des boyteux

Starting from the calendar reform, Montaigne mocks credulity about witches and miracles and urges suspended judgment.

3.11.1 Two or three years ago the year was shortened by ten days in France. How many changes ought to follow from this reform! It was literally moving heaven and earth at once. And yet nothing has budged from its place. My neighbors find the time for their sowing and their harvest, the right moment for their business, the unlucky and lucky days, at exactly the same point where they had always placed them. Neither was the error felt in our practice, nor is the correction felt now. So much uncertainty is there everywhere; so coarse, dim and dull is our perception.[1] They say this adjustment could have been carried out less inconveniently, by omitting the leap day for a few years, following the example of Augustus—a day that, one way or another, is a day of hindrance and confusion—until the debt had been exactly paid off. Which in fact has not even been done by this correction: we are still a few days in arrears. And by the same means provision could have been made for the future, by ordering that after the cycle of such-and-such a number of years this extra day would always be dropped, so that our miscount could never thereafter exceed twenty-four hours. We have no other reckoning of time than years.[2] The world has used them for so

1 France adopted the reformed calendar in December 1582.

2 Augustus suspended leap years for a period to correct errors made in applying Julius Caesar's calendar.

many centuries, and yet it is a measure we have not yet finished fixing—so much so that every day we wonder what different forms other nations have given it and how they used it. And what of the claim some make, that the heavens are contracting toward us as they grow old, and throwing us into uncertainty even about hours and days? And about months, what Plutarch says: that even in his time astronomy had not managed to determine the motion of the moon? A fine position we are in for keeping records of things past!

3.11.2 I was musing just now, as I often do, on what a free and vague instrument human reason is. I commonly see that men, when facts are put before them, would rather amuse themselves by looking for the reason for them than by looking for the truth of them. They pass over the premises, but examine the consequences with great care. They leave the things and run to the causes. Fine talkers about causes they are! Knowledge of causes concerns only the one who has the direction of things, not us, who only undergo them, and who have the full and complete use of them, according to our need, without penetrating their origin and essence. Nor is wine any more pleasant to the man who knows its primary properties. On the contrary: both body and soul disturb and impair the right they have to the use of the world and of themselves by mixing into it the conceit of knowledge. Effects concern us, but the means not at all. Determining and distributing belong to mastery and rule, just as accepting belongs to subjection and apprenticeship. To return to our habit: they usually begin like this: "How does this happen?" What they should say is: "But does it happen?" Our reasoning is capable of furnishing a hundred other worlds and finding their principles and structure. It needs neither matter nor foundation. Let it run: it builds as well on the empty as on the full, and out of nothingness as out of matter, *fit to give weight to smoke.* I find almost everywhere that we ought to say: "There is nothing to it." And I would often use this answer, but I dare not, for they cry that it is an evasion born of weakness of mind and ignorance. So I usually have to play the clown for company's sake, discussing sub-

jects and frivolous tales that I entirely disbelieve. Besides, to tell the truth, it is a bit rude and quarrelsome to flatly deny a statement of fact. And few people fail—especially in things hard to make others believe—to assert that they have seen it, or to cite witnesses whose authority stops our contradiction.[3] Following this practice, we know the foundations and the means of a thousand things that never existed. And the world skirmishes over a thousand questions in which both the pro and the con are false. *The false is so close to the true that the wise man should not venture onto such a precipitous slope.* Truth and falsehood have matching faces; their bearing, taste and gait are alike; we look at them with the same eye. I find that we are not only slack in defending ourselves against deception, but that we seek it out and invite it to run us through. We love to entangle ourselves in vanity, as something in keeping with our being.[4]

HOW MIRACLES ARE BORN

Rumor grows from small beginnings as each teller adds something of his own.

3.11.3 I have seen the birth of several miracles in my time. Even though they are smothered at birth, we can still foresee the course they would have taken if they had lived out their span. For you need only find the end of the thread, and you can unwind as much as you like. And there is a greater distance from nothing to the smallest thing in the world than from that to the greatest. Now the first people who have drunk in this beginning of strangeness, when they come to spread their story, sense from the objections raised against them where the difficulty of persuading lies, and go about caulking that spot with some false patch. Besides which, *through men's innate desire to feed rumors deliberately*, we naturally feel it a matter of conscience not to return what has been lent us without some interest and some addition of our own growing. Private error first creates public

3 Persius, Satires V.20.
4 Cicero, Academica II.21.

error; and afterward, in its turn, public error creates private error. So this whole edifice goes on filling out and taking shape from hand to hand, so that the remotest witness is better informed about it than the nearest, and the last to be told more convinced than the first. It is a natural progression. For whoever believes something thinks it a work of charity to persuade another of it.[5] And to do so he is not afraid to add of his own invention as much as he sees is needed in his account to make up for the resistance and the deficiency he thinks he finds in the other person's understanding. I myself, who make a particular point of conscience about lying, and who hardly care about giving credence and authority to what I say, nevertheless notice, in the matters I have in hand, that when I am heated either by someone else's resistance or by the very warmth of my telling, I swell and inflate my subject by voice, gestures, vigor and force of words, and also by extension and amplification—not without harm to the plain truth. But I do it on this condition, however: that for the first person who brings me back and asks me for the naked, raw truth, I immediately drop my effort and give it to him, without exaggeration, without emphasis or padding. Lively, loud speech, such as mine usually is, readily runs away into hyperbole. There is nothing men are commonly more bent on than making way for their opinions. Where the ordinary means fail us, we add command, force, steel and fire. It is a misfortune to have come to this: that the best touchstone of truth should be the number of believers, in a crowd where fools so far outnumber the wise. *As if anything were as common as lack of wisdom! A crowd of madmen is the advocate of sanity.* It is a hard thing to settle one's judgment against common opinions. The first persuasion, drawn from the subject itself, seizes the simple; from there it spreads to the clever, under the authority of the number and age of the testimonies. For my part, what I would not believe from one, I would not believe from a hundred and one. And I do not judge opinions by their years.[6] Not long ago one of

5 Livy XXVIII.24.

6 Cicero, On Divination II.39, and Augustine, The City of God VI.10.

our princes, in whom gout had spoiled a fine nature and a cheerful disposition, let himself be so thoroughly persuaded by the reports of the marvelous cures of a priest who healed every disease by means of words and gestures that he made a long journey to find him. And by the force of his imagination he persuaded his legs and numbed them for a few hours, so that he got out of them a service they had long since forgotten how to give him. If Fortune had let five or six such incidents pile up, they could have made this miracle part of nature. Afterward so much simplicity and so little skill were found in the architect of these works that he was judged unworthy of any punishment. As would be done with most such things, if one tracked them down in their lair. *We marvel at things that deceive us from a distance.* In the same way our sight often presents strange images from afar that vanish as we draw near. *Rumor is never brought to clarity.*[7]

3.11.4 It is a marvel from what empty beginnings and frivolous causes such famous impressions usually arise. That very fact hinders the investigation of them; for while we look for strong, weighty causes and ends, worthy of so great a name, we lose the true ones. They escape our sight by their smallness. And truly, such inquiries require a very prudent, attentive and subtle investigator, impartial and unprejudiced. Up to now all these miracles and strange events hide from me. I have seen no more manifest monster or miracle in the world than myself. We grow used to any strangeness through habit and time; but the more I frequent myself and know myself, the more my deformity stuns me, and the less I understand myself. The chief right to bring forward and produce such incidents is reserved to Fortune. Passing through a village two leagues from my house the day before yesterday, I found the place still quite warm from a miracle that had just come to nothing there. It had kept the neighborhood busy for several months, and the neighboring provinces were beginning to be stirred by it and to flock there in large bands of every rank. A young man of the place had amused himself one night by imitating the voice of a spirit in his

7 Seneca, Letters 118; Quintus Curtius IX.2.

house, with no further trick in mind than enjoying a joke on the spot. This having worked a little better than he hoped, he took on as partner, to give his farce more machinery, a village girl, utterly dull and simple; and in the end there were three of them, of the same age and similar wits. And from sermons at home they went on to public sermons, hiding under the altar of the church, speaking only at night, and forbidding anyone to bring any light there. From words aimed at the conversion of the world and threats of the Day of Judgment (for these are subjects under whose authority and reverence imposture most easily lurks), they went on to certain visions and movements so silly and ridiculous that there is hardly anything so crude in little children's games. Yet if Fortune had been willing to lend them a little favor, who knows how far this juggling act might have grown? These poor devils are now in prison, and will probably pay the penalty for the common folly; and I do not know whether some judge will take revenge on them for his own. We see clearly in this case, which has been exposed; but in many things of the same kind that are beyond our knowledge, I am of the opinion that we should hold back our judgment, as much from rejecting as from accepting.

PROFESSING IGNORANCE

Words like "perhaps" and "it seems" are wiser than confident assertions.

3.11.5 Many abuses are bred in the world—or, to put it more boldly, all the abuses in the world are bred—from our being taught to be afraid of professing our ignorance, and being obliged to accept whatever we cannot refute. We speak about everything by precept and decision. The usage at Rome required that even what a witness deposed as having seen with his own eyes, and what a judge decreed from his most certain knowledge, be couched in this form of words: "It seems to me." People make me hate probable things when they plant them on me as infallible. I love those words that soften and moderate the rashness of our pro-

positions: "perhaps," "to some extent," "some," "they say," "I think," and the like. And if I had had children to bring up, I would have put this way of answering into their mouths so often—inquiring, not decisive: "What does that mean? I do not understand it. It might be so. Is it true?"—that they would sooner have kept the manner of apprentices at sixty than play the learned doctors at ten, as they do. Whoever would be cured of ignorance must confess it.

3.11.6 Iris is the daughter of Thaumas. Wonder is the foundation of all philosophy, inquiry its progress, ignorance its end. Yes indeed, there is a strong and noble ignorance that owes nothing in honor and courage to knowledge—an ignorance that takes no less knowledge to conceive than it takes to conceive knowledge.[8] In my childhood I saw the account of a trial that Coras, a councilor of Toulouse, had printed, about a strange case of two men who each passed himself off as the other. I remember (and I remember nothing else) that he seemed to me to have made the imposture of the man he judged guilty so marvelous, and so far beyond our knowledge and his own, who was the judge, that I found great boldness in the sentence that had condemned the man to be hanged. Let us adopt some form of sentence that says: "The court does not understand the matter at all"—more freely and candidly than the Areopagites did, who, finding themselves pressed by a case they could not unravel, ordered the parties to come back in a hundred years.[9]

WITCHES

Montaigne refuses to see people burned on charges that lie beyond human proof.

The witches in my neighborhood risk their lives on the opinion of each new author who comes along to give body to their

8 Plato, Theaetetus 155d: Iris, messenger of the gods, is the daughter of Thaumas, whose name evokes wonder (thauma).

9 Jean de Coras published (1561) his account of the Martin Guerre case; the impostor Arnaud du Tilh was hanged in 1560.

dreams. To adapt the examples that the divine Word offers us of such things—most certain and irrefutable examples—and to attach them to our modern events, since we see neither their causes nor their means, requires another kind of wit than ours. It belongs perhaps to that sole and most powerful testimony to tell us: "This man is one of them, and that woman, but not this other." God must be believed in this; that is indeed entirely right. But not, for all that, one of us, who is astonished at his own story (and he must necessarily be astonished at it, if he is not out of his mind), whether he applies it to someone else's doings or against himself.

3.11.7 I am heavy-minded, and keep somewhat to the solid and the probable, avoiding the ancient reproaches: *Men put more faith in what they do not understand. Through a craving of the human mind, obscure things are more readily believed.* I see plainly that people get angry, and forbid me to doubt it on pain of execrable insults. A new way of persuading! Thank God, my belief is not handled with fists. Let them berate those who accuse their opinion of falsehood; I accuse it only of being difficult and bold. And I condemn the opposite assertion just as they do, though not so imperiously. Whoever establishes his reasoning by bravado and command shows that reason is weak in it. In a verbal, scholastic dispute, let them have as much plausibility as their opponents.[10] *By all means let them be put forward as seeming true, but not affirmed.* But in the practical consequence they draw from it, these people have much the advantage.[11]

3.11.8 To kill people, there must be a bright, clear light. And our life is too real and substantial to stand surety for these supernatural and fantastic incidents. As for drugs and poisons, I leave them out of my account: those are homicides, and of the worst kind. Yet even there, they say, one must not always rely on these people's own confession; for they have sometimes been seen to accuse themselves of having killed people who were found healthy and alive. As for these other extravagant accusations, I

10 The second Latin sentence is Tacitus, Histories I.22.
11 Cicero, Academica II.27.

would readily say that it is quite enough for a man, whatever recommendation he may have, to be believed about what is human. As for what is beyond his comprehension and has a supernatural effect, he should be believed only when a supernatural approval has authorized him. This privilege that it has pleased God to give to some of our testimonies must not be cheapened and passed around lightly. My ears are battered with a thousand such tales: "Three people saw him on such a day in the east; three saw him the next day in the west, at such an hour, in such a place, dressed thus." Truly, I would not believe it of myself. How much more natural and likely I find it that two men are lying than that one man should pass with the winds from east to west in twelve hours! How much more natural that our understanding should be carried off its base by the whirling of our unhinged minds than that one of us should be flown up his chimney flue on a broomstick, in flesh and blood, by some alien spirit! Let us not look for illusions from outside and unknown, we who are perpetually shaken by illusions that are domestic and our own. It seems to me pardonable to disbelieve a marvel, at least as far as one can divert and evade its verification by non-marvelous means. And I follow the opinion of Saint Augustine, that it is better to lean toward doubt than toward certainty in things difficult to prove and dangerous to believe.

3.11.9 Some years ago I passed through the lands of a sovereign prince, who, as a favor to me and to beat down my incredulity, did me the kindness of showing me, in his presence and in a private place, ten or twelve prisoners of this kind. Among them was an old woman, truly a witch in ugliness and deformity, long very famous in that profession. I saw proofs and free confessions, and some mark or other on that wretched old woman that could feel nothing; and I questioned and talked to my heart's content, bringing to it the soundest attention I could. And I am not a man who lets his judgment be much tied up by prejudice. In the end, and in all conscience, I would rather have prescribed them hellebore than hemlock. *Their case seemed more like madness than crime.* Justice has its own remedies for such illnesses. As for

the objections and arguments that decent men have put to me, both there and often elsewhere, I have felt none that held me fast, or that did not admit a solution always more plausible than their conclusions. It is true that the proofs and reasons founded on experience and fact—those I do not untie; besides, they have no end to them. I often cut them, as Alexander did his knot. After all, it is putting a very high price on one's conjectures to have a man roasted alive for them.[12]

3.11.10 It is told in various examples (and Praestantius tells it of his father) that, drowsy and asleep much more heavily than in a proper sleep, he imagined he was a mare and was serving as a packhorse for soldiers; and what he imagined, he was. If sorcerers dream so materially, if dreams can sometimes take bodily form in deeds like this, still I do not believe our will should be held accountable for it to justice. I say this as one who is neither a judge nor a counselor of kings, nor thinks himself remotely worthy of being one, but a man of the common sort, born and vowed to obedience to public reason, in both his deeds and his words.[13] Anyone who took my musings into account to the prejudice of the paltriest law, opinion or custom of his village would do himself a great wrong, and me just as much. For in what I say I guarantee no other certainty than that it is what I had in mind at the time—a tumultuous, wavering mind. I speak of everything by way of conversation, and of nothing by way of advice. *Nor am I ashamed, as they are, to confess that I do not know what I do not know.* I would not be so bold in speaking if I had any right to be believed. And that is what I answered a great man who complained of the harshness and vehemence of my exhortations:[14] "Feeling you braced and prepared on one side, I set the other before you with all the care I can, to clarify your judgment, not to bind it. God holds your hearts and will provide you with a choice. I am not so presumptuous as even to wish

12 Hellebore was the classic remedy for madness, hemlock a deadly poison. The Latin is Livy VIII.18.

13 Augustine tells the story of Praestantius in The City of God XVIII.18.

14 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations I.25.

that my opinions should tip the balance in a matter of such importance; my fortune has not trained them for such powerful and lofty conclusions." Indeed, I have not only a great many traits of temperament but also a fair number of opinions that I would gladly put my son off, if I had one. What if the truest are not always the most suitable for man, so wild is his makeup?

THE LAME

An Italian proverb about lame women shows how readily reason invents causes for anything.

3.11.11 Apropos or not, it does not matter. They say in Italy, as a common proverb, that he does not know Venus in her perfect sweetness who has not lain with a lame woman. Fortune, or some particular incident, put this saying into the people's mouths long ago; and it is said of males as well as females. For the queen of the Amazons answered the Scythian who invited her to love: *The lame man does it best.* In that female republic, to escape the domination of males, they maimed them from childhood—arms, legs and other limbs that gave them an advantage over the women—and used them only for what we use women for over here. I would have said that the irregular movement of a lame woman brought some new pleasure to the business, and some spice of sweetness to those who try it; but I have just learned that even ancient philosophy has settled the question. It says that since the legs and thighs of lame women do not receive, because of their imperfection, the nourishment due to them, the result is that the genital parts, which are just above, are fuller, better nourished and more vigorous. Or else that, since this defect hinders exercise, those who have it dissipate their strength less and come more whole to the games of Venus. Which is also the reason why the Greeks decried women weavers as being hotter than other women: because of the sedentary trade they practice, without much bodily exercise. What can we not reason about at that rate? Of these women I could also say that the jiggling their work gives them, sitting like

that, arouses and stirs them, as the jolting and shaking of their coaches does the ladies.

3.11.12 Do not these examples serve what I was saying at the beginning: that our reasons often run ahead of the fact, and have so infinite an extent of jurisdiction that they judge and operate even in emptiness and non-being? Besides the flexibility of our invention in forging reasons for all sorts of dreams, our imagination is likewise found to be easy in receiving impressions of falsehood from very frivolous appearances. For on the sole authority of the ancient and public use of this saying, I once made myself believe that I had received more pleasure from a woman because she was not straight, and counted that among her charms.

3.11.13 Torquato Tasso, in the comparison he makes between France and Italy, says he has noticed that we have thinner legs than Italian gentlemen, and attributes the cause to our being continually on horseback. That is the very cause from which Suetonius draws an entirely opposite conclusion: for he says, on the contrary, that Germanicus had made his legs thicker by persistent practice of this same exercise. There is nothing so supple and erratic as our understanding. It is the shoe of Theramenes, good for any foot. And it is double and diverse, and so are its materials. "Give me a drachma of silver," said a Cynic philosopher to Antigonus. "That is not a king's gift," he replied. "Then give me a talent."[15]

3.11.14 "That is not a gift for a Cynic." *Whether that heat loosens more*
channels and hidden
Pores, through which the sap may reach the new plants,
Or rather hardens the soil and binds its gaping veins,
So that neither fine rains nor the scorching sun's fiercer
Power nor the North Wind's piercing cold may sear it.[16]

15 Theramenes, Athenian politician of the late 5th century BC, was nicknamed "the buskin," a boot that fits either foot. The Cynic and Antigonus anecdote is from Seneca, On Benefits II.17.

16 Virgil, Georgics I.89–93, giving opposite explanations of why burning stubble benefits a field.

3.11.15 *Every medal has its reverse.* That is why Clitomachus said long ago that Carneades had surpassed the labors of Hercules, for having torn assent from men—that is, opinion and rashness in judging. This idea of Carneades, so vigorous, was born long ago, in my view, from the impudence of those who profess to know, and from their boundless arrogance. Aesop was put up for sale with two other slaves. The buyer asked the first what he could do; to make himself valued, that one promised wonders—he knew this and he knew that. The second said as much of himself, or more. When it came to Aesop's turn, and he too was asked what he could do: "Nothing," he said, "for these two have taken everything already: they know everything." So it has happened in the school of philosophy. The pride of those who attributed to the human mind the capacity for all things produced in others, out of spite and rivalry, the opinion that it is capable of nothing. Some hold the same extreme in ignorance that others hold in knowledge. So that no one can deny that man is immoderate everywhere, and that he has no stopping point but that of necessity and the inability to go further.

III.12 Of Physiognomy

De la Physionomie

Montaigne praises Socrates' natural simplicity, recounts the civil wars and plague, and asks whether a good face shows a good soul.

3.12.1 Almost all the opinions we hold are taken on authority and on credit. There is no harm in that: we could not choose worse than by ourselves, in so feeble an age. That image of Socrates' discourses which his friends have left us, we approve only out of reverence for public approval. It is not from our own knowledge: they are not in keeping with our usage. If something like them were born now, few men would prize it. We perceive graces only when they are pointed, puffed up and swollen with artifice. Those that flow beneath naturalness and simplicity easily escape a coarse sight like ours.[1] They have a delicate and hidden beauty; it takes a clear, well-purged sight to discover that secret light. Is not naturalness, in our view, akin to foolishness, and a quality to be reproached? Socrates makes his soul move with a natural and common motion. So says a peasant, so says a woman. He never has anything in his mouth but coachmen, joiners, cobblers and houses. These are inductions and similes drawn from the commonest and most familiar actions of men; everyone understands him. Under so humble a form we would never have picked out the nobility and splendor of his admirable conceptions—we who consider flat and low all those that learning does not elevate, who perceive richness only in display

1 Socrates' friends who left accounts of his talk are chiefly Plato and Xenophon.

and pomp. Our world is formed only for ostentation. Men puff themselves up with nothing but wind, and move by leaps and bounds, like inflated balls. This man does not set himself vain fancies. His aim was to provide us with things and precepts that really and more directly serve life: *To keep the mean, to hold to the limit, / And to follow nature.* He was also always one and the same. And he rose to the highest point of vigor not by fits and starts but by temperament. Or rather, he raised nothing, but instead brought down and led back to his own original and natural level, and subjected to it, vigor, harshness and difficulties. For in Cato one sees quite clearly that it is a pace strained far above the common.[2] In the brave exploits of his life, and in his death, one feels him always mounted on his high horses. This man keeps to the ground, and at a gentle, ordinary pace treats the most useful subjects, and bears himself both toward death and toward the thorniest hardships that can arise in the course of human life. It has turned out well that the man most worthy to be known and to be held up to the world as an example should be the one of whom we have the most certain knowledge. He has been illuminated by the most clear-sighted men who ever lived. The witnesses we have of him are admirable in fidelity and in ability. It is a great thing to have been able to give such order to the pure imaginings of a child that, without altering or stretching them, he produced from them the finest effects of our soul. He represents it neither as elevated nor as rich; he represents it only as healthy, but certainly with a very lively and clean health. By these common and natural springs, by these ordinary and familiar notions, without getting agitated or worked up, he set up not only the most orderly but the loftiest and most vigorous beliefs, actions and morals that ever were. It is he who brought human wisdom back down from heaven, where it was wasting its time, to restore it to man, where its most proper and most laborious work lies. See him plead before his judges; see by what reasons he rouses his courage to the hazards of war, what arguments fortify his patience against calumny, tyranny,

2 Lucan, Pharsalia II.381–82, describing Cato the Younger.

death, and against his wife's temper: there is nothing borrowed from art and the sciences. The simplest people recognize in it their own means and strength; it is impossible to go further back or lower. He has done human nature a great favor by showing how much it can do by itself.

RICHER THAN WE THINK

Natural wisdom is enough to live by; learning burdens us more than it helps.

3.12.2 Each of us is richer than we think; but we are trained to borrow and to beg; we are taught to use what belongs to others more than our own. In nothing does man know how to stop at the point of his need. Of pleasure, wealth, power, he takes up more than he can hold. His greed is incapable of moderation. I find it is the same with curiosity for knowledge: he cuts out for himself far more work than he can do, and far more than he has any use for, extending the utility of knowledge as far as its subject matter goes. *As in all things, so in letters too, we suffer from intemperance.* And Tacitus is right to praise Agricola's mother for having curbed in her son an overheated appetite for learning.[3]

3.12.3 Looked at with a steady eye, it is a good that, like the other goods of men, has much vanity and weakness inherent in its nature; and it comes at a high cost. Acquiring it is far more hazardous than acquiring any other food or drink. For with anything else, what we have bought we carry home in some vessel, and there we are free to examine its worth: how much of it we will take, and when. But branches of knowledge we cannot, from the start, put into any vessel but our soul. We swallow them as we buy them, and we leave the market already either infected or improved. Some of them only hinder and burden us instead of nourishing us; and some, under the pretext of curing us, poison us. I have been pleased to see, somewhere, men who out of devotion took a vow of ignorance, as others do of chastity, poverty and penitence. It is also a way of gelding our unruly

3 Seneca, Letters 106; Tacitus' praise is in his Agricola, chapter 4.

appetites to blunt this craving that goads us on to the study of books, and to deprive the soul of that voluptuous self-satisfaction which tickles us with the belief that we know something. And it is a rich fulfillment of the vow of poverty to add poverty of mind to it as well. We need little learning to live at our ease. And Socrates teaches us that it is in us, and how to find it there and make use of it. All this ability of ours that goes beyond the natural kind is more or less vain and superfluous. We are doing well if it does not burden and trouble us more than it serves us. *Little learning is needed for a sound mind.* These are feverish excesses of our mind, a meddlesome and restless instrument. Collect yourself: you will find in yourself Nature's arguments against death—true ones, and the best suited to serve you in your need. They are what make a peasant, and whole peoples, die as steadfastly as a philosopher. Would I have died less cheerfully before I had read the Tusculans? I think not. And when I come down to the point, I feel that my tongue has been enriched, my courage hardly at all.[4] My courage is just as Nature forged it for me, and for the fight it shields itself only in the natural, common way. Books have served me not so much for instruction as for exercise. What if learning, in trying to arm us with new defenses against natural ills, has imprinted their magnitude and weight on our imagination more deeply than it has its arguments and subtleties to shield us from them? Subtleties they are indeed, and with them it often rouses us quite pointlessly. Even in the tightest and wisest authors, see how many other flimsy arguments they scatter around one good one—arguments which, if you look closely, have no body to them. They are mere verbal quibbles that deceive us. But since this may be done to some purpose, I do not want to pick them apart any further. There are enough of that sort in here, in various places, either borrowed or imitated. Still, we must take a little care not to call strength what is only elegance, or solid what is only sharp, or good what is only beautiful: *things that delight more when sipped*

4 Cicero's Tusculan Disputations, whose first book deals with the contempt of death.

than when drunk down. Not everything that pleases nourishes, *where the business at hand concerns not the wit but the soul.*[5] Seeing the efforts Seneca makes to prepare himself against death, seeing him sweat and strain to stiffen and reassure himself, and struggle so long on that perch, I would have shaken his reputation if he had not upheld it most valiantly in dying. His agitation, so ardent and so frequent, shows that he himself was hot-tempered and impetuous. *A great soul speaks more calmly and more securely. The wit has not one color and the soul another.* He must be convicted at his own expense. And it shows to some extent that he was hard pressed by his adversary. Plutarch's way, being more disdainful and more relaxed, is in my view all the more manly and persuasive. I would readily believe that his soul had more assured and more orderly movements. The one, sharper, pricks us and makes us leap with a start; it touches the mind more. The other, more solid, informs us, settles us and comforts us steadily; it touches the understanding more. The former ravishes our judgment; the latter wins it. I have likewise seen other writings, even more revered, which, in depicting the struggle they put up against the goads of the flesh, represent those goads as so burning, so powerful and invincible, that we ourselves, who belong to the common refuse of the people, have as much cause to marvel at the strangeness and unheard-of vigor of their temptation as at their resistance. What is the point of our getting up in arms like this with these exertions of learning?

PEASANTS AND DEATH

Unlearned country people bear poverty, illness and death more steadily than philosophers.

Let us look down at the poor people we see scattered over the ground, heads bent over their work, who know neither Aristotle nor Cato, neither example nor precept. From them Nature draws every day deeds of constancy and patience purer and sterner

5 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations; then Seneca.

than those we study so carefully in the schools. How many do I commonly see who take no notice of poverty? How many who long for death, or go through it without alarm or distress? The man who is digging my garden buried his father or his son this morning. Even the names they call diseases by sweeten and soften their harshness. Consumption, for them, is a cough; dysentery, an upset stomach; pleurisy, a chill; and as they name them gently, so they bear them. They are serious indeed when they interrupt their usual work; they take to their beds only to die. *That simple and open virtue has been turned into an obscure and clever science.*

WAR ON HIS DOORSTEP

Civil war ravages his lands, and suspicion falls on him from both sides.

3.12.4 I was writing this at about the time when a heavy load of our troubles settled for several months, with all its weight, right on top of me. On one side I had the enemy at my door; on the other, the marauders, worse enemies: *the fight is waged not with arms but with vices.* And I was experiencing every kind of military outrage at once: *An enemy to be feared is at hand on the right and on the left, / And with harm close by he menaces both flanks.* A monstrous war! Other wars act outward; this one acts against itself as well, eating away and destroying itself with its own poison. It is by nature so malignant and ruinous that it ruins itself along with everything else, and tears and rends itself in its fury.[6]

6 The campaigns of 1585–1586 in Guyenne during the Wars of Religion, fought around Montaigne's lands. The verses are from Ovid, Letters from Pontus.

> We see it more often dissolve of itself than through scarcity of any necessity or through enemy force. All discipline flees from it. It comes to cure sedition and is full of it. It means to punish disobedience and sets the example of it; and, employed in defense of the laws, it plays its part in rebellion against its own. What have we come to? Our medicine carries infection. *Our sickness is poisoned*
> *By the help it is given.*
> *It grows worse and sicker with the treatment.*
> *Right and wrong, all confounded in our wicked frenzy,*
> *Have turned from us the just will of the gods.*[7]

3.12.5 In these epidemic diseases one can tell the healthy from the sick at the beginning; but when they come to last, as ours has, the whole body feels it, head and heels alike: no part is free from corruption. For there is no air that is breathed in so greedily, that spreads and penetrates so, as license. Our armies are bound and held together now only by foreign cement; out of Frenchmen no one knows any longer how to make a steady, disciplined army. What a disgrace! There is only as much discipline as borrowed soldiers show us. As for us, we conduct ourselves at our own discretion, not the commander's—each at his own; the commander has more to deal with inside than outside. It is for the command to follow, to court and to bend; it alone has to obey; all the rest are free and dissolute. It pleases me to see how much cowardice and faintheartedness there is in ambition, and through how much abjection and servility it must reach its goal. But this it displeases me to see: good-natured characters, capable of justice, being corrupted every day in managing and commanding this chaos. Long toleration breeds custom; custom, consent and imitation. We had enough ill-born souls without spoiling the good and noble ones. So that, if we go on like this, there will hardly be anyone left to whom we can entrust the health of this state, should Fortune give it back to us. *At least do*

7 Virgil, Aeneid; then Catullus.

not prevent this young man / From coming to the aid of a world turned upside down![8]

3.12.6 What has become of that ancient precept, that soldiers should fear their commander more than the enemy? And of that marvelous example: when an apple tree was found enclosed within the bounds of a Roman army's camp, the army was seen the next day moving off and leaving the owner the full count of his apples, ripe and delicious? I would much like our young men, instead of spending their time on less useful travels and less honorable apprenticeships, to put half of it into seeing war at sea under some good captain, a Knight Commander of Rhodes, and half into studying the discipline of the Turkish armies. For it differs from ours in many ways and has many advantages over it. This is one: our soldiers become more licentious on campaign; theirs, more restrained and fearful.[9] For offenses or thefts against the common people, which are punished with a beating in peacetime, are capital crimes in war. For an egg taken without paying, the fixed count is fifty strokes of the stick. For anything else, however slight, that is not needed for food, they are impaled or beheaded without delay. I was astonished to see, in the history of Selim, the cruelest conqueror that ever was, that when he subjugated Egypt, the fine gardens around the city of Damascus—wide open, in conquered land, with his army camped on the very spot—were left untouched by the soldiers' hands, because they had not been given the signal to plunder.

3.12.7 But is there any ill in a government worth fighting with so deadly a drug? Not even, said Favonius, the usurpation of a commonwealth by a tyrant's seizure. Plato likewise does not consent to doing violence to the peace of one's country in order to cure it, and does not accept the reform that disturbs and endangers everything and costs the citizens their blood and their ruin. He

8 Virgil, Georgics, of the young Octavian; readers have seen here an allusion to Henry of Navarre.

9 The apple-tree story is told by Frontinus of the army of Marcus Scaurus. The Knights of Saint John, once of Rhodes, then held Malta.

lays down that the duty of a good man, in that case, is to leave everything be, and only pray God to set his extraordinary hand to it. And he seems to bear a grudge against Dion, his great friend, for having proceeded somewhat differently. I was a Platonist on this point before I knew there was any Plato in the world.[10] And if this man is to be flatly excluded from our fellowship (he who, through the sincerity of his conscience, deserved divine favor to penetrate so far into the Christian light through the general darkness of the world of his time), I do not think it becomes us to let ourselves be taught by a pagan how impious it is to expect from God no help that is simply his own, without our cooperation. I often wonder whether, among so many people who meddle in such business, there has been anyone of so feeble an understanding as to have been seriously persuaded that he was moving toward reformation by the worst of deformations; that he was heading for his salvation by the most explicit causes we have of most certain damnation; that by overturning the government, the magistracy and the laws under whose protection God has placed him, by filling brotherly hearts with parricidal hatreds, by calling the devils and the Furies to his aid, he could bring help to the sacrosanct gentleness and justice of the divine law. Ambition, avarice, cruelty and vengeance do not have enough impetuosity of their own: let us bait them and fan them with the glorious title of justice and devotion. No worse state of affairs can be imagined than where wickedness becomes legitimate and, with the magistrate's leave, puts on the cloak of virtue: *Nothing is more deceptive in appearance than a depraved religion, where the will of the gods is made a cloak for crimes.* The extreme form of injustice, according to Plato, is for what is unjust to be held just.[11]

10 Marcus Favonius, a follower of Cato, held that civil war was worse than tyranny. Dion overthrew the tyrant Dionysius II of Syracuse by force.

3.12.8 The people suffered greatly then, not only the present damage, *such turmoil there is*

Everywhere, in all the fields, but the future damage as well. The living had to suffer from it, and so did those not yet born. They plundered the people—and me, consequently—right down to their hope, robbing them of everything they had laid by to live on for many years: *What they cannot carry or drive off, they destroy;*

And the criminal mob burns innocent cottages.
Walls give no security; the fields lie waste from the raids.

3.12.9 Besides this shock, I suffered others. I incurred the troubles that moderation brings in such diseases. I was mauled on every side. To the Ghibelline I was a Guelph, to the Guelph a Ghibelline. One of my poets puts it well, but I do not know where. The location of my house and my acquaintance with the men of my neighborhood presented me in one light, my life and my actions in another. No formal accusations were made, for there was nothing to bite on. I never abandon the laws, and anyone who had investigated me would have ended up in my debt. They were silent suspicions circulating underhand, which never lack some plausibility in so confused a mixture—any more than there is ever a lack of envious or foolish minds.[12] I usually lend a hand to the damaging presumptions that Fortune sows against me, through a habit I have always had of shunning to justify, excuse or explain myself, for I think that to plead for my conscience is to put it up for arbitration. *For clarity is diminished by argument.* And as if everyone could see into me as clearly as I do, instead of drawing back from the accusation I step forward to meet it, and rather heighten it with an ironic, mocking confession—unless I keep flatly silent about it, as a thing unworthy of an answer. But those who take this for overweening confidence bear me hardly less ill will than those who take it for the weakness of an indefensible cause. Especially the great, with

11 Livy.
12 Guelphs and Ghibellines: the rival factions of medieval Italy, supporting the papacy and the emperor respectively.

whom lack of submission is the ultimate fault. They are harsh toward any justice that knows itself and feels its own worth, and is not submissive, humble and suppliant. I have often bumped against this pillar. Be that as it may, over what happened to me then an ambitious man would have hanged himself; so would a greedy one. I have no concern whatever for acquiring. *Let me have what I have now, or even less, and live for myself / What remains of my life, if the gods will that any remain.* But losses that come to me through another's wrongdoing, whether theft or violence, pinch me much as they would a man sick and tortured with avarice. The offense is immeasurably more bitter than the loss. A thousand different kinds of ills came rushing at me one after another.[13] I would have borne them more cheerfully all together in a crowd. I was already considering which of my friends I could entrust with a needy and unfortunate old age. After casting my eyes all around, I found myself stripped bare. To let oneself fall straight down, and from such a height, one must fall into the arms of a solid, vigorous and fortunate affection. Such are rare, if there are any. In the end I realized that the safest course was to trust myself with myself and with my need; and that if I happened to stand coldly in Fortune's favor, I should commend myself more strongly to my own, cling to myself, look more closely to myself. In all things men throw themselves on outside supports to spare their own, which alone are sure and alone powerful, for one who knows how to arm himself with them. Everyone runs elsewhere, and into the future, because no one has arrived at himself. And I concluded that these were useful misfortunes: first, because bad pupils must be warned with strokes of the whip when reason is not enough, just as with fire and the force of wedges we bring a crooked piece of wood back to straightness. I have been preaching to myself for so long to hold on to myself and keep apart from outside things; yet I still keep turning my eyes aside. A great man's goodwill, a favorable word from him, a kindly look, tempts me. God knows whether there is any shortage of those these days, and what meaning

13 Horace, Epistles.

such things carry! I still listen without a frown to the inducements offered me to draw me into the marketplace, and I defend myself against them so feebly that it seems I would rather willingly let myself be won over. Now a mind so unteachable needs beatings; and this vessel that is coming apart, coming unstitched, slipping away and escaping from itself, must be hammered back and tightened with good blows of the mallet. Secondly, this misfortune served me as an exercise to prepare me for worse, in case I, who through the kindness of Fortune and the nature of my character hoped to be among the last, should come to be among the first caught by this storm. It taught me early to constrain my life and set it in order for a new condition. True freedom is to have power over oneself in all things. *Most powerful is he who has himself in his own power.* In ordinary, peaceful times one prepares for moderate and common mishaps; but in this confusion we have been in for thirty years, every Frenchman, whether individually or collectively, sees himself at every hour on the verge of the complete overthrow of his fortune. All the more must we keep our courage stocked with stronger and more vigorous provisions. Let us be grateful to fate for having made us live in an age that is not soft, languid or idle. Many a man who would not have become famous by any other means will make himself famous by his misfortune. Just as I rarely read in histories of such upheavals in other states without regretting that I could not have observed them better in person, so my curiosity makes me take some satisfaction in seeing with my own eyes this notable spectacle of our public death, its symptoms and its form. And since I could not delay it, I am content to be destined to witness it and learn from it. Indeed we plainly seek to see, even in shadow and in the fictions of the theater, the representation of the tragic play of human fortune. It is not without compassion for what we hear; but we take pleasure in arousing our distress through the rarity of these pitiful events. Nothing tickles that does not pinch. And good historians shun calm narratives like stagnant water and a dead sea, to get back to seditions and wars, where they know we

are calling them. I doubt whether I can decently admit at how low a cost to the repose and tranquility of my life I have spent more than half of it amid the ruin of my country. I get my patience a little too cheaply in misfortunes that do not seize me personally; and when I come to complain to myself, I look not so much at what is taken from me as at what remains safe, both within and without. There is some consolation in dodging, now one, now another, of the ills that keep eyeing us one after another and land their blows elsewhere, all around us. Also, in matters of public interest, the more widely my affection is spread, the weaker it is. Add that it is half true that *we feel public misfortunes only insofar as they touch our private affairs*. And that the health from which we started was such that it itself eases the regret we ought to feel for it. It was health, but only by comparison with the sickness that followed it. We have not fallen from very high. Corruption and brigandage that hold rank and office seem to me the least bearable. Being robbed in a wood is less of an outrage than being robbed in a place of safety. It was a general assemblage of limbs, each rotten in its own way, vying with one another, and most of them with inveterate ulcers that no longer admitted or asked for a cure.

3.12.10 So this collapse certainly roused me more than it crushed me, with the help of my conscience, which bore itself not only peacefully but proudly; and I found nothing to reproach myself with. Also, since God never sends men evils, any more than goods, that are wholly unmixed, my health held up during that time better than usual. And just as without it I can do nothing, there are few things I cannot do with it. It enabled me to rouse all my reserves and to put my hand up against the wound, which might well have gone deeper. And I found, by testing my patience, that I had some grip against Fortune, and that it would take a heavy blow to knock me out of the saddle. I do not say this to provoke her into charging me more vigorously. I am her servant; I hold out my hands to her. For God's sake, let her be satisfied! Do I feel her assaults? I certainly do. Just as those overwhelmed and possessed by sadness still let

themselves be touched at intervals by some pleasure, and a smile escapes them, so I have enough power over myself to make my ordinary state peaceful and free of distressing thoughts; but still I let myself be caught off guard now and then by the bites of these unpleasant thoughts, which strike me while I am arming myself to drive them away or wrestle with them. Here is another aggravation of my troubles that came to me on the heels of the rest.

THE PLAGUE

Plague drives his household from home, and the dying peasants show him true resolution.

Both outside and inside my house I was greeted by a plague more violent than any other. For just as healthy bodies are subject to more serious diseases, because only those can overcome them, so my very healthy air, where within anyone's memory the contagion, though close by, had never been able to gain a foothold, produced strange effects when it came to be poisoned. *The funerals of old and young crowd thick together; no head / Does cruel Proserpina pass by.* I had to endure this pleasant predicament: the sight of my house filled me with dread. Everything in it was unguarded and abandoned to anyone who wanted it. I, who am so hospitable, was put to a very painful search for a refuge for my household.[14] A household gone astray, frightening its friends and itself, and causing horror wherever it tried to settle, having to change lodgings as soon as one of the band began to feel a pain in the tip of a finger. All illnesses are then taken for plague; no one takes the time to identify them. And the best of it is that, by the rules of medicine, whenever you come near any danger you must spend forty days in dread of the disease, your imagination meanwhile working on you in its own way and making even your health feverish. All this would have affected me much less if I had not had to feel the sufferings of

14 The plague of 1585–1586 in Guyenne, which drove Montaigne and his household from their home for six months.

others and serve wretchedly for six months as guide to this caravan. For I carry my preservatives within me: resolution and endurance. Apprehension, which is particularly feared in this disease, hardly troubles me. And if I had been alone and had wanted to take flight, it would have been a much more cheerful flight, and much farther away. It is a death that does not seem to me among the worst. It is usually short, a stupor, without pain, consoled by the common lot, without ceremony, without mourning, without a crowd. But as for the people round about, not one soul in a hundred could be saved. *You would see the shepherds' realms deserted, / And the pastures empty far and wide.* In this place my best income comes from manual labor. What a hundred men worked for me lay idle for a long time. Now what an example of resolution did we not see then in the simplicity of all these people! Generally, everyone gave up caring for life. The grapes, the chief wealth of the region, remained hanging on the vines; all alike were preparing for and awaiting death that evening or the next day, with faces and voices so little frightened that it seemed they had come to terms with this necessity, and that it was a universal and inevitable sentence. It always is. But on how little does resolution in dying depend! The gap and difference of a few hours, the mere thought of company, changes our apprehension of it. Look at these people: because they are dying in the same month—children, young people, old people—they are no longer stunned, they no longer weep for themselves. I saw some who were afraid of being left behind, as in a horrible solitude. And generally I saw no concern among them but for burial: it grieved them to see the bodies scattered across the fields at the mercy of the animals, which promptly swarmed there. How differently human notions are cut! The Neorites, a nation that Alexander subjugated, throw the bodies of the dead into the depths of their woods to be eaten there—the only burial they consider happy. One man, still healthy, was already digging his grave; others lay down in theirs while still alive. And one of my laborers, as he was dying, pulled the earth over himself with his

hands and feet.[15] Was that not tucking himself in to sleep more comfortably? An undertaking somewhat comparable in loftiness to that of the Roman soldiers who were found after the battle of Cannae with their heads plunged into holes they had dug and filled in with their own hands, suffocating themselves in them. In short, a whole nation was promptly brought by habit to a pitch that yields in firmness to no studied and deliberated resolution.[16]

3.12.11 Most of learning's instructions for encouraging us have more show than force, and more ornament than fruit. We have abandoned Nature and want to teach her her lesson—she who guided us so happily and so surely. And meanwhile the traces of her teaching, and the little of her image that, thanks to ignorance, remains imprinted on the life of this rustic crowd of unpolished men—these learning is forced to go borrowing every day, to make of them a model of constancy, innocence and tranquility for its pupils. It is a fine thing to see these men, full of so much fine knowledge, having to imitate this foolish simplicity, and to imitate it in the very first actions of virtue; and to see our wisdom learn from the very beasts the most useful teachings for the greatest and most necessary parts of our life: how we should live and die, manage our property, love and raise our children, maintain justice. A singular testimony to human sickness; and proof that this reason, which we handle as we please, always finding some diversity and novelty, leaves in us no visible trace of Nature. And men have done with Nature as perfumers do with oil: they have adulterated her with so many arguments and reasonings brought in from outside that she has become variable and particular to each person, and has lost her own constant and universal face. And we must seek testimony of her from the beasts, testimony not subject to favor, corruption or diversity of opinions. For it is quite true that they themselves do not always go exactly along Nature's road; but they stray from it

15 A people of Gedrosia, on the coast of modern Pakistan, described by Diodorus Siculus.

16 Hannibal's great victory over the Romans in 216 BC.

so little that you can always see the rut. Just as horses led by hand do plenty of bucking and breaking away, but only to the length of their halters, and still always follow the steps of the one leading them; and as the hawk takes flight, but under the restraint of its tether line.

FORETHOUGHT OF ILLS

Rehearsing misfortunes torments more than suffering them; nature will teach us to die.

Meditate on exile, torture, war, disease, shipwreck, so that you may be a novice to no misfortune. What good does it do us, this eagerness to anticipate all the ills of human nature and to prepare ourselves with so much trouble even against those that may perhaps never touch us? (*The possibility of suffering makes us as sad as those who suffer.* Not only the blow, but the wind and the fart of it strike us.) Or, like the most feverish—for it certainly is a fever—to go and have yourself whipped right now because it may happen that Fortune will make you suffer it one day, and to put on your fur-lined gown on Saint John's Day in June because you will need it at Christmas? "Throw yourselves into the experience of all the ills that can befall you, especially the most extreme," they say; "test yourselves there, make yourselves secure there." On the contrary: the easiest and most natural thing would be to unburden even our thoughts of them. They will not come soon enough; their real existence does not last long enough for us; our mind must stretch them out and lengthen them, absorb them into itself beforehand and dwell on them, as if they did not weigh heavily enough on our senses. "They will weigh enough when they are here," says one of the masters—not of some soft sect, but of the hardest. "Meanwhile, favor yourself; believe what you like best. What good does it do you to go gathering up and anticipating your ill fortune, to lose the present for fear of the future, and to be miserable now because you are bound to be so in time?" Those are his words. Learning certainly does us a fine service by instructing us very precisely in the dimensions

of our ills. *Sharpening mortal hearts with cares.* It would be a pity if any part of their magnitude escaped our feeling and knowledge.[17] It is certain that for most people preparing for death has caused more torment than undergoing it. It was truly said long ago, and by a very judicious author: *Exertion affects the senses less than brooding does.* The sense of death at hand sometimes inspires us of itself with a prompt resolution no longer to avoid what is utterly inevitable. Many gladiators were seen in times past who, after fighting like cowards, swallowed death courageously, offering their throats to the enemy's sword and inviting it. The distant prospect of death to come requires a slow firmness, and one therefore hard to sustain. If you do not know how to die, never mind.[18]

> Nature will teach you on the spot, fully and adequately; she will do this job for you exactly; do not trouble yourself about it. *In vain, mortals, you seek the uncertain hour*
> *Of your end, and by what road death will come.*
> *It is less pain to suffer a sudden, certain ruin*
> *Than to endure for long what you fear.* We trouble life with concern about death, and death with concern about life. The one distresses us, the other frightens us. It is not against death that we prepare ourselves; that is too momentary a thing. A quarter of an hour of suffering, without consequence and without harm, does not deserve special precepts. To tell the truth, we are preparing ourselves against the preparations for death.[19]

Philosophy orders us to keep death always before our eyes, to foresee it and consider it ahead of time, and then gives us rules and precautions to see to it that this foresight and this thought do not wound us. That is what physicians do who throw us into illnesses so that they will have something to use their drugs and their skill on. If we have not known how to live, it is unjust to teach us how to die and to make the end out of keeping with the

17 Seneca, the Stoic, in his Letters.
18 Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory.
19 Maximianus, Elegies, once attributed to Cornelius Gallus.

whole. If we have known how to live steadfastly and tranquilly, we will know how to die the same way. They may boast about it as much as they like: *The whole life of philosophers is a meditation on death.* But it seems to me that death is indeed the end of life, yet not its aim. It is its end, its extremity, yet not its object. Life should be its own aim, its own purpose. Its proper study is to regulate itself, guide itself, bear with itself. Among the many other duties comprised in the general and principal chapter of knowing how to live is this article of knowing how to die—and one of the lightest, if our fear did not give it weight.

3.12.12 Judged by their usefulness and by their natural truth, the lessons of simplicity hardly yield to those that learning preaches to us to the contrary. Men differ in feeling and in strength; they must be led to their good according to what they are, and by different roads. *Wherever the storm drives me, I put in as a guest.* I never saw any peasant among my neighbors start pondering with what countenance and assurance he would pass that last hour. Nature teaches him not to think about death except when he is dying. And then he does it with better grace than Aristotle, whom death presses doubly, both by itself and by such long premeditation. That is why it was Caesar's opinion that the least premeditated death was the happiest and the least burdened. *He suffers more than necessary who suffers before it is necessary.* The bitterness of this imagining springs from our curiosity. This is how we always encumber ourselves, wanting to anticipate and lord it over nature's prescriptions. It is only for learned doctors to dine the worse for it while in perfect health, and to scowl at the image of death. Ordinary people need neither remedy nor consolation except at the impact, at the blow, and they consider it exactly as much as they suffer from it. Is that not what we say: that the stupidity and lack of apprehension of the common people give them this patience in present ills and this profound unconcern about sinister future events?[20] That their souls, being coarser and duller, are less easily penetrated and stirred? For God's sake, if that is so, let us from now on

20 Plutarch reports that Caesar said this at supper on the eve of his assassination.

hold a school of stupidity. It is the ultimate fruit that the sciences promise us, and this school leads its pupils to it so gently.

SOCRATES' DEFENSE

Montaigne paraphrases Socrates' plea to his judges as a model of natural simplicity.

3.12.13 We will not lack good teachers to interpret natural simplicity. Socrates will be one. For, as far as I remember, he speaks roughly to this effect to the judges deliberating on his life: I am afraid, gentlemen, that if I beg you not to put me to death, I will entangle myself in the charge my accusers bring, which is that I set myself up as knowing more than others, as having some more hidden knowledge of things above and below us. I know that I have neither frequented nor explored death, nor seen anyone who has tested its qualities so as to instruct me about it.[21] Those who fear it presuppose that they know it; as for me, I know neither what it is nor what things are like in the other world. Perhaps death is a thing indifferent, perhaps a thing desirable. It is to be believed, however, that if it is a migration from one place to another, there is improvement in going to live with so many great men who have passed away, and in being exempt from having anything more to do with unjust and corrupt judges. If it is an annihilation of our being, it is still an improvement to enter a long and peaceful night. We feel nothing sweeter in life than a tranquil rest and a sleep deep and without dreams. The things I know to be bad, such as wronging one's neighbor and disobeying one's superior, whether God or man, I carefully avoid; those I do not know to be good or bad, I could not fear. If I go off to die and leave you alive, the gods alone see which of us, you or I, will fare better. Therefore, as far as I am concerned, you will decide as you please. But, in keeping with my way of advising what is just and useful, I do say that for the sake of your conscience you will do better to set me free, unless you see further into my case than I do. And judging by my past

21 A free paraphrase of Socrates' defense in Plato's Apology.

actions, both public and private, by my intentions, by the profit that so many of our citizens, young and old, draw every day from my conversation, and by the benefit I bring to you all, you cannot duly acquit yourselves toward my deserts except by ordering that, in view of my poverty, I be fed in the Prytaneum at public expense—which I have often seen you grant to others on lesser grounds. Do not take it for obstinacy or disdain that I do not, following custom, go about beseeching you and moving you to pity.[22] I have friends and relatives—for I was not, as Homer says, begotten of wood or stone any more than others are—who are capable of appearing in tears and mourning; and I have three weeping children with whom to move you to pity. But I would bring shame on our city, at my age and with such a reputation for wisdom that I stand accused because of it, if I stooped to such base displays. What would people say of the other Athenians? I have always admonished those who have heard me speak not to buy back their lives by a dishonorable act. And in my country's wars, at Amphipolis, at Potidaea, at Delium and others where I was present, I showed in deed how far I was from securing my safety by my shame. Moreover, I would be compromising your duty and inviting you to ugly acts; for it is not for my entreaties to persuade you, but for the pure and solid reasons of justice. You have sworn to the gods to conduct yourselves thus. It would seem that I wanted to suspect you and accuse you of not believing that there are any. And I would be bearing witness against myself that I do not believe in them as I should, by distrusting their guidance and not placing my case simply in their hands.[23] I trust in them entirely, and hold it certain that in this matter they will do what is most fitting for you and for me. Good men, whether living or dead, have nothing whatever to fear from the gods. Is that not a childlike plea, of unimaginable loftiness—and used in what an extremity! Truly it

22 The Prytaneum: the public hall in Athens where honored citizens were fed at the city's expense.

23 Battles of the Peloponnesian War in the 430s and 420s BC, at which Socrates served as a foot soldier.

was right that he should prefer it to the one the great orator Lysias had written out for him, excellently fashioned in the judicial style but unworthy of so noble a defendant. Would anyone have heard a pleading voice from the mouth of Socrates? Would that proud virtue have struck its sails at the height of its display? [24] And would his rich and powerful nature have entrusted its defense to art, and in its supreme trial renounced truth and naturalness, the ornaments of his speech, to deck itself out with the makeup, the figures and the feints of a memorized oration? He acted very wisely, and true to himself, in not corrupting an incorruptible tenor of life and so holy an image of human form in order to prolong his decrepitude by a year, and in not betraying the immortal memory of that glorious end. He owed his life not to himself but to the example of the world. Would it not have been a public loss if he had ended it in an idle and obscure way? Certainly so unconcerned and easy a consideration of his own death deserved that posterity should consider it all the more on his behalf. And so it did. And there is nothing in justice so just as what Fortune ordained to honor his memory. For the Athenians held those who had caused his death in such abomination that people shunned them like excommunicated persons. Everything they had touched was held polluted; no one would bathe with them at the baths, no one greeted them or had any dealings with them; so that in the end, unable to bear this public hatred any longer, they hanged themselves.

3.12.14 Someone may think that, of all the examples I could have chosen from the sayings of Socrates to serve my purpose, I picked this one badly, and judge that this reasoning rises above common opinion. I did it deliberately, for I judge otherwise. I hold that, in rank and in naturalness, it is a reasoning that stands much further back and lower than common opinion. With an artless boldness and a childlike assurance, it shows nature's pure and first impression, and nature's ignorance. For it is believable that we naturally fear pain, but not death for its own sake. Death is a part of our being no less essential than liv-

24 Lysias (c. 445–380 BC), Athenian orator and writer of speeches for litigants.

ing. Why would Nature have bred in us a hatred and horror of it, when it is so very useful to her in sustaining the succession and alternation of her works? And when, in this universal commonwealth, it serves birth and increase more than loss or ruin: *Thus the sum of things is renewed: / One life put to death has given a thousand.* The failing of one life is the passage to a thousand other lives. Nature has imprinted on animals the care of themselves and of their preservation. They go so far as to fear being impaired: knocking and hurting themselves, our haltering and beating them, accidents within the reach of their senses and experience. But they cannot fear that we will kill them, nor do they have the faculty to imagine death or reason their way to it.[25] And yet it is said that they are seen not only to bear it cheerfully (most horses neigh as they die, and swans sing it), but also to seek it out when they need to, as many examples of elephants show.

BORROWED FLOWERS

He admits his book gathers other men's flowers, though he borrows far less than he could.

3.12.15 Besides, the way of arguing that Socrates uses here: is it not equally admirable for its simplicity and its force? Truly it is much easier to speak like Aristotle and live like Caesar than to speak and live like Socrates. There lies the extreme degree of perfection and of difficulty; art cannot reach it. Now our faculties are not trained that way. We neither try them out nor know them; we clothe ourselves in other people's and let our own lie idle. Someone might say of me, for instance, that here I have merely made a heap of other people's flowers, supplying nothing of my own but the thread to tie them. It is true that I have yielded to public opinion in letting these borrowed ornaments go along with me; but I do not mean them to cover me and hide me. That is the reverse of my design, since I want to

25 The first line is from Lucretius, On the Nature of Things; the second from Ovid, Fasti.

show nothing but what is my own, and mine by nature. If I had trusted myself, I would have taken the risk and spoken entirely on my own. Every day I load myself with them more heavily, beyond my intention and my original form, to suit the fancy of the age, and out of idleness. If it does not become me, as I believe, no matter: it may be useful to someone else. Some people quote Plato and Homer who never set eyes on them; and I have taken plenty of passages from places other than their source. Without effort and without ability, having a thousand volumes around me in this place where I write, I could borrow right now, if I pleased, from a dozen such patchers of old cloth (people I hardly ever leaf through) enough to enamel this treatise on Physiognomy. All it takes is the prefatory epistle of some German to stuff me with quotations; and that is how we go begging for a toothsome glory, to fool the silly world. These hodgepodges of commonplaces, with which so many people husband their studies, are hardly any use except for commonplace subjects. They serve to show us off, not to guide us: a ridiculous fruit of learning, which Socrates mocks so amusingly in his exchange with Euthydemus.[26] I have seen books made about things their authors had never studied or understood. The author hands over to various learned friends the research on this subject and that, to build it up, and contents himself with having drawn up the plan and bound together, by his own ingenuity, this bundle of provisions unknown to him. At least the ink and the paper are his. That is buying or borrowing a book, not making one. It teaches people not that you know how to make a book but, on a point they might have been in doubt about, that you do not. A presiding judge boasted in my presence of having piled up two hundred and some passages from other authors in one of his presidential rulings. By proclaiming it, he wiped out the glory people gave him for it. A petty and absurd boast, to my taste, for such a subject and such a person. I do the opposite. Among so many borrowings, I am very glad

26 Euthydemus is the target of Socrates' teasing both in Plato's dialogue of that name and in Xenophon's Memorabilia.

when I can steal one, disguising and reshaping it for new service. At the risk of letting people say that it is because I failed to understand its natural use, I give it some particular twist of my own hand, so that it may be that much less purely foreign. These people put their thefts on parade and on record; so they stand better with the law than I do. We naturalists consider that the honor of invention is greatly and incomparably to be preferred to the honor of quotation.

3.12.16 If I had wanted to speak from learning, I would have spoken sooner. I would have written at a time closer to my studies, when I had more wit and memory; and if I had wanted to make a profession of writing, I would have trusted the vigor of that age more than this one. And what if this gracious favor that Fortune has lately offered me through this work had come my way in that season, instead of this one, when it is as desirable to possess as it is ready to be lost? Two of my acquaintances, great men in this field, lost half their worth, in my opinion, by refusing to go before the public at forty so as to wait for sixty. Maturity has its defects, as greenness does, and worse ones.[27] And old age is as ill-suited to this kind of work as to any other. Whoever puts his decrepitude under the press is a fool if he hopes to squeeze out of it juices that do not smack of the dismal, the dreamy and the drowsy. Our mind gets constipated and thickens as it ages. I speak of ignorance pompously and lavishly, and of learning meagerly and pitifully: of learning secondarily and incidentally, of ignorance expressly and principally. And I deal specifically with nothing but nothing, and with no knowledge but the knowledge of unknowing. I have chosen the time when the life I have to portray lies entirely before me; what remains of it has more to do with death. And as for my death, if I found it talkative, as others do, I would still gladly give people notice of it as I moved out.

27 The "gracious favor" is probably the friendship of Marie de Gournay, who sought Montaigne out after reading the Essays and became his "adopted daughter."

BEAUTY AND THE FACE

Socrates' ugliness hid a beautiful soul; beauty is powerful, but faces are poor guarantees.

3.12.17 Socrates was a perfect model in all great qualities. It vexes me that he met with a body so ill-favored, as they say, and so ill-matched to the beauty of his soul: he who was so in love with beauty, so mad about it. Nature did him an injustice. Nothing is more likely than that the body should match and correspond to the mind. *It matters greatly to the mind itself in what kind of body it is lodged; for many things arise from the body to sharpen the mind, and many to blunt it.* This writer is speaking of an unnatural ugliness and deformity of limbs. But we also call ugliness an unattractiveness at first sight, which lies chiefly in the face and puts us off by the complexion, a blemish, a rough bearing, often for some inexplicable reason, in limbs that are nevertheless well ordered and whole. The ugliness that clothed a very beautiful soul in La Boétie was of this kind. This superficial ugliness, though it is the most imperious, does less harm to the state of the mind, and carries little certainty in people's opinion. The other, more properly called deformity, being more substantial, more readily strikes home to the inside.[28] Not every shoe of well-polished leather, but every well-shaped shoe, shows the inner shape of the foot. So Socrates said of his ugliness that it accurately revealed as much in his soul, had he not corrected it by education. But in saying so, I think he was joking, as was his habit; never did so excellent a soul make itself.

3.12.18 I cannot say often enough how highly I value beauty, a powerful and advantageous quality. Socrates called it a short-lived tyranny, and Plato the privilege of nature. We have no quality that surpasses it in credit. It holds the first rank in human dealings. It steps forward in front; it seduces and prejudges our judgment with great authority and a wondrous impression. Phryne would have lost her case, in the hands of an

28 The quotation is from Cicero, Tusculan Disputations.

excellent advocate, had she not opened her robe and corrupted her judges with the radiance of her beauty. And I find that Cyrus, Alexander and Caesar, those three masters of the world, did not forget it in conducting their great affairs. Nor did the first Scipio. In Greek a single word embraces the beautiful and the good. And the Holy[29] Spirit often calls good those it means to call beautiful. I would gladly keep the ranking of goods given in the song that Plato says was commonly sung, taken from some ancient poet: health, beauty, wealth. Aristotle says that the right to command belongs to the beautiful, and that when there are people whose beauty approaches that of the images of the gods, veneration is likewise due to them. To someone who asked him why people spent more time, and more often, with the beautiful, he said: "That is a question only a blind man would ask." Most philosophers, and the greatest, paid for their schooling and acquired wisdom through the help and favor of their beauty. Not only in the men who serve me but in animals too, I consider it within two fingers of goodness.

3.12.19 Yet it seems to me that the cast and shape of the face, and the features from which people infer certain inner dispositions and our future fortunes, do not fall very directly and simply under the heading of beauty and ugliness. Any more than every pleasant smell and every clear sky promises health, or every heaviness and stench promises infection, in time of plague. Those who accuse ladies of belying their beauty by their character do not always hit the mark. For a face that is not very well composed may harbor an air of honesty and trustworthiness; just as, conversely, I have sometimes read between two beautiful eyes the threat of a malignant and dangerous nature. There are favorable physiognomies. In a crowd of victorious enemies, among men you do not know, you will immediately choose one rather than another to surrender to and entrust your life to, and not strictly on account of beauty.

3.12.20 Looks are a weak guarantee; still, they count for something. If I had to whip the wicked, I would whip more harshly

those who belie and betray the promises that Nature had planted on their brows. I would punish malice more severely in a kindly appearance. It seems that some faces are lucky and others unlucky. And I believe there is some skill in telling kindly faces from simple ones, stern from rough, malicious from sullen, disdainful from melancholy, and other such neighboring qualities. There are beauties that are not only proud but sour; there are others that are sweet, and beyond that, insipid. As for foretelling future events from them, those are matters I leave undecided.

GOODNESS FROM NATURE

Goodness should grow from nature and reason, not from hope and fear.

3.12.21 As I have said elsewhere, I have taken quite simply and crudely, for my own part, this ancient precept: that we cannot go wrong in following Nature, that the sovereign precept is to conform to her. I have not, like Socrates, corrected my natural dispositions by force of reason, nor in any way disturbed my inclination by art. I let myself go as I came. I fight nothing. My two chief parts live of their own accord in peace and good harmony; but my nurse's milk was, thank God, reasonably healthy and temperate. May I say this in passing? I see a certain image of school-taught goodness held in higher esteem than it is worth, though it is almost the only kind in use among us: a slave to precepts, held down by hope and fear. I love goodness of the kind that laws and religions do not make but perfect and authorize; that feels it has the means to stand without help; that is born in us from its own roots, from the seed of universal reason imprinted in every man who is not unnatural. This reason, which straightens Socrates out of his vicious bent, makes him obedient to the men and gods who command in his city, and courageous in death, not because his soul is immortal but because he is

29 Phryne was a famous Athenian courtesan of the 4th century BC, tried for impiety and acquitted.

mortal. It is a ruinous teaching for any government, and much more harmful than it is ingenious and subtle, that persuades peoples that religious belief alone, without morals, is enough to satisfy divine justice. Experience shows us an enormous difference between devotion and conscience.

SAVED BY HIS FACE

Twice his open face and frank speech disarmed men who meant to seize him.

3.12.22 I have a favorable appearance, both in its features and in how it is read. *Did I say I have? No, I had, Chremes! / Alas, you see only the bones of a worn-out body!* And it makes the opposite impression to Socrates'. It has often happened that people who did not know me at all have relied on me greatly, on the mere credit of my presence and my air, whether in their own affairs or in mine. And in foreign countries I have obtained singular and rare favors from it. But the following two experiences are perhaps worth telling in detail. A certain fellow made a plan to take my house and me by surprise. His trick was to arrive alone at my gate and press rather urgently to be let in.[30] I knew him by name, and had reason to trust him as my neighbor and in some degree my relation by marriage. I had the gate opened for him, as I do for everyone. There he is, all terrified, his horse out of breath, very worn out. He regaled me with this tale: that he had just been set upon half a league away by an enemy of his, whom I also knew (I had heard about their quarrel); that this enemy had chased him hard; and that, having been caught in disarray and outnumbered, he had thrown himself at my gate for safety. He was very worried about his men, he said, whom he believed dead or captured. I quite innocently tried to comfort, reassure and refresh him. Soon after, here come four or five of his soldiers, with the same bearing and the same fright, asking to come in; then others, and still others after them, well equipped

30 The first line is from Terence, The Self-Tormentor; the second from the elegies of Maximianus.

and well armed, up to twenty-five or thirty, pretending to have their enemy at their heels. This mystery began to stir my suspicion. I knew very well what age I was living in, and how much my house might be coveted, and I knew several people of my acquaintance to whom the same misfortune had happened. Be that as it may, finding that there was nothing to be gained by beginning to do a kindness if I did not finish it, and unable to get out of it without breaking off entirely, I let myself go along the most natural and simplest course, as I always do, and ordered that they be let in. Besides, to tell the truth, I am by nature not very distrustful or suspicious. I readily lean toward excuse and the gentler interpretation. I take men according to the common order, and I do not believe in perverse and unnatural inclinations unless strong evidence forces me to, any more than in monsters and miracles. Moreover, I am a man who readily commits himself to Fortune and throws himself headlong into her arms. So far I have had more cause to congratulate myself on this than to complain. I have found her both wiser and better disposed toward my affairs than I am. There are some actions in my life whose conduct may justly be called difficult, or, if you like, prudent. Even of those, suppose a third is my own: the other two thirds are certainly and richly hers. We go wrong, it seems to me, in not entrusting ourselves enough to heaven, and in claiming more for our own conduct than is our due. That is why our plans so often go astray. Heaven is jealous of the scope we give to the rights of human prudence at the expense of its own, and it cuts them down for us all the more, the more we enlarge them. These men stayed on horseback in my courtyard. The leader was with me in my hall; he had refused to have his horse stabled, saying he would have to leave as soon as he had news of his men. He saw himself master of his enterprise, and at that point nothing remained but the execution. He has often said since (for he was not afraid to tell this story) that my face and my frankness had wrested the treachery from his grip. He gets back on his horse, his men keeping their eyes on him con-

stantly to see what signal he would give them, and quite stunned to see him ride out and abandon his advantage.

3.12.23 Another time, trusting to some truce or other that had just been proclaimed in our armies, I set out on a journey through strangely ticklish country. No sooner had word of me got out than three or four troops of horsemen set off from various places to catch me. One of them overtook me on the third day, and I was charged by fifteen or twenty masked gentlemen, followed by a wave of mounted arquebusiers. There I am, taken and surrendered, led into the thick of a nearby forest, unhorsed, robbed, my chests searched, my money box taken, my horses and gear shared out among new masters. We spent a long time arguing in that thicket over my ransom, which they set so high that it was quite plain they hardly knew who I was. They fell into a great argument over my life. And in truth there were several circumstances that showed me the danger I was in. *Then was the time for courage, Aeneas, then for a steady heart.* I kept standing on the terms of my truce, offering to leave them only what they had gained by stripping me, which was not to be despised, with no promise of any other ransom.[31] We had been there two or three hours; they had put me on a horse that had no chance of getting away from them, assigned fifteen or twenty arquebusiers to guard me in particular, and split my people among others, with orders to take us away as prisoners by different roads; and I was already two or three arquebus shots away, *after prayers to Pollux, after pleas to Castor,* when suddenly a most unexpected change came over them. I saw the leader come back to me with gentler words, taking pains to search through the troop for my scattered belongings and having them returned to me, as far as they could be recovered, right down to my money box.[32] The best present they gave me, in the end, was my freedom; the rest hardly mattered to me at the time. The true cause of so novel a change, of this second thought without any apparent impulse, of so miraculous a repentance at such a time, in an enterprise

31 Virgil, Aeneid.

32 Catullus. Castor and Pollux were invoked as protectors of travelers in danger.

planned and deliberate and made legitimate by common practice (for at the outset I openly admitted to them which party I belonged to and which road I was taking): truly I still do not quite know what it was. The most prominent of them, who took off his mask and told me his name, said to me several times then that I owed my deliverance to my face and to the freedom and firmness of my words, which made me undeserving of such a misadventure; and he asked me to pledge him the same in return. It is possible that divine goodness chose to use this vain instrument for my preservation. It protected me again the next day from other, worse ambushes, of which these very men had warned me. The leader of the second band is still on his feet to tell the story; the man in the first was killed not long ago.

3.12.24 If my face did not answer for me, if people did not read the simplicity of my intentions in my eyes and my voice, I would not have lasted so long without quarrels and without giving offense, given this indiscreet freedom of mine to say, rightly or wrongly, whatever comes into my head, and to judge things rashly. This manner may reasonably seem uncivil and ill-suited to our customs; but I have never seen anyone judge it outrageous or malicious, nor anyone take offense at my freedom if he heard it from my own mouth. Words repeated have, as it were, a different sound and a different sense. Besides, I hate nobody. And I am so slack at giving offense that I cannot do it even in the service of reason. When occasion has called me to pass criminal sentences, I have rather fallen short of justice. *So that I would rather sins were not committed than have the heart to punish them.* Aristotle, they say, was reproached for having been too merciful to a wicked man. "I have indeed been merciful," he said, "to the man, not to the wickedness." Ordinary judgments are stirred to punish by the horror of the crime. That very horror cools mine. The horror of the first murder makes me fear a second; and the ugliness of the first cruelty makes me abhor any imitation of it.[33] To me, who am only the jack of clubs, may apply what was said of Charillus, king of Sparta: "He cannot be

33 Livy, History of Rome.

good, since he is not bad to the wicked." Or else this way, for Plutarch gives it both ways, as he gives a thousand other things in different and contrary forms: "He must indeed be good, since he is good even to the wicked." Just as, in lawful actions, I am reluctant to take part when it is against people who dislike it, so too, to tell the truth, in unlawful ones I am not scrupulous enough about taking part when it is with people who consent to it.[34]

34 Charillus was an early king of Sparta; the sayings come from Plutarch. The jack of clubs, a low court card, stands for a person of no consequence.

III.13 Of Experience

De l'Experience
Montaigne finds laws and reason too weak to capture life's variety and turns to self-knowledge, health, and enjoying ordinary living.

3.13.1 There is no desire more natural than the desire for knowledge. We try every means that can lead us to it. When reason fails us, we use experience: *Through various trials experience created art, / Example showing the way.* It is a much weaker and humbler means. But truth is so great a thing that we must not disdain any channel that leads us to it. Reason has so many forms that we do not know which one to take hold of. Experience has no fewer. The inference we try to draw from comparing events is unreliable, because they are always unlike. In this image of things, no quality is so universal as diversity and variety.[1] The Greeks, the Latins and we ourselves all use eggs as the most telling example of likeness. Yet there have been men, notably one at Delphi, who could recognize marks of difference between eggs, so that he never took one for another; and when there were several hens, he could tell which one an egg came from. Dissimilarity intrudes of itself into our works; no art can achieve similarity. Neither Perrozet nor anyone else can polish and whiten the backs of his cards so carefully that some players cannot tell them apart just by watching them slip through another player's hands. Resemblance does not make things one

1 Manilius, Astronomica.

so much as difference makes them other.[2] Nature has bound herself to make nothing that is not unlike everything else.

LAWS AND INTERPRETATION

Multiplying laws and glosses breeds more doubt and more lawsuits, not fewer.

3.13.2 That is why I hardly like the opinion of the man who thought he could curb the authority of judges by a multitude of laws, cutting up their portions for them. He did not perceive that there is as much freedom and latitude in interpreting laws as in making them. And those people are making fun of us who think they can reduce and halt our disputes by calling us back to the express words of the Bible: as if our mind did not find as wide a field in checking someone else's meaning as in presenting its own, and as if there were less animosity and bitterness in glossing than in inventing. We can see how mistaken he was. For we have more laws in France than all the rest of the world put together, and more than would be needed to govern all the worlds of Epicurus: *As once we suffered from crimes, so now we suffer from laws.* And yet we have left so much to our judges' opinion and decision that there was never a liberty so powerful and so licentious. What have our legislators gained by singling out a hundred thousand particular kinds of cases and facts and attaching a hundred thousand laws to them? That number bears no proportion to the infinite diversity of human actions. Multiplying our inventions will never catch up with the variety of cases.[3] Add a hundred times as many: still it will not happen that any future event finds, among all those many thousands of events selected and recorded, one that it can be joined and matched with so exactly that there does not remain some circumstance or difference requiring a different judgment. There is little relation between our actions, which are in perpetual change, and fixed, immovable laws. The most desirable laws are

2 Perrozet was a well-known card maker of Montaigne's time.
3 Tacitus, Annals. Epicurus taught that there are innumerable worlds.

the fewest, the simplest and the most general. And even so, I believe it would be better to have none at all than to have them in such numbers as we do. Nature always gives happier ones than those we give ourselves. Witness the poets' picture of the golden age, and the state in which we see nations live that have no laws but hers. Here are some who, for their only judge, use in their disputes the first passerby traveling along their mountains. And these others choose one of their number on market day, who decides all their lawsuits on the spot. What danger would there be in having the wisest settle ours in the same way, case by case and by eye, without being bound by precedent and consequence? For each foot its own shoe. King Ferdinand, when he sent colonists to the Indies, wisely provided that no students of law should be taken there, for fear that lawsuits would breed in that new world.[4] He regarded it as a science that by its very nature breeds altercation and division, and judged with Plato that lawyers and physicians are a poor stock for a country.

3.13.3 Why is it that our common language, so easy for every other use, becomes obscure and unintelligible in contracts and wills, and that a man who expresses himself so clearly in whatever he says or writes can find no way of stating his meaning in these that does not fall into doubt and contradiction? Unless it is that the princes of this art, applying themselves with special care to picking solemn words and framing artful clauses, have weighed every syllable and examined every kind of seam so minutely that they are now tangled and muddled in an infinity of figures and in such fine distinctions that these can no longer come under any rule or prescription, or any definite understanding. *Whatever is cut up into dust is confused.* Whoever has seen children trying to divide a mass of quicksilver into a set number of parts knows that the more they press and knead it and strive to force it to their law, the more they provoke the freedom of this noble metal: it eludes their skill and keeps breaking

4 Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452–1516), who with Isabella of Castile sponsored Columbus.

up and scattering beyond all count.[5] It is the same here: by subdividing these subtleties, people are taught to multiply doubts; we are set on the road to extending and diversifying difficulties; we lengthen them, we scatter them. By sowing questions and pruning them, we make the world bear fruit and teem with uncertainty and quarrels, just as the earth grows more fertile the more finely it is broken up and the more deeply it is turned. *Learning creates difficulty.* We had doubts about Ulpian, and we have doubts all over again about Bartolus and Baldus. The traces of this countless diversity of opinions should have been wiped out, not paraded as ornaments and drummed into posterity's heads. I do not know what to say about it; but experience makes us feel that so many interpretations dissipate the truth and break it.[6] Aristotle wrote to be understood. If he could not manage it, a less able man will manage it even less, and a third party less than the man who was treating his own ideas. We open up the matter and spread it out by diluting it. Out of one subject we make a thousand, and by multiplying and subdividing we end up in the infinity of Epicurus's atoms. Never did two men judge the same thing alike. And it is impossible to find two opinions exactly alike, not only in different men but in the same man at different times. I usually find something to doubt in what the commentary has not deigned to touch. I stumble more readily on flat ground, like certain horses I know that trip more often on a smooth road.

3.13.4 Who would not say that glosses increase doubt and ignorance, since there is no book, human or divine, that the world busies itself with whose interpretation makes the difficulty dry up? The hundredth commentary hands it on to the next one thornier and more rugged than the first had found it. When have we ever agreed among ourselves: this book has had enough, there is nothing more to say about it now? This is best seen in

5 Seneca, Letters to Lucilius.

6 Quintilian, The Orator's Education. Ulpian was a Roman jurist of the 3rd century AD; Bartolus and Baldus were famous 14th-century Italian commentators on Roman law.

legal wrangling. We give the authority of law to countless doctors, countless rulings and as many interpretations. Do we find any end, for all that, to the need to interpret? Is there any progress or advance toward tranquility to be seen? Do we need fewer lawyers and judges than when this mass of law was still in its first infancy? On the contrary, we obscure and bury understanding. We can no longer reach it except at the mercy of so many fences and barriers. Men do not recognize the natural sickness of their mind. It does nothing but ferret and search, and goes on endlessly circling, building and entangling itself in its own work, like our silkworms, and suffocates in it. *A mouse in pitch.* It thinks it can make out in the distance some sort of glimmer of light and imaginary truth; but while it runs toward it, so many difficulties, obstacles and new quests cross its path that they lead it astray and make it drunk.[7] It is not much different from what happened to Aesop's dogs. Spotting what looked like a dead body floating in the sea, and being unable to get near it, they set about drinking up the water to dry a path to it, and choked. This fits with what one Crates said of the writings of Heraclitus: that they needed a reader who was a good swimmer, so that the depth and weight of his doctrine would not swallow him up and drown him.

3.13.5 It is nothing but individual weakness that makes us content with what others, or we ourselves, have found in this hunt for knowledge; an abler man will not be content with it. There is always room for a successor, yes, and for ourselves, and a road somewhere else. There is no end to our inquiries; our end is in the other world. It is a sign of a shrunken mind when the mind is content, or a sign of weariness. No noble mind stops within itself; it is always reaching and goes beyond its strength; its leaps outrun its achievements. If it does not push forward, press on, back itself into a corner, collide and wheel about, it is only half alive.

7 A Latin proverb for someone hopelessly stuck, collected in Erasmus's Adages.

> Its pursuits are without limit and without form. Its food is wonder, the chase, ambiguity. Apollo made this plain enough by always speaking to us in double, obscure and oblique terms, not feeding us but amusing and occupying us. It is an irregular, perpetual motion, without model and without goal. Its inventions excite one another, follow one another and give birth to one another. *So in a running stream we see*
> *One water rolling after another without end,*
> *All in order, in an eternal course;*
> *One follows another, and one flees another.*
> *By this one, that one is pushed along,*
> *And this one by the other is outrun:*
> *Always water flows into water, and always it is*
> *The same stream, and always different water.*[8]

3.13.6 There is more work in interpreting interpretations than in interpreting things, and more books about books than about any other subject. We do nothing but gloss one another. Everything swarms with commentaries; of authors there is a great shortage. Is not the principal and most celebrated learning of our times the learning to understand the learned? Is that not the common and final goal of all study? Our opinions are grafted onto one another. The first serves as stock for the second, the second for the third. So we climb from rung to rung. And so it happens that the man who has climbed highest often has more honor than merit, for he has climbed only a grain's height above the shoulders of the one before him.

3.13.7 How often, and perhaps how foolishly, have I stretched my book to talk about itself? Foolishly, if only for this reason: I ought to have remembered what I say of others who do the same, that these frequent fond glances at their works show that their hearts quiver with love for them, and that even the disdainful roughness with which they beat them is nothing but the coddling and affectation of a mother's fondness. As Aristotle has

8 The verses are by La Boétie.

it, prizing oneself and despising oneself often spring from the same air of arrogance. As for my excuse, that I ought to have more freedom in this than others, since I write expressly about myself and my writings as about my other actions, and my theme turns back upon itself: I do not know whether everyone will accept it.

3.13.8 I have seen in Germany that Luther has left behind as many divisions and altercations over the doubtful meaning of his opinions as he stirred up over the Holy Scriptures, and more. Our disputes are about words. I ask what nature, pleasure, circle and substitution are. The question is one of words, and is paid in the same coin. A stone is a body. But if someone pressed: "And what is a body?" "Substance." "And what is substance?" and so on, he would end up driving the respondent to the last page of his Calepino. One word is exchanged for another, and often for one less known. I know better what man is than I know what animal is, or mortal, or rational. To settle one doubt, they give me three: it is the Hydra's head.[9] Socrates asked Meno what virtue was. "There is," said Meno, "the virtue of a man and of a woman, of a magistrate and of a private person, of a child and of an old man." "That's splendid!" cried Socrates. "We were looking for one virtue, and you bring us a whole swarm." We put forward one question, and we are handed back a hiveful. Just as no event and no form entirely resembles another, so none entirely differs from another. An ingenious blend of Nature's. If our faces were not alike, we could not tell man from beast; if they were not unlike, we could not tell man from man. All things hold together by some likeness. Every example limps. And the correspondence drawn from experience is always defective and imperfect.[10] Still, we join our comparisons together at some end. That is how laws serve, and that is how they are fitted to each of our affairs: by some roundabout, forced and slanted interpretation.

9 Ambrogio Calepino's Latin dictionary (1502) was so widely used that "calepin" came to mean any dictionary.

10 The exchange is from Plato's dialogue Meno.

THE INJUSTICE OF JUSTICE

Courts condemn the innocent and serve forms over truth; laws are obeyed because they are laws.

3.13.9 Since ethical laws, which concern each person's individual duty in himself, are so hard to frame, as we see they are, it is no wonder if those that govern so many individuals are harder still. Consider the form of this justice that rules us: it is a true testimony to human weakness, so full is it of contradiction and error. What we find to be favor and severity in justice (and we find so much of both that I do not know whether the middle way is found there as often) are diseased parts and unjust members of the very body and essence of justice. Some peasants have just come in haste to tell me that a moment ago, in a forest of mine, they left a man battered with a hundred blows, still breathing, who begged them for water out of pity and for help to lift him up. They say they did not dare go near him and ran away, for fear that the officers of the law would catch them there and that, as happens to people found near a murdered man, they would have to answer for this incident, to their utter ruin, having neither the ability nor the money to defend their innocence. What could I have said to them? It is certain that this act of humanity would have got them into trouble.

3.13.10 How many innocent people have we discovered to have been punished, and I mean without any fault on the judges' part? And how many more have there been whom we have not discovered? This happened in my time. Certain men are condemned to death for a homicide. The sentence, if not yet pronounced, has at least been reached and settled. At this point the judges are informed by the officers of a lower court nearby that they are holding some prisoners who openly confess to this homicide and cast an unmistakable light on the whole affair. The judges deliberate whether they ought nonetheless to interrupt and postpone the execution of the sentence passed on the first men. They consider the novelty of the precedent and what

it would mean for holding up judgments. The condemnation has been passed in due legal form, and judges are denied any right to change their minds. In short, these poor devils are offered up to the formulas of justice. Philip, or someone else, dealt with a similar difficulty in this way. He had condemned a man, by a final judgment, to pay heavy damages to another. When the truth came out some time later, it turned out that he had judged unjustly. On one side stood the justice of the case; on the other, the logic of judicial forms. He satisfied both to some extent: he left the sentence as it stood and made good the condemned man's loss out of his own purse. But he was dealing with a mishap that could be repaired. My men were hanged beyond repair. How many condemnations have I seen that were more criminal than the crime?[11]

3.13.11 All this reminds me of those ancient opinions. One is that whoever wants to do right on the whole must do wrong in the details, and whoever wants to succeed in doing justice in great things must do injustice in small ones. Another is that human justice is formed on the model of medicine, by which everything useful is also just and honorable. Then there is what the Stoics hold, that Nature herself goes against justice in most of her works. There is what the Cyrenaics hold, that nothing is just in itself and that customs and laws make justice. And there are the Theodorians, who think theft, sacrilege and every kind of lechery just for the wise man, if he knows it to be profitable to him. There is no remedy. I am in the same position as Alcibiades: I will never, if I can help it, put myself in the hands of a man who is to decide on my head, where my honor and my life depend more on the skill and diligence of my attorney than on my innocence. I would take my chances with a justice that took account of my good deeds as well as my bad ones, where I had as much to hope for as to fear. Going unpunished is not sufficient payment for a man who does better than merely not doing wrong. Our justice holds out only one of its hands to us, and the

11 Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great; the story is in Plutarch.

left one at that. Whoever a man may be, he comes out of it the loser.[12]

3.13.12 Consider China. Its government and arts, without any dealings with ours or knowledge of them, surpass our examples in several kinds of excellence, and its history teaches me how much wider and more varied the world is than either the ancients or we can fathom. There the officers sent by the Prince to inspect the state of his provinces punish those who abuse their office, and they also reward, out of pure liberality, those who have conducted themselves better than the common run and beyond what their duty required. People present themselves to these officers not merely to protect themselves but to gain something, and not simply to be paid but to receive a gift.[13]

3.13.13 No judge, thank God, has yet spoken to me as a judge, in any case whatever, my own or another's, criminal or civil. No prison has ever received me, not even for a stroll. The very thought of one makes even the sight of its outside unpleasant to me. I am so infatuated with liberty that if anyone barred me from some corner of the Indies, I would live somewhat less at ease for it. And as long as I can find earth or open air elsewhere, I will not lie stagnating in a place where I have to hide. My God, how badly I would bear the condition in which I see so many people! They are nailed to one district of this kingdom, barred from entering the principal cities and the courts and from using the public roads, for having quarreled with our laws. If the laws I serve threatened so much as the tip of my finger, I would immediately go off and find others, wherever it might be. All my little prudence, in these civil wars we are in, goes into keeping them from interrupting my freedom to come and go.

3.13.14 Now laws keep their credit not because they are just, but because they are laws. That is the mystical foundation of their authority; they have no other. And it serves them well. They are

12 Alcibiades fled rather than stand trial at Athens, saying he would not trust even his own mother with his life (Plutarch).

13 Montaigne's source was probably Juan González de Mendoza's History of China (1585), translated into French in 1588.

often made by fools. More often they are made by people who, out of hatred of equality, are wanting in equity. But always by men, vain and irresolute authors. There is nothing so grossly and widely faulty as the laws, nor so regularly. Whoever obeys them because they are just does not obey them for the right reason. Our French laws, by their irregularity and deformity, rather lend a hand to the disorder and corruption that can be seen in the way they are administered and carried out.

STUDYING MYSELF

Self-study is his physics and metaphysics, and it teaches him his own fallibility.

The command is so muddled and inconsistent that it partly excuses both disobedience and faults of interpretation, administration and observance. Whatever fruit, then, we can draw from experience, the experience we take from foreign examples will hardly do much for our education if we make such poor use of the experience we have of ourselves. That experience is more familiar to us, and certainly sufficient to teach us what we need. I study myself more than any other subject. That is my metaphysics; that is my physics.

By what art God governs this house of the world;
whence the moon comes rising, where it wanes, how with its horns
drawn together it returns each month to the full;
whence the winds prevail over the sea, what the east wind
seeks with its blast, and whence the clouds draw their unceasing water;
whether a day will come to topple the citadels of the world—
inquire, you who are tormented by the toil of knowing the world.

> In this universe I let myself be handled, ignorantly and negligently, by the general law of the world. I shall know it well enough when I feel it. My knowledge cannot make it change its course. It will not vary for my sake; it is folly to hope so. And it is greater folly to trouble oneself about it, since it is necessarily uniform, public and common.[14]

The goodness and capacity of the governor ought to relieve us purely and fully of the care of governing. Philosophical inquiries and contemplations serve only to feed our curiosity. The philosophers, with good reason, refer us to the rules of Nature. But those rules have no need of such sublime knowledge. The philosophers falsify them and show us Nature's face painted, too high in color and too elaborately made up; hence so many different portraits of so uniform a subject. As she has given us feet to walk with, so has she given us prudence to guide us through life. It is not a prudence as ingenious, robust and pompous as the one they invented, but correspondingly easy, quiet and wholesome. And it does very well what the other only talks about, in the man who has the good fortune to know how to use it simply and in good order, that is to say, naturally. To commit oneself to Nature most simply is to commit oneself to her most wisely. Oh, what a soft, gentle and wholesome pillow ignorance and incuriosity are for resting a well-made head!

3.13.15 I would rather understand myself well by studying myself than by studying Cicero. In the experience I have of

myself I find enough to make me wise, if I were a good scholar. Whoever recalls the excess of his past anger, and how far that fever carried him away, sees the ugliness of this passion better than in Aristotle and conceives a more justified hatred of it. Whoever remembers the ills he has run into, those that have threatened him, and the slight occasions that have shifted him from one state to another, prepares himself by that for future changes and for recognizing his own condition. Caesar's life holds no more of an example for us than our own. Imperial or common, it is always a life exposed to all human accidents. Let us only listen: we tell ourselves everything we chiefly need. Whoever remembers having been mistaken in his own judgment so many, many times, is he not a fool if he does not distrust it ever after? When I find myself convinced of a false opinion by another man's reasoning, what I learn is not so much the new thing he has told me and my ignorance on this particular point; that would be small gain. What I learn is my weakness in general and the treachery of my understanding, and from that I draw a reform of the whole mass. I do the same with all my other errors, and I find this rule of great use in life. I do not look on the particular kind and instance as just a stone I have tripped over. I learn to fear my footing everywhere, and I set about regulating it. To learn that one has said or done something foolish is nothing. One must learn that one is nothing but a fool, a far fuller and more important lesson. The false steps my memory has so often made me take, even when it was surest of itself, have not been wasted. It may swear and assure me all it likes now; I shake my ears. The first objection raised against its testimony leaves me in doubt. I would not dare trust it in a matter of weight, nor vouch for it where someone else is concerned. And were it not that what I do from lack of memory, others do still more often from lack of good faith, I would always take the truth in matters of fact from another man's mouth rather than from my own. If each man watched closely the effects and circumstances of the passions that rule him, as I have done with the

14 Propertius, Elegies III.5.

one whose share I fell to, he would see them coming and would slow their violence and their course a little. They do not always leap at our throats in a single bound; there are warnings and stages.

> *As when a wave first begins to whiten under the wind,*
> *little by little the sea swells and lifts its waves higher,*
> *then rises from its lowest depths up to the sky.* In me judgment holds a magisterial seat; at least it carefully tries to. It lets my appetites go their way, hatred and friendship alike, even the friendship I bear myself, without being altered and corrupted by them. If it cannot reform the other parts to its own pattern, at least it does not let itself be deformed by them. It plays its game apart.[15]

3.13.16 The advice that each man should know himself must have an important effect, since that god of knowledge and light had it planted on the front of his temple, as containing all he had to counsel us. Plato also says that prudence is nothing other than carrying out this command, and Socrates proves it point by point in Xenophon. The difficulties and obscurities of any science are perceived only by those who have gained entry to it. For it still takes some degree of intelligence to be able to notice that one is ignorant, and one must push at a door to know that it is closed to us.[16] From this comes that Platonic subtlety: neither those who know need inquire, since they know, nor those who do not know, since to inquire one must know what one is inquiring about. So it is with this matter of knowing oneself. The fact that each man seems to himself so resolved and satisfied, and thinks himself expert enough in it, means that no one understands anything about it at all, as Socrates teaches Euthydemus. I, who profess nothing else, find in it a depth and variety so infinite that my apprenticeship bears no other fruit than to make me feel how much I still have to learn.[17] To my weakness, so often recognized, I owe my inclination to modesty, to obedi-

15 Virgil, Aeneid VII.
16 Apollo, whose temple at Delphi bore the inscription "Know yourself."
17 Xenophon, Memorabilia IV.2.

ence to the beliefs prescribed to me, and to a constant coolness and moderation in my opinions. I owe it also my hatred of that importunate and quarrelsome arrogance which believes and trusts wholly in itself, the mortal enemy of learning and of truth. Listen to them laying down the law. The very first follies they come out with are delivered in the style in which religions and laws are established. *Nothing is more shameful than for assertion and approval to run ahead of knowledge and perception.* Aristarchus said that in ancient times there were scarcely seven wise men to be found in the world, and that in his own time there were scarcely seven ignorant ones. Would we not have more reason than he to say so in our time?[18] Assertiveness and obstinacy are express signs of stupidity. This fellow will have fallen flat on his nose a hundred times in a day, and there he is, up on his spurs again, as resolute and unbending as before. You would think someone had since poured into him a new soul and a new vigor of understanding, and that it is with him as with that ancient son of the earth who regained his firmness and grew stronger by his fall: *Whose limbs, when they touched their mother, / exhausted as they were, grew strong again with renewed vigor.* Does this unteachable, stubborn man not think he takes on a new mind when he takes up a new argument? It is from my own experience that I accuse human ignorance, which is, in my opinion, the surest position in the school of the world.[19] Those who will not reach this conclusion in themselves from so vain an example as mine or their own, let them recognize it through Socrates, the master of masters. For the philosopher Antisthenes used to say to his disciples: "Let us go, you and I, and hear Socrates. There I shall be a disciple with you." And upholding the dogma of his Stoic sect, that virtue was enough to make a life fully happy and in need of nothing whatever, he would add: "except the strength of Socrates."

18 Cicero, Academica I. Aristarchus of Samothrace was a scholar at Alexandria in the 2nd century BC.

19 Antaeus, the giant son of Earth, who regained his strength whenever he touched the ground; Lucan, Pharsalia IV.

JUDGING OTHERS, ADVISING KINGS

Long self-observation helps him read his friends; kings most need someone to tell them the truth.

3.13.17 This long attention I devote to considering myself trains me to judge others fairly well too, and there are few things I speak about more successfully and more defensibly. It often happens that I see and distinguish my friends' characters more exactly than they do themselves. I have astonished more than one by the aptness of my description and shown him things about himself. Having trained myself from childhood to mirror my life in that of others, I have acquired a studious bent in this. And when I put my mind to it, I let few things that serve this purpose slip by me: bearing, temperament, talk. I study everything: what I must avoid, what I must follow. So I reveal to my friends, from what they show outwardly, their inner inclinations. I do not do it to arrange this infinite variety of such diverse and disconnected actions into fixed kinds and chapters, or to distribute my lots and divisions neatly into known classes and regions: *But how many kinds there are, and what their names, / there is no counting.* The learned speak and set down their notions more specifically and in detail. I, who see into the matter only as far as practice informs me, without rule, present mine in general terms and gropingly. As here: I pronounce my opinion in disjointed articles; it is something that cannot be said all at once and in a block. Coherence and consistency are not to be found in souls as low and common as ours.[20] Wisdom is a solid and complete building, each piece of which keeps its place and bears its mark. *Wisdom alone is wholly turned in upon itself.* I leave it to the professionals, and I do not know whether they will succeed in a thing so mixed, so minute and so fortuitous, to sort this infinite diversity of aspects into groups, to pin down our inconstancy and set it in order. Not only do I find it hard to link our actions to one another; I find it hard to designate each one, taken by itself,

20 Virgil, Georgics II.

properly by some principal quality, so double and motley are they, seen in different lights.[21] It is noted as a rare thing in Perseus, King of Macedonia, that his mind, attaching itself to no one condition, went wandering through every kind of life, and showed a character so flighty and vagrant that neither he nor anyone else knew what sort of man he was. This seems to me to fit almost everyone. And above all I have seen another man of his stature to whom this conclusion would apply still more properly, I believe. No middle position; always swinging from one extreme to the other for reasons no one could guess; no course of any kind without twists and astonishing contradictions; no single faculty. So the most plausible thing that will one day be imagined about him is that he affected and studied to make himself known by being unknowable. It takes very strong ears to hear oneself judged frankly. And because there are few who can bear it without being stung, those who venture to undertake it with us show us a singular act of friendship. For it is a healthy love that sets out to wound and offend in order to do good. I find it hard to judge a man in whom the bad qualities outweigh the good. Plato prescribes three qualities for anyone who would examine another's soul: knowledge, goodwill, boldness.[22]

3.13.18 I was sometimes asked what I would have thought myself good for, if someone had taken it into his head to make use of me while I was still of an age for it: *While better blood gave me strength, and envious old age / had not yet sprinkled white over both my temples.* "For nothing," I said. And I readily excuse myself for not knowing how to do anything that would make me a slave to another. But I would have told my master the truth about himself and kept watch on his conduct, if he had wanted it. Not wholesale, through scholastic lessons, which I do not know, and from which I see no true reform arise in those who do. But by observing his conduct step by step, at every opportunity, judging it by eye, piece by piece, simply and naturally, making

21 Cicero, On Ends III.
22 Plato, Gorgias.

him see what he is in common opinion, standing up to his flatterers.[23] There is not one of us who would not be worth less than kings if he were continually corrupted, as they are, by that rabble. How could it be otherwise, when even Alexander, that great king and philosopher, could not defend himself against them? I would have had enough loyalty, judgment and freedom for the task. It would be an office without a name; otherwise it would lose its effect and its grace. And it is a role that cannot belong indiscriminately to everyone. For truth itself does not have the privilege of being used at any hour and in any manner. Its use, noble as it is, has its bounds and limits. It often happens, the world being what it is, that truth is let slip into the Prince's ear not only fruitlessly but harmfully, and unjustly besides. And no one will make me believe that a holy remonstrance cannot be applied wrongly, or that the interest of substance must not often give way to the interest of form. For this trade I would want a man content with his fortune, *Who would wish to be what he is, and prefer nothing else,* and born of middling fortune. For on the one hand he would not hold back from touching his master's heart keenly and deeply for fear of losing his chances of advancement. And on the other, being of middling condition, he would have easier communication with all sorts of people.[24] I would want this given to one man only, for spreading the privilege of such freedom and familiarity among several would breed a harmful irreverence. Yes, and from that man I would require above all the loyalty of silence.

3.13.19 A king is not to be believed when he boasts of his steadfastness in awaiting the enemy's attack for the sake of his glory, if for his own profit and improvement he cannot bear a friend's free words, which have no other force than to sting his ears, the rest of their effect being in his own hands. Now there is no condition of men that needs true and free admonitions as much as kings do. They sustain a public life and have to please the opinion of so many spectators that, since people are in the habit of

23 Virgil, Aeneid V.
24 Martial, Epigrams X.47.

keeping quiet before them about anything that might turn them from their course, they find themselves, without noticing it, caught up in the hatred and detestation of their peoples. Often this is for reasons they could have avoided at no cost even to their pleasures, if someone had warned them and set them right in time. Their favorites commonly look out for themselves more than for their master. And they do well by it, since in truth most of the offices of true friendship toward a sovereign are a rough and perilous trial. So what is needed is not only a great deal of affection and frankness, but courage as well.

MY EXPERIENCE OF HEALTH

Distrusting medicine, Montaigne describes the habits by which he has kept his health.

3.13.20 In the end, all this hodgepodge I am scribbling here is only a record of the trials of my life. For inner health it is exemplary enough, if one takes its lessons the other way round. But as for bodily health, no one can furnish more useful experience than I, who present it pure, in no way corrupted or altered by art or by opinion. In the matter of medicine, experience is truly on its own dunghill, where reason yields it the whole field. Tiberius used to say that anyone who had lived twenty years ought to be able to answer for himself about what was harmful or wholesome to him, and to know how to manage himself without medicine. He may have learned this from Socrates. Socrates earnestly advised his disciples to study their health as a most important study, and added that it was hard for a man of understanding who paid attention to his exercise, his drinking and his eating not to discern better than any physician what was good or bad for him. And indeed medicine professes always to use experience as the touchstone of its practice. So Plato was right to say that to be a true physician, whoever took it up would need to have gone through all the illnesses he wants to cure, and all the accidents and circumstances he has to judge. It is only reasonable that physicians should catch the pox if they want to know

how to treat it. That is a physician I would truly trust. For the others guide us like a man who paints seas, reefs and harbors while sitting at his table, and moves a model ship about on it in perfect safety. Throw him into the real thing, and he does not know where to begin. They describe our ills the way a town crier cries a lost horse or dog: such a coat, such a height, such ears. But bring the animal to him, and he still does not recognize it. For God's sake, let medicine some day give me some real and perceptible help, and see how I will cry out in good faith: *At last I surrender to an effective science!* The arts that promise to keep the body in health and the soul in health promise us a great deal; but there are none that keep their promises less. And in our time those among us who profess these arts show their results less than any other men. The most one can say of them is that they sell medicinal drugs; that they are physicians, one cannot say. I have lived long enough to give an account of the habits that have brought me so far. For anyone who wants a taste of them, I have tried them first, as their cupbearer.[25] Here are some articles of it, as my memory supplies them. I have no habit that has not kept varying with circumstances. But I record those I have most often seen at work, which have had the strongest hold on me up to now.

3.13.21 My way of life is the same in sickness as in health: the same bed, the same hours, the same food serve me, and the same drink. I add nothing at all to it except moderation in the more or the less, according to my strength and appetite. For me, health means keeping my accustomed state undisturbed. I see that sickness dislodges me from it on one side; if I believe the physicians, they will turn me away from it on the other; and so, by fortune and by art, I am thrown off my course. I believe nothing more firmly than this: that I cannot be harmed by using things I have been accustomed to for so long. It is for custom to give our life whatever form it pleases; in this it can do everything. It is Circe's potion, which varies our nature as it sees fit. How many nations, even three steps away from us, think

25 Horace, Epodes 17.

ridiculous our fear of the evening damp, which so plainly harms us; and our boatmen and peasants laugh at it. You make a German ill by putting him to bed on a mattress, as you make an Italian ill on a feather bed and a Frenchman without curtains and without a fire. A Spaniard's stomach cannot stand our way of eating, nor ours drinking in the Swiss manner. A German at Augsburg amused me by attacking the inconvenience of our fireplaces with the very argument we usually use to condemn their stoves.[26] For in truth that stagnant heat, and then the smell of the heated material the stoves are made of, gives a headache to most people who are not used to them, though not to me. But otherwise, since this heat is even, constant and spread throughout, without glare, without smoke, without the draft that the opening of our chimneys lets in, it bears comparison with ours on other counts. Why do we not imitate Roman architecture? For they say that in ancient times the fire in their houses was made only outside, at the foot of the house, and from there the heat was breathed into the whole dwelling through pipes built into the thickness of the walls, which ran around the rooms that were to be heated. I have seen this clearly indicated somewhere in Seneca, I don't know where. This German, hearing me praise the conveniences and beauties of his city, which certainly deserves it, began to pity me for having to leave it. And among the first drawbacks he cited was the heaviness of head that the fireplaces elsewhere would give me. He had heard someone make this complaint and was pinning it on us, since habit kept him from noticing it at home. All heat that comes from a fire weakens me and makes me heavy. And yet Evenus said that fire was the best seasoning of life. I prefer any other way of escaping the cold.[27]

3.13.22 We are wary of wine from the bottom of the cask; in Portugal that heady flavor is a delight and the drink of princes. In short, each nation has many customs and usages that are not only unknown but strange and astonishing to some other

26 Montaigne passed through Augsburg in 1580 on his journey to Italy.
27 Evenus of Paros, Greek elegiac poet of the 5th century BC.

nation. What are we to do with people who accept only printed testimony, who do not believe men unless they are in a book, nor truth unless it is of a respectable age? We dignify our follies when we put them into print. For such people it carries quite another weight to say "I have read it" than to say "I have heard it said." But I do not disbelieve men's mouths any more than their hands. I know that people write as rashly as they speak, and I think this age as good as any past one. So I cite a friend of mine as readily as Aulus Gellius or Macrobius, and what I have seen as readily as what they have written. And as they hold that virtue is no greater for lasting longer, so I hold that truth is no wiser for being older. I often say that it is sheer folly that makes us run after foreign and scholastic examples. They are as plentiful now as in the time of Homer and Plato.[28] But is it not that we seek the honor of quoting more than the truth of the argument? As if it counted for more to borrow our proofs from the shop of Vascosan or Plantin than from what can be seen in our own village. Or else, surely, that we do not have the wit to sift and make the most of what happens before our eyes, and to judge it keenly enough to make an example of it. For if we say that we lack the authority to make our testimony believed, we are speaking beside the point.[29] Because in my opinion the greatest miracles of nature and the most marvelous examples, especially on the subject of human actions, can be made out of the most ordinary, common and familiar things, if we know how to see them in the right light.

3.13.23 Now, on my subject, leaving aside the examples I know from books, and what Aristotle says of Andron of Argos, that he crossed the arid sands of Libya without drinking: a gentleman who has worthily discharged several offices said in my presence that he had gone from Madrid to Lisbon in midsummer without drinking. He is vigorous for his age and has nothing extraordin-

28 Aulus Gellius (2nd century AD) and Macrobius (5th century AD), Latin authors of miscellanies full of anecdotes and quotations.

29 Michel de Vascosan and Christophe Plantin, leading printers of Paris and Antwerp.

ary in his way of life except this: he goes two or three months, even a year, he told me, without drinking. He feels thirst, but lets it pass, and holds that it is an appetite that easily dies down of itself. He drinks more from whim than from need or for pleasure.

3.13.24 Here is an example of another kind. Not long ago I came upon one of the most learned men in France, among those of no mean fortune, studying in a corner of a hall that had been partitioned off for him with tapestry, and around him an uproar of his servants, taking every liberty. He told me, and Seneca says almost as much of himself, that he profited from this din: as if, battered by the noise, he drew back and gathered himself more closely into himself for contemplation, and this storm of voices drove his thoughts back inward. When he was a student at Padua, his study was lodged so long amid the clatter of coaches and the tumult of the square that he trained himself not only to scorn noise but to make use of it in the service of his studies. Alcibiades once wondered how Socrates could bear the endless din of his wife's temper, and Socrates answered: "As those do who are used to the ordinary noise of wheels drawing water." I am quite the opposite. My mind is delicate and quick to take flight. When it is busy on its own, the slightest buzzing of a fly murders it.

3.13.25 Seneca in his youth eagerly took up the example of Sextius and ate nothing that had been killed. He did without it for a year, with pleasure, as he says, and gave it up only so as not to be suspected of borrowing this rule from certain new religions that were spreading it. At the same time he adopted Attalus's precept of no longer lying on mattresses that sink under you, and used, right into old age, the kind that do not yield to the body. What the usage of his time made him count as hardness, ours makes us consider softness.[30]

3.13.26 Look at the difference between my laborers' way of living and mine: the Scythians and the Indians have nothing further removed from my strength and my ways. I know that I have

30 Attalus was a Stoic philosopher whose teaching Seneca followed.

taken children off begging to serve me, who soon afterward left me, my kitchen and their livery, simply to go back to their former life. And later I found one of them gathering mussels in the refuse for his dinner, and neither by entreaty nor by threat could I draw him away from the savor and sweetness he found in poverty. Beggars have their magnificences and their pleasures, like the rich, and, they say, their dignities and political orders. These are the effects of habit. Habit can shape us not only to whatever form it pleases (and that is why, say the wise, we must fix ourselves on the best, which habit will at once make easy for us), but also to change and variation, which is the noblest and most useful of its lessons. The best of my bodily qualities is that I am flexible and not very obstinate. I have inclinations that are more my own, more usual and more agreeable than others; but with very little effort I turn away from them and slip easily into the opposite way. A young man should upset his rules to rouse his vigor and keep it from going moldy and slack. And there is no way of life so foolish and so feeble as one conducted by prescription and discipline.

> *If he wants to ride out as far as the first milestone, the hour is taken from his book; if the corner of his eye itches from rubbing,*
>
> *he consults his horoscope before seeking eye-salve.* He will often throw himself even into excess, if he takes my advice; otherwise the slightest indulgence will ruin him. He becomes awkward and disagreeable in company. The quality most contrary to a man of good breeding is fastidiousness and being tied to some particular way of doing things. And it is particular if it is not pliable and supple. It is shameful to leave undone, from incapacity or from not daring, what one sees one's companions doing. Let such people stay in their kitchens. Everywhere else this is unbecoming; but in a soldier it is a vice and intolerable.[31]

31 Juvenal, Satires VI.

For a soldier, as Philopoemen said, should accustom himself to every variety and unevenness of life.

THE HOLD OF HABIT

Habit has made him depend on certain comforts, though flexibility is the better rule.

3.13.27 I was trained as much as possible to freedom and indifference. Nevertheless, through carelessness, I have settled more on certain ways as I grew old (my age is past education and has nothing left to look to but keeping itself going), and custom has already, without my noticing, so stamped its character on me in certain things that I call it excess to depart from them. And without an effort I cannot sleep by day, nor eat between meals, nor have breakfast, nor go to bed without a long interval, of some three hours, after supper, nor make children except before sleeping, nor make them standing up, nor bear my own sweat, nor quench my thirst with pure water or pure wine, nor stay bareheaded for long, nor have my hair cut after dinner. And I would do without my gloves as uneasily as without my shirt, and without washing when I leave the table and when I get up, and without a canopy and curtains on my bed, as things quite necessary. I could dine without a tablecloth; but without a clean napkin, in the German manner, very uncomfortably. I soil napkins more than the Germans and the Italians do, and I make little use of spoon and fork. I regret that people have not kept up a practice I saw begun after the example of kings: that our napkins should be changed with each course, like our plates. We are told of that hardworking soldier Marius that as he grew old he became fastidious about his drink and would take it only from a particular cup of his own. I too let myself favor a certain shape of glass, and I do not like drinking from a common glass, any more than from a common hand. All metal displeases me compared with a clear, transparent material. Let my eyes taste as well, as far as they can. I owe several such softnesses to habit. Nature, on the other hand, has also brought me her own: for

instance, I can no longer stand two full meals in one day without overloading my stomach, nor go without one of the meals entirely without filling up with wind, drying my mouth and stunning my appetite. And I am harmed by long exposure to the night air. For some years now, on night expeditions in the wars, when they last all night, as commonly happens, after five or six hours my stomach begins to be upset, with a violent headache, and I do not reach daylight without vomiting. When the others go off to breakfast, I go off to sleep, and afterward I am as cheerful as before. I had always been taught that the evening damp spread only at nightfall. But in these past years I spent much time, and for a long while, with a lord imbued with the belief that the damp is harsher and more dangerous as the sun goes down, an hour or two before it sets. He carefully avoids it and scorns the damp of the night. He very nearly impressed on me not so much his reasoning as his feeling. What! Can mere doubt and inquiry strike our imagination and change us? Those who give in all at once to these tendencies bring complete ruin on themselves. And I pity several gentlemen who, through the folly of their physicians, have shut themselves up like prisoners while still young and sound. Even so, it would be better to suffer a cold than to lose forever, through disuse, the company of ordinary life in an activity of such common use. A troublesome science, that spoils for us the sweetest hours of the day! Let us stretch our hold on life to its very last means. Most often one hardens oneself by persisting, and corrects one's constitution, as Caesar did with his epilepsy, by dint of scorning and thwarting it. One should devote oneself to the best rules, but not enslave oneself to them, except to those, if there are any, to which obligation and servitude are useful.

3.13.28 Kings and philosophers defecate, and so do ladies. Public lives are owed to ceremony; mine, obscure and private, enjoys every natural dispensation. Soldier and Gascon are also qualities a little given to indiscretion. So I will say this of that function: it should be put off to certain set hours, at night, and one should force and subject oneself to them by habit, as I have

done. But one should not subject oneself, as I have done in growing old, to worrying about a particular comfort of place and seat for this service, and make it a nuisance by dawdling and softness. Still, in the dirtiest functions, is it not somewhat excusable to require more care and cleanliness? *By nature man is a clean and dainty animal.* Of all natural functions, it is the one I least willingly allow to be interrupted. I have seen many soldiers inconvenienced by the irregularity of their bowels. Mine and I, on the other hand, never fail to keep our appointment, which is the moment I jump out of bed, unless some violent business or illness disturbs us.[32]

3.13.29 So I do not think, as I was saying, that sick people can put themselves anywhere safer than by keeping quietly to the way of life in which they were raised and brought up. Change of any kind stuns and wounds. Go and believe that chestnuts harm a man from Périgord or from Lucca, and milk and cheese the mountain people! They go about prescribing for them a way of life that is not just new but contrary—a change a healthy man could not bear. Prescribe water to a Breton of seventy, shut a sailor up in a steam room, forbid a Basque footman to walk: they deprive them of movement, and in the end of air and light. Is life worth so much?

/ We are forced to wean our minds from the things we are used to,
and to stay alive we cease to live.
Shall I count those still living for whom the air they breathe
and the very light that rules us have become a burden? If physicians do no other good, they at least do this: they prepare their patients for death in good time, undermining and cutting back, little by little, their enjoyment of life.[33]

32 Seneca, Letters 92.
33 Maximianus, Elegies I, then attributed to the Roman poet Cornelius Gallus.

TRUSTING APPETITE

He trusts his desires over physicians and finds pleasure the best medicine.

3.13.30 Sick or well, I have readily let myself follow the appetites that pressed me. I give great authority to my desires and inclinations. I do not like to cure one ill with another. I hate remedies that are more troublesome than the illness. To be subject to the colic and subject to abstaining from the pleasure of eating oysters—that is two ills for one. The illness pinches us on one side, the rule on the other. Since we run the risk of getting it wrong, let us rather take the risk in pursuit of pleasure. The world does the opposite, and thinks nothing useful that is not painful. Ease is suspect to it. My appetite has, in many things, adjusted itself quite happily on its own and fallen in with the health of my stomach. Sharp, pungent sauces pleased me when I was young; when my stomach later tired of them, my taste promptly followed suit. Wine harms the sick: it is the first thing my mouth loses its taste for, and with an invincible distaste. Whatever I take with displeasure harms me; and nothing harms me that I do with hunger and gusto. I have never been harmed by anything I did that was really pleasant to me. And yet I have made every medical conclusion give way, and very liberally, to my pleasure. And when I was young, *When Cupid, darting about me this way and that, / shone radiant in his saffron tunic,* I gave myself up as licentiously and thoughtlessly as anyone to the desire that had me in its grip, *And I campaigned, not without glory,* more, however, in staying power and endurance than in sudden dashes: *I barely remember managing six bouts.* There is certainly something unfortunate, and something miraculous, in confessing how young I was when I first found myself in its subjection. It was indeed by chance, for it was long before the age of choice and knowledge. I do not remember myself so far back. And my fortune can be paired with that of Quartilla, who had no

memory of her maidenhood.[34] *Hence the goatish smell, the early hair, and a beard / that amazed my mother.* Physicians usually bend their rules, and usefully, to the violence of the sharp cravings that come over the sick. This great desire cannot be imagined so strange and perverse that Nature is not at work in it. And then, what a thing it is to satisfy the fancy! In my opinion this part matters above all—at least more than any other. The most grievous and common ills are those that fancy loads on us. This Spanish saying pleases me from many angles: *God defend me from myself.* When I am sick, I regret not having some desire that would give me the satisfaction of fulfilling it; medicine would hardly turn me from it. I do as much when I am well.[35] I can see little more left to me than hoping and wishing. It is a pitiful thing to be so languid and weakened that it reaches even one's wishes.

3.13.31 The art of medicine is not so settled that we cannot find some authority for whatever we do. It changes with climates and with moons, with Fernel and with Scaliger. If your physician does not think it good for you to sleep, to drink wine, or to eat a certain food, don't worry: I will find you another who will not agree with him. The diversity of medical arguments and opinions covers every possible form. I saw a wretched sick man bursting and fainting with thirst in order to be cured, and afterward mocked by another physician who condemned that advice as harmful. Had he not put his suffering to good use?[36] A man of that profession recently died of the stone who had used extreme abstinence to fight his illness; his colleagues say that, on the contrary, the fasting had dried him out and baked the sand in his kidneys.

3.13.32 I have noticed that when I am wounded or ill, talking excites me and harms me as much as any excess I might commit. My voice costs me effort and tires me, for it is loud and

34 Quotations from Catullus, Horace (Odes III.26) and Ovid (Amores III.7); Quartilla is a character in Petronius' Satyricon.

35 Martial, Epigrams.

36 Jean Fernel (1497–1558), physician to Henry II; Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484–1558), physician and scholar.

strained; so that when I have had occasion to hold the ear of the great on weighty matters, I have often made them anxious to get me to moderate my voice.

3.13.33 This story deserves a digression. Someone in a certain Greek school spoke loudly, as I do; the master of ceremonies sent word to him to speak lower. "Let him send me," he said, "the pitch at which he wants me to speak." The other replied that he should take his pitch from the ears of the person he was speaking to. That was well said, provided it is understood to mean: "Speak according to what you have to do with your listener." For if it means "Be content that he hears you," or "Regulate yourself by him," I do not find that reasonable. The tone and movement of the voice carry some expression and signification of my meaning; it is up to me to direct it so as to represent myself. There is a voice for instructing, a voice for flattering, or for scolding. I want my voice not only to reach him but, as it may be, to strike him and pierce him. When I am berating my footman in a sharp, cutting tone, it would be a fine thing if he were to come and tell me, "Master, speak more softly; I can hear you perfectly well." *There is a kind of voice suited to the hearing, not by its volume but by its quality.* Speech belongs half to the one who speaks, half to the one who listens. The listener must prepare to receive it according to the motion it takes. So among tennis players, the one who receives steps back and gets ready according to how he sees the one hitting the ball to him move, and according to the kind of stroke.[37]

LETTING ILLNESS RUN ITS COURSE

Diseases have their own life span, and impatience only prolongs them.

3.13.34 Experience has also taught me this: that we ruin ourselves through impatience. Ills have their life and their limits, their sicknesses and their health. The constitution of diseases is formed on the pattern of the constitution of animals. Their fortune is limited from their birth, and so are their days. Whoever

37 Quintilian, Training of the Orator XI.3.

tries to cut them short imperiously, by force, in the middle of their course, lengthens and multiplies them, and harasses them instead of calming them. I agree with Crantor that we must neither oppose our ills obstinately and recklessly nor succumb to them from weakness, but give way to them naturally, according to their condition and ours. We must let diseases pass through; and I find they stay less long with me, because I let them run their course.[38] And I have lost some of those considered most stubborn and tenacious through their own decline, without help and without the art of medicine, and against its rules. Let us leave things a little to Nature: she understands her business better than we do. "But so-and-so died of it." So will you —if not of that illness, then of another. And how many have nonetheless died of it with three physicians at their backsides? Example is a hazy mirror, universal, reflecting every way. If it is a pleasant medicine, accept it; it is always so much present good. I will not dwell on the name or the color if it is delicious and appetizing. Pleasure is one of the chief kinds of profit. I have let colds, gouty discharges, looseness, palpitations of the heart, migraines and other ailments grow old in me and die a natural death—ailments I lost just when I had half trained myself to nurse them. They are better conjured away by courtesy than by bravado. We must gently endure the laws of our condition. We are made to grow old, to grow weak, to be sick, in spite of all medicine. That is the first lesson the Mexicans give their children, when, as they come out of their mothers' wombs, they greet them thus: "Child, you have come into the world to endure: endure, suffer, and be quiet." It is unjust to lament that something has happened to someone which can happen to anyone. *Be indignant if any decree has been unjustly made against you alone.*[39]

3.13.35 Look at an old man asking God to keep his health whole and vigorous—that is to say, to make him young again. *Fool, why*

38 Crantor (c. 335–275 BC), philosopher of Plato's Academy, author of a famous work On Grief.

39 Seneca, Letters 91.

do you vainly wish for these things with childish prayers? Is it not folly? His condition does not allow it. Gout, gravel and indigestion are symptoms of long years, as heat, rain and wind are of long journeys. Plato does not believe that Aesculapius troubled to provide, by regimens, for prolonging life in a spoiled and feeble body, useless to its country, useless to its calling and to producing healthy and robust children; nor does he find such care fitting to divine justice and wisdom, which must guide all things toward what is useful.[40]

> My good man, it's over: no one can set you straight again; at most they will plaster you up and prop you a little, and prolong your misery by an hour or so. *Just so, a man who wants to shore up a building about to fall*
> *sets various supports against it,*
> *until the fixed day comes and, with every joint loosened,*
> *brings down the props themselves along with the house.* We must learn to endure what we cannot avoid. Our life is composed, like the harmony of the world, of contrary things, and also of different tones, sweet and harsh, sharp and flat, soft and deep. What would a musician mean who liked only some of them? He must know how to use them all together and blend them. And so must we with the goods and ills that are consubstantial with our life.

Our being cannot do without this mixture, and one side is no less necessary to it than the other. To try to kick against natural necessity is to reenact the folly of Ctesiphon, who took it upon himself to have a kicking match with his mule.[41]

40 Ovid, Tristia III.8; Plato, Republic III.

41 Plutarch tells of Ctesiphon, a wrestler, who kicked back at his mule (On Controlling Anger).

CONSOLING MYSELF FOR THE STONE

His mind argues that the kidney stone is mild, deserved and a lesson in dying.

3.13.36 I seldom consult anyone about the changes I feel. For these people are overbearing when they have you at their mercy. They batter your ears with their prognoses; and once, catching me weakened by illness, they treated me insultingly with their dogmas and their magisterial frowns, threatening me now with great pains, now with approaching death. I was not knocked down by it or dislodged from my position, but I was jostled and pushed. If my judgment was neither changed nor troubled by it, at least it was hindered. It is always agitation and combat. Now, I treat my imagination as gently as I can, and would relieve it, if I could, of all pain and strife. One must help it, and flatter it, and fool it if one can. My mind is well suited to this task. It never lacks plausible arguments about anything. If it persuaded as well as it preaches, it would help me admirably. Would you like an example? It says that it is for my own good that I have the gravel; that buildings of my age naturally have to suffer some leaks; that it is time they began to loosen and give way. It is a common necessity, and no new miracle would have been worked for my sake. By this I pay the rent due to old age, and I could not get a better bargain. And the company, it says, ought to console me, since I have fallen into the most common ailment of men of my time. Everywhere I see men afflicted with the same kind of illness.[42] And I find its fellowship honorable, all the more since it prefers to attack the great: its essence has nobility and dignity. Of the men who are stricken with it, few get off more cheaply; and even so it costs them the trouble of an irksome diet and the tedious daily taking of medicinal drugs, whereas I owe it purely to my good fortune. For a few ordinary broths of eryngo and Turkish herb, which I have swallowed two or three times to oblige the ladies—who, more graciously than

42 The gravel: small kidney stones.

my illness is bitter, offered me half of theirs—seemed to me as easy to take as they were useless in their effect.[43] They have to pay a thousand vows to Aesculapius, and as many crowns to their physician, for the easy and abundant flow of sand that I often receive by the bounty of Nature. Even the decorum of my bearing in company is not disturbed by it, and I can hold my water for ten hours, as long as a healthy man. The fear of this illness, it says, used to frighten you when you did not know it. The cries and despair of those who make it worse by their impatience bred in you a horror of it. It is an illness that strikes you in the members through which you have sinned most. You are a man of conscience: *The punishment that comes undeserved is the one to grieve over.* Look at this chastisement: it is very mild compared with others, and shows a fatherly favor.[44] Look at how late it came: it troubles and occupies only that season of your life which, one way or another, is by now lost and barren, having made way for the license and pleasures of your youth, as if by agreement. The fear and pity people feel for this illness give you matter for glory—a quality from which, even if you have purged your judgment and cured your reasoning of it, your friends still recognize some tinge in your temperament. There is pleasure in hearing people say of you: "What strength! What patience!" You are seen sweating with strain, turning pale, turning red, trembling, vomiting until you bring up blood, suffering strange contractions and convulsions, sometimes letting great tears drip from your eyes, passing thick, black, frightful urine, or having it stopped by some sharp, bristling stone that pricks and cruelly flays the neck of your penis—while all the while you entertain those present with an ordinary countenance, joke now and then with your people, hold your own in a strenuous discussion, make excuses for your pain in words and play down your suffering. Do you remember those men of old who sought out ills with such hunger, to keep their virtue in breath and in practice? Sup-

43 Eryngo (sea holly) and "Turkish herb" (rupturewort) were remedies for the stone.

44 Ovid, Heroides V.

pose that Nature is carrying and pushing you into that glorious school, which you would never have entered of your own accord. If you tell me that it is a dangerous and mortal illness, which others are not? For it is a medical trick to except some, which they say do not lead straight to death. What does it matter if they get there by accident, and slip and veer easily toward the road that leads us there? But you do not die because you are sick; you die because you are alive. Death kills you well enough without the help of illness. And for some, illnesses have kept death at a distance: they have lived longer because they thought they were dying. Besides, just as with wounds, there are illnesses that are medicinal and wholesome. The colic often has as tenacious a life as you do. There are men in whom it has continued from childhood to extreme old age; and if they had not deserted its company, it was ready to keep them company longer still. You kill it more often than it kills you. And even if it showed you the image of approaching death, would it not be doing a good service to a man of such an age to bring him back to thoughts of his end? And what is worse, you no longer have anything to get well for. One way or another, the common necessity will call you any day now. Consider how artfully and gently your illness gives you a distaste for life and detaches you from the world: not forcing you with tyrannical subjection, like so many other ills you see in old men, which keep them continually shackled, with no respite from weakness and pain, but by warnings and instructions repeated at intervals, mingled with long pauses of rest, as if to give you the chance to meditate and rehearse its lesson at your leisure. To give you the chance to judge soundly and make up your mind like a man of courage, it shows you the state of your whole condition, both good and bad, and on the same day a life now very cheerful, now unbearable. If you do not embrace death, at least you shake hands with it once a month. So you have the further hope that it will catch you one day without warning; and that, having been brought so often to the harbor, while you trust that you are still within the usual limits, you and your trust will one morning, unexpectedly,

have been ferried across the water. We have no cause to complain of illnesses that share our time fairly with health.

3.13.37 I am obliged to Fortune for assailing me so often with the same kind of weapons. She shapes me and trains me to them by practice, hardens and accustoms me; by now I know more or less what it will cost me to get off. For lack of natural memory, I make myself one out of paper. And whenever some new symptom appears in my illness, I write it down; so that now, having been through almost every kind of example, if some alarm threatens me, I leaf through these little loose notes, like the Sibyl's leaves, and never fail to find some favorable prognosis in my past experience to console me. Being used to it also helps me hope for better in the future.[45] For since this discharge has kept up its course for so long, it is likely that Nature will not change its pace and that no worse ailment will come of it than the one I feel. Moreover, the character of this illness is not ill-suited to my quick and sudden temperament. When it attacks me gently, it frightens me, for then it will last a long time. But by nature it has vigorous and lusty fits. It shakes me violently for a day or two. My kidneys lasted an age without change; it will soon be another since they changed their state. Ills have their cycles, like goods: perhaps this ailment is near its end. Age is weakening the heat of my stomach; since its digestion is less perfect, it sends this raw matter on to my kidneys. Why, at some turn of time, might not the heat of my kidneys be weakened likewise, so that they can no longer petrify my phlegm, and Nature set about finding some other way of purging? The years have plainly dried up certain catarrhs in me. Why not these excretions that supply the matter for the gravel? But is there anything as sweet as that sudden change, when from extreme pain I come, by voiding my stone, to recover as if in a flash the fair light of health, so free and so full, as happens in our sudden and sharpest attacks of colic? Is there anything in the pain endured that can be weighed against the pleasure of so swift an improvement? How much

45 The Sibyl of Cumae was said to write her prophecies on leaves (Virgil, Aeneid III).

more beautiful health seems to me after illness, when the two are so near and so close together that I can recognize them face to face, each in its finest array, where they vie with each other as if to stand up to and defy each other! Just as the Stoics say that vices were usefully introduced to give value and support to virtue, we can say, with better reason and less bold conjecture, that Nature has lent us pain for the honor and service of pleasure and freedom from pain. When Socrates, after his chains had been taken off, felt the delicious itching that their weight had caused in his legs, he rejoiced to consider the close alliance between pain and pleasure, how they are bound together by a necessary link, so that they follow each other in turn and engender each other; and he exclaimed that good Aesop ought to have taken from this consideration the material for a fine fable.[46]

3.13.38 The worst thing I see in other illnesses is that they are not so grievous in their effect as in their aftermath. It takes a year to recover, always full of weakness and fear. There is so much risk, and there are so many steps in getting back to safety, that it is never over. Before they have stripped you of a kerchief and then of a skullcap, before they have given you back the use of fresh air, and wine, and your wife, and melons, it is a wonder if you have not relapsed into some new misery. This one has the privilege of clearing out completely. The others, by contrast, always leave some imprint and change that makes the body susceptible to new illness, and they lend each other a hand. Those are excusable that are content with their hold on us without extending it and without bringing their train in after them. But courteous and gracious are those whose passage brings us some useful consequence. Since my colic, I find myself relieved of other ailments, more so, it seems to me, than I was before, and I have not had a fever since. I argue that the extreme and frequent vomiting I suffer purges me; that, on the other hand, my losses of appetite and the strange fasts I go through digest my morbid humors; and that Nature voids in these stones whatever she has

46 Plato, Phaedo, on the day of Socrates' execution.

that is superfluous and harmful. Let no one tell me that it is a medicine sold too dear. For what about so many stinking potions, cauteries, incisions, sweatings, setons, diets, and so many methods of cure that often bring us death because we cannot stand their violence and harassment? So when I am attacked, I take it as medicine; when I am free, I take it as a lasting and complete deliverance.

3.13.39 Here is yet another particular favor of my illness: it more or less plays its own game and lets me play mine, and if I do not, it is only for want of courage. At its most violent, I have stayed on horseback with it for ten hours. Just endure; you need no other regimen. Play, dine, run, do this, and do that too if you can; your excesses will help more than they harm. Say as much to a man with the pox, to a man with gout, to a man with a hernia. Other illnesses impose more universal obligations, constrain our actions in quite another way, disturb our whole order, and make the whole conduct of our life revolve around them. This one only pinches the skin; it leaves your understanding and your will at your disposal, and your tongue, and your feet, and your hands. It wakes you up rather than putting you to sleep. The soul is struck by the burning of a fever, felled by epilepsy, dislocated by a sharp migraine, and in short stunned by all the illnesses that wound the whole mass and the noblest parts. Here it is not attacked. If things go badly with it, that is its own fault: it betrays itself, abandons itself and falls apart. Only fools let themselves be persuaded that this hard, massive body that is baked in our kidneys can be dissolved by potions. So once it has been set moving, there is nothing to do but let it pass; it will take its passage anyway.

3.13.40 I note yet another particular advantage: it is an illness about which we have little to guess. We are spared the disturbance that other ills throw us into through the uncertainty of their causes, conditions and progress—an infinitely painful disturbance. We have no need of consultations and learned interpretations: our senses show us what it is and where it is.

3.13.41 With such arguments, both strong and weak, as Cicero did with the ill of his old age, I try to lull and beguile my imagination and grease its wounds. If they get worse tomorrow, tomorrow we will find other ways out. And so it proves: here, lately, the slightest movements squeeze pure blood from my kidneys. What of it? I do not stop moving as before and riding after my hounds with youthful, insolent ardor. And I find I am getting off very well from so serious an accident, which costs me only a dull heaviness and discomfort in that part.[47] It is some big stone crushing and consuming the substance of my kidneys, and my life, which I am voiding little by little, not without some natural pleasure, like an excrement now superfluous and in the way. Now, if I feel something crumbling, do not expect me to start amusing myself by checking my pulse and my urine so as to take some distressing precaution. I will be in time enough to feel the pain without prolonging it with the pain of fear. He who fears suffering already suffers from what he fears. Besides, the doubt and ignorance of those who take it upon themselves to explain the springs of Nature and her inner workings, and so many false prognoses of their art, should make us realize that her means are infinitely unknown. There is great uncertainty, variety and obscurity in what she promises or threatens us with. Except for old age, which is an indubitable sign that death is approaching, I see in all other accidents few signs of the future on which we can base our divination. I judge myself only by actual feeling, not by reasoning. What would be the point, since I mean to bring to it nothing but waiting and patience? Do you want to know how much I gain by this? Look at those who do otherwise and who depend on so many different opinions and counsels: how often their imagination oppresses them when their body does not. I have many times taken pleasure, when I was safe and free of these dangerous symptoms, in describing them to the physicians as if they were just starting in me. I heard the sentence of their horrible conclusions quite at my

47 Cicero, On Old Age.

ease, and came away all the more obliged to God for his grace, and better instructed in the vanity of that art.

SLEEP, FOOD AND DAILY HABITS

A portrait of how he sleeps, eats, drinks and dresses as he grows old.

3.13.42 There is nothing we should recommend so strongly to the young as activity and wakefulness. Our life is nothing but movement. I am hard to get moving, and slow in everything: getting up, going to bed, and at my meals. Seven o'clock is early morning for me; and where I am in charge, I do not dine before eleven or sup until after six. I used to attribute the fevers and illnesses I fell into to the heaviness and drowsiness that long sleep had brought on me; and I have always regretted going back to sleep in the morning. Plato condemns excess in sleeping more than excess in drinking. I like to sleep on a hard bed, and alone—even without a wife, in royal fashion—and fairly well covered.[48] My bed is never warmed with a warming pan; but since I have grown old, I am given warm cloths when I need them for my feet and stomach. The great Scipio was criticized for being a sleepyhead—for no other reason, in my opinion, than that it annoyed people that in him alone there was nothing to criticize. If I am at all fussy about how I am looked after, it is about my bed more than anything else; but in general I yield and adapt to necessity as well as anyone. Sleep has taken up a large part of my life, and at this age I still sleep eight or nine hours at a stretch. I am usefully weaning myself from this lazy propensity, and I am plainly the better for it. I feel the shock of the change a little, but it is over in three days. And I hardly see anyone who can live on less when need be, or who exercises more steadily, or on whom hard duties weigh less. My body is capable of steady exertion, but not of violent and sudden exertion. I now avoid violent exercise that makes me sweat: my limbs tire before they warm up. I can stay on my feet all day long, and I do not tire of walking. But on paved streets, since my earliest years, I have liked to go only on

48 Plato, Laws VII.

horseback. On foot I get muddy up to my buttocks; and short people are liable, in these streets, to be jostled and elbowed for lack of an imposing presence. And I have liked to rest, lying or sitting, with my legs as high as the seat or higher.

3.13.43 There is no occupation as pleasant as soldiering—an occupation noble in its execution (for the strongest, most generous and proudest of all the virtues is valor) and noble in its cause. There is no service more just or more universal than protecting the peace and greatness of one's country. You enjoy the company of so many men, noble, young, active; the daily sight of so many tragic spectacles; the freedom of that artless conversation, and a manly way of life without ceremony; the variety of a thousand different actions; that courageous harmony of martial music, which sustains you and warms both your ears and your soul; the honor of this occupation; its very harshness and difficulty, which Plato thinks so little of that in his Republic he gives women and children a share in it.[49] You volunteer for particular roles and risks according to your judgment of their brilliance and importance, as a volunteer soldier; and you see when life itself can be excusably spent there: *And it comes to mind how fine it is to die in arms.* To fear the common dangers that concern so great a crowd, not to dare what so many kinds of souls dare, and a whole people, is for a heart soft and base beyond measure. Company reassures even children. If others surpass you in knowledge, in grace, in strength, in fortune, you have outside causes to blame; but if you yield to them in firmness of soul, you have only yourself to blame.[50] Death is more abject, more lingering and painful in bed than in battle; fevers and catarrhs are as painful and deadly as a arquebus shot. Anyone trained to bear the accidents of ordinary life valiantly would not need to swell his courage to become a man-at-arms. *To live, my Lucilius, is to be a soldier.*[51]

3.13.44 I do not remember ever having had the itch. Yet scratching is among the sweetest of Nature's gratifications, and as

49 Plato, Republic V.
50 Virgil, Aeneid II.

handy as any. But its penance follows too annoyingly close behind. I practice it most on my ears, which itch inside from time to time.

3.13.45 I was born with all my senses sound, almost to perfection. My stomach is comfortably good, as is my head; and most of the time they hold up through my fevers, and so does my breath. I have passed the age at which certain nations, not without reason, had prescribed so fitting an end to life that they did not allow anyone to exceed it. Yet I still have remissions, irregular and short though they are, so clear that they fall little short of the health and painlessness of my youth. I do not speak of vigor and sprightliness; it is not reasonable that they should follow me beyond their limits: *No longer can this body bear lying at a threshold / or the rain from heaven.* My face and eyes give me away at once.[52] All my changes begin there, and look somewhat worse than they really are. My friends often pity me before I feel the cause. My mirror does not alarm me, for even in my youth it happened more than once that I took on a murky complexion and bearing, of bad omen, without any serious ailment; so that the physicians, finding no cause within to account for this outward change, attributed it to the mind and to some secret passion gnawing at me inside. They were wrong. If the body governed itself according to my will as much as my soul does, we would get along a little more comfortably. My soul at that time was not only free from trouble but full of satisfaction and gaiety, as it most usually is, half by its nature, half by its design: *Nor does the contagion of a sick mind infect my limbs.* I believe that this temper of my soul has many times lifted my body up from its falls. The body is often low; and if the soul is not merry, it is at least in a tranquil and restful state. I had a quartan fever for four or five months, which had quite disfigured me; my mind kept going all the while, not just peacefully but pleasantly. If the pain is outside me, weakness and languor hardly sadden me. I see many bodily failings, horrible merely to name, which I would

51 Seneca, Letters 96.

52 Horace, Odes III.10, a lover's complaint at his mistress's door.

fear less than a thousand passions of the mind that I see in common use.[53] I have made up my mind to run no longer—it is enough that I can drag myself along; nor do I complain of the natural decline that has hold of me—*Who is surprised at a swollen throat in the Alps?*—any more than I regret that my lifespan is not as long and sound as an oak's.[54]

3.13.46 I have no complaint about my imagination: I have had few thoughts in my life that have so much as interrupted the course of my sleep, unless they were thoughts of desire, which woke me without distressing me. I seldom dream, and then it is of fantastic things and chimeras, usually produced by pleasant thoughts, more ridiculous than sad. And I hold it true that dreams are faithful interpreters of our inclinations; but there is skill in sorting and understanding them. *What men busy themselves with in life, what they think of, care for and see, what they do and pursue when awake—if this happens to them in sleep,*

it is less to be wondered at. Plato says, moreover, that it is the office of wisdom to draw from them prophetic instructions for the future.[55]

I see nothing in that, except the marvelous experiences that Socrates, Xenophon and Aristotle relate of it, persons of irreproachable authority. The histories say that the Atlantes never dream; they also never eat anything that has been killed. I add this because it is perhaps the reason why they do not dream. For Pythagoras prescribed a certain preparation of food so as to have dreams to the purpose. Mine are mild, and bring me no agitation of body or utterance of voice. I have seen several people in my time wonderfully agitated by theirs. Theon the philosopher walked about while dreaming, and Pericles' servant did so even on the tiles and the ridge of the house.[56]

53 Ovid, Tristia III.8.
54 Juvenal, Satires XIII; goiter was common in Alpine regions.
55 Accius, quoted by Cicero, On Divination I; Plato, Timaeus.
56 The Atlantes, a people of North Africa, are described by Herodotus (IV.184).

3.13.47 I am not very choosy at table. I take the first thing and the nearest, and I am reluctant to move from one taste to another. A crowd of dishes and courses displeases me as much as any other crowd. I am easily content with few dishes, and I hate the opinion of Favorinus that at a feast they should snatch away the dish you are getting an appetite for and always put a new one in its place; that it is a wretched supper if the guests have not been glutted with the rumps of various birds; and that the beccafico alone deserves to be eaten whole. I regularly eat salted meats; yet I prefer bread without salt.[57] My baker at home serves no other kind for my table, against the custom of the region. In my childhood, the main thing they had to correct was my refusal of the things children of that age usually like best: sugar, preserves, pastries. My tutor fought this dislike of dainty foods as a kind of daintiness in itself. And indeed it is nothing else but fussiness of taste, wherever it is applied. Whoever cures a child of a particular, stubborn fondness for brown bread and bacon, or garlic, cures him of being finicky about food. There are some who play the long-sufferers and make a show of patience by pining for beef and ham among the partridges. They have it easy. It is the daintiness of the dainty; it is the taste of a soft fortune that grows jaded with ordinary, everyday things, *By which luxury beguiles its weariness of riches*. To stop relishing what another man relishes, to take fastidious care over one's fare: that is the essence of this vice. *If you are afraid to dine on a plain dish of greens.* There is indeed this difference: it is better to bind one's desire to things that are easier to come by. But it is always a vice to bind oneself. I used to call a kinsman of mine dainty because in our galleys he had unlearned how to use our beds and to undress before lying down.[58]

3.13.48 If I had sons, I would gladly wish them my own lot. The good father God gave me (who has nothing from me but my grat-

57 Favorinus of Arles, a 2nd-century AD orator and philosopher whose table talk is reported by Aulus Gellius. The beccafico ("fig-pecker") is a small songbird prized as a delicacy.

58 The first quotation is from Seneca's Letters; the second adapts Horace, Epistles.

itude for his goodness—though a very hearty gratitude) sent me from the cradle to be nursed in a poor village of his. He kept me there as long as I was at nurse, and even longer, training me to the lowliest and commonest way of living: *A well-disciplined belly is a large part of freedom*. Never take on yourselves, and still less give to your wives, the charge of bringing up your children. Let them be shaped by fortune, under the laws of the common people and of nature. Let custom train them to frugality and austerity, so that they have to come down from hardship rather than climb up to it.[59] His temperament aimed at yet another end: to bind me to the people and to that class of men who need our help. He thought I ought to look toward the man who holds out his arms to me rather than toward the man who turns his back on me. And this was why he also had me held at the font by people of the humblest station: to oblige and attach me to them.

3.13.49 His plan has not altogether failed. I readily take the side of the little people, whether because there is more glory in it or out of a natural compassion that has infinite power over me. The party I condemn in our wars I shall condemn more harshly when it is flourishing and prosperous; it will go some way toward winning me over when I see it wretched and crushed. How gladly I contemplate the fine disposition of Chelonis, daughter and wife of kings of Sparta! While Cleombrotus, her husband, had the upper hand over Leonidas, her father, in the disorders of her city, she played the good daughter: she joined her father in his exile and his misery, opposing the victor. Did luck happen to turn?[60] There she is, changing her will along with fortune, bravely taking her husband's side, and following him wherever his ruin carried him. She had no other choice, it seems to me, than to throw herself into the party where she was most needed and where she could show the most compassion. I am more naturally inclined to follow the example of Flamininus, who gave himself to those who needed him rather

59 The quotation is from Seneca's Letters.
60 The story is told in Plutarch's Life of Agis; it took place in the 3rd century BC.

than to those who could do him good, than that of Pyrrhus, who was apt to stoop before the great and swagger over the small.

3.13.50 Long meals weary me and do me harm. For, perhaps because I got used to it as a child for lack of anything better to do with myself, I eat as long as I am at table. So at home, though my table is one of the short ones, I like to sit down a little after the others, in the manner of Augustus; but I do not imitate him in leaving before the others as well. On the contrary, I like to sit on for a long while afterward and listen to the talk, provided I take no part in it. For talking on a full stomach tires me and does me harm, just as I find the exercise of shouting and arguing before a meal very healthy and pleasant.

3.13.51 The ancient Greeks and Romans were wiser than we are. Unless some other extraordinary occupation diverted them, they gave several hours and the better part of the night to eating, which is one of the principal actions of life. They ate and drank less hurriedly than we do, who rush through all our actions post-haste. They stretched out this natural pleasure with more leisure and enjoyment, interspersing it with various kinds of useful and agreeable conversation.

3.13.52 Those who have to look after me could easily steal from me whatever they think is bad for me, for in such matters I never want or miss what I do not see. But as for things that are set before me, they waste their time preaching abstinence to me. So when I want to fast, I must be kept apart from the supper-eaters and served exactly as much as a measured light meal requires; for if I sit down at table, I forget my resolution. When I order a dish to be prepared some other way, my people know that this means my appetite has flagged and I shall not touch it. I like all meats that can stand it underdone. And I like them well hung, in many cases even to the point where the smell changes. Only toughness generally bothers me (about every other quality I am as indifferent and tolerant as any man I have known), so that, contrary to the common taste, I find even some fish both too fresh and too firm. It is not the fault of my teeth. They have always been good, to the point of excellence, and age is only

now beginning to threaten them. I learned in childhood to rub them with my napkin, both in the morning and on sitting down to table and rising from it.

DYING BY DEGREES

Losing a tooth, he welcomes a death that comes piece by piece.

3.13.53 God shows favor to those from whom he takes life away bit by bit. That is the only benefit of old age. The final death will be all the less complete and harmful for it: it will kill no more than half a man, or a quarter. Here is a tooth that has just fallen out, without pain, without effort: it had reached the natural term of its life. And that part of my being, and several others, are already dead, and others half dead—some of the most active ones, which held first rank in the vigor of my prime. That is how I melt away and slip from myself. What stupidity it would be in my understanding to feel the final drop of this fall, already so far advanced, as if it were the whole fall! I hope it will not. In truth, my chief consolation when I think of my death is that it will be of the just and natural kind, and that from now on I cannot ask or hope from destiny for any favor in this matter that would not be illegitimate. Men persuade themselves that in former times they had longer lives, as they had greater stature. But they are mistaken: Solon, who belongs to those old times, nevertheless sets the extreme limit of life at seventy years. I, who have so worshiped, and in all things, that *measure is best* of ancient times, and who have taken the middle measure as the most perfect—am I to aspire to an immoderate and prodigious old age?[61] Whatever goes against the course of nature may be unpleasant, but what comes in accordance with it should always be pleasant. *All things that happen according to nature are to be counted among goods.* Thus, says Plato, the death brought by wounds or illness may be violent; but the death that comes upon us with old age leading us to it is the lightest of all, and in a way delightful. *Violence takes life from the young, ripeness from the old.* Death mingles

61 "Measure is best" was the motto of Cleobulus, one of the Seven Sages.

and blends everywhere with our life. Decline anticipates its hour and thrusts itself into the very course of our growth. I have portraits of myself at twenty-five and at thirty-five; I compare them with the one of today.[62] How many times over it is no longer I! How much farther my present image is from those than from the image of my death! It is abusing nature too much to drag her so far that she is forced to leave us, to abandon our guidance—our eyes, our teeth, our legs, and the rest—to the mercy of outside help we have to beg for, and, weary of following us, to hand us over to the hands of art.

3.13.54 I am not excessively fond of salads or of fruit, except melons. My father hated every kind of sauce; I like them all. Eating too much bothers me; but as for the nature of foods, I do not yet know for certain that any food harms me. Nor do I notice full moon or waning moon, or autumn as against spring. There are movements in us that are inconstant and unknown. Radishes, for example: first I found them agreeable, then troublesome, and now agreeable again. In several things I feel my stomach and my appetite varying like this. I have switched from white wine to claret, and then from claret back to white.

3.13.55 I am fond of fish, and I make my meat days of the lean days and my feasts of the fast days. I believe what some say, that it is easier to digest than meat. Just as my conscience balks at eating meat on a fish day, so my taste balks at mixing fish with meat. The gap between them seems to me too wide.

3.13.56 Since my youth I have sometimes skipped a meal. Sometimes it was to sharpen my appetite for the next day: for as Epicurus fasted and ate lean meals to accustom his pleasure to do without abundance, I did the opposite, to train my pleasure to make better profit and more cheerful use of abundance. Sometimes I fasted to keep my vigor for some action of body or mind, for both grow cruelly sluggish in me from a full stomach (and above all I hate that foolish coupling of so healthy and lively a goddess with that little indigestible, belching god, all bloated with the fumes of his liquor). Sometimes it was to cure my sick

62 Both quotations are from Cicero, On Old Age.

stomach, or because I lacked suitable company.[63] For I say, like that same Epicurus, that we should look not so much at what we eat as at whom we eat with. And I praise Chilon for refusing to promise to attend Periander's feast before he had been told who the other guests were. For me there is no dressing so sweet, no sauce so appetizing, as the one that comes from company. I believe it is healthier to eat more gently and less, and to eat more often. But I want to give appetite and hunger their due. I would get no pleasure from dragging out three or four meager meals a day, medicinally, under such constraint. Who could assure me that I would find the keen appetite I have this morning again at supper? Let us seize—old men above all—the first opportune moment that comes our way. Let us leave hopes and forecasts to the almanac-makers. The ultimate fruit of my health is pleasure: let us hold on to the first pleasure that is present and known. I avoid constancy in these laws of fasting. Whoever wants a regimen to serve him should avoid keeping it up. We grow hardened to it, and our powers fall asleep in it. Six months later you will have got your stomach so used to it that your only profit will be to have lost the freedom to do otherwise without harm.

3.13.57 I keep my legs and thighs no more covered in winter than in summer: a single plain silk stocking. To help with my colds I let myself keep my head warmer, and my belly for my colic. My ailments got used to it in a few days and scorned my ordinary provisions. I had moved up from a cap to a kerchief, and from a bonnet to a double hat. The padding of my doublet now serves only for show. That is nothing, unless I add a hare's skin or a vulture's skin, and a skullcap on my head. Follow this progression and you will go at a fine pace. I shall do nothing of the sort. And I would gladly take back the start I gave it, if I dared. Do you fall into some new trouble? This adjustment is no use to you anymore; you are used to it; look for another. That is how those people ruin themselves who let themselves get entangled in strict regimens and bind themselves to them super-

63 The goddess and the god are Venus and Bacchus.

stitiously. They need more, and more again after that, and still others beyond: it is never done.

3.13.58 For our occupations, and for pleasure, it is much more convenient to skip the midday meal, as the ancients did, and put off feasting until the hour of retirement and rest, without breaking up the day. That is what I used to do. For health, on the contrary, I have since found by experience that it is better to eat at midday, and that digestion goes better when one is awake. I am hardly ever thirsty, sick or well. At such times I do often have a dry mouth, but without thirst. As a rule I drink only from the desire that comes to me while eating, and well into the meal. I drink fairly well for a man of ordinary make. In summer, and at an appetizing meal, I not only exceed the limit of Augustus, who drank precisely three times and no more, but, so as not to break the rule of Democritus, who forbade stopping at four as an unlucky number, I slip on when need be to five: about three half-pints. For small glasses are my favorites, and I like to empty them, which others avoid as unseemly. Most often I dilute my wine half with water, sometimes with a third. And when I am at home, following an old practice that his physician prescribed for my father and for himself, the wine I need is mixed in the pantry two or three hours before it is served. They say that Cranaus, king of the Athenians, invented this practice of watering wine; whether usefully or not, I have heard it debated. I think it more seemly and healthier for children not to drink wine until after sixteen or eighteen. The most usual and common way of life is the finest. All singularity seems to me something to avoid in it; and I would hate a German who put water in his wine as much as a Frenchman who drank it neat. Public usage lays down the law in such things.[64]

3.13.59 I dread stuffy air and avoid smoke like death (the first repairs I rushed to make in my house were to the chimneys and privies, a common and unbearable fault of old buildings). And among the hardships of war I count those thick clouds of dust in which they keep us buried in the heat all day long. My breathing

64 Cranaus, a legendary early king of Athens.

is free and easy, and my colds usually pass without affecting the lungs and without a cough.

3.13.60 The harshness of summer is more hostile to me than that of winter. For besides the discomfort of heat, which is harder to remedy than that of cold, and besides the blow the sun's rays deal to the head, my eyes are hurt by any glaring light. I could not now dine sitting opposite a bright, blazing fire.

3.13.61 To dull the whiteness of the paper, when I was more in the habit of reading, I used to lay a piece of glass over my book, and found it a great relief. To this day I know nothing of the use of spectacles, and I see as far as I ever did, and as far as anyone. It is true that as the day declines I begin to feel some blurring and weakness when I read—an exercise that has always strained my eyes, but especially at night. That is one step backward, barely perceptible. I shall go back another, from the second to the third, from the third to the fourth, so quietly that I shall have to be fully blind before I feel the decline and aging of my sight. So artfully do the Fates unwind our life. And yet I suspect that my hearing is beginning to grow dull; and you will see that when I have half lost it I shall still be blaming the voices of the people speaking to me. One must strain the soul hard indeed to make it feel how it is ebbing away.

3.13.62 My walk is quick and firm; and I do not know which of the two, mind or body, I have found harder to keep fixed on one spot. The preacher who holds my attention through a whole sermon is a good friend of mine indeed. At ceremonies, where everyone keeps his countenance so stiff, where I have seen ladies hold even their eyes so steady, I have never managed to stop some part of me from forever wandering off. Though I am seated, I am hardly settled. The maidservant of the philosopher Chrysippus said of her master that he was drunk only in his legs, for he had the habit of moving them whatever position he was in; and she said it at times when the wine was stirring his companions and he felt no change from it. In the same way it could have been said of me since childhood that I had folly in

my feet, or quicksilver, so much fidgeting and natural restlessness do I have in them, wherever I put them.

3.13.63 It is unseemly, besides being bad for one's health and even for one's pleasure, to eat greedily, as I do. I often bite my tongue, and sometimes my fingers, in my haste. Diogenes, meeting a boy who was eating like that, gave his tutor a slap. There were men in Rome who taught people to chew gracefully, as they taught them to walk. Eating this way I lose the leisure to talk, which is such a sweet seasoning to a meal, provided the talk is of the same sort, pleasant and short.

3.13.64 There is jealousy and envy among our pleasures: they clash and get in each other's way. Alcibiades, a man who well understood good living, banished even music from the table, so that it would not disturb the sweetness of conversation, for the reason Plato gives him: that it is a custom of common men to call in instrument players and singers to their feasts, for lack of the good talk and pleasant conversation with which people of understanding know how to regale one another. Varro asks this of a banquet: a gathering of people handsome in appearance and agreeable in conversation, who are neither mute nor chatterboxes; cleanliness and delicacy in the food and the place; and fine weather. A good table is no small work of art and no small pleasure.[65] Neither great generals nor great philosophers have disdained its practice and its science. My imagination has entrusted to my memory three such meals, which fortune made supremely sweet for me at various times in the flower of my life. My present state shuts me out of them, for each person supplies the chief charm and savor according to the good temper of body and soul he finds himself in at the time. I, who deal only in things down to earth, hate that inhuman wisdom that would make us disdainful of the care of the body and hostile to it. I think it equally unjust to set our hearts against natural pleasures as to set our hearts on them too much.

65 Varro's rules for a dinner party are reported by Aulus Gellius.

ACCEPTING PLEASURE

Natural pleasures should be received, neither chased nor fled; when I dance, I dance.

Xerxes was a fool: wrapped in every human pleasure, he went and offered a prize to whoever could find him others. But hardly less a fool is the man who cuts off those that nature has found for him. We should neither pursue them nor flee them; we should accept them. I accept them a little more amply and graciously, and more readily let myself follow the natural slope. We have no need to exaggerate their emptiness: it makes itself felt enough and shows itself enough. Thanks to our sickly, killjoy mind, which puts us off them as it puts us off itself. It treats both itself and everything it receives now well, now badly, according to its insatiable, wandering, and fickle nature: *Unless the vessel is clean, whatever you pour into it turns sour.* I, who boast of embracing the comforts of life so carefully and so particularly, find in them, when I look at them that closely, little more than wind. But what of it? We are wind through and through. And even the wind, more wisely than we, likes to make a noise and move about, and is content with its own functions, without wishing for stability and solidity, qualities that are not its own.[66]

3.13.65 The pure pleasures of the imagination, some say, like its displeasures, are the greatest, as the scales of Critolaus expressed. No wonder: the imagination composes them as it pleases and cuts them out of whole cloth. Every day I see striking examples of this, and perhaps enviable ones. But I, being of a mixed condition and coarse, cannot bite so wholly into this single, simple object that I do not let myself go, quite heavily, to the present pleasures of the general human law—intellectually sensual, sensually intellectual. The Cyrenaic philosophers hold that bodily pleasures, like bodily pains, are the more powerful, both as being double and as being more just. There are some, as Aristotle says, who out of a fierce insensibility make a show of

66 Horace, Epistles.

disdaining them.[67] I know others who do it out of ambition. Why don't they give up breathing too? Why don't they live on their own resources, and refuse the light because it is free and costs them neither invention nor vigor? Let Mars or Pallas or Mercury feed them, just to see, instead of Venus, Ceres, and Bacchus. Won't they be seeking to square the circle while perched on their wives? I hate being told to keep our minds in the clouds while our bodies are at table. I do not want the mind to be nailed to the table or to wallow there, but I want it to attend to it: to sit at it, not lie down at it. Aristippus defended only the body, as if we had no soul; Zeno embraced only the soul, as if we had no body. Both were at fault. Pythagoras, they say, followed a philosophy that was all contemplation, Socrates one that was all morals and action; Plato found the balance between the two. But they say this just to tell a story. The true balance is found in Socrates; and Plato is more Socratic than Pythagorean, and it suits him better. When I dance, I dance; when I sleep, I sleep. Yes, and when I walk alone in a beautiful orchard, if my thoughts have been occupied with outside matters for part of the time, for another part I bring them back to the walk, to the orchard, to the sweetness of this solitude, and to myself.

3.13.66 Nature has seen to it, like a mother, that the actions she has enjoined on us for our needs should also give us pleasure. She invites us to them not only through reason but also through appetite: it is wrong to corrupt her rules. When I see both Caesar and Alexander, in the thick of their great task, enjoying human and bodily pleasures so fully, I do not say that they are relaxing their souls; I say they are toughening them, by strength of spirit subjecting those violent occupations and laborious thoughts to the practice of ordinary life. Wise men they would have been, had they believed that ordinary life was their regular calling and the other their extraordinary one. We are great fools. "He has spent his life in idleness," we say; "I have done nothing today." What? Have you not lived? That is not only the most fun-

67 Critolaus, a Peripatetic philosopher of the 2nd century BC, held that goods of the soul would outweigh in a balance all goods of the body and of fortune.

damental of your occupations but the most illustrious. "If I had been put in charge of great affairs, I would have shown what I could do." Have you known how to think over and manage your life? You have done the greatest task of all. To show and exert herself, nature has no need of fortune. She shows herself equally at every level, and behind a curtain as well as without one. Have you known how to compose your character? You have done much more than the man who has composed books. Have you known how to take rest? You have done more than the man who has taken empires and cities.

LIVING FITTINGLY

To live well is man's masterpiece, and Socrates is its model.

3.13.67 The glorious masterpiece of man is to live fittingly. All other things—ruling, hoarding, building—are only little appendages and props, at most. I enjoy seeing a general at the foot of a breach he is about to attack, giving himself wholly and freely to his dinner and to conversation among his friends. And Brutus, with heaven and earth conspiring against him and against Roman liberty, stealing an hour of the night from his rounds to read and summarize Polybius in perfect calm. It is for little souls, buried under the weight of business, not to know how to disentangle themselves from it cleanly, not to know how to set it aside and take it up again.[68]

> *O brave men, who have often suffered worse things*
> *with me, now drive away your cares with wine;*
> *tomorrow we shall set out again on the vast sea.*[69]

3.13.68 Whether in jest or in earnest, the wine of the theologians and the Sorbonne has become proverbial, and their feasts too. I think it only right that they dine all the more comfortably and pleasantly for having spent the morning usefully and seriously in the work of their school. The consciousness of having spent

68 Plutarch tells how Brutus spent the night before the battle of Pharsalus (48 BC) making a summary of the historian Polybius.
69 Horace, Odes; Teucer is speaking to his companions.

the other hours well is a just and savory condiment at table. That is how the sages lived. And that inimitable striving for virtue which astounds us in both Catos, that disposition severe to the point of being tiresome, submitted thus gently and yielded to the laws of the human condition, and of Venus and Bacchus.[70] They were following the precepts of their sect, which require the perfect sage to be as expert and skilled in the enjoyment of pleasures as in every other duty of life. *Let him whose heart is discerning have a discerning palate too.*[71]

3.13.69 Ease and relaxation, it seems, do a strong and generous soul wonderful honor and suit it best. Epaminondas did not think that joining in the dance of the young men of his city, singing, playing music, and giving his whole attention to it, in any way detracted from the honor of his glorious victories or from the perfect reform of morals that was in him. And among so many admirable actions of Scipio the grandfather, a man worthy of being thought of heavenly birth, nothing gives him more charm than to see him idly and childishly fooling about, gathering and choosing shells and playing ducks and drakes along the seashore with Laelius. And in bad weather he amused and tickled himself by portraying in writing, in comedies, the most common and lowly actions of men. And with his head full of that marvelous enterprise against Hannibal and Africa, he visited the schools in Sicily and attended lectures in philosophy, so much so that he armed the blind envy of his enemies in Rome with teeth. Nor is there anything more remarkable in Socrates than that, quite old, he found time to have himself taught dancing and playing instruments, and thought it time well spent. This same man was seen in an ecstasy, standing, for a whole day and a night, in the presence of the whole Greek army, overtaken and enraptured by some profound thought. He was seen, first among so many valiant men in the army, running to rescue Alcibiades when he was overwhelmed by the enemy, covering him with his body, and freeing him from the throng by sheer

70 The Sorbonne was the theology faculty of Paris.
71 Cicero, On Ends, playing on the Latin sapere, "to be wise" and "to taste".

force of arms. In the battle of Delium he was seen lifting up and saving Xenophon, who had been thrown from his horse. And amid all the people of Athens, outraged as he was by so shameful a spectacle, he was the first to come forward to rescue Theramenes, whom the Thirty Tyrants were having their henchmen lead to his death; and he gave up this bold attempt only at the urging of Theramenes himself, though only two men in all had followed him. He was seen, when courted by a beauty with whom he was smitten, to keep, when need be, a strict abstinence.[72] He was seen continually marching to war and treading the ice barefoot, wearing the same robe in winter and summer, surpassing all his companions in endurance of toil, and eating no differently at a feast than at his ordinary meals. He was seen for twenty-seven years, with the same countenance, bearing hunger, poverty, the unruliness of his children, the claws of his wife; and in the end calumny, tyranny, prison, fetters, and poison. But was this man invited by the duty of civility to a drinking contest? He was also the one in the army who came off best. And he did not refuse to play at nuts with the children, or to ride a hobbyhorse with them, and he did it gracefully; for all actions, says philosophy, equally become and equally honor the wise man. We have every reason, and we should never tire, to present the image of this man as the pattern and model of every kind of perfection. There are very few examples of a life that is full and pure. And it harms our instruction to be offered every day examples that are feeble and defective, barely good for a single purpose, which pull us backward instead—corrupters rather than correctors. People are mistaken. It is much easier to travel along the edges, where the outer limit serves as boundary, stop, and guide, than by the broad, open middle way; and according to art than according to nature. But it is also much less noble and less commendable.

3.13.70 Greatness of soul lies not so much in pressing upward and forward as in knowing how to order and limit oneself. It regards as great whatever is enough, and shows its height by

72 The beauty is Alcibiades.

preferring moderate things to eminent ones. There is nothing so fine and legitimate as to play the man well and properly, nor any knowledge so hard as knowing how to live this life well. And the wildest of our maladies is to despise our own being.

3.13.71 Whoever wants to send his soul elsewhere, let him do it boldly if he can, when the body is ailing, to free it from that contagion. At other times, on the contrary, let the soul assist and favor the body, and not refuse to share in its natural pleasures and to delight in them as a spouse would, bringing to them moderation, if it is the wiser of the two, for fear that through lack of discretion they may become mixed up with displeasure. Intemperance is the plague of pleasure; and temperance is not its scourge but its seasoning. Eudoxus, who made pleasure the sovereign good, and his companions, who set so high a value on it, savored it in its most gracious sweetness by means of temperance, which was singular and exemplary in them.

3.13.72 I order my soul to look upon both pain and pleasure with an equally regulated gaze—*for it is as much a fault for the soul to overflow in joy as to contract in grief*—and an equally firm one: but upon the one cheerfully, upon the other sternly. And, as far as it can contribute, it is to be as careful to extinguish the one as to extend the other. Seeing good things sanely brings with it seeing bad things sanely. Pain has something unavoidable in its tender beginning, and pleasure something avoidable in its excessive end. Plato couples them together, and holds that it is equally the function of fortitude to fight against pain and against the immoderate and bewitching blandishments of pleasure.[73] These are two fountains: whoever draws from them where, when, and as much as he should, be it a city, a man, or a beast, is very fortunate. The first must be taken as medicine and of necessity, more sparingly; the other for thirst, but not to the point of drunkenness. Pain, pleasure, love, and hatred are the first things a child feels; if, when reason arrives, they fall in with it, that is virtue.

73 Cicero, Tusculan Disputations.

PASSING THE TIME

He savors life all the more closely as it grows short.

3.13.73 I have a dictionary all my own. I "pass the time" when it is bad and disagreeable; when it is good I do not want to pass it, I taste it again, I hold on to it. We must run through the bad and settle down in the good. This ordinary phrase "pastime" and "passing the time" reflects the habit of those prudent people who think they can make no better use of their life than to let it slip by and escape it, to pass it, sidestep it, and, as far as they can, ignore it and flee it, as something irksome and contemptible. But I know it to be otherwise, and find it both worth prizing and agreeable, even in its last decline, where I now hold it. And nature has put it into our hands furnished with such favorable circumstances that we have only ourselves to blame if it weighs on us and if it slips away from us uselessly. *The fool's life is joyless and anxious, wholly borne toward the future.* Even so, I am preparing myself to lose it without regret, but as something by its nature losable, not as something burdensome and troublesome. Besides, not minding death is truly fitting only for those who take pleasure in living. There is husbandry in enjoying it. I enjoy it twice as much as others, for the measure of enjoyment depends on the greater or lesser attention we give to it.[74] Especially now that I see mine so short in time, I want to extend it in weight. I want to check the speed of its flight by the speed of my grasp, and by the vigor of my use of it to make up for the haste of its ebbing away. The shorter my possession of life, the deeper and fuller I must make it.

3.13.74 Others feel the sweetness of contentment and prosperity; I feel it as they do, but not in passing and gliding by. Rather, it must be studied, savored, and ruminated, so as to give due thanks for it to him who grants it to us. They enjoy their other pleasures as they enjoy that of sleep, without being aware of them. So that even sleep should not escape me so stupidly, I

74 Seneca, Letters.

once thought it a good idea to have it disturbed, so that I might catch a glimpse of it. I deliberate with myself about a contentment; I do not skim it, I sound its depths, and I bend my reason, which has grown peevish and fastidious, to gather it in. Do I find myself in some tranquil state? Is there some pleasure tickling me? I do not let my senses filch it; I bring my soul into it—not to bind itself to it, but to enjoy it; not to lose itself in it, but to find itself there. And I set it, for its part, to see itself mirrored in this prosperous state, to weigh and appraise its happiness, and to amplify it. It measures how much it owes to God for being at peace with its conscience and free from other inner passions, and for having the body in its natural condition, enjoying in an orderly and fitting way the soft and pleasing functions with which he is pleased, by his grace, to compensate for the pains with which his justice in its turn chastises us. How much it is worth to it to be lodged in such a place that, wherever it casts its eyes, the sky is calm around it: no desire, no fear or doubt to trouble its air, no difficulty past, present, or future over which its imagination cannot pass without harm! This reflection gains great luster from comparison with different conditions. So I set before me, in a thousand guises, those whom fortune or their own error carries away and buffets with storms; and also those, closer to me, who receive their good fortune so slackly and incuriously. These are people who really do "pass their time." They overleap the present and what they possess, to serve hope, and for the sake of shadows and vain images that fancy sets before them, *Like the shapes that, rumor says, flit about after death, / Or the dreams that delude our slumbering senses*; and these images hasten and lengthen their flight the more they are pursued. The fruit and goal of their pursuit is to pursue, as Alexander said that the end of his labor was to labor. *Thinking nothing done while anything remained to do.*[75]

3.13.75 As for me, then, I love life and cultivate it just as it has pleased God to grant it to us. I do not go around wishing that it lacked the need to eat and drink; and it would seem to me no

75 The first quotation is from Virgil, Aeneid; the second from Lucan, Pharsalia.

less excusable an error to wish that need doubled. *The wise man is the keenest seeker after natural riches.* Nor do I wish that we could sustain ourselves just by putting into our mouths a little of that drug by which Epimenides took away his appetite and kept himself alive. Nor that we should produce children insensibly, through our fingers or our heels—but rather, saving your reverence, that we might also produce them with pleasure through our fingers and our heels. Nor that the body should be without desire and without titillation. These are ungrateful and unjust complaints.[76] I accept with a glad and grateful heart what nature has done for me, and I am pleased with it and proud of it. We wrong that great and all-powerful giver by refusing his gift, nullifying it, and disfiguring it. All good himself, he has made all things good. *All things that are according to nature are worthy of esteem.*[77]

BODY AND MIND TOGETHER

Mind and body belong together; those who would rise above man sink below him.

3.13.76 Among the opinions of philosophy, I more readily embrace those that are most solid, that is to say, the most human and most our own. My reasonings, in keeping with my ways, are low and humble. To my mind philosophy is being very childish when she struts up on her spurs to preach to us: that it is an uncouth alliance to marry the divine with the earthly, the reasonable with the unreasonable, the severe with the indulgent, the honorable with the dishonorable; that pleasure is a brutish quality, unworthy of being tasted by the wise man; that the only pleasure he draws from the enjoyment of a beautiful young wife is the pleasure of his conscience at performing an action according to order, like pulling on his boots for a useful ride. May her followers have no more right, nerve, and sap for deflowering their wives than her lesson has!

76 Seneca, Letters.
77 Cicero, On Ends.

3.13.77 That is not what Socrates says, her tutor and ours. He values bodily pleasure as he should, but he prefers that of the mind, as having more force, constancy, ease, variety, and dignity. According to him, the pleasure of the mind by no means goes alone—he is not so fanciful—but only first. For him temperance is the moderator of pleasures, not their adversary. Nature is a gentle guide, but no more gentle than prudent and just. *We must penetrate into the nature of things and see thoroughly what it demands.* I seek her track everywhere; we have muddled it with artificial tracks. And for this reason that sovereign good of the Academics and Peripatetics, which is to live according to nature, becomes hard to define and explain.[78] So does that of the Stoics, close to it, which is to consent to nature. Is it not an error to consider some actions less worthy because they are necessary? They will never get it out of my head that the marriage of pleasure with necessity is a most fitting one—necessity, with whom, says an ancient, the gods always conspire. Why do we tear apart in divorce a structure woven of so close and brotherly a correspondence? On the contrary, let us bind it together again by mutual services. Let the mind awaken and quicken the heaviness of the body, and the body check the lightness of the mind and steady it. *He who praises the nature of the soul as the sovereign good and condemns the nature of the flesh as evil, assuredly both desires the soul carnally and flees the flesh carnally, since he feels this from human vanity, not from divine truth.*[79] There is no part of this present God has given us that is unworthy of our care; we must account for it down to a single hair. And the commission given to man to guide man according to his condition is no perfunctory one. It is express, plain, and of the first importance, and the Creator gave it to us seriously and sternly. Authority alone carries weight with common minds, and it weighs more in a foreign language. Let us charge again here. *Who would not say that it is the mark of folly to do lazily and rebelliously what has to be done, to*

78 Cicero, On Ends.
79 Saint Augustine, The City of God.

push the body one way and the mind another, and to be torn between the most contrary motions?[80]

3.13.78 Come now, just to see, have such a man tell you one day the amusements and imaginings he fills his head with, for whose sake he turns his thoughts away from a good meal and begrudges the hour he spends feeding himself. You will find that there is nothing so insipid among all the dishes on your table as this fine entertainment of his soul (most often we would do better to be sound asleep than awake for the things we stay awake for). And you will find that his reasonings and intentions are not worth your stew. Even if they were the raptures of Archimedes himself, what would they amount to? I am not touching here, nor mixing in with this rabble of men that we are and this vanity of desires and musings that distract us, those venerable souls raised by the ardor of devotion and religion to a constant and conscientious meditation on divine things. By the force of a lively and vehement hope they anticipate the enjoyment of eternal nourishment, the final goal and last resting place of Christian desires, the only constant and incorruptible pleasure; and so they disdain to concern themselves with our needy comforts, fluid and uncertain, and readily leave to the body the care and use of sensual and temporal fodder. That is a privileged study. Between ourselves, there are two things I have always seen in singular agreement: supercelestial opinions and subterranean morals.

3.13.79 Aesop, that great man, saw his master pissing as he walked. "What," he said, "are we to shit as we run?" Let us husband our time; even so, a great deal of it remains to us idle and ill spent. Does our mind not have enough other hours to do its business without dissociating itself from the body in the little space the body needs for its necessities? They want to get outside themselves and escape from the man. That is folly: instead of changing into angels, they change into beasts; instead of raising themselves, they bring themselves down. These transcendent humors frighten me, like high and inaccessible places. And

80 Seneca, Letters.

nothing in the life of Socrates is so hard for me to digest as his ecstasies and his dealings with his daemon.[81] Nothing in Plato is so human as the very things for which, they say, he is called divine. And of our sciences, those that have climbed highest seem to me the most earthly and low. And I find nothing so humble and mortal in the life of Alexander as his fancies about his immortalization. Philotas stung him wittily with his reply. He had congratulated him by letter on the oracle of Jupiter Ammon that had placed him among the gods: "For your sake I am very glad of it; but there is reason to pity the men who will have to live with, and obey, a man who exceeds the measure of a man and is not content with it."[82] *It is because you hold yourself lesser than the gods that you rule.* The fine inscription with which the Athenians honored Pompey's arrival in their city agrees with my view: *You are a god just so far / As you know yourself a man.*[83]

3.13.80 It is an absolute perfection, and as it were divine, to know how to enjoy our being rightly. We seek other conditions because we do not understand the use of our own, and go outside ourselves because we do not know what it is like within. Yet it is no use our mounting on stilts, for on stilts we must still walk with our own legs. And on the loftiest throne in the world we are still sitting on our own backside. The finest lives, to my mind, are those that conform to the common human pattern, with order, but without miracle and without extravagance. Now old age needs to be treated a little more tenderly.

> Let us commend it to that god who is protector of health and wisdom—but a cheerful and sociable wisdom: *Grant me, son of Latona, to enjoy what I have*
> *in good health, and, I pray, with my mind*
> *unimpaired, to pass an old age not shameful,*
> *nor lacking the lyre.*[84]

81 Aesop's master was the philosopher Xanthus, in the legendary Life of Aesop.
82 The oracle of Ammon was at the Siwa oasis in Egypt.
83 The Latin line is from Horace, Odes; the inscription is reported by Plutarch in his Life of Pompey.
84 Horace, Odes, addressed to Apollo, son of Latona.