

Essays, Book II

(without 'Defence of Raymond Sebond')

Michel de Montaigne

1572–80

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type.—Essay 12, 'Defence of Raymond Sebond', is about 200 pages long and is not included here. —Montaigne kept adding to this work. Following most modern editions, the present version uses tags in the following way:

^[A]: material in the first edition (1580) or added soon thereafter,

^[B]: material added in the greatly enlarged second edition (1588),

^[C]: material added in the first posthumous edition (1595) following Montaigne's notes in his own copy.

The tags are omitted where they seem unimportant. The ones that are retained are kept very small to make them neglectable by readers who aren't interested in those details. Sometimes they are crucial. —The footnotes are all editorial. —Montaigne's spellings of French words are used in the glossary and in references in the text to the glossary. —In the original, all the quotations from Latin writers are given in Latin.

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Glossary

braverie: Courage, usually thought of as swaggering courage.

colic: This is used to translate *colique* on page 44 and in essay 37; the OED defines it as ‘Acute episodic abdominal pain, especially one arising from the twisting, spasm, or obstruction of a hollow organ’; but as essay 37 proceeds it becomes increasingly clear that Montaigne’s affliction was from kidney stones.

coutume: Where the *coutume* is social it is translated as ‘custom’; where it is individual, as ‘habit’, especially in Essay 23.

esprit: Mind, intelligence, wit—take your pick.

essai: An *essai* (French) may be a test, or an attempt, or an exercise, or a certain kind of literary production. The last meaning came solely from Montaigne’s way of labelling these ‘attempts’ or ‘exercises’ of his, and occasionally in the text there is some play on the word.

fatal: Translating *fatal(e)*. As used on pages 94 (item (iv)) and 121, the word means ‘destiny-setting’, applicable to something that *settles* how some later course of events will unroll.

fever: The varieties ‘continual fever’ and ‘quotidian fever’ mentioned on pages 121 and 124 belong to a classification that was old in Montaigne’s time and still has some currency today.

gentleman: This is sometimes used to translate *gentil-homme*; but in Montaigne’s time it tended to mean something stronger than that—a man of *very* good family, perhaps a nobleman.

(im)patience: Mostly translated as ‘(not) putting up with’ or the like; but in some places, especially the paragraph

on pages 128–128 that translation wouldn’t work very well, although the meaning is the same.

magistrate: In this work, ‘a magistrate’ is any official who applies the law; ‘the magistrate’ of a given nation is its system of such officials.

moeurs: The *moeurs* of a people include their morality, their basic customs, their attitudes and expectations about how people will behave, their ideas about what is decent. . . and so on. This word—rhyming approximately with ‘worse’—is left untranslated because there’s no good English equivalent to it. The Oxford *English* dictionary includes it for the same reason it has for including *Schadenfreude*.

prince: Like the English ‘prince’, this in early modern times could refer to any rank up to that of king (or monarch; Queen Elizabeth I referred to herself as a ‘prince’). It is translated by ‘prince’ throughout.

regimen: ‘A prescribed course of exercise, way of life, or diet, esp. for the promotion or restoration of one’s health’ (OED). Translates *régime*, which means the same thing.

science: Translated as ‘branch of learning’ or simply ‘learning’, except in a few cases where those seem stylistically impossible. Then it is left untranslated, or translated as ‘science’, though it never means anything much like ‘science’ in our sense.

speculum: ‘An instrument used to dilate an orifice or canal in the body to allow inspection’ (OED); *speculum matricis* on page 126 refers to the inspection of the vagina.

vice: Translates *vice*, meaning bad behaviour, not necessarily of any of the kinds that would be called ‘vices’ today. Similarly ‘vicious’ [*vicieux*.]

1. The inconsistency of our actions

^[A] Those who strive to account for a man's deeds are never so perplexed as when they set them out and show them in the same light; for they commonly contradict each other in such a strange way that it seems impossible that they should come from the same shop. At one moment young Marius is a son of Mars, another moment a son of Venus. They say that Pope Boniface VIII entered office like a fox, behaved in it like a lion, and died like a dog. And—who would believe it?—when Nero, the very image of cruelty, was presented with the death-sentence of a convicted criminal to be duly signed, he said 'Would to God that I had never learned to write!', so much it oppressed his heart to condemn a man to death.

Everything is so full of such examples—indeed each man can provide himself with so many—that I find it strange to see men of understanding sometimes working hard to make something harmonious of these fragments, seeing that vacillation strikes me as the most common and obvious defect of our nature: witness that famous line of Publius: 'It's a bad resolution that can never be changed!'

^[B] It seems reasonable to judge a man on the basis of the most ordinary features of his life; but given the natural instability of our *moeurs* [see Glossary] and our opinions, it has often seemed to me that even good authors are wrong to insist on seeing each of us as one invariable and solid structure. They select one general characteristic, and set about classifying and interpreting all someone's actions to fit their picture; and if they cannot twist them enough they accuse the man of dissimulating. Augustus has escaped them; for there is in that man such an obvious, abrupt, and continual variety of actions that even the boldest judges had to let him go, intact and unsolved. Nothing is harder for me

than to believe in men's consistency; nothing easier than their inconsistency. Anyone who judged a man in his detail, ^[C] piece by piece, separately, ^[B] would hit on the truth more often.

^[A] In all antiquity it is hard to pick out a dozen men who set their lives on an assured and definite course, which is the principal goal of wisdom. For, to comprise all wisdom in a word, says an ancient [Seneca], and to embrace all the rules of our life in one, it is 'always to want the same thing, always to oppose the same thing. I would not deign to add "provided that the will is just", for if it is not just it cannot possibly remain the same through time.'

In truth, I once learned that vice [see Glossary] is only irregularity and lack of moderation, and that consequently it is impossible for it to go with consistency through time. There is a maxim attributed to Demosthenes: the beginning of all virtue is consultation and deliberation; its end and perfection, consistency. If by reasoning we adopted one definite course of action, it would be the most beautiful one; but nobody has thought of doing that: 'He scorns the thing he sought; seeks again for what he spurned. He fluctuates, and his whole life is disordered' [Horace].

Our ordinary practice is to follow the inclinations of our appetite—to the left, to the right, uphill and downhill—as the wind of circumstance carries us. What we want is in our thought only for the instant that we want it; we change like the animal that takes the colour of the place you set it on. What we decided just now we will change very soon; and soon afterwards we retrace our steps; it is all nothing but shaking and inconstancy: 'We are led like a wooden puppet by wires pulled by others' [Horace]. We do not *go*; we are *carried*; like things afloat, now gently, now violently, as the water is angry or calm: 'Do we not see them, not knowing what they want, always looking for something and changing place, as though

they could get rid of their burden?' [Lucretius].

[A] Every day a new fancy, and our moods change with changes in the weather. . . . [C] We float about among different states of mind; we wish nothing freely, nothing absolutely, nothing constantly. [A] If **a man** were to prescribe and establish definite laws and a definite organisation in his head, we would see shining throughout his whole life an evenness of *moeurs*, an order, and an infallible relation between his principles and his practice.

[C] (The defect Empedocles noted in the Agrigentines was their abandoning themselves to pleasure as though they were to die the next day, while they built as though they would never die.)

[A] **This man** would be easy to understand. That is shown by the younger Cato: touch one of his keys and you have touched them all; there is in him a harmony of sounds in perfect concord that cannot conflict. We on the contrary need a separate judgement for each action: in my opinion the surest way to understand one of us would be to relate each of his actions to its immediate circumstances, without researching further into it and without inferring from it any conclusions about what else he will do.

During the disorders of our poor country I was told that a girl living near where I then was had thrown herself from a high window to escape the violence of a knavish soldier billeted on her. She was not killed by her fall, and repeated her attempt by trying to cut her own throat with a knife—she was stopped from doing so, but only after she had given herself a nasty wound. She herself admitted that the soldier had not yet gone beyond pressing her with requests, solicitations and gifts, but that she was afraid that he would eventually use force. And above all this, there were the words, the look on her face, and that blood testifying to her virtue, truly like some second Lucretia. Well, I learned as a

fact that both before and after this event she was a wench not so hard to come to terms with. As it says in the story: Handsome and gentlemanly as you may be, when you have no luck do not promptly conclude that your lady is inviolably chaste; for all you know, the mule-driver may get his will with her.

Antigonus, having taken a liking to one of his soldiers for his virtue and valour, ordered his doctors to treat him for a persistent internal malady that had long tormented him. He noticed that after the soldier was cured he set about his work with much less ardour, and asked him who had changed him into such a coward. 'You yourself, Sire,' he replied, 'by delivering me from the ills that made life valueless to me.'

A soldier of Lucullus who had been robbed of everything by the enemy made a fine attack on them to get revenge. When he had made up for his loss, Lucullus, having formed a high opinion of him, urged him to some dangerous exploit with all the fine expostulations he could think of: 'With words that might have stirred a coward's heart' [Horace]. 'Urge that', he said, 'on some wretched soldier who has lost everything'—'Yokel though he was, he replied "The man who will go anywhere you like is the one who lost his money-belt"' [Horace]—and resolutely refused to go.

[C] We read that after Sultan Mohammed outrageously berated Hasan, the leader of his Janissaries, for allowing his line of battle to be broken by the Hungarians and for fighting faint-heartedly, Hassan's only reply was to charge furiously against the first group of enemy soldiers to come along, alone and just as he was, weapon in hand; they promptly overwhelmed him. That was perhaps not so much self-justification as ecstasy, not so much natural bravery as a new anger.

[A] That man you saw so adventurous yesterday, do not think it strange if you find him just as cowardly tomorrow.

What put heart into his belly ·yesterday· was anger, or need, or company, or wine, or the sound of a trumpet. His courage was not fashioned by reasoning; it was those factors that stiffened it; it is no wonder if ·today—look at him!—he is made different by other, contrary circumstances.

[C] These supple variations and contradictions that are seen in us have made some people imagine that we have **two** souls, others that **two** powers accompany us and drive us each in his own way, one toward good, the other toward evil; for such sudden changes cannot, ·they think·, be reconciled with **one** simple subject.

[B] Not only does the wind of events move me at will, but I also shake and disturb myself by the instability of my posture; and anyone who observes carefully will hardly find himself in the same state twice. I give my soul now this face, now that, according to which direction I point it in. If I speak of myself in different ways, that is because I look at myself in different ways. Every sort of contradiction can be found in me, depending upon some twist or attribute: timid, insolent; [C] chaste, lecherous; [B] talkative, taciturn; tough, delicate; clever, stupid; angry, meek; lying, truthful; [C] learned, ignorant; generous and miserly and extravagant; [B] I can see something of all that in myself, depending on which way I turn; and anyone who studies himself attentively finds in himself—yes, even in his judgement—this turbulence and discord. There is nothing I can say about myself as a whole, simply, solidly, with no confusion or mixing. . . .

[A] I am always inclined to speak well of what is good, and to interpret favourably anything that can be taken that way; yet the strangeness of our ·human· condition leads to its often being the case that by acting badly we in fact do good; or this would be so if *doing good* were not judged solely by our intentions.

So one courageous action should not be taken as proof

that a man is brave; one who is truly brave will be so always and in all circumstances. If it were a habit of virtue and not a sudden outburst, it would make him equally resolute in all eventualities—as much alone as in company, as much in the barracks as on the battlefield. . . . He would bear being ill in bed as bravely as suffering a wound in battle, and would no more fear dying at home than in an attack. We would not see a man charging into the breach with brave assurance and then—the same man—tormenting himself, like a woman, over the loss of a lawsuit or a son. [C] If he cannot bear slander but is resolute in poverty; if he is weak against the surgeons' knives but steadfast against the swords of his adversaries, then praise should go not to the man but to the action.

Many Greeks, Cicero says, cannot look at their enemies, yet bear up well in illnesses; the Cimbrians and the Celtiberians, just the opposite. 'For nothing can be called constant that does not arise out of a fixed principle' [Cicero].

[B] There is no valour greater in its kind than Alexander's; but it is only of one kind, and is not full or universal enough in all cases. [C] Incomparable though it is, it has blemishes. [B] Which is why we see him •frantically worried over his slightest suspicion that his men are plotting against his life, and •investigating this with passionate and indiscriminate injustice, and with a fear that subverts his natural reason. The superstition with which he was so strongly tainted bears some stamp of faint-heartedness. [C] And the excessiveness of the penance he did for murdering Cleitus is also testimony to the unevenness of his courage.

[A] Our actions are nothing but a patchwork—[C] 'they despise pleasure but are cowardly in pain; they are indifferent to glory but are broken by disgrace' [Cicero]— [A] and we want to win honour under false colours. Virtue wants to be followed only for its own sake; if we borrow its mask for some other purpose, it promptly snatches it from our face. It is, once

the soul is steeped in it, a vivid and strong dye that does not leave the soul except by taking the fabric with it.

That is why to judge a man we must follow his tracks long and carefully. If

- his constancy does not rest firmly on its own foundations—^[C] ‘his way of life having been thought about and prepared for beforehand’ [Cicero], if
- ^[A] changing circumstances make him change his pace (I mean his *path*, for his pace may be sped up or slowed down by them),

then let him go; that man ‘goes before the wind’, as the crest of our Talbot puts it.

It is no wonder, says an ancient [Seneca] that chance has so much power over us, since we live by chance. Anyone who has not groomed his life in general towards a definite goal cannot possibly arrange his individual actions properly. He cannot put the pieces together if he does not have in his head a picture of the whole. What good is a paint supply for someone who does not know what he is to paint? No-one makes a definite plan for his life; we think about it only piecemeal. The Bowman must first know what he is aiming at, and then adjust his hand, bow, bowstring, arrow and movements to that goal. Our projects go astray because they have no direction and no aim. No wind is right for someone who has no port of destination.

In the action brought against Sophocles by his son, I do not agree with the verdict—on the strength of seeing a performance of one of his tragedies—that he was competent to manage his domestic affairs. ^[C] Nor do I think that the Parians sent to reform the Milesians were sound in their thinking. Visiting the island, they identified the best-tended lands and the best-run country estates and noted down their owners’ names, assembled all the citizens in the town, and appointed those owners as the new governors and

magistrates—judging that those who were careful of their private affairs would be careful of those of the public.

^[A] We are all patchwork, so shapeless and diverse in composition that each piece, each moment, plays its own game. And there is as much difference between us and ourselves as there is between us and other people. ^[C] ‘Consider it a great thing to play the part of one single man’ [Seneca]. ^[A] **Ambition** can teach men valour, temperance, generosity, even justice. **Greed** can plant in the mind of a shop-boy, brought up in obscurity and idleness, enough confidence to put himself at the mercy of the waves and angry Neptune, in a frail boat far from his hearth and home; and can also teach him discretion and prudence. And even **Venus** provides resolution and boldness to youths still subject to discipline and the cane, and puts a soldier’s heart into virgins still in their mothers’ laps: ‘With that guidance, the maiden all alone and in the dark steals furtively past the sleeping guardians to come to the young man’ [Tibullus].

In view of all this, a sound intellect will not judge men simply by their outward actions; we must probe right down inside and find out what springs set men in motion. But since this is a dangerous and difficult undertaking, I wish fewer people would meddle with it.

2. Drunkenness

^[A] The human world is all variety and dissimilarity. Vices are all the same in being vices—and perhaps that is how the Stoics understand it—but although they are equally vices they are not equal vices. It is not credible •that a man who has transgressed by a hundred paces those limits ‘beyond which, and short of which, there is no right way’ [Horace] is not in a worse condition than one who has transgressed them

only by ten paces; or •that sacrilege is no worse than stealing a cabbage from our garden: 'Reason cannot convince me that there is equal sinfulness in trampling down someone's spring cabbages and in robbing the temple-treasures in the night' [Horace]. There is as much diversity there as anywhere else.

[B] Confusion about the ranking and measuring of sins is dangerous. Murderers, traitors and tyrants gain too much by it; it is not right that their conscience is relieved because somebody else is lazy, lascivious or less assiduous in his devotions. Each man lays weight on his neighbours' sins and lightens his own. Even our theological teachers often rank sins badly, in my opinion.

[C] Socrates said that wisdom's chief duty is to distinguish good from bad, and we whose best is always partly vicious should say the same about the science [see Glossary] of distinguishing among the vices; if that is not done precisely, virtuous people will be jumbled together with vicious ones.

[A] Now drunkenness, among the others, seems to me gross and brutish. The **mind** has more of a part in the others; and there are some vices that have about them something indefinably magnanimous, if that is the right word. There are some that have an ingredient of learning, diligence, valour, prudence, skill and dexterity; drunkenness is all **body** and earthiness. So the grossest nation of our day is the only one that holds it in esteem. Other vices harm the understanding; this one overthrows it; [B] and it stuns the body: 'When the strength of the wine has sunk in, limbs become heavy, legs get tangled, speech is slowed, the mind becomes sodden, the eyes swim; then come the din, the hiccups and the brawling' [Lucretius]. [C] The worst state for a man is when he loses knowledge and control of himself.

·USES OF DRUNKENNESS·

[A] And among other things they say that, just as the juice fermenting in the jar pushes what is at the bottom up to the top, so wine uncorks the most intimate secrets of those who have drunk too much: 'Jolly Bacchus, you uncover the cares and secret counsels of the wise' [Horace].

[A] Josephus tells how he wormed secrets out of a certain ambassador sent to him by his enemies by getting him to drink a lot. Yet Augustus confided his most private secrets to Lucius Piso, the conqueror of Thrace, and was never let down by him; nor was Tiberius by Cossus, on whom he unburdened all of his plans; though we know them to have been so given to drinking that they had often to be carried out of the Senate, both drunk, 'Their veins swollen with yesterday's wine, as usual' [Virgil]. [C] And the plan to kill Caesar was confided to Cimber (who was often drunk) as trustingly as it was confided to Cassius (who drank water); and Cimber amusingly responded 'I should bear the weight of a tyrant—I who cannot bear the weight of wine!' [A] We see our Germans when drowned in wine remember their quarters, password, and rank: [B] 'It is not easy to beat them, even when they are sodden-drunk, incoherent and staggering about' [Juvenal].

[C] I would not have believed anyone could be so deeply drunk—dead and buried in drunkenness—if I had not read the following in the history books. With the purpose of inflicting on him some notable indignity, Attalus invited to supper that Pausanias who for the same reason later killed Philip king of Macedon¹. . . . and got him to drink so much that he could insensibly abandon his handsome body, like the body of a hedgerow whore, to mule-drivers and to many

¹ Why 'for the same reason'? Because it was thought that the murder of Philip was driven by anger at Philip's not having punished Attalus for procuring Pausanias's rape.

abject scullions in his household.

And a lady whom I honour and greatly esteem told me that in a village not far from her home a widow of chaste reputation, feeling the first hints of pregnancy, told her neighbours that if she had a husband she would think she was with child. But as the reason for her suspicions grew bigger every day and finally became evident, she brought herself to having it declared from the pulpit of her church that if any man would admit the deed she promised to pardon him and, if he saw fit, to marry him. One of her young farm-hands, emboldened by this proclamation, declared that he had found her, one holiday when she had taken her wine very freely, so deeply asleep by her fireside and so indecently displayed that he had been able to enjoy her without waking her up. They married each other and are still alive.

^[A] Antiquity, certainly, did not strongly condemn this vice. Even the writings of several philosophers speak of it very mildly; and some Stoics advise us to allow ourselves to drink our fill occasionally, and to get drunk to relax the soul: ^[B] 'They say that in this trial of strength Socrates took the prize' [Maximianus]. ^[C] That censor and corrector of others, ^[A] Cato was reproached for his heavy drinking: ^[B] 'It is told how the old Cato's strength was often warmed with wine' [Horace].

^[A] Cyrus, such a renowned king, cited among the praise-worthy qualities that made him preferable to his brother Artaxerxes the fact that he could drink better. Among the best regulated and governed nations, this test of drinking one's fill was much in use. I have heard Silvius, an excellent Parisian doctor, say that to arouse the powers of our stomachs it is a good thing once a month to awaken them by this excess, stimulating them so as to stop them from getting sluggish. ^[B] And we read that the Persians discussed their most important affairs after drinking wine.

·MONTAIGNE'S ATTITUDE TO ALL THIS·

^[A] My taste and constitution are more hostile to this vice than my reason is. For, apart from the fact that I readily submit my beliefs to the authority of ancient opinions, I find this vice—though base and stupid—less malicious and harmful than the others, which nearly all do more direct damage to our society. And if we cannot enjoy ourselves without its costing us something, as they say, I find that this vice costs our conscience less than the others. Besides which, wine is easy to prepare and easy to find—a non-negligible consideration.

^[C] A man advanced in years and rank told me that he counted drink among the three main pleasures left to him in this life. But he went about it wrongly. A fine palate and care in the selecting of wines are to be avoided. If you base your pleasure on drinking good wine, you are bound to suffer from drinking bad. A less exacting and freer taste is required. A good drinker should not have such a delicate palate. The Germans drink almost all wines with equal pleasure. Their aim is to swallow rather than to taste. They get a better bargain. Their pleasure is more abundant and closer at hand.

Secondly, to drink French style, at two meals but moderately, is to restrain the god's favours too much. More time and constancy are required. The ancients spent entire nights in this occupation and often went on into the next day. So we make our daily drinking habits more expansive and vigorous. I have seen in my time a great lord, a person of high enterprises and famous successes, who effortlessly and in the course of his ordinary meals drank almost two gallons of wine and who on leaving showed himself only too wise and circumspect—at the expense of our affairs!

The pleasure that we want to count on over the whole of our life should take up more space in it. Like shop-

apprentices and workmen we ought to refuse no opportunity for a drink, and have this desire always in our head. It seems that we daily cut back on the use of wine, and that in our houses, as I saw as a boy, lunches, suppers and snacks used to be much more frequent and usual than they are now. Could it be that in something we are moving towards an improvement? Surely not. But it could be that we are much more given to lechery than our fathers were. Those two occupations impede each other's strength. On the one hand lechery has weakened our stomachs; on the other, sobriety makes us more lively and lusty for love-making.

·AN INTERLUDE IN PRAISE OF MONTAIGNE PÈRE·

It is wonderful the accounts I have heard my father give of the chastity of his times. He was the one to talk of this, being well suited both by nature and by art to the service of the ladies. He spoke little and well; he sprinkled his speech with elegant expressions from books in the modern-vernaculars, especially Spanish. . . . His bearing was one of gentle, humble and very modest gravity. Particular care for neatness and propriety of person and dress, whether afoot or on horseback. Enormous fidelity in keeping his word, and conscientiousness and over-all piety tending towards superstition rather than towards the other extreme. For a small man, full of vigour, and straight and well-proportioned in stature; and with an attractive face, inclining to brown; adroit and nimble in all gentlemanly exercises. I have seen canes filled with lead with which he is said to have exercised his arms for throwing the bar and the stone, or for fencing, and shoes with leaden soles to make him lighter in running and jumping. Folk recall little miracles of his in vaulting. I have seen him, past sixty, put our agility to shame, vaulting into the saddle in his furred gown, doing a turn over the table on his thumb, nearly always going up to his room taking

three or four steps at a time. On my subject, he used to say that in a whole province there was hardly one woman of quality who had a bad reputation, and he would tell of men—especially himself—who were on remarkably intimate terms with decent women without a breath of suspicion. In his own case he would solemnly swear that he had come to his marriage as a virgin; and this was after he had taken a long part in the Italian wars, leaving a detailed hand-written diary of events there, both public and personal. He married on his way back from Italy in 1528 at the mature age of 32.

Let us get back to our bottles.

·RETURNING TO THE TOPIC·

[A] The discomforts of old age, which need some support and refreshment, could reasonably make me want to be a better drinker, since that is almost the last pleasure that the passing years steal from us. According to our drinking fraternity, natural heat starts in the feet; that concerns childhood. From there it rises to the middle region, where it settles in for a long time and produces there, in my opinion, the only bodily pleasures of true life. . . . Towards the end, like a mist rising and evaporating, it lands in the gullet and makes there its last stop.

[B] But I cannot understand how anyone can prolong the pleasure of drinking beyond his thirst, creating in his imagination an appetite that is artificial, unnatural. My stomach would not go that far; it has enough trouble coping with what it takes in for its needs. [C] My disposition is not to care much about drink except after a meal, which is why my last drink is always the biggest. Anacharsis was amazed that the Greeks should at the end of their meals drink out of bigger glasses than they used at the start. I suppose it was for the same reason that the Germans do it, beginning their drinking contests at that point.

Plato forbids young people to drink before the age of eighteen and to get drunk before forty. But men over forty he permits to enjoy themselves in this way and to bring copiously into their banquets the influence of Dionysius, that good god who restores gaiety to all men, and youth to the old ones, who calms and softens the passions of the soul as iron is softened by fire. And in his *Laws* he finds such drinking parties to be useful (provided that the group has a leader to ensure that order is maintained), on the ground •that drunkenness is a good and certain test of each man's character and, at the same time, is suited to giving older men the courage to enjoy themselves in music and dancing, useful pastimes that they would not venture to engage in when sober; and •that wine can temper the soul and give health to the body. However, he likes these restrictions, partly borrowed from the Carthaginians: that it should be engaged in sparingly on military expeditions, and that it should be avoided

- by all statesmen and judges when they are about to perform their duties and to consult on matters of public concern;
- in daylight hours that are owed to other activities; and
- on any night when we intend to beget children. . . .

·EVEN WISE MEN ARE FRAIL·

^[A] But it is an old and entertaining question whether the soul of a wise man would yield to the power of wine: 'if wine can storm the fort of wisdom' [Horace]. What inanity we are driven to by our good opinion of ourselves! The best governed and most perfect soul in the world has only too much to do to stay on its feet and keep itself from falling to the ground through its own weakness. Not one soul in a thousand stands up calm and straight for one instant in its life; and it could be questioned whether, given the soul's

natural condition, it can ever be so. But if you add constancy as well, that is the soul's highest perfection—I mean when nothing shakes it, which a thousand stray events can do.

It was all very well for that great poet Lucretius to philosophise and brace himself—look at him, driven insane by a love-potion! Do they think that an apoplexy will not make Socrates lose his wits as much as it will a porter? Some have been led by the force of an illness to forget their very name, and a slight wound has overturned the judgement of others. For all his wisdom, the sage is still a man; and what is there more null and void, more wretched, more *nothing*? Wisdom cannot overcome our natural limitations: ^[B] 'Then we see sweat and pallor take over his whole body, his tongue grows incoherent, his voice fails, his eyes are troubled, his ears begin to ring, his legs give way and he falls to the ground, as panic seizes his mind' [Lucretius]. ^[A] When he—the sage—is threatened with a blow nothing can stop him from blinking; if you set him on the edge of a precipice he must shudder like a child; because nature has reserved to itself these signs of its authority—slight ones, but invulnerable to reason or Stoic virtue—in order to teach man his mortality and our triviality. ^[A] He becomes pale with fear, he blushes with shame, he bewails an attack of colic in a voice which, if not desperate and clamorous, is at least broken and hoarse. 'Let him not take anything human to be alien to him' [Terence]. Poets, ^[C] who invent things as they please, ^[A] do not dare to exempt their heroes from tears: 'Thus he speaks, weeping, and then sets sail with his fleet' [Virgil]. Enough for him to rein in and moderate his affections, for it is not in his power to do away with them.

Even that Plutarch of ours—so perfect and excellent a judge of human actions—on seeing Brutus and Torquatus killing their children came to doubt whether virtue could go that far, and whether those great men had not rather been

shaken by some other passion. All actions outside the usual limits are open to sinister interpretations, since our taste is no more drawn to things above it than to things below.

·THE SOUL CUTTING LOOSE·

[C] Let us leave aside that other sect—the Stoics—which makes an express profession of pride. But even in the sect that is considered the softest, we hear these boasts of Metrodorus: ‘I have forestalled you, Fortune, and caught you; I have blocked off all your approaches; you cannot get near me’ [Cicero]. [Montaigne now offers, in gruesome detail, three episodes in which people undergoing torture shout defiance and even claim to be contented. He comments:]

[A] When we hear such defiance, we have to admit that in these souls there is some change for the worse, some frenzy, no matter how holy.

When we come across such Stoic sallies as

- Antisthenes saying ‘I would rather be mad than voluptuous’,
- Sextius telling us that he would rather be pierced by pain than by pleasure, and
- Epicurus undertaking to be *caressed* by gout, refusing rest and good health, cheerfully defying ills and—scorning less severe pains and not condescending to struggle with them—calling for and *wanting* pains that are strong, biting, and worthy of him. . . .

who does not conclude that these are outbursts of a runaway courage? Our soul could not reach so high while staying in its own place. It has to leave it and rise and, taking the bit between its teeth, abduct its man and carry him so far that afterwards even he is amazed by his deeds. As in war, the heat of the combat often makes valiant go through such dangers that that they are the first to be struck with astonishment once they have come back to themselves; so

too poets are often seized by wonder at their own works and no longer recognise the track through which they ran such a fine race. In their case too it is called frenzy and mania. And just as Plato says that a sedate man knocks in vain at poetry’s door, so too Aristotle says that no outstanding soul is free from a mixture of folly. He is right to call folly any leap—however praiseworthy it might be—that goes beyond our judgement and reason. Especially since wisdom is an orderly management of our soul, carried out with measure and proportion, on the soul’s responsibility. . . .

3. Suicide

[Montaigne entitled this essay ‘A custom of the island of Cea’, for a reason that does not appear until page 15. The present title is anachronistic: French did not have *suicide*—or (it seems) any other one word with that meaning—until about two centuries later.]

[A] If to philosophise is to doubt, as they say, then *a fortiori* to fool about and weave fantasies as I do must also be to doubt; for it is the learners’ role to inquire and argue, the master’s to provide the solutions. My master is the authority of God’s will, which rules us without contradiction, and has its place above these vain human controversies.

·IN DEFENCE OF SUICIDE·

When Philip had entered the Peloponnesus with his army, somebody told Damidas that the Spartans would have sufferings in plenty if they did not get back into Philip’s favour. ‘Coward,’ he replied, ‘what can men suffer who do not fear death?’ And Agis was asked how a man could live free; ‘By regarding death as negligible’, he replied.

These assertions and a thousand others that we find to the same effect evidently mean something beyond merely accepting death when it comes to us; for many things we can

suffer in life are worse than death. Witness that Spartan boy who was captured by Antigonus and then sold as a slave; when pressed by his master to perform some abject task he said: 'You will see whom you have bought; it would be shameful for me to be a slave when freedom is so ready at hand.' And so saying, he threw himself from the top of the house. When Antipater harshly threatened the Spartans to force them to go along with one of his demands, they answered 'If you threaten us with something worse than death, we will be all the more willing to die.' ^[C] And when Philip threatened to block all their undertakings, 'What,' they said, 'will you also block us from dying?'

^[A] That is what they say: that a wise man lives not as long as he can but as long as he should; and that nature's most beneficent gift to us—the one that deprives us of all grounds for complaining over our condition—consists in leaving to us the means to get out. It has ordained only one entrance to life, and a hundred thousand exits. ^[B] 'We may lack land to live on,' as Boiocalus replied to the Romans, 'but we cannot lack land to die on.' ^[A] Why do you complain of this world? It has no hold on you; if you live in pain the cause is your cowardice; to die, all that is needed is the will: 'Death is everywhere. It is a great favour from God that while anyone can take your life from you, no-one can take away your death; a thousand open roads lead to it.' [Seneca]

And it is not the remedy for a single illness; death is the remedy for all ills. It is a very safe haven that is never to be feared and is often to be sought. It all comes to the same thing whether a man gives himself his death or passively accepts it, whether he runs to meet his last day or waits for it. Wherever it comes from, it is still his; no matter where the thread breaks, that is the whole of it—it's the end of the skein.

The most voluntary death is the most beautiful. Life

depends on the will of others; death on our own. In nothing should we suit our own humour as much as in this. Reputation has nothing to do with such an undertaking; it is folly to consider it. Living is slavery if the freedom to die is lacking. . . .

^[C] Just as I do not break the laws against theft when I take my own property or cut my own purse, or the laws against arson if I burn my own woods, so too I am not bound by the laws against murder if I take my own life.

Hegesias used to say that like the condition of life, the condition of death should depend on our choice. And when Diogenes met Speusippus the philosopher, long afflicted with dropsy and carried in a litter, who called to him 'Good health, Diogenes!', he replied 'No health to you, who allow yourself to live in that condition.' Indeed, some time later Speusippus had himself killed, weary of such a painful condition of life.

·THE CASE AGAINST SUICIDE·

^[A] But this does not pass without opposition. For many hold that •we cannot abandon this garrison of the world without the express command of him who has posted us here; that •it is for God (who has sent us here not for ourselves alone but for his glory and for the service of others) to *give* us leave when he pleases, not for us to *take* it; and that ^[C] •we were born not for ourselves but also for our country: the laws require us. . . .to account for ourselves, and can bring an action for homicide against us. ^[A] Otherwise, as deserters from our post we are punished in the next world: 'Then, nearby, was the region where, overwhelmed with sadness, stand the just who had killed themselves by their own hand and, loathing daylight, had thrown away their souls' [Virgil].

There is much more fortitude in wearing out the chain that binds us than in breaking it, and more proof of firmness in Regulus than in Cato. It is rashness and impatience [see

Glossary] that hasten our pace. No mishap can make living virtue turn its back; it goes looking for evils and pains, and feeds on them. The threats of tyrants, the rack and the scaffold put spirit and life into it: ‘. . . as some oak, rich in its dark leaves, trimmed back by the double-bladed axe, draws strength and life, despite loss and destruction, from the very steel itself’ [Horace]. And as another says: ‘Virtue is not as you think, father, fearing life; it is confronting huge evils without turning one’s back or retreating’ [Seneca]. ‘In adversity it is easy to despise death; stronger is the man who can live in misery’ [Martial]. It is the part of cowardice, not virtue, to go and hide in a hole beneath a massive tombstone so as to avoid the blows of fortune. Whatever storm it faces, virtue does not stop on the road or slacken its pace: ‘If the world were to shatter and fall on him, its ruins would strike him but fear would not’ [Horace].

Most commonly what drives us to this misfortune is flight from others. Indeed, flying from death sometimes makes us run towards it—‘[C] I ask you, is it not madness to perish in order to avoid death?’ [Martial]—^[A] like those who for fear of the precipice throw themselves over it: ‘The fear of future ills has driven many into great dangers; strongest of all is the man who can brave dangers when they come but knows how to avoid them when possible’ [Lucan]. ‘Fear of dying can even bring men to hate life and the very sight of the light, so that with heavy heart they arrange their own deaths, forgetting that the source of all their distress was their fear of dying’ [Lucretius]. ^[C] In his *Laws*, Plato ordains an ignominious burial for anyone who has deprived his closest and best friend, namely himself, of life and of his destined course, under the influence not of

- the sentence of the public court, or of
- some sad and unavoidable accident of fortune, or of
- some unbearable shame, but only of

•the cowardice and weakness of a timorous soul.

^[A] 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 can look down on ours, but it is unnatural for us to despise ourselves or care little for ourselves; hating and disdaining oneself is a malady peculiar to man, not found in any other creature.

It is by a similar vanity that we want to be something other than what we are. The success of such a desire has no effect on us because the desire contradicts, and works against, itself. Anyone who wants to be changed from man to angel does nothing for himself; he would gain nothing by it. For when he no longer exists, who will rejoice and feel for him over that change? ^[B] ‘For anyone to be wretched in the future, he must exist at the time when the blow falls’ [Lucretius].

^[A] What we purchase by our death—security, rest, calm, freedom from the evils of this life—bring us no benefit. A man achieves nothing by avoiding war if he cannot enjoy peace; he achieves nothing by fleeing trouble if he does not have what it takes to savour rest.

·VARIANTS WITHIN THE SUPPORT FOR SUICIDE·

Among those who endorse suicide there has been much uncertainty over what occasions could justify anyone’s deciding to kill himself, i.e. to make what they call a ‘reasonable exit’. For although they say that in many cases it is right to end one’s life for minor reasons, because the reasons that keep us living are not very strong either, still there should be some moderation.

Some fantastic and irrational humours have driven not only individual men but whole peoples to do away with themselves. I cited examples of this ·in Book 1, essay 14·; and we also read of the virgins of Miletus who in a mad

conspiracy hanged themselves one after another, until the authorities put a stop to this by ordering that any found hanging in this way should be dragged by the same rope stark naked through the city.

When Cleomenes has fled from death in the battle he has just lost, Threicion urges him to kill himself because of the sorry state of his affairs, accepting this other death that is second in honour to the one he has escaped, giving the victors no chance to make him suffer a shameful death or a shameful life. Cleomenes, with a stoic Spartan courage, rejects this counsel as weak and effeminate: 'That is a remedy', he says, 'that I will never be without but that should not be used while there is an inch of hope remaining.' He adds that to go on living sometimes requires constancy and courage, and that he wants even his death to serve his country, and wants to make it an honourable and virtuous deed. Threicion followed his own advice and killed himself. Cleomenes did the same later on, but only after experiencing the worst that fortune can do.

Not all troubles are worth our wanting to die to avoid them. And then there are so many sudden changes in human affairs that it is hard to judge at what point it is right to abandon hope: ^[B] 'Even when lying vanquished on the cruel sand, while the menacing crowd in the arena turn their thumbs down, the gladiator still hopes on' [Pentadius].

^[A] There is an ancient saying that anything can be hoped for while a man is still alive. 'Yes,' replies Seneca, 'but why should I bear in mind that fortune can do anything *for* one who remains alive rather than that fortune can do nothing *to* one who knows how to die?'

We see Josephus involved in a danger so clear and so imminent, with a whole nation in revolt against him, that he could not reasonably hope for relief; yet having been (as he tells us) advised by a friend to do away with himself at this

point, he did well to cling stubbornly to hope, for fortune, beyond all human reason, so reversed the situation that he found himself delivered from it unharmed. Cassius and Brutus, on the other hand, by the rash and unthinking haste with which they killed themselves before the proper time and occasion, demolished the remnants of Roman freedom, which it was their duty to protect.

^[C] I have seen hundreds of hares escape from the very jaws of the greyhounds: 'A man has been known to outlive his executioner' [Seneca]. ^[B] 'Time in its wavering course has often produced great changes for the better; and fortune, altering its course, has sported with men and restored them again to solid prosperity' [Virgil]. . . .

·MISCELLANEOUS ANECDOTES INVOLVING SUICIDES·

[Montaigne offers six wearying pages of these. The ones omitted here only illustrate things also shown by some of the others.]

^[A] There are some who, to avoid a worse death, decide to seek death at their discretion. ^[C] Damocritus, the leader of the Aetolians, was led prisoner to Rome; one night he found a way to escape. But being pursued by his guards he ran himself through with his sword before they could recapture him.

When the city of Epirus was reduced to the last extremity by the Romans, Antinous and Theodotus advised all its people to kill themselves; but when policy of surrendering was decided on by the populace, these two went and sought death, rushing on the enemy, intent only on striking and not on protecting themselves.

A few years ago when the island of Gozo was taken by the Turks, a Sicilian with two beautiful daughters who were ready for marriage killed them with his own hand, and then killed their mother who came running up at their death. With that done, he went into the street with a crossbow

and an arquebus; with two shots he killed the first two Turks who approached his door; then with sword in hand he threw himself furiously into the mêlée where he was quickly surrounded and cut to pieces, saving himself from slavery after having first delivered his family from it.

[A] Fleeing the cruelty of Antiochus, Jewish women, after having their infants circumcised, jumped to their deaths with them. . . .

Scribonia advised her nephew Libo to kill himself rather than await the hand of justice, telling him he was doing other people's work if he preserved his life merely to surrender it three or four days later into the hands of those who would come looking for it. . . .

·SUICIDE TO AVOID BEING RAPED·

Of acts of violence against the conscience, the one most to be avoided in my opinion is that against the chastity of women; because an element of bodily pleasure is naturally mixed in with it, so that their resistance cannot be absolutely complete, and it seems that ·in a rape· force is met with a some willingness.

[C] Ecclesiastical history reveres several examples of devout persons who called on death to protect them from the outrages prepared by tyrants against their religion and their conscience. Two of them have been canonised:

- Pelagia, who cast herself and her mother and sisters into the river to avoid rape by a group of soldiers, and
- Sophronia, who killed herself to avoid being raped by the Emperor Maxentius.

[A] Future centuries may honour us for having a learned author in our days (a Parisian be it noted) who takes trouble to persuade the ladies of our time to do anything rather than follow the horrible counsel of such despair. I am sorry he

did not know, for inclusion among his stories, the good one I heard in Toulouse concerning a woman who had passed through the hands of a group of soldiers: 'God be praised', she said, 'that at least once in my life I have been satisfied without sin.'

But these cruelties are not worthy of the gentle ways of France.¹ Thank God our air has been thoroughly purged of them since that sound piece of advice. All women need is to follow the rule of our good Marot: say 'No!' while doing it.

·BACK TO THE OTHER ANECDOTES·

History is full of those who have in a thousand ways exchanged a pain-filled life for death.

[B] Lucius Aruntius killed himself, 'in order', he said, 'to escape both the future and the past'.

[C] After Granius Silvanus and Staius Proximus had been pardoned by Nero, they killed themselves: either •so as not to live by the grace of such a wicked man, or else—in view of his readiness to suspect and accuse good men—•so as not to have to go through the ordeal of a second pardon later on. . . .

Bogez, governor of Eion for King Xerxes, when besieged by the Athenian army under the leadership of Cimon, refused the offer of a safe-conduct to Persia for him and his ·personal· goods, because he could not bear to survive the loss of what his master had given into his keeping. Having defended his city to the very end when there was nothing left to eat, he first threw into the river Strymon all the gold and everything else he thought the enemy might best take as plunder; then, having ordered a huge pyre to be lit and the throats of his wife, children, concubines and servants to be cut, he threw them into the fire and then himself. . . .

[B] Sextilia the wife of Scaurus, and Paxea the wife of Labeo,

¹ [He means the cruelty of committing suicide to escape from rape or from the supposed shame of having been raped.]

to encourage their husbands to escape the dangers that beset them—in which they were not concerned except as loving wives—voluntarily took their own lives so as to provide their hard-pressed husbands with examples and with company.

What they did for their husbands Coceius Nerva did for his country, less usefully but with equal love. That great jurist, flourishing in health, riches, reputation and respect, and close to the Emperor, killed himself out of compassion for the wretched condition of the Roman Republic.

Nothing can be added to the delicacy of the death of the wife of Fulvius, a close friend of Augustus. One morning Augustus, having learned that Fulvius had revealed a vital secret he had entrusted to him, received him frowningly when he came to see him. Fulvius returned home in despair and told his wife piteously that having fallen into this misfortune he was resolved to kill himself. She said very frankly: 'You will only be doing what's right, seeing that for all your experience of the indiscipline of my tongue you did not guard against it. But wait, let me kill myself first', and without more ado she ran a sword through her body. . . .

Alexander was besieging a city in India; its inhabitants, finding themselves hard-pressed, vigorously resolved to deprive him of the pleasure of this victory, and—despite his humanity—they burned themselves to death along with their city. A new kind of war: the enemy fought to save them; they to destroy themselves; and to ensure their death they did all the things that people do to ensure their life.

[C] When the walls and defence-works of Astapa (a town in Spain) turned out to be too weak to withstand the Romans, the inhabitants made a pile of their riches and household objects in the market-place and placed their wives and children on top of the heap, surrounding it with wood and other material that would catch fire easily; then, leaving behind fifty young men to carry out their plan, they made

a sortie during which they all sought death, as they had sworn to do, not being able to win. The fifty young men, having first massacred every living soul scattered about their town, set fire to the pile and then threw themselves upon it, ending their high-minded freedom in insensibility rather than in pain and shame; and showing their enemies that if it had pleased fortune they would have been as brave in depriving them of victory as they had been in making their victory frustrating and horrifying—indeed *fatal* to those who, lured by the glitter of gold melting in those flames, crowded around it and were suffocated and burned to death, unable to draw back because of the crowd behind them.

The people of Abydos, pressed by Philip, made the same resolution. But they had too little time. King Philip, horrified by the rash haste of their preparations (they had already assembled the treasures and household goods they were going to destroy by fire or water), withdrew his soldiers and granted them three days to kill themselves with more order and less pressure, days that they filled with blood and slaughter exceeding any enemy's cruelty; not a single person of them escaped who had power over himself.

There are countless examples of similar mass resolves; they seem all the more horrible as their effect is more universal; but they are in fact less horrible than when done individually. What persuasion would not do for each man separately it does for them all together, group frenzy snatching away each individual judgement.

·SUICIDE WITH AN EYE ON THE AFTER-LIFE·

[A] Sometimes death is desired in the hope of a greater good: 'I have a desire', said St Paul, 'to depart and to be with Christ.' And 'Who shall deliver me from these bonds?' Cleombrotus Ambraciota, having read Plato's *Phaedo*, acquired such a great appetite for the life to come that for no other reason he

went and threw himself into the sea. ^[C] That clearly shows how wrong we are to label as 'despair' this wish to depart, to which we are often brought by the ardour of hope, and often by a calm and thoughtful inclination of our judgement.

^[A] During Saint Louis's journey to Outremer, Jacques du Chastel the Bishop of Soissons saw that the king and the whole army were preparing to return to France leaving their religious business unfinished; he resolved rather to go to Paradise, and having said adieu to his friends he charged alone into the enemy, in full view of everyone, and was cut to pieces. . . .

·VARIOUS LAWS RELATING TO SUICIDE·

^[B] In the time of Tiberius, condemned men awaiting execution forfeited their property and were denied funeral rites; those who got in first by killing themselves were buried and could make a will.

^[A] There are governments that have taken it upon themselves to rule when voluntary death is legal and appropriate. In our Marseilles there used to be kept, at public expense, some poison based on hemlock for those who wanted to hasten their days. They first had to get their reasons approved by 'the six hundred', their senate. It was not permissible to lay hands on oneself except by leave of the magistrate [see Glossary] and for legitimate reasons. This same law was also found elsewhere.

When sailing to Asia, Sextus Pompeius went via the island of Cea in the Aegean. As one of his company tells us, it happened by chance that while he was there a woman of great authority, who had just explained to the citizens why she had decided to end her life, asked him to honour her death with his presence; which he did. Having tried in vain for a long time—by force of eloquence (at which he was wonderfully proficient) and of persuasion—to deflect her from

her purpose, he finally allowed her to have her way. She had lived for ninety years in a happy state of mind and body; now she was lying on her bed (made more ornate than usual) and was propped up on her elbow. She said:

'Sextus Pompeius, may the gods be gracious to you (the gods I leave behind rather than those I am about to meet) for not disdaining to be a counsellor in my life and a witness to my death. For my part, having always experienced fortune's favourable face, and fearing that the desire to live too long might confront me with an adverse face, I am with this happy death giving leave of absence to what remains of my soul, leaving behind me two daughters and a legion of grandchildren.'

She then urged her family to agree in peace and unity, divided her possessions among them, and commended her household gods to her elder daughter, then with a steady hand she took the cup containing the poison and—having addressed her vows to Mercury, praying to be taken to some happy abode in the next world—she quickly swallowed that mortal potion. She then kept the company informed of the progress of its operation; how the the parts of her body grew cold, one after another; until she finally said it had reached her heart and her entrails, whereupon she called on her daughters to do one last thing for her, to close her eyes.

Pliny gives an account of a certain Hyperborean people whose climate is so temperate that their lives are ordinarily ended only by their own will. When they become weary, having had their fill of life and reached an advanced age, it is their custom after making merry with their friends to leap into the sea from a high rock reserved for this purpose.

^[C] Unbearable ^[B] pain and the fear of a worse death seem to me the most excusable motives for suicide.

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Essay 4. 'Let business wait till tomorrow' is a couple of pages of musings on procrastination.

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5. Conscience

·CONSCIENCE AS A BETRAYER·

[A] During our civil wars I was travelling one day with my brother the sieur de la Brousse when we met a gentleman [see Glossary] of good appearance; he was of the opposing party, but I did not know that because he pretended not to be. The worst of these wars is that the cards are so shuffled—your enemy not being marked off from you by any clear indication of language or of bearing, having been brought up under the same laws, *moeurs* and atmosphere as you—that it is hard to avoid confusion and disorder. That made me fear that I myself would encounter our own troops in a place where I was not known and might have no chance to state my name, or maybe something worse. [B] Such a misunderstanding had happened to me once before; I lost men and horses. Among others, they miserably killed one of my pages, an Italian of good family whom I was carefully training; in him was extinguished a fine young life full of great promise.

[A] But this man ·whom we met on the road· was so madly afraid, and I saw him so paralysed every time we met any horsemen or passed through towns loyal to the King, that I finally guessed that his alarms arose from his conscience. It seemed to this poor man that right through his visor and the crosses on his greatcoat people would read the secret thoughts of his mind. So marvelous is the power of conscience! It makes us betray, accuse and fight ourselves; in the absence of an outside witness it brings us forward

against ourselves: 'Lashing us with invisible whips, our soul torments us [Juvenal].

This story is on the lips of children: a Paeonian called Bessus was rebuked for having wantonly knocked down a nest of sparrows and killed them. He said he had reason to do so, because these little birds kept falsely accusing him of having murdered his father. Until then this act of parricide had been hidden and unknown; but the avenging furies of conscience made the very man who was to pay the penalty be the one who made it public.

· . . . AS A SOURCE OF ANXIETY·

Hesiod corrects Plato's dictum that the punishment follows close after the sin; for he says it is born at the same instant as the sin itself. Whoever expects punishment is already suffering it, and whoever has done something to deserve it expects it. Wickedness forges torments against itself—'Bad designs are worst for the person who makes them' [Proverb]—just as the wasp harms others when it stings but especially itself, for it thereby loses its sting and its strength for ever. . . .

Blister-beetles have something in them that works as an antidote to their poison, by a contrariety of nature. So also, even while we are taking pleasure in vice there is born in our conscience an opposite displeasure that torments us, waking and sleeping, with many painful thoughts: 'Many indeed, often talking in their sleep or delirious in illness, have revealed long-hidden sins' [Lucretius].

[A] Apollodorus dreamed that he saw himself being flayed by the Scythians, then boiled in a cauldron, while his heart kept muttering 'It is I who has caused you all these woes.' No hiding-place awaits the wicked, said Epicurus, for they can never be sure of being hidden, since their conscience reveals them to themselves. 'This is the principal vengeance: no guilty man is absolved, he being his own judge' [Juvenal].

· . . . AS A SOURCE OF CONFIDENCE ·

As conscience fills us with fear, so also it fills us with assurance and confidence. ^[B] And I can say that in a number of dangerous situations I have walked with a much firmer step because of my secret knowledge of my own will and of the innocence of my intentions. ^[A] 'A man's knowledge of his own actions creates either hope or fear in him, according to what the actions were' [Ovid]. There are a thousand examples; it will suffice to cite three, all about the same man.

When Scipio was arraigned one day before the Roman people on a grave indictment, instead of making excuses or flattering his judges he said: 'You will be cutting a fine figure, undertaking to judge on a capital charge the man who has enabled you to have the authority to judge the whole world!'

And at another time, his only reply to the accusations made against him by a tribune of the people was not to plead his cause but to say: 'Come, fellow citizens, let us go and give thanks to the gods for the victory they gave me over the Carthaginians on a day like this one!'.¹ Then as he started to walk towards the temple, look! the whole assembled crowd following him—even his accuser.

When Petilius was incited by Cato to ask Scipio to account for the money he had handled in the province of Antioch, Scipio came to the Senate for this purpose, took his account-book from under his toga and declared that it contained the truth about his receipts and expenditure; but when he was told to enter it into the records he refused to do so, saying that he was not willing to submit himself to such shame; and he tore it up with his own hands while the Senate watched. I do not believe that a damaged soul could *counterfeit* such assurance. ^[C] He had, says Livy, a mind too great by nature and accustomed to too lofty a fortune to be

able to be a criminal and stoop to the baseness of defending his innocence.

· . . . IN RELATION TO TORTURE ·

^[A] Torture is a dangerous invention, which seems to be a test of endurance rather than of truth. ^[C] The man who can endure it hides the truth, and so does the one who cannot endure it. ^[A] For why should pain make me confess what is true rather than force me to say what is not true? And, on the other hand, if an innocent man has the fortitude to bear such torment, why won't a guilty man have it also when so beautiful a reward as life itself is set before him?

I think that this invention is based on a view about the power of conscience. It seems that •the guilty man's conscience weakens him and helps the torture to make him confess his fault, and that •the innocent man's conscience strengthens him against the torture.

To tell the truth, it is a method full of danger and uncertainty. What would one not say, what would one not do, to escape such grievous pain? ^[C] 'Pain compels even the innocent to lie' [Publilius Syrus]. This results in a man whom the judge has tortured so as not to put him to death *innocent* being put to death *innocent and tortured*. ^[B] Thousands upon thousands have falsely confessed to capital charges. I count Philotas among them, after considering the facts of the suit Alexander brought against him and the way he was tortured.

^[A] All the same it is, so they say, the least bad method that human frailty has been able to discover; ^[C] very inhumanely, however, and very uselessly in my opinion. Many nations, less barbarous in this respect than the Greeks and the Romans who call them 'barbarians', consider it horrifying and cruel to torture and smash a man of whose guilt you are still in doubt. What can *he* do about *your* ignorance? Aren't

¹ [It was the 17th anniversary of his victory in the battle of Zama.]

you unjust, you who in order not to kill him without cause subject him to something worse than killing him? To see that this is so, consider how often a man would rather die for no reason than go through this questioning that is more painful than the execution, and that by its harshness often gets in ahead of the execution and carries it out. . . .

6. Practice

[A] Even when our trust is readily placed in them, reasoning and education can hardly be powerful enough to lead us to action unless by experience we also train and form our soul to the way we want it to go; otherwise when the time comes for action it will undoubtedly find itself at a loss. That is why the philosophers who have wanted to attain to some greater excellence have not been content to await the rigours of fortune in shelter and repose—not wanting it to take them unawares, inexperienced and untried in battle—and have gone out to confront it, deliberately putting themselves to the test of hardships. Some renounced wealth, to accustom themselves to voluntary poverty; others sought toil and the austerity of a laborious life, to toughen themselves against trouble and toil; yet others deprived themselves of the most precious parts of their bodies—such as their eyes and their organs of generation—fearing that the use of them, being too pleasant and easy, might relax and soften the firmness of their souls.

·PRACTISING FOR DEATH·

But practice is no help in the greatest task we have to perform: dying. We can by habit and experience strengthen ourselves against pain, shame, poverty and other such eventualities; but as for death, we can try it only once; we are all apprentices when we come to it.

In ancient times there were men so excellent at using their time that they even tried to taste and savour their own death; they strained their minds to discover what that crossing-over was; but they have not come back give us the news about it. 'No-one who has felt the icy end of life awakes again' [Lucretius].

Canius Julius, a noble Roman of particular virtue and steadfastness, having been condemned to death by that scoundrel Caligula, gave many wonderful proofs of his resoluteness, including this one. At the moment when he was on the point of being executed, a philosopher friend of his asked him, 'Well, Canius, what is the state of your soul right now? What is it doing? What thoughts are you having?' He replied: 'I was thinking about holding myself ready and with all my powers intent to see whether in that moment of death, so short and so near at hand, I will be able to perceive any dislodgment of the soul, and whether it will have any sense of its departure; so that if I learn anything about it I may come back, if I can, to inform my friends.' This man philosophises not merely right up to his death but into death itself. What assurance it was, and what proud courage, to want his death to teach him something! . . . 'Such sway he had over his dying soul' [Lucan].

[A] It seems to me, however, there is a certain way for us to familiarise ourselves with death and to some extent to try it out. We can have experience of it, not whole and complete but at least not useless, making us more strong and assured over the thought of our death. If we cannot come right up to it we can come close, we can reconnoitre it; and if we do not get the whole way to its stronghold we can at least see and become acquainted with the approaches to it. It is not without reason that we are told to look to our own sleep for its resemblance to death.

[C] How easily we pass from waking to sleeping, and with how little concern we lose consciousness of the light and of ourselves! Our capacity for sleep, which deprives us of all action and sensation, might seem useless and unnatural were it not that through its nature teaches us that it has made us for dying and for living alike, and from the start of life presents to us the eternal state it reserves for us after this one, to get us accustomed to it and to take away our fear of it.

[A] But those who by some violent accident have fallen into a faint and lost all sensation have, in my opinion, been very close to seeing death's true and natural face. As for the instant—the point in time—at which we pass away, there is no risk of its bringing with it any hardship or pain, because we can have feelings only while time passes. Our sufferings need time, which in death is so short and precipitate that death must be imperceptible. What we have to fear are death's approaches, and they *can* fall within our experience.

Many things appear to us greater in imagination than they are in reality. I have spent a good part of my life in health that was perfect and intact; indeed not only intact but downright vivacious and bubbling. This state, so full of sap and festivity, made me find the thought of illnesses so horrible that when I came to experience them I found their pains mild and weak compared with my fears. . . .

The mere thought of being always shut up in a room seemed to me quite unbearable; then suddenly I had to adapt to being there for a week, a month, full of emotion, decline, and weakness. And I have found that in time of health I used to pity the sick much more than I am to be pitied when I am sick myself, and that the power of my anxiety made its object almost half as bad again as it was in its truth and essence. I hope it will be like that with my death, and that all the trouble I take to prepare for it and

all the aids I invoke and assemble to sustain the shock of it are wasted labour. But I don't give them up, because, come what may, we cannot give ourselves too many advantages!

·MONTAIGNE'S PERSONAL SKIRMISH WITH DEATH·

During our third troubles (or the second; my memory is not clear about this), I was out riding one day about a league from my home, which is situated at the hub of all the tumult of our French civil wars. Thinking myself perfectly safe and so near my home that I had no need of better equipage, I had taken an easy but not very reliable horse. On my way home, when there suddenly arose an occasion to use that horse for a task it was not much used to, one of my men—big, strong, on a powerful work-horse with a desperately hard mouth but fresh and vigorous—wanting to show his daring and get ahead of his companions in coming to my assistance, rode it full speed along the path behind me and came down like a colossus on the little man and little horse, striking us like a thunderbolt with all his and his horse's rigidity and weight, knocking us both upside down. So there was my horse thrown down and lying stunned, and myself, ten or twelve paces further on, stretched out on my back with my face all bruised and cut about, the sword I had been holding lying more than ten yards further on still, my belt in pieces, having no more movement or feeling than a log. To this day, that is the only swoon that I have experienced.

Those who were with me, having tried every means in their power to bring me round, thought I was dead; they took me in their arms and struggled back with me to my house, about half a French league away.

On the way, and after I had been taken for dead for more than two full hours, I began to move and breathe, because so much blood had found its way into my stomach that nature had to revive its forces to discharge it. They set me up on

my feet, where I threw up a bucketful of clots of pure blood; and I had to do the same several times along the the way. With that I began to recover a little life; but it was bit by bit, and over such a long stretch of time that at first my feelings were closer to death than to life. . . . This recollection, which I retain strongly printed on my soul, shows me the face of death in such a natural portrait that it somewhat reconciles me to it.

When I began to see anything, my vision was so blurred, weak and dead that I could make out nothing but light, ‘as one who now opens his eyes, now shuts them, half sleeping, half awake’ [Tasso]. As for the functions of the soul, they came back to life in step with those of the body. I saw myself all bloody, for my my doublet was stained all over with the blood I had thrown up. The first thought that came to me was that I had been shot in the head by an arquebus volley; and indeed several were being fired around us at the time of the incident. It seemed to me that my life was hanging on to me only by the outer edges of my lips; I closed my eyes in order (it seemed to me) to help push it out, and I found it pleasant to relax and let myself go. It was a fancy that was merely floating on the surface of my soul, as delicate and feeble as all the rest; but truly it was not only free from distress but mingled with that sweet feeling people have when they let themselves slide into sleep.

·IT IS WRONG TO PITY THE TERMINALLY ILL·

I believe that this is the same state that people are in when they are failing from weakness in the throes of death, and I maintain that we pity them without cause, thinking that they are agitated by grievous pains or have the soul oppressed by painful thoughts. This has always been my belief (against the opinion of many, and even of Etienne de La Boétie) concerning those we see prostrate in a coma as their end

approaches, or crushed by the length of their illness or by an apoplectic fit or by epilepsy—

^[B] ‘Often, before our very eyes, a man is struck down by illness as if by lightning; he foams at the mouth; he groans and he twitches; he is delirious; he stretches out his legs, he twists and turns; he pants for breath and tires his limbs throwing himself about’ [Lucretius]
—^[A] or by a wound in the head. We hear them groaning and sometimes uttering penetrating sighs, and see them making certain bodily movements, which makes it seem that they retain some remnant of consciousness; but I have always thought, I repeat, that their soul and their body are buried, and asleep. ^[B] ‘He lives, and is unconscious of his life’ [Ovid].
^[A] And I could never believe that after such a great shock to the bodily parts and such a great failing of the senses the soul could sustain any inward power to be conscious of itself; and consequently ·I believed· that those men had no reflections to torment them and make them judge and feel the misery of their condition; and that in consequence they were not much to be pitied.

[Then a gruesome ^[B]-tagged paragraph about much less peaceful deaths.]

^[A] The short and incoherent words and replies that are extorted from the dying by shouting in their ears and storming at them, or movements that seem to have some connection with what is asked of them—that is still not evidence that they are alive, at least fully alive. The same thing happens to us when we are in the early stages of sleep, before it has taken us over completely: we sense as in a dream what is happening around us, and we follow voices with a blurred and uncertain sense of hearing which seems to reach only the edges of the soul; and after the last words spoken to us we make replies that are more random than meaningful.

·BACK TO MONTAIGNE'S NEAR-TO-DEATH EXPERIENCE·

Well, now that I have actually experienced it, I have no doubt that I have judged this matter correctly all along. For from the first, while wholly unconscious, I laboured to rip open my doublet with my bare nails—I was not wearing armour—and I *know* that I was not imagining any wounds; for many of our movements do not arise from any command of ours: ^[B] ‘Half-dead fingers twitch and grasp the sword again’ [Virgil]. ^[A] Those who are falling throw out their arms in front of them, by a natural impulse that makes our limbs lend each other their services and have stirrings independent of our reason. . . . My stomach was swollen with clotted blood; my hands rushed to it of their own accord, as they often rush to an itch against the intention of our will.

There are many animals, and even men, whose muscles are seen to contract and move after they are dead. Each man knows from his own experience that he has parts that often stir, stand up, and lie down again without his leave. Well, these passive movements that touch only our *rind* cannot be called ours. To make them ours, the whole man must be involved; the pains that our foot or our hand feels while we are asleep are not ours.

As I approached my home, where the news of my fall had already arrived and the members of my household had greeted me with the outcries customary in such cases, not only did I briefly answer their questions but they say that I thought to order that a horse be provided for my wife, whom I saw struggling and stumbling along the road, which is steep and difficult. It might seem that this concern must have come from a wide-awake soul, but the fact is that I had *no* part in it. They were empty, cloudy thoughts provoked by sensations in my eyes and ears; they did not come from *me*. I had no idea where I was coming from or where I was going to; nor could I weigh and consider what I was asked.

My reactions were slight effects that my senses produced of themselves, as if from habit. What the soul contributed was in a dream, very lightly touched—licked and sprinkled, as it were—by the gentle impression of the senses.

Meanwhile my condition was truly very pleasant and peaceful; I felt no affliction for others or for myself; it was a languor and extreme weakness, without any pain. I saw my house without recognising it. When they got me into bed, I felt infinite sweetness in this repose, for I had been dreadfully pulled about by those poor fellows who had taken the trouble to carry me in their arms over a long and very bad road and who, working in relays, had tired themselves out two or three times.

I was offered many remedies, of which I accepted none, being convinced that I was fatally wounded in the head. It would, honestly, have been a very happy death; for the weakness of my reason kept me from having any judgement of it, and the weakness of my body kept me from having any feeling of it. I was letting myself slip away so gently, in such a mild and easy fashion, that I hardly ever did anything with less sense of effort.

When I came back to life and regained my powers. . . ., which was two or three hours later, I at once felt myself caught up again in pains, my limbs having all been battered and bruised by my fall; and they had me feeling so bad two or three nights later that I thought I was going to die all over again, but of a less peaceful death! And I still feel the shock of that battering.

I do not want to forget this, that the *last* thing I could recover was my memory of the accident itself. I could not take it in until after I had people tell me several times where I was going, where I was coming from, at what time this had happened to me. As for the manner of my fall, they hid that from me and made up other explanations, for the sake of

the man who had caused it. But a long time later, and the following day, when my memory opened up and depicted to me the state I had been in at the instant when I saw that horse bearing down on me—

(for I had seen it at my heels and thought I was done for, but that thought had been so sudden that I had no time to be frightened by it)

—it seemed to me that a bolt of lightning had struck my soul and that I was returning from the other world.

This account of such a minor event would be rather pointless if it were not for the instruction I have derived from it for myself; for in truth I find that to get used to the idea of death, all you need is to come close to it. Well, as Pliny says, each man is a good education for himself provided he has what it takes to spy on himself from close up.

·IN DEFENCE OF TALKING ABOUT ONESELF·

What I am writing here is not my teaching; it is my study. It is not others' lesson; it is mine. ^[c] Still, it should not be held against me if I publish it. What helps me may happen to help someone else. Anyway, I am not spoiling anything; I am using 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 reports of only two or three ancients who trod this road, and we cannot say whether it was in any way like what I am doing, because we know only their names. No-one since then has followed in their tracks. It is a thorny undertaking—more so than it seems—to follow so roaming a course as our mind's, to penetrate the opaque depths of its innermost folds, to pick out and immobilise the innumerable flutterings that agitate it. It is a new and unusual pastime, which withdraws us from the ordinary occupations of people—yes, even from the ones that are most recommended.

For many years now the target of my thoughts has been myself alone; I observe and study only myself; and if I do study anything else, it is so as to apply it promptly to myself or more correctly ·to install it· *within* myself. And it does not seem to me to be wrong if, as is done in other incomparably less useful branches of learning, I share what I have learned in this one, though I am hardly satisfied with the progress I have made. No description is equal in difficulty, or certainly in usefulness, than the description of oneself. One must spruce up, present oneself in an orderly arrangement, if one wants to go out in public. Well, I am constantly making myself ready, for I am constantly describing myself.

Custom has made it a vice to talk about oneself, and obstinately forbids it out of hatred for the boasting that always seems to be attached to self-description. Instead of wiping the child's nose this amounts to pulling it off. 'Flying from a fault, we fall into a vice' [Horace].

I find more harm than good in that remedy. But even if it were true that talking to the public about oneself is necessarily presumptuous, my general plan will not let me refrain from an activity that openly displays this morbid quality, since it is in me; and I must not conceal this fault, which I not only practise but profess. Anyway, to say what I think about it, custom is wrong to condemn wine because many get drunk on it. Only things that are good can be misused. And I think that this rule ·against speaking in public about oneself· applies only to the vulgar form of this failing. It is a bridle for calves, which neither the saints (whom we hear talking so boldly about themselves) nor the philosophers nor the theologians curb themselves. Nor do I, though I am none of those. If they do not write about themselves openly, at least when the occasion calls for it they do not hesitate to put themselves on display. What does Socrates treat of more fully than himself? And what does

he most often lead his disciples to do, if not to talk about themselves—not about the lesson of their book but about the essence and the movement of their soul? We religiously speak of ourselves to God and to our confessors, just as our neighbours [the Protestants] do before the whole congregation. ‘But’, someone will reply, ‘we then speak only to accuse ourselves.’ In that case we say everything, for everything about us, even our virtue, is faulty and fit for repentance.

My trade, my art, is *living*. If anyone forbids me to talk about it according to my own sense, experience and practice, let him command an architect to talk about buildings not according to himself but according to his neighbour, according to someone else’s knowledge and not his own. . . .

Perhaps they mean that I should testify to myself by works and deeds, not by bare words. What I chiefly portray are my ways of thinking, a shapeless subject that does not express itself in actions. It is all I can do to couch it in this airy medium of words. Some of the wisest of men, and of the most devout, have lived avoiding any sign of activity. My activities would tell you more about fortune than about me. They testify to their own role, not to mine except by uncertain conjecture—*samples* that display only details. I am *all* on display; I present a cadaver in which can be seen at a glance the veins, the muscles, the tendons, each working part in its place. . . . It is not my deeds that I write down; it is myself, it is my essence.

·SELF-PRAISE·

I hold that a man should be careful in making an estimate of himself, and—whether he rates himself high or low—he should be equally conscientious in testifying about himself. If I seemed to myself to be absolutely good and wise, I would shout it out at the top of my voice. Saying less of oneself than is true is stupidity, not modesty. According to Aristotle,

to pay yourself less than you are worth is cowardice and pusillanimity. No virtue is helped by falsehood, and truth never generates error. Saying more of oneself than is true is not always presumption; it is also often stupidity. In my judgement, the substance of that misconduct is to be—stupidly—immoderately pleased with oneself and so to fall into an injudicious self-love.

The sovereign remedy for this is the exact opposite of what is prescribed by people who, in forbidding talking about oneself, even more strongly forbid thinking about oneself. The pride lies in the thought; the tongue can only have a very slight share in it. It seems to them that to be occupied with oneself means being pleased with oneself, that to frequent and associate with oneself means cherishing oneself too much. But this excess arises only in those who merely finger the surface of themselves; who observe themselves only after taking care of business; who call it daydreaming and idleness to be concerned with oneself; who regard enriching and constructing one’s character as building castles in the air; who treat themselves as outsiders.

If anyone gets intoxicated with his self-knowledge when he looks down on others, let him turn his eyes upward toward past ages; he will lower his horns, finding there many thousands of minds that trample him underfoot. If he gets into some flattering presumption about his valour, let him recall the lives of Scipio and Epaminondas, so many armies, so many nations, that leave him so far behind. No one individual quality will bring pride to any man who at the same time takes account of all those other weak and imperfect qualities that are in him and, finally, of the nullity of the human condition.

Because Socrates alone had seriously digested his god’s precept to *know himself*, and by that study had come to despise himself, he alone was judged worthy of being called

wise. If any man knows himself thus, let him boldly reveal himself by his own mouth.

7. Honorific awards

[A] The biographers of Augustus Caesar note this in his military discipline: he was wonderfully free with his gifts to those who deserved it; but where purely honorific awards were concerned he was equally sparing. Yet before he had ever gone to war himself, all the military awards had been bestowed on him by his uncle.

It was a fine invention—taken up by most of the governments in the world—to establish certain vain and valueless decorations to honour and reward virtue, such as crowns of laurel, oak or myrtle, certain forms of dress, the privilege of riding through the city in a coach or with torch-bearers by night, a special seat at public meetings, the prerogative of certain surnames and titles, certain symbols on coats of arms, and such-like things. This system was operated differently according to each nation's opinions, and is still in use.

We for our part, like many of our neighbours, have the orders of knighthood, which are established only for this purpose. It is in truth a very good and beneficial practice to find a way to recognise the worth of rare and excellent men, pleasing and satisfying them with rewards that are no charge on the people and cost the prince nothing. It was always recognised by the experience of the ancients—and could formerly be seen to be so among us French—that men of quality were more anxious for such rewards than for ones bringing gain and profit. There is reason and great justification for that: if a prize that should be for honour alone has other advantages and riches mixed in with it,

instead of increasing the prestige it lessens it, prunes it back.

The Order of Saint Michael, which was so long held in high esteem among us, had no greater advantage than its having no connection with any other advantage. As a result there used to be no office or status whatever that the nobility aspired to with as much desire and longing as they did to this order, and no distinction that brought more respect and grandeur, because virtue more readily embraces and aspires to a reward that is truly its own, glorious rather than useful. For in truth other gifts do not have the same dignity, because they are used for all sorts of purposes. Money repays the services of a valet, the diligence of a courier, dancing, vaulting, talking and the meanest services done for us; yes, and even vice is paid for with money, flattery, pimping and treachery. It is no wonder if virtue is less eager to receive that sort of common coin than that which is proper and peculiar to itself, and wholly noble and generous. Augustus was right to be much more thrifty and sparing with this than with the other, especially since honour is a privilege that gets its principal essence from rarity.

(And so does virtue itself. 'For him who thinks no man is bad, can any man be good?' [Martial]. We do not praise a man for taking trouble over the upbringing of his children, because that, however right it may be, is not unusual; [C] any more than we pick out a tree for its height where the whole forest is like that. [A] I do not think that any citizen of Sparta boasted of his valour—for that was a universal virtue in their nation—any more than of his fidelity and indifference to wealth. No reward falls due to any virtue, however great, that has become customary; I'm not sure we would ever call it 'great' when it was common.)

Since these honorific titles have no value or prestige except for the fact that few people enjoy them, all that is

needed to wipe them out is to be generous with them. Even if there were more men nowadays than before who merited our order, that would not justify degrading its prestige by awarding it to more people. And it can easily happen that there *are* more who deserve it, for there is no other virtue that spreads as easily as military valour.

[In the original, this paragraph does not contain *vallance* or any other word meaning 'valour'.] There is another kind of valour that is true, perfect, philosophical (it is not what I have been writing about; I use the word according to our usage); it is much greater than ours and more ample; it is a power and assurance of the soul, equally disregarding every sort of adverse event; equable, uniform and constant; our kind of valour is only a very feeble glimmer of it. Custom, education, example and habit are all-powerful in establishing what—i.e. the kind of valour which—I am talking about, and easily make it common, as can easily be seen from the experience of it that our civil wars give us. ^[B] And if anyone could unite us now and arouse our whole people for some common enterprise we would make our former military reputation flower again.

^[A] It is certain that in former times the award of this order of Saint Michael did not depend solely on valour in our ordinary sense of that word; it looked beyond that. It was never the payment of a valiant soldier, but that of a famous captain; the science [see Glossary] of *obeying* orders did not merit such an honourable reward. Back then they required for it a more universal expertness in war, taking in the broadest and greatest qualities of the fighting man—^[C] For the skills of a soldier and those of a commander are not the

same' [Livy]—^[A] who should also be of a rank suitable to such a dignity. But I say that even if more men were worthy of it than were found to be in former times, it should not on that account have been handed out more liberally; it would have been better to fail to bestow it on everyone who deserves it than to lose for ever, as we have just done, such a valuable institution. No man of spirit deigns to pride himself on what he has in common with many men. And today those who merit it least make the greatest show of despising it, so as to put themselves in the rank of those who were wronged when a decoration that was peculiarly their due was unworthily extended and debased.

Now, to obliterate and abolish this order, in the expectation of immediately restoring prestige and renewal to some similar decoration, is not an appropriate undertaking in such a licentious and sick time as our present one; the new order will from its inception run into the same troubles that have just ruined the other. For this new order to have any authority, the rules governing the award of it would need to be extremely tight and restrictive, and our troubled times are not capable of a short and firm rein. Besides, this one cannot have any prestige until all memory has been lost of the former order and of the contempt into which it has fallen.¹

This could be the place for a discussion of valour, and of what makes it different from other virtues. But since Plutarch often returned to this theme, I would be meddling to no purpose in reporting here what he says about it. But it is worth considering that our nation gives the first place among the virtues to valour, as is shown by its name [*vallance*], which

¹ Montaigne was a knight of the Order of Saint Michael. In his *Apology for Raymond Sebond*—which was in Book II but is not included here—he reports that for years he wanted this honour but did not receive it until early in the 1570s, when it had been devalued by being spread widely. It was followed by the Order of the Holy Ghost in 1578.

comes from 'value' [*valeur*], and that •by our usage in the language of our court and our nobility, when we speak of 'a very valuable man' [*un homme qui vaut beaucoup*]. . . ., all we mean is 'a valiant man'; as with the Romans, who derived their general term for virtue [*virtus*] from the word for strength [*vis*]. The proper, the only, the essential form of nobility in France is the military profession.

It is probable that the first virtue to appear among men, giving some of them the advantage over others, was this one by which the strongest and bravest made themselves masters of the weaker, acquiring individual rank and reputation, this being the source of our terms of honour and dignity; or else those nations, being very warlike, gave the prize and the title highest in dignity to the virtue they were most familiar with.

So too our passion, and our feverish concern for the chastity of women, bring it about that 'a good woman', 'a worthy woman', and 'a woman of honour and virtue' means in effect to us nothing but *a chaste woman*; as though, in order to bind them to that duty, we neglected all the rest and gave women free rein for any other fault provided they abandon this one.

8. Fathers' affection for their children

TO MADAME D'ESTISSAC

•WHY MONTAIGNE IS WRITING THIS•

[A] Madame, if strangeness and novelty, which usually give value to anything, do not save me, I shall never extricate myself with honour from this stupid enterprise; but it is so fantastic and appears so remote from normal practice that it may just get by.

What first put into my head this fancy of trying my hand at writing was a melancholy mood—and therefore one most

hostile to my natural disposition—brought on by the gloom of the solitude I was plunged into a few years ago. Then finding myself quite destitute and empty of anything else to write about, I offered *myself* to myself as theme and as subject-matter. It is [C] the only book of its kind in the world, [A] wild and eccentric in its conception. The only thing worthy of notice in this work of mine is its bizarreness; for the best craftsman in the world could not have turned material so vacuous and base into something worth taking account of.

Now, Madame, having here to portray myself to the life, I would have overlooked an important feature if I had not portrayed the honour I have always paid to your merits. I particularly wanted to do so at the start of this chapter, since of all your fine qualities one of the first in rank is the love you have shown your children. Anyone who knows •at what age you were left a widow by your husband Monsieur d'Estissac, •the great and honourable matches that have been offered you, as many as to any lady in France of your rank, •the constancy and firmness with which you have, for so many years and through so many thorny difficulties, carried the weight of responsibility for your children's affairs, which have driven you through all corners of France and still besiege you, and •the happy prosperity which your wisdom or good fortune have brought to those affairs, will readily agree with me that we have today no clearer example of maternal affection than yours.

I praise God, Madame, that it has been so well employed. For the promise shown by your son Monsieur d'Estissac are assurance enough that when he comes of age you will receive from him the obedience and gratitude of an excellent son. But because as a child he has not been able to appreciate the countless supreme benefits he has received from you, I want him—if these writings happen to fall into his hands some day when I shall have neither mouth nor speech to

say it to him—to receive from me this absolutely truthful testimony. . . .that there is not a gentleman [see Glossary] in France who owes more to his mother than he does, and that he cannot give any more certain proof of his goodness and virtue than by recognising you for what you are.

·A COOL ATTITUDE TO NATURAL PARENTAL AFFECTION·

If there is any truly natural law—that is to say, any instinct that can be seen to be universally and permanently stamped on the beasts and on ourselves (which is not beyond dispute)—I may say that in my opinion the affection every animal has for his offspring is second only to his concern for self-preservation and the avoidance of what is harmful. And since nature seems to have required this affection from us with a view to extending and *advancing* the successive working parts of this great machine, ·the world·, it is not surprising if *backwards* the affection of children for fathers is not so great.

[C] Add to that this other Aristotelian consideration, that whoever does good to someone loves him better than he is loved by him; that he to whom something is owed loves better than he who owes; and that every worker loves his product better than he would be loved by it if it had feeling. For *being* is something we hold dear, and being consists in movement and action; so that each person is, in a way, *in* his work-product. The benefactor performs a fair and honourable action; the beneficiary performs only a useful one. And the useful is much less lovable than the honourable. The honourable is stable and lasting, providing constant satisfaction to the one who has done it. the useful easily escapes and is lost, and the memory of it is not so refreshing or so sweet. The things that have cost us most are dearest to us, and giving costs more than taking.

[A] [Picking up from '... not so great.'] Since it has pleased God to endow us with some capacity for reasoning, so that we would not be slavishly subject to the common laws as the beasts are but would conform to them through judgement and freedom of the will, we should indeed give some weight to the simple authority of nature but should not allow ourselves to be tyrannically carried away by it; our inclinations should be directed by reason alone.

For my part, I have a strangely blunted taste for these propensities that are produced in us without the command and mediation of our judgement. For example on this subject I am discussing: I cannot feel the emotion that leads people to hug new-born infants that do not yet have movements of soul or recognisable features of body to make themselves lovable. [C] And I have not willingly allowed them to be nursed in my presence.

[A] A true and well-regulated affection should be born and then increase with the knowledge children give us of themselves; *then*, if they are worthy of it, we should cherish them with a truly paternal love, the natural propensity going along with reason; if they turn out differently we should still judge them, always submitting to reason despite the force of nature.

What happens is often the reverse of this; we feel ourselves more moved by the skippings and games and babyish tricks of our children than we are later on by their grown-up activities, as though we had loved them as giving us amusement, [C] like monkeys, not like men. [A] Some ·fathers· supply plenty of toys for their infancy but tighten up at the slightest expenditure they need when they are of age. Indeed it seems that our jealousy at seeing them appear in the world and enjoy it when we are about to leave it makes us stingy and tight with them; it annoys us that they come treading on our heels, [C] as if to urge us to leave. [A] And if

that frightened us, then since things are so ordered that—in sober truth—children can be and live only at the expense of our being and our life, we ought not to have involved ourselves in fatherhood in the first place.

·CHILDREN AND PARENTAL PROPERTY·

For my part, I find it cruel and unjust not to •receive them into a share and association in our goods, and as companions in the understanding of our domestic affairs when they are capable of it, and •cut back and economise on our own comforts so as to provide for theirs, since we gave them birth for just such a purpose. It is unjust that an old, broken, half-dead father should enjoy alone, in a corner of his hearth, possessions that would be enough to advance and maintain many offspring, allowing them for lack of means to waste their best years without advancing in public service and recognition. They are driven by despair to find some way, however unjust, of providing for their needs. I have seen in my time several young men of good family so addicted to theft that no punishment could turn them from it. I know one well connected young man with whom I spoke about about this matter at the request of a brother of his, a very honourable and brave gentleman. He answered me, and admitted openly that he had been started on this filthy path by his father's unbending miserliness, but that now he was so accustomed to it that he could not stop himself. He had just been caught stealing rings from a lady whose morning reception he was attending with many others. . . .

[B] I am a Gascon, but there is no vice I understand less. I temperamentally hate it rather more than I rationally condemn it; I never even *want* to take anything from anyone.

[A] It is true that this region of France has a somewhat worse reputation for theft than the others; yet we have seen in our time, on various occasions, men of good family from

other provinces convicted of many horrible robberies. This depravity, I fear, owes something to the meanness of fathers.

A nobleman with good understanding told me once that he hoarded his wealth not •to get any practical advantage from it but •to be honoured and courted by his offspring. When age had deprived him of all his other powers, he said, this was the only means he had left for maintaining his authority over his family and not being treated with disdain and neglect by everyone. . . . Well, there is something in that; but it is medicine for a disease that ought not to have been allowed to start.

A father is wretched indeed if he can only hold the affection of his children—if you can call it affection—by their need for his help. He should make himself worthy of respect by his virtue and by his ability, and worthy of love by his goodness and the gentleness of his *moeurs* [see Glossary]. With rich material even the ashes have their value, and we customarily hold in respect and reverence the bones and relics of persons of honour. For a person who has lived his life honourably, old age cannot be so decrepit and rancid as not to be venerable; especially to his children, whose souls he should have trained in their duty by reason, not by necessity and need or by harshness and force: 'In my opinion, it is wrong to think that authority is firmer or more stable when it relies on force than when it is associated with affection' [Terence].

·DISCIPLINING CHILDREN·

[B] I condemn all violence in the upbringing of a tender soul that is being trained for honour and liberty. There is something servile about rigour and constraint, and I hold that what cannot be done by reason, and by wisdom and tact, is never done by force. That is how I was brought up: they say that in all my childhood felt the rod only twice, and

that was very lightly. I owed the same treatment to my own children, who all die on me before they are weaned. But Leonor, one single daughter who escaped that misfortune, has reached the age of six or more without being guided in her conduct or punished for her childish faults by anything but words, and gentle ones. (Her indulgent mother easily went along with that.) And even if my wishes for her are frustrated, there are enough other causes to blame for that without finding fault with my method of discipline, which I know to be just and natural.

I would have been even more punctilious about this with boys, who are less born to serve and whose condition is more free: I would have loved to fill their hearts with innocence and openness. The only effect of the rod that I have seen is to make souls more cowardly or more maliciously obstinate.

[A] Do we want to be loved by our children? Do we want to remove any occasion for their wishing us dead?—

though no occasion for such a horrible wish could be right or pardonable: [C] 'no crime has rational justification' [Livy]

—[A] then let us do whatever is in our power to enrich their lives reasonably.

·THE BEST AGE FOR A MAN TO MARRY AT·

To achieve that we ought not to get married so young that our age comes to be almost confounded with theirs, for this drawback plunges us into many great difficulties. I apply this especially to the nobility, which is a leisured class that lives, as they say, only on its annuities. In other cases, where a living must be earned, the plurality and company of children is an advantage to the household; they are so many new tools and instruments for enriching it.

[B] I married at 33, and I approve the suggestion of 35, which is said to be Aristotle's. [C] Plato does not want one

to marry before 30; but he is right to laugh at those who perform the works of marriage after 55; and he dismisses their offspring as unworthy of nourishment and life. Thales set the limits best: his mother pressed him to get married when he was young, and he replied that it wasn't yet time; and when he was getting old, that it was no longer time. We should accept no time as appropriate for doing something inappropriate!

[A] The ancient Gauls thought it extremely reprehensible for a man under twenty to lie with a woman, and particularly recommended to men who wanted to train for war to keep their virginity until well along in years, because courage is softened and deflected by coupling with women. 'But now, married to a young wife, happy to have children, he was weakened by his love as father and husband' [Tasso]. [More to this effect from ancient Greece and from modern Tunis and the West Indies.]

When a gentleman is 35, it is not the time for him to make way for his son who is 20; he is himself engaged in appearing on military expeditions and at the court of his prince; he needs his resources, and should certainly share them with his son, but not so lavishly that he forgets himself. Such a man can rightly give the answer that fathers often have on their lips: 'I have no wish to be stripped before I go to lie down.'

·MORE ON PARENTAL PROPERTY·

But a father who is brought low by age and illness, whose weakness and ill-health deprive him of ordinary human fellowship, wrongs himself and his family by uselessly brooding over a great pile of riches. In his situation, if he is wise, he *will* want to get stripped as a preliminary to going to lie down—not stripped to his shirt but down to a nice warm dressing-gown. He has no more use for all the remaining

pomp: he should willingly present it to those who by nature's ordinance ought to have it. It is right for him to leave the use of these things to them, since nature won't let him use them; if he does otherwise, malice and envy are certainly involved.

The finest action of Emperor Charles V was this, ^[C] in imitation of certain ancients of his calibre: ^[A] he was able to recognise that reason clearly enough commands us to strip ourselves when our robes become a burden and a hindrance to us, and to go to bed when our legs fail us. He resigned his possessions, his rank and his power to his son when he felt himself losing the firmness and strength needed to continue to conduct his affairs with the glory he had acquired in them: 'Be wise enough to unharness that tired old nag, lest it ends up short-winded, stumbling while men jeer at it' [Horace].

·HOW TO DEAL WITH ONE'S OLD AGE·

This fault of not being able to recognise oneself early, of not feeling the impotence and extreme decline that age naturally brings to the body and to the soul (equally, in my opinion, unless the soul has the larger share), has ruined the reputation of most of the world's great men. I have seen in my time, and intimately known, persons of great authority who it was easy to see had declined amazingly from their former ability, which I knew of from the reputation it had brought them in their better years. For their honour's sake I would have wished them to withdraw to their home at their ease and unburdened with the public and military occupations that were no longer suited to their shoulders.

I used to be an intimate in the house of a gentleman, a widower and very old, but of a quite green old age. He had several daughters to marry off and a son already old enough to enter society. This burdened his household with many expenses and visits of strangers; he took little pleasure in

this, not only because of the expense but even more because his age had led him to adopt a way of life far different from ours. I told him one day—a little boldly, as is my custom—that it would be more becoming if he made room for us younger folk, leaving his principal residence to his son (for it was the only one he had that was properly equipped and furnished), and retired to a neighbouring estate of his where nobody would disturb his rest; because—given his children's circumstances—there was no other way he could avoid our unsuitable company. He later took my advice and liked its result.

This is not to say that we should give them our property in such a binding way that we cannot take it back. I, who am ready to play that role, would leave them the enjoyment of my house and possessions but be free to change my mind if they gave me cause. I would let them have use of all this because it no longer did anything for me; but I would retain as much general authority over affairs as I wanted to. I have always thought that it must be a great happiness for an old father to train his own children in the management of his affairs, and to be able during his lifetime to oversee their conduct, providing them with instruction and advice according to the experience he has of them, personally arranging for the former honour and order of his house to come into the hands of his successors, thereby providing firm ground for the hopes he may have for their future conduct.

So I would not avoid their company; I would like to be near so as to watch them and to enjoy their fun and festivities as much as my age permitted. I could not live *among* them without inflicting on them the testiness of my age and the demands of my illnesses, and without having to constrain and alter the rules and habits I would then have; but I would like at least to live *near* them in some corner of my house—not the most showy but the most comfortable.

[He contrasts this with a melancholy cleric who spent two decades in one room, seeing almost no-one but the servant who brought his daily meal; and eventually died there.]

·RELATIONS OF FATHERS TO THEIR ADULT CHILDREN·

I would try to have gentle relations with my children, encouraging in them an active love and unfeigned affection for me, which is easily gained in well-born natures; ·but not otherwise·, for if they are wild beasts ^[C] such as our century produces in profusion, ^[A] one ought to hate and shun them as such.

I hate the custom ^[C] of forbidding children to say 'Father' and requiring them to use some less familiar title, as more respectful; as if nature had not sufficiently provided for our authority. We call almighty God 'Father' and disdain to have our own children call us that! I have reformed this fault in my family. It is also stupid and wrong to ^[A] deprive adult offspring of easy relations with their fathers, and to prefer to maintain an austere and disdainful frown, hoping by that to keep them in fear and obedience. That is a quite useless farce, which makes fathers unpleasant—and, worse, ridiculous—to their children. *They* have youth and vigour in their hands, and consequently the wind and the world's favour going their way; they receive with mockery these fierce and tyrannical looks from men who have no blood left in either heart or veins—real scarecrows in a hemp field! Even if I could make myself feared, I would rather make myself loved.

^[B] There are so many sorts of defects in old age, so much impotence, it is so liable to contempt, that the best acquisition it can make is the love and affection of one's family; command and fear are no longer its weapons. I know one old man who had been very imperious when young and who, now that old age is coming upon him, although he is

as healthy as can be, slaps and bites and swears—^[C] the stormiest master in France. ^[B] He is eaten up by care and vigilance, but this is all a farce in which the household itself conspires. Others have the use of the best part of his granary, his cellar, and even his purse, while he keeps the keys to them in his pouch, more protectively than he keeps his eyes. While he is happy to keep so spare and thrifty a table, everyone is living it up in various corners of his house, gambling, spending, and exchanging stories about his pointless anger and precautions. Everyone is on guard against him. If some wretched servant happens to become devoted to him, he is promptly regarded by him with suspicion—a trait that old age so readily gets its teeth into. How many times has he boasted to me of the tight rein he kept on his family, and the strict obedience and reverence he received from them, and how clearly he saw into his own affairs! . . . I know no man who can bring to bear more qualities, both natural and acquired, appropriate for maintaining his mastery; yet he fell from mastery, like a child. That is why I have picked him out from several other cases that I know, as the best example.

^[C] It would be a matter for a scholastic debate whether he is better off like this than ·he would be· otherwise. In his presence, all things yield to him. His authority is allowed to run its empty course, in that nobody ever resists him. They believe him, they fear him, they give him a bellyful of respect. •Does he dismiss a servant? He packs his bag and *voilà!* he is gone—but only out of his presence. The steps of old age are so slow, the senses so confused, that the servant will live for a year in the house, carrying out his duties, without being noticed ·by the master·. At the appropriate time arrangements are made for a letter to arrive from distant parts, piteous, suppliant, full of promises to do better, whereby he is restored to favour. •Does Monsieur make a deal or send a letter that displeases ·his household·? They

suppress it, inventing soon afterwards reasons to explain the lack of action or reply. Since no letters from outside are ever brought to him first, he only sees those that it seems convenient for him to know. If he happens to get hold of any ·others·, the person he usually relies on to read them for him promptly finds in them whatever he chooses; letters that abuse him are regularly 'read' as begging his pardon. In short he sees his affairs only through some counterfeit image designed to be as satisfactory as possible, so as not to arouse his bad humour and anger. I have seen, in various forms, plenty of households run long and steadily ·in this way·, all with the same result.

·BEING CHEATED·

[B] Wives are always disposed to disagree with their husbands. [C] They seize with both hands every pretext for going against them; the first excuse ·they can think of· serves as full justification. I have known one who robbed her husband wholesale—in order, she told her confessor, to fatten up her almsgiving. Just trust that pious almsgiving! No responsibility seems to them to have enough dignity if the husband *allows* it. For it to have grace and authority ·in their eyes· it must be something they usurped by cunning or by insolence, and in any case unjustly. When, as in the case I was describing, they are acting against a poor old man and for offspring, they seize this pretext and glory in making it serve their passion; and, as though they ·and the offspring· were slaves banded together, they readily plot against the father's sovereignty and government. [B] If the offspring are male and adult, in the bloom of youth, then ·in cooperation with the mothers· they by force or by favour suborn the steward, the bursar and everyone else ·in the household·.

Those ·old men· who have neither wife nor son fall into this misfortune less easily but more cruelly and shame-

fully. . . . It is a good thing that decrepitude provides us with the sweet benefits of imperceptiveness, ignorance and a facility for letting ourselves be deceived. If we got stirred up over this, what would become of us, especially nowadays when the judges who settle our quarrels usually side with the young and have something to gain by doing so? . . .

[C] If others deceive me, at least I do not deceive myself into thinking I am capable of guarding against this, or into racking my brains to make myself so. I escape from such betrayals in my own bosom, not by restless and tumultuous curiosity but rather by diversion and resolution.

When I hear of the state someone is in, I do not dwell on him; I immediately turn my eyes to myself to see how I am doing. Everything that touches him concerns me too. What has happened to him informs me and alerts me. . . . Every day, every hour, we say things about others that we would more properly say about ourselves if we knew how to turn our attention inward as well as extend it outward. . . .

·BACK TO RELATIONS OF FATHERS TO CHILDREN·

[A] The late Marshal de Monluc, talking to me of the loss of his son (a truly brave gentleman of great promise who died on the island of Madeira), among other regrets emphasised the grief and heartbreak he felt at never having opened up to him. By his manner of paternal gravity and stiffness, ·he lamented·, he had lost the pleasure of knowing and enjoying his son, and of telling him of his great love for him and the high opinion he had of his virtue. He said:

'All that poor boy saw of me was a frowning face full of scorn; he is gone, believing I was unable to love him or to esteem him according to his merit. The revelation of the special affection I had for him in my soul—whom was I saving that for? Should not *he* have had all the pleasure of it and all the gratitude?

I forced myself, I tortured myself, to keep up that silly mask, thereby losing the joy of his company—and his goodwill along with it, which must have been cold towards me since he had never received from me anything but harshness or experienced anything but a tyrannical façade.'

I think this lament was reasonable and well taken; for, as I know all too well from experience, when we lose our friends there is no consolation sweeter than the knowledge of not having forgotten to tell them anything and of having had perfect and complete communication with them.

^[B] As much as I can I open myself to my family, and very readily signify to them the state of my will and my judgement towards them, as towards everyone. I hasten to bring myself out and present myself, for I do not want to be misunderstood, whether for better or worse.

^[A] According to Caesar, among the customs peculiar to our ancient Gauls there was this: sons were not presented to their fathers, or appeared in public with them, until they had begun to bear arms; as if they wanted to say that *now* it was appropriate for the fathers to admit them to their intimate acquaintance.

•MAKING A REASONABLE WILL•

I have seen another kind error of judgement by some fathers in my time: not content with having deprived their children of their natural share of the property during their long lifetime, they have left to their widows this same authority over all of it and the right to dispose of it at their pleasure. And I knew one lord, one of the highest officers of our crown, who •could rightfully have expected to come into property worth fifty thousand crowns a year but •died in need and overwhelmed with debts at over fifty years of age, while his mother in her extreme decrepitude still enjoyed rights over

the entire property under the will of his father, who himself had lived to be nearly eighty. To me that seems in no way reasonable.

^[B] For all that, I do not see that a man whose affairs are prospering is helped much by seeking a wife who burdens him with a large dowry; no outside debt brings more ruin to a household. My predecessors have usually followed this counsel to good advantage, and so have I. ^[C] But those who warn us against rich wives for fear that they may be less tractable and grateful are mistaken, making us lose some real profit because of such a frivolous conjecture. For an unreasonable woman it costs no more to override one reason than to override another, ·so that not being rich won't make her tractable and grateful·. Such women are most pleased with themselves when they are most in the wrong; unfairness allures them. Whereas good women are allured by the honour of acting virtuously; and the richer they are the more gracious they are, just as their being beautiful makes them that much more willingly and proudly chaste.

^[A] It is reasonable to let mothers run affairs until the sons are legally old enough to take over; but the father has brought them up very badly if he cannot expect them as adults to be wiser and more competent than his wife, given the ordinary weakness of the sex. But in truth it would be even more unnatural to make mothers depend on their offsprings' discretion. They should be given plentiful means to maintain their state according to the condition of their family and their age, especially since want and indigence are far more unbecoming and hard to bear for them than for males. ·If there is to be poverty in the family·, that burden should be borne by the sons rather than the mother.

[Then a ^[C]-tagged couple of pages in which Montaigne •says (with an illustrative quotation from Plato) that it is right for the law of the land to control how a man leaves his

property, •deplores those who chop and change their wills as a means of reward and punishment, •expresses scepticism about 'male entails', i.e. legal devices ensuring that property is left to male members of the same family, and •warns against predicting the character a man will have from what he was like as a boy. Then:]

·CAUTION ABOUT LEAVING THINGS TO WOMEN·

[C] To return to my subject, [A] it seems to me that there are almost no women who should have any kind of mastery over men except for the maternal and natural,

unless it is for the punishment of a man who has wilfully submitted to the woman out of some feverish humour; but that would not happen with old women, the subject of my present discussion.

(It is the obviousness of this consideration that has made us create and so readily give force to that law—which nobody has ever seen—that debars women from succeeding to our throne; and though fortune has given it more credit in some places than others, there is hardly a sovereignty in the world where that law is not cited, as here, on the strength of its reasonableness.)

It is dangerous to leave the distribution of our property ·after our death· to the judgement of women, based on the choice they will make among the children, a choice that is always unfair and capricious. For that disordered appetite and sick taste that they have during pregnancy they have in their soul at all times. We commonly see them devote themselves to the weakest and the most boorish, or to those (if they have any) who are still hanging about their necks. Not having enough reasoning power to choose and embrace what deserves it, they are all the more willing to let themselves be led solely by natural impulses—like animals that recognise their young only while they cling to their nipples.

Moreover, experience clearly shows us that this natural love that we give such authority to has very weak roots. Every day we take their own children out of women's arms and get them to take charge of our own, for a very small sum. We get them to abandon theirs to some wretched wet-nurse to whom we are not willing to entrust our own, or to some goat; forbidding them to suckle them (whatever harm may come of that) and even to take care of them, so that they can devote themselves entirely to the service of *our* children. And most of them soon come to have •a bastard affection created by habit, more passionate than natural affection is, and •a greater concern for the preservation of the borrowed children than for their own.

I mentioned goats because the village women where I live, when they cannot breast-feed their children themselves, call in the help of goats. I have now two menservants who never tasted mothers' milk for more than a week. These goats are promptly trained to suckle human children; they recognise their voices when they start crying, and come running up. If they are presented with any child other than the one they are feeding, they reject it—animals debase and bastardise natural affection as easily as we do—and the child does the same with another goat. The other day I saw an infant whose goat had been taken away because the father had only borrowed it from a neighbour; the child rejected the different one that was provided for him, and no doubt died of hunger. . . .

·OFFSPRING OF OUR NOBLER PART·

Now, once we consider this simple reason we have for loving our children—that we begot them, and so call them our second selves—it seems that we also produce from ourselves something else that is no less commendable. For what we engender by our soul, the offspring of our mind, our heart

and our ability, are produced by a part ·of us· more noble than the body and are more *ours*. In this act of generation we are both mother and father; these ‘children’ cost us much more and, if they have any good in them, bring us more honour. The value of our other children is much more theirs than ours; we have only a very slight share in them; but in the case of these ·offspring of our souls· all their beauty, all their grace and value, is *ours*. [Montaigne develops this idea through the remaining four pages of the essay. Historical anecdotes about •writers who went into decline when their books were condemned and destroyed; •the Latin poet Lucan who died reciting lines from his most famous poem; •Epicurus, who in dying was consoled by the thought of the beauty of his doctrine (Montaigne writes: ‘If he had had to choose between leaving behind either a deformed and ill-born child or a stupid and inept book, would not he—and any man of similar ability—have chosen to incur the former misfortune rather than the other?’). Also, several reflections on how various great men must have attached less value to their biological children than to such ‘offspring’ as a great poem, wonderful military victories, a fine statue. Mixed in with all this, Montaigne shows how he views the offspring of his own mind, his essays:]

[B] I think I might prefer producing one perfectly formed child by intercourse with the muses to producing one by intercourse with my wife. [C] As for this present one, what I give to it I give unconditionally and irrevocably, as one gives to the children of one’s body. Such little good as I have done for it is no longer at my disposal. It may know things that I no longer know, and hold for me things that I have forgotten; if I needed to get some of them back, it would be like borrowing from a stranger. If I’m wiser than it is, it is richer than I am.

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Essay 9. ‘The arms of the Parthians’ is four pages on the use—of which Montaigne is sceptical and even scornful—of heavy personal armour in battle.

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10. Books

[A] I have no doubt that I often happen to speak of things that are treated better and more truthfully by the masters of the craft. This here is purely the *essai* [see Glossary] of my natural abilities, not at all of the acquired ones. Anyone who catches me out in ignorance wins no victory over me; I would hardly be answerable to others for my ideas when I am not answerable to myself for them and am not satisfied with them. Anyone who looks to them for *knowledge* should fish for it where it dwells; there is nothing I lay claim to less. These are my fancies, by which I try to give knowledge not of things but of myself. The things may be known to me some day, or used to be so when fortune brought me to places where light was thrown on them; but I no longer remember them. [C] If I am a man of fairly wide reading, I am a man of no retentiveness.

[A] So I guarantee nothing for certain, except for making known what point I have at that moment reached in my knowledge of what I am treating. Do not linger over the things I talk about, but over how I shape them when talking about them.

[C] Where my borrowings are concerned, see whether I have known how to choose what will enhance or support my theme, a choice that is always *mine*. I get others to say—after I have said my piece, not before—things that I cannot put so well myself, sometimes because of the weakness of my

language and sometimes because of the weakness of my intellect. I do not count my borrowings; I weigh them. If I had wanted them valued for their number, I would have loaded myself with twice as many. They are very nearly all taken from names so famous and ancient that they seem to identify themselves well enough without help from me. [This version supplies authors' names for Montaigne's quotations; the original does not, and he now explains why.] In the reasonings, comparisons and inventions that I transplant into my own soil and mix up with my own, I deliberately omit the author's name so as to rein in the temerity of those hasty criticisms that are tossed at all sorts of writings, especially recent writings by men still alive—and in the vulgar tongue, which invites everyone to talk about them and seems to convict their conception and design of also being vulgar. I want them to give Plutarch a *nazarde* [= a contemptuous finger-flick against the nose] on *my* nose, and make fools of themselves by insulting Seneca *in me*. I have to hide my weakness under these great reputations.

I will love anyone who can pluck out my feathers—i.e. can identify any of these borrowed passages as not by me—I mean through sharpness of judgement and by spotting the force and beauty of the passages. That is what I do when re-reading my work. My memory is not good enough for me to pick them out by my knowledge of their origin; but I am quite able, by measuring my capacity, to realise that my own soil is utterly incapable of producing certain too-rich flowers that I find rooted there. . . .

[A] [Picking up from '...when talking about them.'] What I *am* obliged to answer for is getting myself tangled up, or having in my reasoning some emptiness or defect that I do not see, or that I cannot see when it is pointed out to me. For faults often escape our eyes; sickness of judgement consists in not being able to perceive them when someone else reveals

them to us. Knowledge and truth can lodge in us without judgement; judgement can do so without them; indeed, the recognition of one's ignorance is one of the finest and surest signs of judgement that I find.

I have no sergeant-major to line up my pieces—except chance! As my fancies present themselves, I pile them up; sometimes they come in a crowd, sometimes in single file. What I want to show is my natural, ordinary step, however much it wanders off the path. I let myself go as I am. Besides, these are not matters of which of ignorance, and talking casually and rashly, are forbidden.

I would like to have a more perfect understanding of things, but that would cost more than I am prepared to pay. My design is to spend what remains of my life gently and unlaboriously. There is nothing for which I am prepared to rack my brain, not even for knowledge, however great its value.

All I look to books for is to give me the pleasure of an honest pastime; or if I do study, I seek in them only the branch of learning that deals with knowledge of myself and teaches me how to die well and live well: 'This is the winning-post towards which my sweating horse must run' [Propertius].

[A] If I encounter difficulties in my reading, I do not gnaw my nails over them; after making one or two attacks on them, I leave them there. [B] If I settled down to them I would waste myself and my time, for I have an impulsive mind. What I do not see at the first attack I see less by persisting. I do nothing without gaiety; too much firmness in continuing the struggle to understand dazes, depresses and wearies my judgement. My vision becomes confused and unfocussed. I have to withdraw it and then apply it again by starts. . . .

[A] If one book wearies me I take up another, applying myself to it only at times when the boredom of doing nothing

starts to grip me. I do not take much to recent books, because the ancients seem to me fuller and stronger; or to books in Greek, because my judgement cannot do its work with a childish beginner's level of understanding.

•READING PURELY FOR PLEASURE•

[A] Among books that are simply entertaining I find, of the moderns, the *Decameron* of Boccaccio, Rabelais and *The Kisses* of Johannes Secundus. . . .to be worth spending time on. As for the *Amadis* and writings of that sort, they did not have anything to hold me even in childhood. I will also add, boldly or rashly, that this heavy old soul of mine no longer lets itself be tickled by Ariosto, or even by the good Ovid; his facility and inventiveness, which once enchanted me, hardly entertain me now.

I speak my mind freely on all things, even those that may exceed my competence and that I don't regard as at all within my jurisdiction. So the opinions I give of are meant to reveal the measure of my sight, not the measure of the things. When I find myself disliking Plato's *Axiochus* as a weak book, considering its author, my judgement does not trust itself: it is not so arrogant as to oppose the authority of so many other judgements, famous and ancient, which it considers its tutors and masters; it would rather be wrong along with them •if they were wrong•. It blames and condemns itself either •for stopping at the outer rind and being unable to penetrate to the heart or •for looking at the thing in some false light. It is content with simply securing itself from confusion and disorder; as for its weakness, it recognises that, and willingly admits it. It thinks it interprets correctly the appearances its conception presents to it; but these are weak and imperfect.

Most of Aesop's fables have many senses and interpretations. Those who take them allegorically select some aspect

that squares well with the fable; but in most cases that is only their most superficial aspect; there are others, more living, more essential and inward, to which they have not known how to penetrate; that is how I read them.

But to continue on my path: it has always seemed to me that in poetry Virgil, Lucretius, Catullus and Horace rank highest by far—especially Virgil in his *Georgics*, which I regard as the most perfect achievement in poetry; by a comparison with it one can easily see that there are passages in the *Aeneid* which the author would have touched up a little if he had had time for that. . . . I also love Lucan and enjoy his company, not so much for his style as for his own worth and for the truth of his opinions and judgements. As for good Terence—the very grace and delight of the Latin tongue—I find him wonderful at depicting to the life the movements of the soul and the state of our *moeurs* [see Glossary]; [C] our own actions constantly bring me back to him. [A] However often I read him, I always find some new beauty and grace in him.

Those who lived near Virgil's time complained that some compared Lucretius to him. In my view, that is indeed a comparison between unequals; but I find it hard to confirm myself in that belief when I find myself entranced by one of the beautiful passages in Lucretius. If they were irritated by that comparison what would they say of the nonsensical and barbarous stupidity of those who now compare Ariosto with him? And what would Ariosto himself say? 'O what a silly, tasteless age!' [Catullus].

I think that the ancients had even more reason to complain of those who put Plautus on a par with Terence (the latter savours much more of the gentleman [see Glossary]) than of those who compared Lucretius with Virgil. [C] It does much for Terence's reputation and superiority that the father of Roman eloquence [Cicero] has him—alone in his class—often

on his lips, and so too the verdict that the best judge among Roman poets [Horace] gave of his fellow.

[A] It has often occurred to me how in our time those who undertake to write comedies (such as the Italians, who are quite good at it) use three or four plots from Terence or Plautus to make one of their own. In a single comedy they pile up five or six stories from Boccaccio. What makes them so load themselves with material is their lack of confidence that they can sustain themselves by their own graces. They need a **body** to lean on; not having enough of their own to detain us, they want the story to amuse us. In the case of my author [Terence], it is quite the reverse: the perfections and beauties of his style of expression make us lose our appetite for his subject. His distinction and elegance hold us throughout; he is everywhere so delightful—‘Clear flowing and most like a crystal stream’ [Horace]—and so fills our souls with *his* charms that we forget those of his plot.

This consideration draws me on further. I note that the good ancient poets avoided affectation, and did not try for fantastic Spanish and Petrarchian flights or even for the milder and more restrained conceits that are the adornment of all the poetic works of the ensuing centuries. Yet no sound judge regrets their absence from ·the works of· those ancients, or fails to regard the smooth polish and sustained sweetness and flowering beauty of Catullus’s epigrams as incomparably superior to all the stings with which Martial sharpens the tails of his. This is for the reason I was stating just now, as Martial said of himself: *He had less need for the labour of wit because its place had been taken by his subject matter*. Those earlier poets make themselves sufficiently felt without getting excited and goading themselves; they find something to laugh at everywhere; they do not have to tickle themselves! The later poets need outside help; the less *esprit* [see Glossary] they have, the more **body** they need. [B] They go

on horse-back because they are not strong enough on their own legs.

[A] Just as at our balls the men of low estate who run dancing schools, not being able to match the bearing and propriety of our nobility, try to gain favour by perilous leaps and other mountebank’s antics. [B] And the ladies can show off their wares more easily in dances where there are various contortions and twistings of the body than in certain other formal dances where they have only to walk with a natural step and display a natural bearing and their ordinary grace. As I have also seen some excellent clowns, dressed in their everyday clothes and with an ordinary face, give us all the delight that can be drawn from their art; whereas apprentices who are less deeply learned in that art can make us laugh only if they put flour on their faces, dress up, and hide behind wild movements and grimaces.

[A] The best place to see this conception of mine at work is in the comparison between ·Virgil’s· *Aeneid* and ·Ariosto’s· *Orlando furioso*. We see the *Aeneid* on outspread wings in lofty and sustained flight, always pursuing its goal; the *Orlando furioso* we see fluttering and hopping from tale to tale, branch to branch, trusting its wings only for a very short hop, landing on every hedge for fear that its breath or strength should fail. —So there are the authors I like best on that kind of subject.

·READING PARTLY FOR PROFIT·

As for my other reading, which mingles a little more profit with the pleasure, and from which I learn how to arrange my opinions and qualities, the books that serve me in this way are ·those of· Plutarch (since he has become a Frenchman [i.e. been translated into French]) and Seneca. They both have this notable advantage, from my point of view, that the knowledge I seek in their works is treated there in detached pieces that

do not require commitment to a lengthy labour, of which I am incapable. Such are the *Moralia* of Plutarch and the *Epistles* of Seneca, which are the finest and most profitable part of their writings. I need no great enterprise to get at them, and I drop them whenever I like; for they have no continuity, no dependence of one part on another.

Those authors agree in most of their useful and true opinions, and their fortunes were also similar: •they were born at about the same period, •both were tutors of Roman Emperors, •both came from foreign lands, and •both were rich and powerful. Their teaching is some of the cream of philosophy, and is presented in a simple and relevant manner. Plutarch is more uniform and constant; Seneca is more undulating and varied. The latter labours, strains and tenses himself to arm virtue against weakness, fear and vicious appetites; the former apparently regards these as less powerful, and disdains to hasten his step to put himself on guard against them. Plutarch has opinions that are Platonic, mild, and suitable for civil society; the other's are Stoic and Epicurean, more remote from common use but in my opinion more suitable for private life and more sturdy. It appears that Seneca bows somewhat to the tyranny of the emperors of his day, for I am sure it is by a forced judgement that he condemns the cause of those high-minded murderers of Caesar; Plutarch is free throughout. Seneca is full of pithy phrases and sallies; Plutarch of things. The former enflames you more, and stirs you; the latter contents you more and pays you better. ^[B] Plutarch guides us; Seneca drives us.

^[A] As for Cicero, the works of his that can serve my purpose are those that treat of philosophy, especially moral philosophy. But to tell the truth boldly (for once the boundaries of impudence have been crossed there is no more curb),

his style of writing seems to me boring, as do all similar styles. For his prefaces, definitions, classifications, etymologies, eat up most of his work. What life and marrow there is in him is smothered by these long-winded preparations. If I spend an hour reading him (which is a lot for me) and then recall what juice and substance I have drawn from him, most of the time I find nothing but wind, because in the course of that hour he has not yet reached the arguments that serve his purpose or the reasons that get to the core of what I am interested in.

For me, who ask only to become wiser, not more learned ^[C] or eloquent, ^[A] these logical and Aristotelian arrangements are not to the point. I want an author to begin with the main proposition. I know well enough what •death and •pleasure are—well enough not to waste time dissecting •them. I want from the outset good solid reasons that teach me how to sustain •their attack; and I am not helped in that by grammatical subtleties or by ingenuity in weaving words and arguments. I want arguments that drive their first attack into the stronghold of the doubt; Cicero's hover around the camp-fire. They are all right for the classroom, the court of law, or the pulpit, where we are free to doze off and a quarter of an hour later are not too late to pick up the thread of the argument again. There is a need to talk like that to judges whom one wants to win over rightly or wrongly, to children, and to the common herd ^[C] to whom one has to say everything and then see what will carry.

^[A] I do not want anyone to work at gaining my attention by crying *Or oyez!* fifty times, like our heralds. The Romans in their religion used to cry *Hoc age!*, ^[C] just as in our own we cry *Sursum corda!*;¹ ^[A] for me these are so many wasted words. I leave home fully prepared; I need no appetisers or

¹ 'Now listen!', 'Do this!', 'Lift up your hearts!'

sauce; I can eat my meat quite raw; and instead of whetting my appetite with those preparations and preliminaries, they deaden it for me and dull it.

[C] Will the licence of our times excuse my sacrilegious audacity in thinking that even Plato's dialogues drag, stifling his matter? And in lamenting the time spent on those long, empty, preliminary discussions by a man who had so many better things to say? My ignorance will excuse me better in that

what comes next: *je ne voy rien en la beauté de son langage.*

strictly meaning: I see nothing in the beauty of his language.

what he may have meant: I cannot see the beauty of his language (because I do not know Greek).

In general I ask for books that *use* the sciences [see Glossary], not ones that *decorate* them.

[A] My first two, as well as Pliny and their like, have no *Hoc age!*; they are addressed to people who are already on the alert. . . .

I also like reading ·Cicero's· *Letters to Atticus*, not only because they contain a very ample education in the history and affairs of his time but much more because of what they tell me about his personal humours. For I am, as I have said elsewhere, singularly curious about my authors' souls and their unstudied judgements. What their writings display when paraded in the theatre of the world should be our basis for judging their talents, but not for judging their *moeurs* or themselves. I have regretted a thousand times that we have lost the book Brutus wrote about virtue; it is a fine thing to learn the theory from those who thoroughly know the practice. But seeing that the preacher and the preaching are different things, I am just as happy to see Brutus in Plutarch as in a book of his own. I would prefer having a true account of his chat with a close friend in his tent on

the eve of a battle to having the oration he delivered next morning to his army, and prefer knowing what he did in his work-room and bedroom to knowing what he did in the Forum or Senate.

As for Cicero, I share the common opinion that apart from his learning there was little excellence in his soul. He was a good citizen, affable by nature as fat jolly men like him are apt to be; but he had in truth a great deal of softness and ambitious vanity. I cannot excuse him for rating his poetry as worth publishing. There is nothing much wrong with writing bad verses, but there was something wrong in his not realising how unworthy they were of the glory of his name. As for his eloquence, it is beyond compare; I believe no man will ever equal it. . . .

·HISTORIES·

The historians come right to my forehand. They are pleasant and easy; and at the same time [C] *man in general*, whom I seek to know, appears in them more alive and more entire than anywhere else—the true variety of his inward qualities, both in the mass and in detail, the variety of the ways he is put together and the events that threaten him.

[A] The ones that suit me best are those who write biographies, since they spend more time on plans than on events, more on what comes from within than on what happens without. That is why in every way Plutarch is my man. I am very sorry that we do not have a dozen Laertiuses, or that his work is not more widely known or better understood. For I consider the lives and fortunes of the world's great teachers no less carefully than their doctrines and fancies.

[A] In this kind of study of history one has to leaf one's way even-handedly through all kinds of authors, both old and new, both gibberish and French, so as to learn from them the things that they variously treat. But Caesar seems to me

to deserve special study, not only for historical knowledge but also for himself, so much perfection and excellence he has above all the others, although Sallust is one of them. I certainly read this author with a little more reverence and respect than one brings to reading ·merely· human works, considering now the man himself through his actions and the miracle of his greatness, now the purity and the inimitable polish of his language, which surpassed not only all the historians, as Cicero said, but perhaps Cicero himself. There is so much sincerity in his judgement concerning his enemies that the only thing he can be reproached for—apart from the deceptive colours under which he seeks to hide his bad cause and the filth of his pestilential ambition—is that he has been too sparing in talking about himself; for so many great things cannot have been done by him without his contributing more to them than he sets down.

I like historians who are either very simple or outstanding. The simple ones—who have nothing of their own to contribute, bringing to their work only care and diligence in collecting everything that comes to their attention and recording everything in good faith without choice or selection—leave our judgement intact to discern the truth. One example of this among others is the good Froissart, •who has gone through his enterprise with such frank sincerity that when he has made an error he is not in the least afraid to admit it and to correct it in the place where he has been made aware of it; and •who presents to us even the various rumours that were current and the differing reports that were made to him. This is the material of history, naked and unformed; each reader can profit from it as his understanding allows.

The truly outstanding historians have the capacity to choose what is worth knowing, selecting from two reports the one that is more likely; from the situation and humours of princes they infer their intentions and attribute appropriate

words to them. They are right to assume the authority to regulate our belief by their own; but that ·privilege· certainly belongs to extremely few.

Those who are between those two kinds (as most historians are) spoil everything for us. They want to chew our morsels for us; they give themselves the right to judge, and consequently slant history to their fancy, for once judgement leans to one side one cannot help turning and twisting the narration to that bias. They undertake to choose what is worth knowing, often hiding from us this remark or that private action which would have taught us more; they omit as incredible things that they do not understand, and perhaps also omit things because they do not know how to say them in good Latin or French. Let them boldly display their eloquence and their reasonings, let them judge as they like, but let them also leave us the means of making our own judgements after them, not interfering with the substance of the matter by their abridgements and suppressions. Let them pass it *all* on to us, pure and whole.

As often as not, and especially these days, people are selected for this work from among the common herd, simply because they can speak well, as though we were trying here to learn grammar! Having been hired only for that, and having nothing to sell but babble, they rightly care mainly about that aspect. Thus with many fine words they cook up a concoction out of the rumours they pick up on the streets.

The only good histories are ones written by men who were actually in charge of the affairs ·they are writing about·, or played some part in the conduct of them, ^[C] or at least happen to have conducted others of the same sort. ^[A] Such are virtually all the Greek and Roman histories. For, when several eye-witnesses have written on the same subject (as happened in those days, when greatness and learning commonly intersected), if a mistake is made it must be *very*

slight and on a very doubtful incident.

What can be expected from a doctor who writes about war, or a schoolboy writing about the designs of princes?

To take in how scrupulous the Romans were over this, we need only this example: Asinius Pollio found even in Caesar's histories some mistakes he had fallen into through •not being able to keep his eyes on every part of his army, •believing individuals who often reported to him things insufficiently verified, or •not being carefully enough informed by his lieutenants about what they had done in his absence. That example shows what a delicate thing the quest for truth is, when we cannot even rely on the commander's knowledge of a battle he has fought, or on the soldiers' knowledge of what went on around them—unless, as in a judicial inquiry, we confront witnesses and hear objections about the evidence in the slightest details of each incident. Truly, the knowledge we have of our own affairs is much looser. . . .

My treacherous and weak memory is so bad that on several occasions I have picked up a book, thinking it new and unknown to me, when in fact I had carefully read it some years earlier and scribbled over it with my notes. To compensate a little for this, I have for some time now adopted the practice of adding at the end of each book (I mean of each book that I intend to consult only once) the date when I finished reading it and the general judgement I drew from it, in order to show me again at least the general idea and

impression I had conceived of its author when reading it. I shall transcribe here some of these annotations.

Here is what I put about ten years ago on my Guicciardini (for whatever language my books speak, I speak to them in my own): 'He is a diligent historian from whom in my opinion we can learn the truth about the affairs of his time as accurately as from any other; moreover he played a part in most of them, holding an honourable rank. There is no sign that he ever disguised anything through hatred, favour or vanity. . . . Some of his digressions and reflections are excellent and enriched by beautiful sketches; but he likes them too much. . . . I have also been struck by the following: that among all his judgements on minds and actions, among so many motives and intentions, he attributes not one of them to virtue, religious scruple or conscience, as if those qualities were entirely extinct in the world; and for all actions, no matter how fine they might seem in themselves, he traces their cause to some evil opportunity or gain. It is impossible to conceive that among the countless actions he makes a judgement about there was not a single one produced by the way of reason. No corruption can have infected everyone so universally that no-one escaped the contagion. That leads me to fear that his own taste was somewhat corrupted; and he may have judged others by himself.' [Montaigne then quotes annotations he had written on his copies of histories by Philippe de Commines and the brothers Du Bellay.]

11. Cruelty

·A VIEW ABOUT VIRTUE AND DIFFICULTY·

[A] [This essay starts to fit its title on page 47.] It seems to me that virtue is something other, and nobler, than the inclinations toward goodness that are born in us. Souls that are in control of themselves and well-born follow the same path as virtuous ones and show the same countenance in their actions. But *virtue* has a resonance of something-or-other greater and more active than letting oneself be gently and quietly led in reason's footsteps by a happy disposition.

Someone who through natural mildness and easygoingness disdained injuries done to him would be doing something very fine and praiseworthy; but a man who, outraged and stung to the quick by an injury, armed himself with the weapons of reason against this frenzied appetite for vengeance and finally mastered it after a great struggle, would undoubtedly be doing much more. The former would have acted well, the latter virtuously; one action might be called *goodness*, the other *virtue*. For it seems that virtue—properly so-called—implies difficulty and opposition, and cannot be exercised without struggle. Perhaps that is why we call God 'good', 'mighty', 'generous' and 'just' but do not call him 'virtuous'. His operations are wholly natural and effortless.

Among the philosophers take the Stoics, and even the Epicureans—

and I use 'even' to reflect the common opinion, which is wrong, . . . for truly in firmness and rigour of opinions and precepts the Epicurean sect yields nothing to the Stoic . One Stoic

(showing better faith than those disputants who, to oppose Epicurus and load the dice in their favour, put into his mouth things he

never even thought of, twisting his words and using the rules of grammar to make his words express senses and beliefs different from those they know he had in his soul and his *mœurs*)

declared that he gave up being an Epicurean because he found their path too steep and unapproachable; [C] 'and those who are called *φιλήδονοι* [lovers of pleasure] are in fact *φιλόχαλοι* [lovers of honour] and *φιλοδίχαιοι* [lovers of justice], cultivating and practising all the virtues' [Cicero].

—[A] among whom many judged that it was not enough to have our soul in a good state, well regulated and well disposed to virtue; that it was not enough to have our decisions and reasonings out of reach of all the attacks of fortune; but that we must also seek opportunities to test them. They want to seek pain, hardship and contempt, so as to combat them and to keep their soul in trim: [C] 'Virtue gains much by being put to the proof' [Seneca].

[A] That is one of the reasons why Epaminondas, who belonged to a third sect [the Pythagorean], rejects the wealth that fortune puts in his hands in a very legitimate way, in order—he says—to have to duel with poverty; and he remained extremely poor up to the end. Socrates, it seems to me, tested himself even more roughly, keeping for his exercise the malignity of his wife, which is a test with the naked blade!

The Roman senator Metellus Numidicus, at a time when he was in danger, . . . said to his friends: 'To act badly is too easy and too cowardly; to act well when there is no danger is something anyone can do; but to act well when there is danger is the proper duty of a virtuous man.' That presents to us very clearly the thing I wanted to prove: that *virtue* will not keep company with *facility*, and that the easy, gentle slope that guides the measured steps of a good natural

disposition is not the path of real virtue. Virtue demands a rough and thorny road: it wants to struggle either against external difficulties. . . .or against inward difficulties created by the disordered appetites and imperfections of our nature.

·RETHINKING THE VIEW ABOUT VIRTUE AND DIFFICULTY·

I have come this far quite easily. But at the end of this argument it comes into my mind that the soul of Socrates, which is the most perfect to have come to my knowledge, would be by my reckoning ·in the account I have been presenting· a soul with little to commend it; for I cannot conceive in that great man any power of vicious desires. I cannot imagine any difficulty or constraint in the progress of his virtue; I know his reason to have been so powerful and so much in command of him that it would never have let a vicious appetite even *start*. I cannot put anything up against as lofty a virtue as his. It seems that I can see it striding victoriously and triumphantly along, stately and at its ease, without being blocked or disturbed by anything.

If virtue can shine only by clashing with opposing appetites, are we to say then that it cannot do without help from vice, and that it owes to vice its repute and honour? And what would become of that bold and noble-minded pleasure of the Epicureans, which prides itself on nursing virtue gently in its lap and making it romp there, giving it as playthings shame, fevers, poverty, death and tortures? If I assume that perfect virtue is recognised by its fighting pain and bearing it patiently, bearing attacks of gout without giving way; if I say that it must involve hardship and difficulty; what becomes of the virtue that has climbed so high that it not only despises pain but rejoices in it, and feels as *tickling* the stabbings of a bad colic [see Glossary]? Such was the virtue established by the Epicureans, many of whom have left us by their actions absolutely certain proof of it. As have many others

whom I find to surpass in their actions the very rules of their discipline.

Witness the younger Cato. When I see him dying and ripping out his entrails I cannot settle for believing simply that he then had his soul totally free from trouble and dismay; I cannot believe that he merely maintained himself in the attitude that the rules of the Stoic sect ordained for him: sedate, without emotion, impassible. That man's virtue, it seems to me, had too much vigour for it to stop there. I am convinced that he felt pleasure, voluptuous pleasure, in so noble a deed, and that he delighted in it more than in any other action in his life: ^[C] 'He departed from life as though rejoicing that he had found a reason for dying' [Cicero]. . . . Witness the younger Cato. When I see him dying and ripping out his entrails I cannot settle for believing simply that he then had his soul totally free from trouble and dismay; I cannot believe that he merely maintained himself in the attitude that the rules of the Stoic sect ordained for him: sedate, without emotion, impassible. That man's virtue, it seems to me, had too much vigour for it to stop there. I am convinced that he felt pleasure, voluptuous pleasure, in so noble a deed, and that he delighted in it more than in any other action in his life: ^[C] 'He departed from life as though rejoicing that he had found a reason for dying' [Cicero]. . . .

Philosophy has given me pleasure by judging that so beautiful an action would have been unbecoming in any life other than Cato's—that it was for his life alone to end in that way. So it was according to reason that he ordered his son and the senators who accompanied him to make some other provision for themselves. . . .

Every death should be of a piece with its life. We do not become somebody else because we are dying. I always interpret the death by the life. And if I am told of a seemingly strong death linked to a feeble life, I maintain that it was

produced by some feeble cause that matches the life.

[A] So the ease of this death of Cato's, the facility he had acquired by the strength of his soul, shall we say that it should diminish somewhat the splendour of his virtue? And who that has a brain even slightly tinctured with true philosophy can be satisfied with imagining a Socrates who is merely free from fear and passion in the circumstances of his prison, his chains, and his condemnation? And who does not recognise in him not merely firmness and constancy (that was his ordinary state) but some [*je ne sçay quel*] new joy and a playful cheerfulness in his last words and actions? . . . Cato must please forgive me: his death is more tragic and more tense, but Socrates's is somehow [*je ne sçay comment*] more beautiful. . . .

·THE HIGHEST KIND OF VIRTUE·

In the souls of those two great men and in those who imitated them (for I very much doubt that anyone actually rivalled them) one sees a habit of virtue so complete that it became a part of their character. It is no longer a laborious virtue, a virtue ordained by reason and maintained only through a stiffening of their soul; it is the very essence of their soul, its natural ordinary way of proceeding. They have made it so by a long practice of the precepts of philosophy coming upon a fine rich nature. The vicious passions that are born in us find nowhere to enter them; the force and rectitude of their soul extinguishes lusts as soon as they begin to stir.

It cannot, I think, be doubted that this:

(i) preventing the **birth** of temptations by a lofty and god-like resolve, being fashioned to virtue in such a way that even the *seeds* of vices have been uprooted is finer than this:

(ii) using active force to preventing their **growing**; after letting oneself be surprised by the first stirrings of

the passions, arming and tensing oneself to halt their progress and conquer them;

or that (ii) is finer than

(iii) being simply provided with a nature that is easy and affable and has an inborn distaste for debauchery and vice.

For it seems that (iii) produces an innocent man but not a virtuous one, exempt from doing evil but not apt enough to do good. Furthermore, (iii) is so close to imperfection and weakness that I do not properly know how to draw the line and distinguish them. That is why the very terms 'goodness' and 'innocence' are to some extent terms of contempt. I note that several virtues—such as chastity, sobriety and temperance—can come to us through bodily failing. Firmness in the face of •danger (if 'firmness' is the right name for it), contempt for •death, and patience in •affliction can and often do come to men through misjudgement of •these accidents, failure to conceive them as they are. Failure of uptake and stupidity sometimes counterfeit virtuous deeds. I have often seen men praised for things that deserved blame.

[Then a paragraph about 'bravery' in battle and its relation to stupidity, leading to the thought:] That is why, when we judge a particular action we should not name it until we have considered many circumstances as well as the man as a whole who performed it.

·MONTAIGNE'S VIEW ABOUT VIRTUE IN HIMSELF·

Now a word about myself. [B] I have sometimes seen my friends call wisdom in me what was really luck, and consider as an advantage of courage and endurance what was really an advantage of judgement or opinion—attributing one quality to me instead of another, sometimes to my gain, sometimes to my loss. Meanwhile, [A] so far am I from having reached (i) that first degree and most perfect degree

of excellence where virtue becomes a habit that I have given hardly any proof of **(ii)** the second. I have not made much of an effort to curb the desires by which I am pressed. My virtue is a virtue—or rather **(iii)** a state of innocence—that is accidental and fortuitous. If I had been born with a more unruly disposition, I fear it would have gone pitifully with me. I have experienced almost no firmness in my soul to withstand passions that had even the slightest intensity. I do not know how to sustain conflicts and debate within me. So I cannot congratulate myself much on finding myself exempt from many vices: ‘If my nature is sound except for a few trivial flaws, like a few moles on an otherwise beautiful body’ [Horace], I owe that more to my fortune than to my reason.

Fortune had me born of a stock famous for integrity, and of a very good father. I do not know whether he infused into me some of his humours, or whether examples in the home and the good education of my childhood insensibly contributed to it, or whether for some other reason I was born so. . . .; but the fact is that of myself I hold most vices in horror, . . . out of a native conviction so thoroughly my own that I have retained—with nothing being able to make me change them for the worse—the instinct and impression that I bore away with me when I was weaned. Not even my own arguments, which in some things have broken away from the common road, would easily give me licence for actions that my natural inclination makes me hate.

^[B] I am about to say something weird, but I will say it all the same. Because of this natural inclination, I find in many cases more rule and order in my *moeurs* than in my opinions, and my appetites less depraved than my reason.

^[C] Aristippus laid down such bold opinions in favour of sensual pleasure and riches that the whole of philosophy was in an uproar against him. But as for his *moeurs*: when the tyrant Dionysius presented him with three beautiful wenches

to choose from, he said he chose all three, since things had gone badly for Paris when he preferred one woman to her companions. But after bringing them to his home he sent them back without touching them. . . .

And Epicurus, whose doctrines are irreligious and favour luxury, was very devout and industrious in his way of life. He writes to a friend of his that he lives on nothing but coarse bread and water, asking him to send him a bit of cheese for when he wants to have a lavish meal. Could it be true that to be wholly good we must be so from some hidden, inborn, universal property—without law, reason, or example?

^[A] The excesses I have found myself involved in are not, thank God, of the worst. I have condemned them in myself, as they deserve, for my judgement has not been infected by them. I accuse them indeed more rigorously in myself than in anyone else. But otherwise I bring too little resistance to bear on them, letting myself too easily come down on the wrong side of the balance; except that I do control my vices, preventing them from being contaminated by other vices, which for the most part hold together and intertwine, if you are not careful. I have pruned my own vices and trained them to be as solitary and simple as I could. . . .

(As for the opinion of the Stoics, who say that when a wise man acts he acts through all his virtues together, though one of them is more in evidence depending on the nature of the action. . . .: if they want to infer from this that when a bad man does wrong he does so through all his vices together, then I do not believe them, . . . for I know by experience that the contrary is true. ^[C] Such are the insubstantial pin-point subtleties that philosophy sometimes lingers over! I go in for some vices, but I flee others as much as a saint could do.)

Furthermore, the Peripatetics do not accept this indissoluble connection and bond between moral belief and conduct: Aristotle maintains that a man may be wise and just yet

intemperate and lacking in restraint. ^[A] Socrates confessed to those who recognised in his face some inclination towards vice that this was indeed his natural propensity but that he had corrected it by discipline. ^[C] And the close friends of the philosopher Stilpo said that he, having been born susceptible to wine and women, had by study made himself very abstinent from both.

^[A] My own case is the reverse of that. Any good that I have in me I owe to the luck of my birth. I have not received it from law or precept or any other apprenticeship. ^[B] The innocence that is in me is an unfledged innocence: little vigour, no art.

·THE VICE OF CRUELTY; THE ‘VICE’ OF SEXUAL PLEASURE·

^[A] Among other vices I cruelly hate cruelty, both by nature and by judgement, as the extreme of all vices. But this is to such a point of softness that I do not see a chicken’s neck wrung without distress, and cannot bear to hear the scream of a hare in the teeth of my dogs, though I enjoy the hunt enormously.

Those who have to combat sensual pleasure like to use the following argument to show that it is entirely vicious and irrational: at its greatest pitch it dominates us to such an extent that reason can have no access; and they cite the experience of it that we feel when lying with women—‘as when the body already anticipates its joy, and Venus is about to scatter seeds broadcast in the woman’s furrows’ [Lucretius]—where it seems to them that the pleasure transports us so far beyond ourselves that our reason, entirely paralysed and enraptured by it, could not perform its function.

I know that it can go otherwise, and that one will sometimes, if one wants, cast the soul back to other thoughts at this very moment. But for this the soul must be tensed and stiffened vigilantly. I know that one can master the onset of this pleasure; and ^[C] I am well versed in this and have not

found Venus to be as imperious a goddess as many chaster men than I am testify to her being. ^[A] I do not take it for a miracle—as does the Queen of Navarre in one of the tales of her *Heptameron*. . . —or for an extremely difficult thing to spend whole nights with a mistress long yearned for, in complete freedom and with every opportunity, while keeping one’s promised word to her to be content with simple kisses and caresses.

I think a more appropriate example of reason being pushed aside would be the pleasure of the hunt; it involves less pleasure but more ecstasy and more surprise, so that our reason, stunned, does not have time to prepare itself for the encounter ^[A] when, after a long chase, the quarry starts up suddenly and reveals itself in a place where we were perhaps least expecting it. This shock and the ardour of the hue and cry strike us, so that it would be hard for those who love this sort of hunt to withdraw their thought elsewhere at that point. And the poets make Diana victorious over Cupid’s torch and arrows. . . .

To return to my subject, I have a most tender compassion for the afflictions of others, and would readily weep to keep others company if I could weep for anything. ^[C] There is nothing that tempts my tears but tears—not only real ones but all sorts, even the feigned or painted [*feintes ou peintes*]. ^[A] I hardly pity the dead; I am more inclined to envy them; but I greatly pity the dying. I am less upset by savages who roast and eat the bodies of the dead than I am by people who torment and persecute the living.

·CRUELTY IN PUNISHMENTS·

Even lawful public executions, however reasonable they may be, I cannot witness with a steady gaze. [Two anecdotes about Julius Caesar’s punishing with ‘simple death’ people he might have had tortured. Then:] As for me, even in the

case of justice, anything beyond simple death strikes me as pure cruelty, and especially for us who ought to be concerned to dispatch souls in a good state, which cannot happen when they have been agitated and driven to despair by unbearable tortures.

[A quite long ^[C]-tagged report of something that happened 'a few days ago'. A soldier under sentence of death clumsily and painfully tried to commit suicide so as to avoid torture. When he learned that he was merely to be decapitated, this 'seemed to him like a deliverance from death'.]

[Picking up from 'unbearable tortures.'] My advice would be that exemplary severity intended to keep the populace to their duty should be exercised on the *corpses* of criminals; for the common people would see their being deprived of burial, boiled and cut into quarters, as being virtually as bad as the pains inflicted on the living, though they really amount to little or nothing, ^[C] as God says, 'they who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do' [Luke 12:4]. And the poets bring out remarkably the horror of this picture, as something worse than death. 'Alas! the remains of a half-burnt king, his flesh torn to the bone, and spattered with mud and blood, dragged along in shame' [Ennius].

^[A] I happened to be in Rome one day when they were doing away with Catena, a notorious robber. When he was strangled, the crowd showed no emotion; but when the executioner proceeded to quarter him, each blow he struck was followed by a plaintive cry and exclamation from the crowd, as if each of them had transferred his own feelings to that carcass. . . .

I live at a time when we abound in incredible examples of this vice of cruelty, thanks to our civil wars; nothing in ancient history is more extreme than what we experience of it every day. But that has not reconciled me to it in the least. If I had not seen it I could hardly have made myself believe

that there are souls so monstrous that they would commit torture and murder for the mere pleasure of it [and he gives details]. For there you have the uttermost point that cruelty can reach: ^[C] '... that a man should kill a man not in anger or in fear but merely for the spectacle' [Seneca].

·CRUELTY AND SPORTS·

^[A] For myself, I have not even been able without distress to see hunted and killed an innocent animal that is defenceless and is doing us no harm. . . . 'It was, I think, by the slaughter of beasts in the wild that our iron swords were first spattered with warm blood' [Ovid]. Natures that are bloodthirsty towards beasts testify to a natural propensity towards cruelty.

^[B] In Rome, after they had grown used to watching the slaughter of animals, they proceeded to men and to gladiators. I fear that nature itself has attached to man some instinct for inhumanity. No-one enjoys watching beasts play together and caress one another; everyone enjoys watching them tear apart and dismember one another.

^[A] Lest anyone should mock my sympathy for beasts, ·I point out that· theology itself orders us to show some favour towards them. And, considering that the same Master has lodged ·them and· us in this palatial abode for his service, and that they are members of his family as we are, theology is right to enjoin upon us some respect and affection for them.

[Then a page about the belief (ancient Egypt, Pythagoras) that at the death of a body its soul enters another body, and the belief ('our ancient Gauls') that after a man's death his soul may enter an animal's body, *which* animal depending on how the man has conducted his life. After this intrusion, Montaigne returns to the thesis that we and the animals are members of one family:]

•FRIENDSHIP WITH THE BEASTS•

As for that cousinship between us and the beasts, I do not put much stock in it; or in the fact that many nations, notably some of the oldest and noblest, not only received beasts into their society and company but even ranked them far above themselves, sometimes esteeming them as intimates and favourites of their gods, holding them in more than human respect and reverence. And other nations recognised no other god, no other divinity, but them: ^[C] 'Beasts were sacred to the barbarians because of the blessings they bestowed' [Cicero]. ^[B] 'This place adores the crocodile; another dreads the ibis, feeder on serpents; here shines the golden image of the sacred ape;. . . here men venerate the fish of the river; there whole towns worship a dog' [Juvenal].

^[A] And the well-conceived interpretation that Plutarch gives of this error is to their honour. For he says that it was not the cat or the bull (for example) that the Egyptians worshipped; what they worshipped in those beasts was some image of the divine attributes: in the bull patience and usefulness; in the cat •liveliness—

^[C] or, like our neighbours the Burgundians along with the whole of Germany, •impatience with being shut in, which they took to represent the freedom that they loved and worshipped above any other divine attribute—and so for the rest.

^[A] But when among more moderate opinions I come across arguments that try to show our close resemblance to the animals, how much they share in our greatest privileges, and how plausibly they are likened to us, I certainly pull down our presumption considerably and willingly resign that imaginary kingship over other creatures that is attributed to us.

Even if there were nothing in all that, there is a certain respect and a general duty of humanity that attaches us not

only to the beasts, which have life and feeling, but even to trees and plants. To men we owe justice; we owe gentleness and kindness to the other created things that can receive them. Between them and us there is some interaction and some mutual obligation. ^[C] I am not afraid to admit that my nature is so tender, so childish, that whenever my dog offers (or asks) to play, however unsuitable the occasion for this, I cannot easily refuse.

^[A] The Turks have charities and hospitals for animals. ^[A] The Romans had a public duty to care for geese, by whose vigilance their Capitol had been saved; the Athenians commanded that the mules that had been used in building the Hecatompeton temple should be set free and allowed to graze anywhere without hindrance.

^[C] It was the usual practice of the citizens of Agrigentum to give solemn burial to the beasts they had loved—horses of some rare merit, to working birds and dogs, or even those that their children had played with. . . . The Egyptians buried wolves, bears, crocodiles, dogs and cats in sacred places, embalmed their corpses and wore mourning at their deaths. ^[A] Cimon gave honourable burial to the mares with which he had three times won the prize for racing at the Olympic games. In antiquity Xantippus had his dog buried on a coastal headland which has borne its name ever since. And Plutarch had scruples, he says, about sending to the slaughter-house, for a slight profit, an ox that had long served him.

* * * * *

Essay 12. 'Defence of Raymond Sebond', about 200 pages long, starts from Sebond's 1434–6 *Natural Theology*, but soon moves away from that into a somewhat rambling series of meditations on faith and reason and their provinces.

* * * * *

13. Judging someone else's death

[A] When we form an opinion about someone else's steadiness when he is dying—and dying is without doubt the most noteworthy action of human life—one thing should be taken into account, namely that it is hard for anyone to believe that he has reached that point. Few people die convinced that this is their last hour; and nowhere are we more distracted by the deception of hope. It never stops trumpeting into our ears: 'Others have been more ill without dying', 'The case is not as desperate as they think', and at worst 'God has certainly performed other miracles'.

This happens because we set too much importance on ourselves. It seems ·to us· that the universe somehow suffers from our annihilation, and that it has compassion for our state. Especially since our deteriorating vision represents things to itself as likewise deteriorating, and in proportion as it fails them we think that they are failing it, like travellers at sea for whom mountains, countrysides, cities, sky and land all go by at the same speed as they do. . . .

[B] Who ever saw an old person who did not praise former times and condemn the present, blaming his own misery and disappointment on the world and on men's *moeurs*? 'Now the old ploughman, shaking his head, sighs and compares present times with past, often praises his parents' happiness, and talks of the old race as full of piety' [Lucretius]. We drag everything along with us; [A] from which it follows that we reckon our death to be a great thing, something that does not happen easily or without solemn consultation among the stars: [C] 'So many gods in a tumult over one head!' [Seneca]. [A] And the higher we rate ourselves the more we think that way.

[C] What! Should so much learning be lost, bringing so much harm, without the special concern of the

fates? Does it not cost more to kill such a rare and exemplary soul than to kill a plebeian and useless one? Is this life—•which protects so many others, •on which so many other lives depend, •whose activities give employment to so many people, and •which fills so many places—to be displaced like a life that is attached ·to the world· by a single knot?

None of us gives enough thought to his being only *one*.

[A] Hence come these words of Caesar to his pilot, words more swollen than the sea that was threatening him: 'If you decline to sail to Italy under the God's protection, trust to mine; the only just cause you have to fear is that you do not know your passenger; sail on, secure in my guardianship' [Lucan]. And these: 'Caesar now believed the perils to be worthy of his destiny: "What a great labour it is for the gods to topple me", he said, "seeking me out where I sit on a huge sea in a tiny boat!"' [B] And that public daydream that for a whole year the sun's face was in mourning for Caesar's death! . . . , and hundreds of similar ones by which the world lets itself so easily be tricked, reckoning that our troubles can harm the heavens. . . .

[A] Now, is not reasonable to judge concerning the resolution and constancy of a man who is not yet sure that he is in danger, even if he is; it is not enough that he did die in that posture [of resolute constancy] unless he adopted it precisely for that purpose [i.e. to die in it]. It happens to most men to stiffen their countenance and their words so to acquire a reputation that they still hope to live to enjoy. . . .

·THE DESIRE FOR A QUICK DEATH·

[A] And even among those who killed themselves in ancient times there is a great distinction to be made between a quick death and one that took time. That cruel Roman Emperor who said of his prisoners that he wanted them to feel death

would comment, if one of them killed himself while in prison, 'That one got away!' He wanted to prolong death and to make it felt through torture: ^[B] 'We have seen in tortured bodies no gift of a mortal wound—only the fierce cruelty of keeping men alive while making them die' [Lucan].

^[A] It is no great thing for a healthy and composed person to resolve to kill himself; it is very easy to play tough before coming to grips. [Montaigne cites the example of 'Heliogabalus, the most effeminate man in the world', who planned various elegant ways for him to end his life, and remarks sardonically:] The luxuriousness of his preparations makes it likely that when it came to the crunch he would have had a ·fear-caused· nosebleed.

But even in those more forceful men who have decided to carry it out, we must (I say) look to see if it was to be by a blow that would leave them no time to feel its effect. For if they saw their life slowly ebbing away, the body's awareness mingling with the soul's, keeping available the means for a change of heart, it is open to question whether they would have remained constant and stubborn in such a dangerous act of the will.

[Montaigne now cites several episodes, six ancient and one recent, of people who tried to kill themselves but failed or needed help, usually through failure of nerve. Then:] Death is a food that must be swallowed without chewing unless one has a leather-lined throat! The Emperor Hadrian had his doctor mark and encircle on his nipple the mortal spot to be aimed at by the man he ordered to kill him. Which explains why Caesar, when asked what kind of death he found most desirable, replied, 'The least anticipated and the quickest.' ^[B] If Caesar dared say it, it is no longer cowardice for me to think the same.

^[A] 'A quick death', says Pliny, 'is the sovereign blessing of human life.' People hate to recognise death. No man can

claim to be resolute in death who is afraid to negotiate it and cannot go through it with his eyes open. Those we see at the gallows running to their end, hastening and urging the carrying out of the sentence, are not doing this because they are resolute; they want to deprive themselves of time to think about it; they are afraid not of being dead but of dying. . . . I know from experience that I could attain to that degree of firmness, like men who dive into dangers as into the sea—with their eyes closed.

·'STUDIED AND DIGESTED DEATHS'·

^[C] In my opinion there is nothing more illustrious in the life of Socrates than his having had thirty whole days to meditate on his death-sentence, digesting his death as a certainty through all that time, without fuss, without alteration, and with a course of actions and words that was subdued and relaxed, rather than strained and exalted, by the weight of that thought.

^[A] When he was ill, Pomponius Atticus (to whom Cicero addressed his epistles) summoned his son-in-law Agrippa and two or three other friends and told them that—having found by experience that he had nothing to gain from trying to be cured, and that everything he was doing to prolong his life was both prolonging and increasing his suffering—he had decided to end them both. He begged them to approve of his decision, or at least not to waste their efforts on trying to dissuade him. Well, then, he chose to kill himself by starvation, and *voilà!* his illness was cured! The remedy he had chosen to end his life restores him to health. The doctors and his friends, celebrating such a happy outcome and rejoicing over it with him, found themselves much mistaken; for they could not get him to go back on his decision, despite his cure. He said that one way or another he would have to cross that line some day, and that having gone this far he

wanted to save himself the trouble of starting all over again on another occasion. That man, having looked death over quite at his leisure, was not merely undismayed but even eager to meet it; for once he was satisfied by his reasons for entering the fight, he spurred himself on by *braverie* [see Glossary] to see the end of it. It is to go far beyond not fearing death to want to taste it and relish it.

[C] The story of the philosopher Cleanthes is very similar. His gums were swollen and rotting; the doctors advised extreme abstinence. After two days of fasting he is so much better that they declare him cured and allow him to return to his usual way of life. He, on the contrary, already tasting some sweetness in his failing powers, decides not to retreat and to cross the line towards which he had advanced so far.

[A] Tullius Marcellinus, a Roman youth, wanting to anticipate the hour of his destiny so as to rid himself of an illness that was battering him more than he was prepared to put up with, although the doctors promised him a certain cure but not a quick one, called his friends together to consider the matter. Seneca reports that some gave him the advice that through cowardice they would have chosen for themselves; others, out of flattery, the advice they thought would be most pleasing to him; but a Stoic said this to him:

‘Do not toil over it, Marcellinus, as if you were deliberating over something important; it is no great thing to be alive—your servants and beasts are alive—but it is a great thing to die honourably, wisely and with constancy. Think how long you have been doing the same things—eating, drinking and sleeping; drinking, sleeping and eating. We turn incessantly in that circle; not only bad and intolerable mishaps but merely being sated with living gives us a desire for death.’

...Marcellinus needed neither blade nor bloodshed; he undertook not to run away from this life but to take leave of

it; not to escape death but to experience it. And to give himself time to deal with it, he gave up all food; three days later he had himself sprinkled with warm water; he faded away gradually, not without some pleasure, so he said. Indeed those who have experienced such fadings of the heart brought on by weakness say that they felt no pain from them but rather a certain pleasure, like dropping off to sleep and resting.

Those are studied and digested deaths. . . .

* * * * *

Essay 14. ‘How our mind gets tangled up’ is one page about puzzles in logic, philosophy, and geometry. Montaigne does little more than mention them. He concludes that ‘they might be adduced to support the bold saying of Pliny: “The only thing that is certain is that nothing is certain, and nothing is more miserable or more arrogant than man.”’

* * * * *

15. Difficulty increases desire

[A] There is no reason that does not have an **opposite**, says the wisest school of philosophers [the sceptics].

I have just been chewing over the fine saying that one of the ancients adduces as a reason for despising life: ‘No good can bring us pleasure except one that we are prepared to lose’ [Seneca]; [C] ‘Grief for something lost is equal to the fear of losing it’ [Seneca]; meaning this to prove that the enjoyment of life can never be truly pleasing if we are afraid of losing it.

But it could be said—going the **opposite** way—that the less securely *ours* we see life as being and the more afraid we are of losing it, the more tightly and affectionately we clutch and embrace it. For it is evident that just as fire is

stirred up by the presence of cold, our will is sharpened by opposition—^[B] ‘Danae would not have had a child by Jupiter had she never been shut up in a tower of bronze’ [Ovid]—and ^[A] that by nature there is nothing so contrary to our enjoyment as the satiety that comes from ease of access, and nothing that sharpens it as much as rareness and difficulty. ‘In all things pleasure is increased by the very danger that should scare us off’ [Seneca]. ‘Galla, say No ·to me·; love is soon sated unless joys meet torments’ [Martial].

To make love exciting, Lycurgus ordained that married couples in Sparta should have sexual relations with each other only by stealth, and that it should be as shameful for them to be discovered lying together as lying with others. The difficulty of arranging trysts, the risk of being caught, the embarrassment on the next day—‘and listlessness, and silence, and a sigh fetched up from the depths’ [Horace]—that is what gives a tang to the sauce. ^[C] How many lasciviously enjoyable frolics arise from the modest and shamefaced way of talking about the works of love! ^[A] Even sensual pleasure seeks stimulation from pain. It is much sweeter when it burns and stings. The courtesan Flora said that she had never lain with Pompey without making him bear the marks of her bites: ‘The object of their desire they tightly hug, hurting each other’s body; they sink their teeth into each one another’s lips; some hidden goads prick them on to hurt the very thing, whatever it is, from which spring the seeds of their ecstasy’ [Lucretius]. It is like that everywhere; difficulty gives value to things. . . .

·SEX, THE REFORMATION, DIVORCE, PUNISHMENT·

[A] Our appetite scorns and passes over what is right there for it, so as to run after what it does not have: ‘He leaps over what lies fixed in his path, to chase after what runs

away’ [Horace]. To forbid us something is to make us want it: ^[B] ‘Unless you start to guard that girl of yours, I shall soon stop wanting her’ [Ovid]. ^[A] To hand it over to us completely is to breed in us contempt for it. Want and abundance create the same discomfort: ‘The excess pains you; the want pains me’ [Terence]. Desire and enjoyment make us equally dissatisfied. Coldness in mistresses is annoying, but the fact is that ease and availability are even more so; that is because the discontent and anger that arise from the value we give to the desired object sharpen our love and heat it up; whereas satiety engenders distaste; our passion then is blunted, hesitant, weary and half-asleep: ‘If she wants to go on reigning over her lover, let her scorn him’ [Ovid]. ‘Scorn her, lovers; then she will come today for what she refused yesterday’ [Propertius]. . . .

Why have they veiled, right down to the heels, those beauties that every woman wants to show,¹ that every man wants to see? Why do they cover with so many impediments, layer on layer, the parts in which our desire and theirs principally dwells? And those defence-works with which our women have just taken to arming their flanks—what are they for if not to allure our appetite and to attract us to them by keeping us at a distance? ‘She flees into the willows, but wants first to be seen’ [Virgil]. . . .

What is the use of that artful maidenly modesty, that poised coldness, that severe countenance, that professed ignorance of things that they know better than we who instruct them in them, except to increase our desire to conquer, overwhelm, and subdue to our appetite all this ceremony and all these obstacles? For there is not only pleasure but also triumph in making that sweet gentleness and that girlish modesty go mad with sensual desire and in

¹ Taking it that *que chacun desire montrer* was a slip for *que chacune desire montrer*.

subjecting a proud and commanding gravity to the mercy of our ardour.

There is glory, they say, in triumphing over coldness, modesty, chastity and moderation, and anyone who counsels ladies against these attitudes betrays both them and himself. We need to believe that their heart trembles with fear, that the sound of our words offends the purity of their ears, that they hate us for it and yield to our persistence with an enforced fortitude. Beauty, all-powerful as it is, has no way of making itself savoured without such preliminaries. . . .

[B] It is an act of God's providence to allow his holy Church to be agitated by so many troubles and storms ·involved in the Reformation·, in order by this opposition to awaken pious souls and bring them back from the idleness and torpor in which such a long period of calm had immersed them. If we weigh •the loss we have suffered by the numbers of those who have gone astray against •the gain that comes to us from our having been brought back into fighting trim, with our zeal and our strength restored to life for the battle, I do not know that the benefit does not outweigh the harm.

[C] We thought we were tying our marriage-knots more tightly by removing all means of undoing them; but the tighter we pulled the knot of constraint the looser and slacker became the knot of our will and affection. In ·ancient· Rome, on the contrary, what made marriages honoured and secure for so long a period was freedom to break them at will. Men loved their wives more because they could lose them; and with full liberty of divorce, more than five hundred years passed before anyone took advantage of it: 'What is allowed has no charm: what is not allowed, we burn to do' [Ovid].

[D] We could add to this the opinion of an ancient philosopher [Seneca] that punishments sharpen our vices rather than blunt them; ^[B] they do not engender a concern to do well—that is the work of reason and discipline—but only a

concern not to be caught doing wrong: 'With the infected spot cut out, the contagion spreads wider' [Rutilius]. ^[A] I do not know whether that is true, but I do know from experience that no society has ever been reformed by such means. The order and regulation of *moeurs* [see Glossary] depends on some other method.

^[C] The Greek histories [here = Herodotus] mention the Argipaeans, neighbours of Scythia, who live without rod or stick for offence; not only does no one undertake to attack them but because of their virtue and sanctity of life any man who seeks refuge with them is quite safe—no-one would venture to lay hands on him. Recourse is had to them to settle the disputes that arise among men of other countries.

·PROTECTING ONE'S HOME IN WAR-TIME·

^[B] There is a nation where the gardens and fields that people want to protect are closed off with a cotton thread, which proves to be much more secure and reliable than our hedges and ditches. ^[C] 'Locked places invite the thief; the burglar passes by what is open' [Seneca].

It may be that one of the things that protects my house from the violence of our civil wars is the ease of access to it. Defence attracts enterprise, and mistrust ·attracts· offence. I have weakened any designs soldiers may have on it by removing from their exploit the elements of risk and military glory that usually provide them with a pretext and an excuse. At a time when justice is dead, anything done courageously brings honour. I make the taking of my house cowardly and treacherous for them. It is closed to no-one who knocks. My entire protection consists of an old-fashioned courteous porter, who serves not so much to block my door as to offer it with more decorum and grace. I have no guard or sentinel except what the stars provide for me.

A gentleman [see Glossary] is wrong to make a show of being defended unless his defences are complete. Whoever is exposed on the flank is exposed over-all. Our fathers had no thought of building frontier forts! The means of storming and surprising our houses—I mean without cannons and armies—increase every day, exceeding the means of defending them. . . . My own house was a stronghold for the time it was built. In that respect I have added nothing to it, fearing that its strength could be turned against me. Moreover, peaceful times will require that houses be defortified. There is the risk of not being able to retake them; and it is hard to be sure of them. For in a civil war your valet may be on the side that you fear. And where religion serves as pretext, even kinsmen cannot be trusted under the cloak of justice.

Our home-garrisons will not be paid for out of the public exchequer, which would be exhausted by doing so. We have not the means to maintain them without ruining ourselves or—more harmfully and unjustly—ruining our people. I would hardly be worse off if I lost my house. . . .

The fact that so many protected houses have been lost while this one endures makes me suspect that they were lost *because* they were protected. That provides an attacker with both the desire and the excuse. All protection bears the aspect of war, which will descend on my house if God so wills it, but which I shall never invite to come there. It is my place of retreat, to rest from the wars. I try to withdraw this corner from the public storm, as I do another corner in my soul. Our war may change forms all it will, and multiply and diversify itself into new factions; as for me, I do not budge.

Amid so many fortified houses, I (alone of my rank as far as I know) have entrusted mine purely to the protection of heaven. I have never removed from it plate or title-deeds or hangings. I will never fear for myself, nor save myself, by halves. If the fullness of my gratitude brings God's favour, it

will see me through to the end; if not, I have already survived the religious civil wars for long enough to make my duration remarkable and worth recording. What! It has been thirty years or more!

16. Glory

[A] There is the name and the thing: the name is a spoken sound that designates and signifies the thing; the name is not part of the thing or of the substance; it is an extraneous piece attached to the thing and outside of it.

God, who is himself all fullness and the ultimate of all perfection, cannot himself grow and increase; but his name can be made to grow and increase through the blessing and praise that we bestow on his works, which are external to him. We cannot incorporate that praise into the substance of God, in whom there can be no increase of good, so we attribute it to his name, which is the extraneous piece nearest to him. That is why glory and honour belong to God alone. There is nothing so unreasonable as for us to go seeking them for ourselves; for since we are intrinsically wanting and necessitous, our essence being imperfect and continually in need of improvement, *that* is what we should be working for.

We are all hollow and empty; it is not with wind and sound that we have to fill ourselves; to restore ourselves we need more solid substance. A starving man would be a simpleton if he went in search of fine clothes rather than a good meal; we should run to our most pressing needs. As our ordinary prayers say, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace toward men' [Luke 1:14]. We have a scarcity of beauty, health, wisdom, virtue and such essential qualities; external ornaments will be sought after we have provided for

the necessities. Theology treats this subject fully and more pertinently, but I am hardly versed in it.

Chrysippus and Diogenes were the first and firmest exponents of the disdain for glory; they said that of all the pleasures none was more dangerous or more to be avoided than the pleasure of being approved of by others. In truth, experience makes us aware of many harmful betrayals at its hands. There is nothing that poisons princes more than flattery, and nothing by which bad men can more easily gain credit in their courts; nor is there any pandering so fitted and so common for corrupting the chastity of women as feeding and entertaining them with their praises.

^[B] The first enchantment the Sirens use to deceive Ulysses is of this nature: ‘Come hither to us, O admirable Ulysses, come hither, thou greatest ornament and pride of Greece’ [Homer]. ^[A] Those philosophers ·whom I mentioned· said that for a man of discretion it would not be worthwhile even to stretch out a finger to acquire all the glory in the world—

^[B] ‘What is there to the greatest glory if it is merely glory?’ [Juvenal]

—^[A] I mean, to acquire it for its own sake; for it often brings with it many advantages that can make it desirable: it brings us good-will, makes us less exposed to insults and injuries from others, and the like.

It was also one of the principal doctrines of Epicurus, for that precept of his school, CONCEAL YOUR LIFE, which forbids men to burden themselves with public affairs and business, also necessarily presupposes a contempt for glory, which is the world’s approbation of actions of ours that we make public. He who . . . does not want us to be known to others is even further from wanting us to be held in honour and glory by them. So he advises Idomeneus not to regulate his actions even slightly by common opinion or reputation, except to avoid the incidental disadvantages that

men’s contempt might bring him. Those lines of thought are infinitely true, in my opinion, and reasonable. But we are in some way intrinsically *double*, so that what we believe we do not believe, what we condemn we cannot help doing. Let us look at the last words of Epicurus, said when he was dying: they are great words, worthy of such a philosopher; yet they bear some sign of •a concern for his reputation and of •that attitude he had denounced in his precepts. Here is a letter that he dictated a little before breathing his last:

‘EPICURUS TO HERMACHUS, GREETINGS! I wrote this during the last day of my life, a happy day though accompanied by pain in the bladder and intestines— pain that could not be greater. But it is made up for by the pleasure brought to my soul by the remembrance of my discoveries and teachings. You now should welcome the task of looking after the children of Metrodorus, as required by the affection you have had since childhood for me and for philosophy.’

That is his letter. What leads me to conclude that the pleasure he says he feels in his soul from his discoveries has something to do with the reputation he hoped they would bring him after death is a clause in his will asking his heirs Amynomachus and Timocrates to provide such money as Hermachus should require for •the celebration of his [Epicurus’s] birthday every January and for •a gathering of his philosopher-friends on the twentieth day of each month to honour the memory of himself and of Metrodorus.

Carneades was the protagonist of the opposite opinion, maintaining that glory was desirable for itself, just as we embrace our descendants for themselves though we have no knowledge or enjoyment of them. This opinion has not failed to be more commonly followed ·than Epicurus’s·, as those that most suit our inclinations are apt to be. ^[C] Aristotle gives glory the first rank among external goods: ‘Avoid,

as two vicious [see Glossary] extremes, immoderately seeking glory and immoderately fleeing it.' ^[A] I believe that if we had the books that Cicero wrote on this subject he would have spun us some good ones! For that man was so frenzied with a passion for glory that, if he had dared, I believe he would readily have fallen into the extreme that others fell into—namely, the view that even virtue is desirable only for the honour that always attended it, an opinion so false that it irks me that it could ever have entered the mind of a man who bore the honoured name of philosopher.

If that were true, we should be virtuous only in public; and it would be pointless to keep the workings of our soul (the true seat of virtue) under rule and order except insofar as they would come to the knowledge of others.

^[C] Is it then only a matter of doing wrong slyly and subtly? 'If you know', says Carneades, 'that a snake is hidden in a place where a man who is unaware of it and by whose death you hope to profit is about to sit down, you act wickedly if you do not warn him, all the more so if your deed could be known only to yourself.' If we do not draw the law of right conduct from within ourselves, if for us impunity is justice, how many kinds of wickedness shall we daily abandon ourselves to?

What Sextus Peduceus did in faithfully returning the money that Caius Plotius had entrusted to him, he alone knowing it—something I have often done in the same way—I do not find as praiseworthy as I would find it execrable if we had failed to do it.

And I find it good and useful to recall in our time the case of Publius Sextilius Rufus, whom Cicero condemns for having accepted an inheritance against his conscience, not only *not against* the law but *through* the law.

And Marcus Crassus and Quintus Hortensius who had been invited by a foreigner to share in the succession of a forged will, so that their authority and power would enable

him to be sure of his own share in it; they contented themselves with not having a hand in the forgery, and did not refuse to profit by it, feeling sufficiently covered if they kept themselves sheltered from accusers, witnesses and laws. 'Let them remember that they have God as a witness, that is to say (as I believe) their own conscience' [Cicero].

^[A] Virtue is a really vain and frivolous thing if what makes it worthwhile is glory. ·If that were so·, it would be pointless for us to try to give it a separate status and to detach it from fortune; for what is there more fortuitous than reputation? ^[C] 'Truly fortune rules in all things; it makes things celebrated or obscure by its own whim, not by truth' [Sallust]. ^[A] Bringing it about that actions are known and seen is purely the work of fortune.

^[C] It is chance that brings glory to us, according to how it throws its weight around. I have very often seen it going ahead of merit, and often outstripping it by a long distance. The man who first noticed the resemblance between shadow and glory did better than he intended. Both are pre-eminently empty things. . . .

^[A] Those who teach noblemen to look to valour for nothing but honour—^[C] 'as if what is not noted were not honorable' [Cicero]—^[A] what do they achieve by this except teaching them never to hazard themselves unless they are seen, and to take care to ensure that there are witnesses who can bring back news of their valour? Whereas there are a thousand occasions for acting well without anyone noticing! How many fine individual actions are buried in the throng of a battle! Anyone who spends time checking on others during such a melee is not very busy in it himself, and produces against *himself* the testimony he gives concerning his comrades' conduct. ^[C] 'True and philosophic greatness of spirit regards the moral goodness to which nature most aspires as consisting in deeds, not in fame' [Cicero].

All the glory I claim for my life is to have lived it tranquilly—tranquilly not according to Metrodorus or Arcesilas or Aristippus, but according to me. Since philosophy has not been able to discover a route to tranquillity that would be good for everyone, let each man seek it individually.

[A] To what but to fortune do Caesar and Alexander owe the measureless greatness of their renown? How many men has it extinguished at the start of their careers—men we know nothing about—who would have brought to their enterprises the same courage as those two if the misfortune of their fate had not stopped them short at the outset! I do not remember reading that Caesar, in the course of so many and so extreme dangers, was ever wounded. A thousand have died from lesser perils than any he passed through.

Countless fine actions must be lost without a witness before one shows to advantage. A man is not always at the top of a breach or at the head of an army, in sight of his general as on a stage. He is ambushed between the hedge and the ditch; he must tempt fortune against a hen-roost; he must root out four wretched musketeers from a barn; he must separate from his unit and go it alone, as necessity requires. And if you watch carefully you will find by experience that the least spectacular occasions are the most dangerous; and that in the wars that have happened in our own times, more good men have been lost on minor and fairly unimportant actions—fighting over some shack—than in places of honour and dignity.

[C] Anyone who holds that his death is wasted unless it is on some conspicuous occasion, instead of making his death illustrious is probably casting a shadow over his life, while letting slip many just occasions for hazarding himself. And all just ones are illustrious enough; each man's conscience trumpets them sufficiently to himself: 'Our glory is the testimony of our conscience' [2 Corinthians, 1:12]. . . .

[A] Whoever acts well only because people will know it and think better of him, whoever is unwilling to act well unless his virtue will come to the knowledge of men, is not a man who will be of much use to anyone. [Montaigne now offers eight lines of Italian verse from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, about the hero Orlando [= Roland], who 'was always more ready to do valiant deeds than to relate them afterwards'.]

[A] One should go to war as a duty, expecting as a reward the satisfaction that a well-governed conscience derives from acting well, which cannot fail any noble actions—even virtuous thoughts—however hidden they are. One should be valiant for one's own sake, and for the advantage of having one's courage firmly grounded and secure against the assaults of fortune. [B] 'Virtue ignores all squalid slights: it gleams with unstained honour; it neither accepts nor lays down the insignia of Consul at the whim of the plebs' [Horace].

[A] It is not for show that our soul must play its part; it is at home, within us, where no eyes but our own can penetrate. There it protects us from fear of death, of pain, of shame even; it arms us against the loss of our children, of our friends, and of our fortunes; and when the opportunity arises, it also leads us to the hazards of war: [C] 'Not for any reward but the beauty of merit itself' [Cicero]. [A] This benefit is much greater, and much more worthy of being coveted and hoped for, than honour and glory, which are nothing but a favourable judgement that people make of us.

·AGAINST GIVING WEIGHT TO THE OPINIONS OF 'THE MOB'·

[B] To adjudicate an acre of land we have to select a dozen men out of an entire nation; yet when it comes to adjudicating our propensities and our actions—the most difficult and most important matter there is—we have recourse to the voice of the common people and of the mob, the mother of ignorance,

of injustice and of inconstancy. ^[C] Is it reasonable to make the life of a wise man depend on the judgement of fools? ‘Can anything be more stupid than think that people we despise as individuals can amount to something collectively?’ ^[Cicero] ^[B] Whoever aims to please them will never finish; it is a shapeless and elusive target. ^[C] ‘Nothing is as unpredictable as the mind of a multitude’ ^[Livy]. Demetrius joked that he set no more store by the voice of the people when it came from their tops than when it came from their bottoms. Cicero wrote: ‘My judgement is that even when something is not shameful it cannot be entirely free from shame when it is praised by the multitude.’

^[B] No skill, no mental agility, could direct our steps in following such an erratic and unregulated guide. In that windy confusion of rumours, reports and popular opinions pushing us around, no worthwhile course can be fixed on. Let us not set ourselves a goal so fluctuating and wavering; let us steadily follow reason; let public approval follow us there, if it will; but since that depends entirely on fortune we have no reason to expect it more by any other route than by this one. Even if I did not follow the right road for its rightness, I would still follow it because I have found from experience that when all is said and done it is usually the happiest one and the most useful. ^[C] ‘Honourable conduct is the most profitable; that is Providence’s gift to men’ ^[Quintilian]. . . .

^[B] I have seen in my time a thousand supple, two-faced, equivocating men, who no-one doubted were more worldly-wise than I am, ruined while I was saved: ‘I laughed when I saw how trickery could fail’ ^[Ovid].

^[C] When Paulus Aemilius set out on his glorious Macedonian expedition, he warned the people of Rome above all to restrain their tongues concerning his actions during his absence. Freedom of judgement—what a great trouble-maker

it is in affairs of public concern! Inasmuch as not everyone has Fabius’s firmness in the face of universal, hostile, and abusive clamour: he preferred to let his authority be torn to shreds by men’s vain fancies, rather than earning popular support by carrying out his responsibilities less well.

^[B] There is an indescribable natural sweetness in hearing oneself praised, but we make far too much of it. ‘I am not afraid of being praised; my heart is not horn-hard; but I deny that the final goal of right conduct should be “Bravo!”, “Well done!”’ ^[Persius].

^[A] I do not care so much about what I am to others as about what I am to myself. I want to be rich through myself, not through borrowing. Those outside us see only upshots and outward appearances; anyone can put on a good outward show while inside he is full of fever and fright. They do not see my heart; they see only my bearing.

·FAKE BRAVERY·

We are right to denounce the hypocrisy that is found in war; for what is easier for a practical man than to dodge the dangers and play the fierce fighter while his heart is full of softness? There are so many ways of avoiding occasions for exposing ourselves to personal risk that we shall have deceived everybody a thousand times before getting into a dangerous situation; and even then, finding ourselves stuck in it, we can quite well hide our game for the moment with a good face and a confident word, though our soul trembles within us. . . . That is why all those judgements that are based on external appearances are so uncertain and dubious, and why there is no witness as reliable as each man is to himself.

On those ·dangerous occasions that we are known to go through·, how many clods do we have as companions in our glory? The man who stands firm in an open trench, what is

he doing there that was not done before him by fifty wretched trench-diggers who open the way for him and protect him with their bodies for five sous a day? . . .

·THE WISH TO BE TALKED ABOUT·

We call it ‘making our name great’ when we spread it around and sow it in many mouths; we want it to be favourably received there and—the most excusable element in this urge—to profit from this increase ·in fame·. But the excess of this malady goes so far that many seek to be talked about no matter how. Trogus Pompeius says of Herostratus, and Livy says of Manlius, that they wanted a *wide* reputation more than they wanted to have a *good* one. That is a common vice. We care more that men should talk of us than *how* they talk of us. . . . It seems that to be known is in some way to have one’s life and duration somehow in the keeping of others.

As for me, I hold that I exist in myself [*chez moy*]; and as for that other life of mine that lies in the knowledge of my friends, ^[C] considering it naked and simply in itself, ^[A] I am well aware that I feel no fruit or enjoyment from it except through the vanity of a fanciful opinion. And when I am dead I shall feel it even less, ^[C] and I shall lose completely the use of the real benefits that sometimes happen to come with it; ^[A] I shall no longer have any handle by which to get hold of reputation or or by which it can have any effect on me.

As for expecting *my name* to receive it, well. . . . [and Montaigne launches into a half-page diatribe about the unimportance of names].

·COURAGE AND POSTHUMOUS FAME·

Moreover, in a whole battle in which ten thousand men are maimed or killed, there are not fifteen that are talked about. For a personal deed to be appreciated—whether a mere infantryman’s or even a general’s—it must have some towering greatness, or some important consequence that

fortune has attached to it. For to kill a man or two, or even ten, to expose oneself courageously to death, is indeed *something* for each one of us, because everything is at stake; but for the world in general these are such ordinary things, so many of them are seen every day, and so many are needed to produce one notable effect, that we can expect no individual commendation for them. ^[B] ‘An incident known to many, now well-worn, picked from fortune’s heap’ [Juvenal].

^[A] Of so many myriads of brave men who have died sword in hand in France over the last fifteen centuries, not a hundred have come to our knowledge. The memory not only of the leaders but of the battles and victories lies buried.

^[C] The fortunes of more than half the world, for lack of a record, stay where they are and vanish immediately. If I had in my possession all the unknown events, I think I could easily supplant [here = ‘improve on’] the known ones, in examples of every kind. ^[A] Why, even of the Romans and the Greeks, amid so many writers and witnesses and so many rare and noble exploits, few have come down to us! ^[B] ‘There scarcely wafts to us a thin breath of their fame’ [Virgil]. ^[A] It will be a big thing if a hundred years from now people remember in a general way that in our time there were civil wars in France.

^[B] On going into battle the Spartans sacrificed to the Muses, so that their deeds would be well and worthily written about; they thought that it would take a divine favour, not an ordinary ·human· one, for fine deeds to find witnesses who could give them life and memory. . . .

^[A] We have not a thousandth part of the writings of the ancients: it is fortune that gives them life, shorter or longer according to its favour; ^[C] and it is permissible to wonder whether what we have is the worst part, since we have not seen the rest. ^[A] Histories are not written about minor events; it takes being the leader in conquering an empire

or a kingdom; it takes winning fifty-two pitched battles, always with smaller forces, like Caesar. Ten thousand good comrades and many great captains died in his service, valiantly and courageously, whose names lasted only as long as their wives and children lived. . . .

Even those we see acting well are no more talked of, three months or three years after their bodies were left on the field, than if they had never been. Anyone who considers soberly and without bias what kinds of people and actions have their glory maintained in the memory of books will find that very few actions and very few men of our century can claim a right to such remembrance. How many valiant men we have seen outlive their own reputation, suffering the extinction in their presence of the honour and glory most justly acquired in their early years! And for three years of this fanciful and imaginary life are we going to lose our true and essential life and commit ourselves to an everlasting death? The sages set themselves a finer and juster end for such an important undertaking: ^[C] ‘The reward for acting properly is to have done so’ [Seneca]; ‘The recompense for duty is duty done’ [Cicero].

^[A] It might be pardonable for a painter or other craftsman, or even for a rhetorician or a grammarian, to drive himself so as to acquire a name through his works; but the actions of virtue are too noble in themselves to seek any reward other than their own intrinsic worth, and especially to seek it in the vanity of human judgements.

·FALSE BELIEFS WITH GOOD EFFECTS·

However, if •this false opinion serves the public good by keeping men to their duty—

^[B] if the people are incited to virtue by it; if princes are influenced by the sight of men blessing Trajan’s memory and abominating Nero’s; if it affects them to

see the name of that great criminal, once so fearsome and so dreaded, cursed and insulted so freely by the first schoolboy who takes him on

—^[A] then let •it grow boldly and be fostered among us as much as possible.

^[C] And Plato, employing every means to make his citizens virtuous, advises them also not to despise the esteem of the nations. And he says that through some divine inspiration it turns out that even the wicked can often soundly distinguish—in speech and thought—good men from bad. This person and his teacher ·Socrates· are marvelous and bold workmen at bringing in divine operations and revelations wherever human power fails. Perhaps that is why Timon insulted Plato by calling him a great maker of miracles: ‘As the tragic poets have recourse to a god when they cannot unravel the end of their plot’ [Cicero].

^[A] Since men, because of their inadequacy, cannot be sufficiently paid with good money, let false money also be used for that. This method has been employed by all the lawgivers. There is no polity in which empty ceremony or lying opinion has not served as a curb to keep the people to their duty. That is why most of them have fables about their origins and have beginnings enriched with supernatural mysteries. That is what has given credence to bastard religions and led them to find favour with men of understanding. [Now Montaigne launches into a scornful list of some of the peoples, religions, and ‘men of understanding’ who have been culprits in this sort of thing. He ends with a distinction:] ^[C] Every polity has a god at its head, •truly so for the one drawn up by Moses for the people of Judaea on leaving Egypt, •falsely so for the others.

^[A] The religion of the Bedouins. . . . held among other things that the soul of any of them who died for his prince went into another body—happier, handsomer and stronger than the

first; on account of which they risked their lives much more willingly. 'The minds of these warriors defy the iron blade; their hearts embrace their deaths; for them it is cowardice to save lives that are to be given back to them' [Lucan]. That is a very salutary belief, however empty it may be. Every nation can provide its own similar examples; but that subject would merit separate treatment.

To add a word on my first topic: I do not advise ladies to call their duty 'honour'. ^[C] 'In common parlance, the term "honourable" is used only for what is glorious in the opinion of the people' [Cicero]. Their duty is the core; their honour is only the rind. ^[A] Nor do I advise them to pay us for their refusals by citing honour as an excuse; for I suppose that their intentions, their desire and their will (which are qualities their honour has nothing to do with since they do not appear on the surface) are even better regulated than their acts: 'She who does not do it because it is not allowed really does it' [Ovid]. The offence against God and their conscience would be just as great in the desiring as in the doing. So we are dealing with actions that are intrinsically hidden and secret; it would be very easy for a lady to hide one of them from the knowledge of the others on whom 'honour' depends—if she did not also have regard for her duty and for the affection she has for chastity for its own sake.

^[C] Any person of honour would rather lose her honour than lose her conscience.

17. Presumption

^[A] There is another kind of glory, 'vainglory', which is a too-good opinion we form of our own worth. It is an unthinking affection by which we cherish ourselves, presenting us to

ourselves as other than we are; in the way passionate love lends beauties and graces to the person it embraces, and makes its victims, with muddled and imperfect judgement, find what they love to be other and more perfect than it is.

I do not want a man to misjudge himself for fear of erring in this direction, or to think himself less than he is; judgement should always maintain its rights. It is right that it should see, here as elsewhere, what truth sets before it. If he is Caesar, let him boldly judge himself the greatest captain in the world.

We are nothing but ceremony;¹ we are carried away by it, and neglect the substance of things; we hang onto the branches and abandon the trunk, the body. We have taught the ladies to blush at hearing the mere mention of something they haven't the slightest fear of doing; we dare not call our 'private' parts by their proper names yet are not afraid to use them for all sorts of debauchery. Ceremony forbids us to express in words permissible and natural things, and we obey it. Reason forbids us to do illicit and wicked things, and no-one obeys it. Here I find myself blocked by the laws of ceremony, which do not allow a man to speak well of himself or to speak ill of himself. I shall put it aside for a while.

People whom fortune (good or bad, call it what you will) has caused to spend their lives in some exalted position can testify to what they are by their public actions. But those whom fortune has set to work only among the crowd ^[C] and whom no-one will talk about unless they do it themselves ^[A] may be excused if they have the temerity to talk about themselves for the sake of those who have an interest in knowing them, following the example of Lucilius: 'He used to confide his secrets to his notebooks as to trusted friends; turning to them and nowhere else, whether things went well

¹ *ceremonie*; one previous translator rendered this by 'etiquette', which seems better for the last occurrence in this paragraph.

or badly; so that the old man's entire life lay revealed as though on votive tablets' [Horace]. He committed his actions and his thoughts to paper, and portrayed himself there as he felt he was. . . .

·AN ASIDE ON MANNERISMS·

I remember, then, that from my tenderest childhood people noticed in me some indefinable way of holding myself and some gestures testifying to some vain and silly pride. But let me say this at the outset: it is not unbecoming to have characteristics and propensities that are so much our own, so incorporated into us, that we have no way of sensing and recognising them. And the body easily retains, without our knowledge or consent, some mark [*ply*, literally = 'fold'] of such natural inclinations. It was a certain mannerism appropriate to his beauty that made the head of Alexander lean a little to one side, and made Alcibiades speak softly and with a lisp. Julius Caesar used to scratch his head with one finger, which is the conduct of a man full of troublesome thoughts; and Cicero, I seem to recall, had the habit of wrinkling his nose, which is a sign of a mocking nature. Such gestures can arise in us imperceptibly.

There are other gestures that are artificial; I am not talking about them. For example salutations and bows, from which one acquires a reputation for being very humble and courteous—usually wrongly: ^[C]one can be humble out of vainglory! ^[B]I am fairly lavish with raising my hat, especially in summer, and I never receive this salute without returning it, whatever class of man it comes from, unless it is someone in my pay. I could wish that certain princes whom I know were more sparing and discriminating over such salutes; for when they are thus spread about indiscriminately they no longer have power. If they are ·given· without regard ·for status· they are without effect.

Among odder affectations ^[A]let us not forget the haughtiness of Emperor Constantius, who in public always held his head straight, not turning this way or that, even to look at those who were saluting him from the side; keeping his body fixed and unmoving, without letting himself move with the swaying of his coach, without venturing to spit or blow his nose or wipe his face in the presence of people.

I do not know whether those gestures that were noticed in me were of that first ·non-artificial· kind, meaning that I really did have some hidden propensity to that fault, ·vainglory·, as may well be the case; I cannot answer for the movements of my body. But as for the movements of my soul, I want to confess here what I know about them.

[A] ·OVER-RATING ONESELF·

In this kind of 'glory' there are two parts: namely, **[A]** rating oneself too highly and **[B]** rating others too low. [Montaigne will reach **[B]** on page 76.]

As for the former, ^[C]It seems to me that first these considerations should be taken into account. **(i)** I feel myself oppressed by an error of my soul which I dislike as unjust and even more as troublesome. I try to correct it, but I cannot eradicate it. It is that I under-value the things I possess, and over-value things that are foreign ·to me·, absent, and not mine. This humour spreads very far. Just as the prerogative of authority leads husbands to regard their own wives—and many fathers to regard their own children—with wicked disdain, so it is with me: out of two equal achievements I will always decide against my own. It is not so much that •eagerness for my progress and improvement disturbs my judgement and keeps me from being satisfied with myself as that •domination, of itself, breeds contempt for what one holds and controls. Far-off governments, *moeurs* and languages impress me. . . . My

neighbour's domestic arrangements, his house and his horse are better than mine only because they are not mine.

(ii) Also, I am very ignorant about myself. I wonder at the assurance and confidence everyone has about himself, whereas there is almost nothing that I know that I know [*que je sçache sçavoir*], or would dare to give my word I can do. I do not have my abilities catalogued and arranged; I find out about them only after the event. I am as doubtful about my power as about any other power. The result is that if I happen to do well in a task, I attribute that more to my good fortune than to my work, especially since I plan them all haphazardly and in fear.

Similarly, ^[A] this is generally true of me: of all the opinions that antiquity held about man ^[C] as a whole, ^[A] the ones I embrace most readily and adhere to most firmly are those that despise, humiliate and nullify us most. Philosophy seems to me never to have a better hand to play than when it battles against our presumption and vanity; when it honestly admits its uncertainty, weakness, and ignorance. It seems to me that the nursing mother of the falsest opinions, both public and private, is man's over-high opinion of himself.

These people who perch astride the epicycle of Mercury, ^[C] who see so far into the heavens, ^[A] are a pain in the neck.¹ For in the study that I am doing, the subject of which is *man*, I find such extreme variation of judgement, such a deep labyrinth of difficulties one on top of another, so much disagreement and uncertainty in the very school of wisdom, that you may well wonder—

since those fellows have not been able to reach any knowledgeable conclusions about themselves and their own state (which is continuously before their eyes, which is within them), and since they do not

understand the motions of what they themselves set in action, or know how to depict and decipher for us the springs that they hold and manage themselves—how I should believe them about the cause of the rise and fall of the Nile! The curiosity to know things was given to man as a scourge, says the Holy Scripture.

But to come to my particular case, it seems to me that it would be hard for anyone to esteem himself less—indeed, for anyone to esteem *me* less—than I esteem myself. ^[C] I regard myself as an ordinary sort of man, except in considering myself to be one; I am guilty of the commoner and humbler faults, but not of faults disowned or excused. I value myself only for knowing my value.

If there is vainglory in me, it is infused in me superficially by the treachery of my nature, and has no body of its own to appear before my judgement. I am sprinkled with it, but not dyed.

^[A] [Picking up from '... than I esteem myself.'] For in truth, as regards products of the mind, whatever form they may take, I have never brought forth anything that satisfied me. And the approval of others is no reward. My taste is delicate and hard to please, especially regarding myself. I feel myself floating and bending with weakness. I have nothing of my own with which to satisfy my judgement. My sight is sufficiently clear and controlled, but when I put it to work it grows blurred, as I find most evidently in poetry. I have a boundless love for it; I know my way well enough through other men's works; but when I try to set my own hand to it I am like a child—I can't bear myself. One can play the fool anywhere else, but not in poetry. [Montaigne now devotes more than a page to that theme, including Martial's statement: 'No-one is more assured than a bad poet.']

¹ *m'arrachent les dents* = 'pull my teeth out'.

·MONTAIGNE'S ATTITUDE TO HIS OWN WORK·

^[A] What I find excusable in my own work I find so not for itself or its true worth but in comparison with other and worse writings that I see getting credit. I envy the happiness of those who can rejoice and feel gratified in their work, for this is an easy way to give oneself pleasure because one draws it from oneself.

^[C] (Especially if there is a little firmness in their self-conceit. I know one poet to whom the strong and the weak, in the crowd and in the drawing-room, heaven and earth, *all* cry out that he does not know his business. For all that, he does not reduce one bit the status he has carved out for himself. Start something new! Revise! Persist! All the more set in his opinion because it is for him alone to maintain it.)

^[A] My own works are so far from smiling on me that they irritate me every single time I go over them again: ^[B] 'When I read it over, I am ashamed to have written it, because even I who wrote it judge it worth erasing' [Ovid].

^[A] I always have in my soul an idea 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 even that idea is only middlingly good. I infer from this that the productions of those great fertile minds of former times greatly surpass the utmost stretch of my imagination and desire. Their writings not only satisfy me and leave me replete, but astound me and transfix me with admiration. I judge their beauty; I see it, if not the whole way through, at least beyond anything I can aspire to follow.

Whatever I undertake, I owe a sacrifice to the Graces to gain their favour. . . . But they abandon me at every turn. Everything I write is coarse; it lacks charm and beauty. I cannot give things their full worth; my style is no help to my matter. That is why I need the matter to be strong, with

plenty to get hold of, and shining by its own light.

^[C] When I seize upon more popular or more cheerful themes it is •to follow my own bent (I do not like solemn and sad wisdom, as people in general do), and •to cheer up myself, not to cheer up my style, which prefers grave and austere matters. (If indeed I should give the label 'style' to a formless and undisciplined way of speaking, a popular jargon, proceeding without definitions, without divisions, without conclusions, and confused, like that of Amafanius and Rabirius.)

^[A] I have no idea how to please, or delight, or titillate; the best story in the world withers in my hands and loses its sparkle. I do not now how to talk except in good earnest. I am quite devoid of that facility that I see in many of my acquaintances of entertaining the first comer and keeping an entire crowd in suspense, or tirelessly holding the attention of a prince on all sorts of topics—never running out of things to say, because of their gift for knowing how to use the first topic that comes along, adapting it to the mood and ability of those they are dealing with. ^[B] Princes are not very fond of serious talk, nor I of telling stories. ^[A] The first and easiest arguments, which are commonly the best received, I do not know how to deploy; ^[C] a bad popular preacher! On any topic I am apt to say the deepest things I know about it. Cicero reckons that the hardest part of a philosophical treatise is the beginning. If that is so, I am wise in sticking to the conclusion.

^[A] Yet the string has to be tuned to all sorts of notes; and the most penetrating note is the one that least often comes into play. There is at least as much perfection in enhancing an empty subject as in sustaining a weighty one. Sometimes things have to be treated superficially, sometimes deeply. I am well aware that most men keep to that lower level because they grasp things only by the outer bark; but I am

also aware that the greatest masters, Xenophon and Plato, can often be found tuning their string for that lower, popular style of speaking and treating things, sustaining it with their never-failing graces. [In this paragraph the two occurrences of 'lower'—*bas(se)*—refer to the level that Montaigne has called 'superficial', not to its opposite that he calls 'deep', *profond*.]

·THOUGHTS ABOUT STYLE·

Meanwhile there is nothing fluent or polished about my language; it is harsh and disdainful, with a free and unruly disposition. And I like it that way, ^[C]if not by my judgement then by my inclination. ^[A]But I am well aware that I sometimes let myself go too far that way, and that in the effort to avoid artificiality and affectation I fall back into them from another direction: 'I try to be brief and become obscure' [Horace].

^[C] Plato says that length and brevity are not properties that add to, or subtract from, the value of one's language.

^[A] If I tried to follow that other style that is even, smooth and orderly, I could not achieve it. And although the concision and cadences of Sallust are more to my humour, I find Caesar both greater and less easy to imitate. And if my inclination leads me more to imitate Seneca's style, I nevertheless esteem Plutarch's more. Whether or not I am speaking, I simply follow my natural bent, which perhaps explains why I am better at speaking than at writing. Movement and action animate words, especially with those who move about briskly, as I do, and who get excited. Bearing, face, voice, clothing and posture can give some value to things which in themselves are hardly worth more than chatter. . . .

My French is corrupted—in pronunciation and in other ways—by the barbarism of my home soil; I never saw a man from our part of the world whose accent was not clearly marked and offensive to pure French ears. Yet that is not

because I am immersed in my Perigordian, for I am no more fluent in that than in German, and that does not worry me much. . . . Above us towards the mountains there is indeed a Gascon dialect that I find singularly beautiful, dry, concise and expressive—indeed a language more truly manly and soldierly than any other I understand, ^[C]as sinewy, powerful and direct as French is graceful, delicate and ample.

^[A] As for Latin, which was given to me as my mother-tongue, I have through lack of practice lost the readiness I had for talking it—^[C]yes, and for writing it too, for which I once used to be called Master John. ^[A]That is how little I am worth in that direction!

·PHYSICAL BEAUTY·

In dealings between men, beauty is a quality of great value. It is the prime means of conciliation between them; no man so barbarous and uncouth as not to feel himself at least a little struck by its sweetness. The body has a great part in our being; it holds a high rank within it; so its structure and composition are well worth consideration. Those who want to separate our two principal parts and sequester them from one another are wrong. On the contrary, they should be coupled and joined together again. The soul should be commanded not to withdraw and entertain itself apart, not to despise and abandon the body (not that it *can* do so except by some counterfeit monkey trick), but to rally to it, embrace it, cherish it, be present with it, control it, advise it, and when it strays set it right and bring it back again; in short, marry it and serve as its husband, so that the actions of body and soul should not appear different and opposed but harmonious and uniform.

Christians are particularly instructed about this bond, for they know that divine justice embraces this fellowship and union of body and soul, even to making the body capable

of eternal rewards, and that God watches the whole man in action, and wills that he in his entirety receive punishment or reward according to his merits.

[C] The Peripatetic sect, the most sociable of all the sects, assigns to wisdom only one task, namely to provide and procure the common good of these two associated parts. And it shows that the other sects, through not focussing enough on this *combination*, have taken sides, one for the body, another—equally erroneously—for the soul; and have pushed aside their subject, which is man, and their guide, which they generally say is Nature.

[A] The first distinction that existed among men, and the first consideration that gave some of them pre-eminence over others, was probably the advantage of beauty: [B] ‘They divided up their lands and granted them to each according to his beauty, his strength and his intelligence; for beauty had great power, and strength was respected’ [Lucretius].

[A] Now, I am a little below medium height. This is not only an ugly defect but also a disadvantage, especially for those who hold commands and commissions, because it deprives them of the authority given by a fine presence and bodily majesty. [C] Gaius Marius was reluctant to accept soldiers who were not six feet in height. ‘The courtiers’ manual-*Il Cortegiano* is quite right to desire, for the gentleman it is training, a medium height rather than any other, and to reject for him any peculiarity that will make him conspicuous. But failing that medium, I would chose that he should be taller rather than shorter than the medium if he is to be a military man.

Little men, says Aristotle, may well be pretty but not handsome; as a great soul is manifested in its greatness, so beauty is known from a body great and tall. [A] When the Ethiopians and Indians select their kings and magistrates, he says, they take account of the beauty and height of their

persons. They were right, for a man’s followers feel respect and the enemy feels dismay upon seeing a leader with a splendid beautiful stature marching at the head of his troops: ‘Turnus himself, outstanding in body, is in the foremost rank, weapon in hand, head and shoulders above the others’ [Virgil].

Our great and holy heavenly King, all of whose particulars should be noted with care, devotion and reverence, did not spurn the advantage of bodily beauty: ‘fairer than the children of men’ [Psalm 14:3]. [C] And as well as temperance and fortitude, Plato desired beauty in the guardians of his Republic. [Now some anecdotes showing the disadvantages a man suffers if he is ugly = short: ‘Other beauties are for women: the only masculine beauty is beauty of stature.’]

·MONTAIGNE’S BODILY QUALITIES·

[A] Summing up: I have a strong thick-set body, a face not fat but full; a temperament [B] between the jovial and the melancholic, moderately [A] sanguine and warm;. . . . Sound and vigorous health until well along in years, rarely troubled by illness. That is how I *was*, for I am not considering myself as I am now that I have entered the approaches to old age, having long since passed 40: [B] ‘Little by little, age smashes their vigour and their adult strength, and they drift into a diminished existence’ [Lucretius]. [A] What I shall be from now on is no more than half a being; it will no longer be me; I daily escape myself and go into hiding from myself: ‘One by one, things are stolen by the passing years’ [Horace].

Skill and agility I have never had; yet I am the son of a very agile father whose energy lasted into his extreme old age. He found hardly anyone of his rank to equal him in any physical exercises, just as I have found hardly anyone who did not surpass me (except in running, at which I was about average). Of music—whether vocal (for which my voice is quite unsuited) or instrumental—they never succeeded in

teaching me anything. At dancing, tennis and wrestling I have been able to acquire only a slight, commonplace ability; at swimming, fencing, vaulting and jumping, none at all. My hands are so clumsy that even I cannot read my writing, so that I would rather re-do what I have scribbled than to give myself the trouble of unscrambling it. [C] And my reading aloud is hardly better: I can feel myself boring my audience. Otherwise, a good scholar!¹ [A] I cannot close a letter the right way, nor could I ever cut a pen, or carve passably at table, [C] or saddle a horse, or properly carry a hawk and release it, or talk to dogs, birds or horses.

·HIS SOUL'S QUALITIES·

[A] My bodily qualities, in short, are very well matched with my soul's. There is no agility, merely a full, firm vigour. I stand up well to hard work, provided that I set myself to it and as long as I am guided by my own desires: 'The pleasure hides the austerity of the toil' [Horace]. Otherwise, if I am not lured to the task by some pleasure, and if I am being guided ·in it· by anything other than my own pure and free will, I am useless for it. For I have reached the point where except for life and health there is nothing [C] I am willing to chew my nails over, nothing [A] that I am willing to buy at the price of mental torment and constraint: 'At such a price I would not buy all the sand of the muddy Tagus or the gold it carries down to the sea' [Juvenal]. [C] Extremely idle and free, both by nature and by art, I would as soon offer my blood [*mon sang*] as offer to take trouble [*mon soing*].

[A] I have a soul that is all its own, accustomed to acting after its own fashion. Having never had a commander or master forced on me, I have gone just as far as I pleased and at my own pace. That has made me soft and useless

for serving others—no good for anything but myself. And for myself there was no need to force that heavy, lazy, do-nothing nature. Finding myself since birth with such a degree of fortune that I had cause to remain as I was—a cause that many people I know would have used as a plank on which to pass over into questing, tumult and disquiet—I have sought nothing and taken nothing either: 'I do not scud with bellying sails before the good north wind, nor does an adverse gale from the south stay my course: in strength, wit, beauty, virtue, rank and wealth I am the last of the first and the first of the last' [Horace]. All that I needed was enough to be contented ·with my lot·

[C] (which if you take it rightly is an ordering of the soul that is equally hard in every kind of fortune, and can be found more readily in want than in abundance, perhaps because (as with our other passions) the hunger for riches is sharpened more by having them than by needing them, while the virtue of moderation is rarer than that of patience [see Glossary].)

And all I needed was [A] to enjoy pleasantly the benefits that God in his bounty had placed in my hands. I have never tasted any sort of tedious work. [C] I have had hardly anything to manage but my own affairs; or if I have, it was in circumstances that let me manage things at my own times and in my own way, commissioned by people who trusted me, did not pressure me, knew me. For experts get some service out of even a skittish broken-winded horse!

[A] Even my childhood went along in a mild, free fashion, exempt from rigorous subjection. All of which gave me a delicate disposition, unable to endure worry—to the point where I prefer to have any losses and disorders in my

¹ Frame suggests that this puzzling remark may be 'a reminiscence of Clément Marot's well-known line, "Au demeurant, le meilleur fils du monde" ("For the rest, the best lad in the world"), which follows an impressive enumeration of the vices of his valet.'

affairs hidden from me. Under the heading 'Expenditure' I include whatever my nonchalance costs me for its board and lodging! . . . I prefer not to know the account of my possessions, so as to feel any loss less exactly. ^[B] I ask those who live with me, if they lack affection for me and for honest dealings, to cheat me and pay me with decent appearances. ^[A] For lack of the fortitude to endure the annoyance of the adverse events that we are subject to, not being able to brace myself to control and manage my affairs, I do my best to foster in myself this attitude: abandon myself to fortune, always expect the worst, and be resolved to bear that worst meekly and patiently. That is the only thing I work at, and the goal towards which I direct all my reflections.

^[B] When I am faced with danger, I think less about how to escape than about how little it matters whether I escape. If I remain in danger, what of it? Not being able to control events, I control myself, and adapt myself to them if they do not adapt themselves to me. I have little of the skill needed •to cheat fortune—to escape it or compel it—and •to direct and lead things foresightedly to serve my purpose. I have even less power to endure the arduous and painful care needed for that. And the most painful situation for me is to be in suspense about urgent matters, tossed between fear and hope. Deliberation, even about the slightest things, bothers me. And I feel my mind more hard-pressed in suffering the shocks and ups and downs of decision-making than in remaining fixed, resigned to whatever results once the die is cast. Few emotions have disturbed my sleep, but the slightest need to decide anything disturbs it for me. Just as on roads •I avoid the sloping and slippery shoulders and go for the muddiest and boggiest beaten tracks •in the centre•, from which I can slip no lower, and seek security there, so also •I prefer pure misfortunes, ones that do not try me and worry me further once the uncertainty about mending them

is over, and which drive me at a single bound directly into suffering: ^[C] 'Uncertain evils torment us most' [Seneca].

^[B] When things happen to me, I bear myself like a man; when I am conducting them, like a child. The fear of falling gives me more anguish than the fall. The game is not worth the candle. The miser's passion makes him worse off than the poor man, and the jealous man than the cuckold. And there is often less harm in losing your vineyard than in pleading for it in court. The lowest step is the firmest; it is the seat of constancy. There you need only yourself. Constancy is founded there and leans only on itself. . . .

•AGAINST AMBITION•

^[A] As for ambition (which is presumption's neighbour, or rather its daughter): for me to have advanced, fortune would have had to take me by the hand. Taking pains for an uncertain hope, submitting myself to all the difficulties faced by those who •ambitiously• try to push themselves into favour at the start of their careers? I could not have done it! ^[B] 'I do not purchase hope with ready cash' [Terence]. I cling to what I see and hold, and I do not go far from port: 'Let one oar row in the water, the other on the shore' [Propertius].

And then, few achieve such advancements without first *risking* their goods; and I think that if a man has enough to maintain the way of life to which he was born and brought up, it is folly to let go of it on the mere chance of increasing it. A man whom fortune denies the means of settling down into a calm and tranquil life can be excused if he stakes all that he has on chance, since either way necessity sends him questing: ^[C] 'In misfortune dangerous paths must be taken' [Seneca]. ^[B] And I excuse a younger son for casting his inheritance to the winds more than I do a man who is responsible for the honour of a household and who cannot fall into want except through his own fault.

^[A] The advice of good friends in former times to rid myself of this desire and to keep quiet has certainly led me to the shorter and easier road, 'someone whose happy lot is to enjoy the prize without the dust' [Horace], also making a healthy judgement that my powers were incapable of great achievements. . . . ^[B] 'It is shameful to take on a too-heavy load and then bend one's knees and drop it' [Propertius]. . . .

Misfortune does have some use. It is good to be born in a deeply depraved century, for then by comparison with others you are reckoned virtuous for a cheap price. In our time anyone who is merely a parricide and sacrilegious is a good and honourable man: ^[B] 'These days if a friend does not deny that you entrusted money to him, if he returns an ancient purse with all its rusty coins, he is a prodigy of trustworthiness, meriting a place in the Tuscan books and deserving to be celebrated with a sacrificial lamb' [Juvenal].

And there never was a time and place where princes' generosity and justice was rewarded more, or more certainly. The first one who tries in that way to push himself into favour and credit—I am much mistaken if he does not easily outstrip his fellows. Force and violence can achieve something, but not always everything.

^[C] We see merchants, village justices and artisans keeping up with the nobility in valour and military knowledge. They fight honourably in open combat and in duels; they do battle and defend cities in these wars of ours. A prince's distinction is smothered amid such a crowd ·if it depends on his courage and military prowess·. Let him shine by his humanity, truthfulness, loyalty, moderation, and above all by his justice—marks that are rare, unknown and banished. It is only through the will of the people that he can do his job; no other qualities can attract their will as these can, because no others are as useful to them. 'Nothing is as pleasing to the people as goodness' [Cicero].

^[A] [Picking up from 'good and honourable man.'] By that comparison I would have found myself ^[C] great and rare, just as I find myself dwarfish and ordinary in comparison with some former times in which it was commonplace. . . .for a man to be ^[A] moderate in revenge, slow to take offence, punctilious in keeping his word, not double-dealing or shifty, not accommodating his faith to the will of others and to circumstances. I would rather let affairs go hang than to bend my faith to serve them.

·DECEIT AND DISSIMULATION·

As for this new-fangled 'virtue' of hypocrisy and dissimulation that is now so much in favour, I loathe it utterly; among all the vices I find none that testifies so much to cowardice and baseness of heart. It is a cowardly and seville attitude to disguise and hide oneself behind a mask and not dare to let one's real self be seen. In that way men of our time are trained for perfidy. ^[B] Being used to giving their word falsely, they do not scruple to break it. ^[A] A generous heart should not belie its thoughts; it wants to reveal itself all the way through; ^[C] everything there is good, or at least everything there is human.

Aristotle considers it the function of magnanimity to hate and to love openly, to judge and speak with total frankness, and to think nothing of others' approval or disapproval compared with the truth. ^[A] Apollonius said that it was for slaves to lie and for free-men to speak the truth. ^[C] Telling the truth is the first and fundamental part of virtue. Truth must be loved for itself. Someone who tells the truth ·only· because he has some external obligation to do so and because it serves him, and who does not shrink from telling a lie when it does not matter to anyone, is not truthful enough.

My soul by its nature shuns lying and hates even to think of it. I have an inward shame and a stinging remorse if a lie

escapes me—as it sometimes does when occasions take me by surprise and get me to act without premeditation.

[A] We should not always say everything, for that would be stupid. But what we say must be what we think; otherwise it is wickedness. I do not know what people expect to gain by constantly pretending and lying, unless it is to be disbelieved even when they tell the truth! It may deceive people once or twice; but to *profess* dissimulation, and to declare as some of our princes have done. . . . that a man who does not know how to dissemble does not know how to rule, is to forewarn those who have to deal with them that what they say is all deceit and lying. [C] ‘The more crafty and artful a man is, the more he is loathed and mistrusted when he loses his reputation for honesty’ [Cicero]. . . .

[C] Those writers nowadays who, when drawing up the duties of a prince, have considered only the good of his affairs of state, preferring that to a care for his fidelity and conscience, would have something to say to a prince whose affairs fortune had so arranged that he could establish them for ever by a single breach and betrayal of his word. But that is not what happens. One stumbles again into similar bargains, making more than one peace, more than one treaty, in one’s lifetime. The gain that lures them to the first breach (and nearly always some gain is on offer, as with all other wickednesses; sacrilege, murder, rebellion and treachery are undertaken for some kind of profit) brings after it endless losses, putting that prince beyond all negotiations, beyond any mode of agreement, because of his first breach of trust. . . .

[A] Now, as for me, I would rather be troublesome and indiscreet than flattering and dissembling.

[B] I admit that a touch of pride and stubbornness may play a part in my remaining forthright and outspoken without consideration for others. And it seems to me that I become

a little more free when I ought to be less so, and that when *respect* would tone me down I become more heated. It may also be that I let myself follow my nature for lack of art. When I display to grandees that same freedom of tongue and manner that I bring to my household, I feel how much it sinks towards indiscretion and rudeness. But besides the fact that I am made that way, I do not have

- a supple enough mind to twist a sudden question and escape from it by some dodge, or to construct a lie, or
- a good enough memory to remember the lie, or, certainly,
- enough confidence to stick by it;

and I put on a bold face because of weakness. Thus, I give myself up to candour and always saying what I think—doing this by temperament and by design—leaving it to fortune to determine the outcome.

·MONTAIGNE’S MEMORY·

[A] Memory is a wonderfully useful tool, without which judgement can hardly do its work. In me it is entirely lacking. If someone wants to propound something to me, it must be done piecemeal, for it is not in my power to respond to a proposal in which there are several different headings. I could not take on any commission without my writing tablets. And when I have something of importance to propound, if it is at all long-winded I am reduced to the abject and pitiful necessity of learning by heart, word for word, what I am to say; otherwise I would have neither manner nor assurance, fearing that my memory would play a dirty trick on me. [C] But for me that method is no less difficult. It takes me three hours to learn three lines of poetry. And then, in a composition of my own, an author’s freedom to switch the order and to change a word, forever varying the matter, makes it harder to retain in the memory. [A] Now, the more

I distrust my memory, the more confused it becomes; it serves me better by chance encounter; I have to solicit it casually; for if I try to force it, it is stunned; and once it has started to totter, the more I probe it the more mixed up and embarrassed it becomes; it serves me when it is ready, not when I am.

(What I feel in my memory I feel in several other parts. I flee command, obligation and constraint. What I do easily and naturally I can no longer do if I order myself to do it with a strict and explicit command. Even as regards my body, the parts that have some freedom and jurisdiction over themselves sometimes refuse to obey me when I bind them to a certain time and place for compulsory service. This tyrannical and preordained constraint repels them; they go limp from fear or spite and become paralysed.) . . .

^[A] My library, which is a good one as country libraries go, is situated at one corner of my house. If I get an idea that I want to look up or write down there, I have to tell someone about it in case it escapes me even as I cross my courtyard. If in speaking I am rash enough to digress however little from my thread, I never fail to lose it; which is why in speaking I keep myself constrained, dry and brief. I have to call my servants by the name of their job or their territory of origin, because it is hard for me to remember names. . . . And if I lived for a very long time I do not doubt that I would forget my own name, as others have done. ^[B] Messala Corvinus went for two years without any trace of memory; . . . and I often think about what sort of life that was, and whether without that part of me I shall have enough left to support me in comfort; and from a close look I am afraid that this defect, if it is complete, ruins all the activities of the soul. . . .

^[A] More than once I have forgotten the password for the watch, having given it to (or received it from) someone else only three hours before; and have forgotten where I had

hidden my purse, despite what Cicero says about that, namely that 'I never heard of an old man forgetting where he had buried his money'. Anything I hide away privately I am helping myself to lose! ^[C] 'It is certain that memory is the only receptacle not only of philosophy but of the whole of life's practices and all the arts and sciences' [Cicero].

^[A] Memory is the receptacle and store-box of knowledge; mine being so defective, I cannot really complain if I know almost nothing. I do know the generic names of the arts and what each of them deals with, but nothing beyond that. I leaf through books; I do not study them. What I retain from them is something I no longer recognise as anyone else's; it is simply the material from which my judgement has profited and the arguments and ideas in which it has been steeped; I immediately forget the author, the source, the wording and other details.

^[B] I am so outstanding a forgetter that I forget my own works and writings as much as I forget anything else. People are constantly quoting me to myself without my realising it. Anyone who wanted to know the sources of the verses and examples that I have piled up here would put me to great trouble to tell him; and yet I have begged them only at well-known and famous doors, authors, not being content with rich material unless it came from rich and honourable hands; in them, authority goes in step with reason. ^[C] It is no great wonder if my book follows the fate of other books, and if my memory lets go of what I write as of what I read, and of what I give as of what I receive.

^[A] Besides the defect of my memory, I have others that greatly contribute to my ignorance. My mind is slow and dull; it cannot penetrate the slightest cloud, so that, for example, I have never offered it a puzzle easy enough for it to solve. There is no subtlety so empty that it will not stump me. Of games in which the intellect plays a part—such as chess,

cards, draughts and so on—I understand nothing but the barest rudiments.

My apprehension is slow and muddled, but when it once grasps something it grasps it *well*—embracing it all, tightly and deeply—for as long as it grasps it at all. My eyesight is sound, whole and good at distances, but is easily tired and burdened by work; which is why I cannot have long sessions with books except by the help of others. . . .

There is no soul is so wretched and brutish that *no* particular faculty can be seen to shine in it. . . . How does it happen that a soul that is blind and asleep to everything else is found to be lively, clear and outstanding in some particular activity? We shall have to ask the experts about that. But the fine souls are the universal ones, open and ready for anything; ^[C] untaught perhaps, but not unteachable. ^[A] And I say that to indict my own: for whether by weakness or indifference

—and it is far from being part of my beliefs that we should be indifferent to what lies at our feet, what we have between our hands, what most closely concerns our daily lives—

no soul is as unfit or ignorant as mine concerning many commonplace matters that it is disgraceful to be ignorant of.

I must relate a few examples. [He devotes a paragraph to them.]

·DEFENDING SELF-DESCRIPTION·

From these details of my confession others can be imagined at my expense. But whatever I make myself known to be, provided that I do make myself known such as I am, I am carrying out my plan. So I make no apology for venturing to put into writing matters as mean and trivial as these; the meanness of my subject restricts me to them. ^[C] Condemn my project, if you will, but not the way I carry it out. ^[A] I

see well enough, without other people telling me, how little value and weight all this has, and the folly of my plan. It is already something if my judgement, of which these are the *essais* [see Glossary], does not cast a shoe in the process: ‘Go on: wrinkle your nose—a nose so huge that Atlas would not carry it if you asked him—mock the famous mocker Latinus if you can, yet you will never succeed in saying more against my trifles than I have said myself. What use is there in grinding your teeth? To be satisfied you need to sink them into meat. Save your energy. Keep your venom for those who admire themselves: I know my work is worthless’ [Martial].

I am not obliged not to say stupid things, provided that I am not deceived about them and recognise them as such. It is so usual for me to go wrong knowingly that I hardly ever go wrong any other way—I hardly ever go wrong accidentally. It is a slight thing to attribute my silly actions to the rashness of my disposition, since I cannot help commonly attributing my really wrong actions to it.

One day in Bar-Le-Duc I saw King Francis II presented, as a memento of René, king of Sicily, a portrait that the latter had made of himself. Why is it not permissible for each man to portray himself with a pen, as he did with his pencil?

·MONTAIGNE’S INDECISION·

So I do not want to omit this further blemish, unfit though it is to be brought out in public, namely *irresolution*, a failing that is very harmful in negotiating worldly affairs. When there are doubts about an enterprise I do not know which side to take: ^[B] ‘My inmost heart will not say yes or no’ [Petrarch]. I can easily *maintain* an opinion, but not choose one.

^[A] That is because in human matters whatever side we incline to we find many probabilities to confirm us in it—

^[C] and the philosopher Chrysippus said that all he

wanted from his masters Zeno and Cleanthes was their tenets; for *he* would supply enough proofs and reasons without their help

—^[A] so in whatever direction I turn, I always provide myself with enough causes and probabilities to keep me going that way. Thus, I maintain within me my doubt and my freedom to choose until the circumstances press me to make a choice; and then, to confess the truth, I most often ‘toss the feather to the wind’ (as the saying goes), abandoning myself to the mercy of fortune; a very slight inclination or circumstance carries me away. . . . In most cases my undecided judgement is so evenly balanced that I would willingly resort to deciding by chance, by dice. And I note, with much reflection on our human weakness, the examples that even sacred history has left us of this practice of entrusting to fortune and chance the making of choices in doubtful cases: ‘The lot fell upon Matthias’ [Acts 1:26, about choosing an apostle to replace Judas].

^[C] Human reason is a two-edged and dangerous sword. Even in the hand of Socrates, its most intimate and familiar friend, see what a many-ended stick it is.

^[A] Thus, I am fitted only for following, and easily let myself be carried along by the crowd. I do not trust my powers enough to undertake to command or to guide. I am quite content to find my path trodden out for me by others. If I must run the risk of an uncertain choice, I prefer to make it under the guidance of someone who is more sure of his opinions and more wedded to them than I am to mine, ^[B] the foundations and grounds of which I find slippery.

And yet I am not too easy to change, since I find equal weakness in the opinions that are contrary to the ones I have opted for. ^[C] ‘The very practice of assenting seems to be dangerous and slippery’ [Cicero]. ^[A] Notably in political matters there is a fine field open for vacillation and dispute. . . .

Machiavelli’s arguments, for example, were solid enough for the subject, yet it was extremely easy to combat them; and those who did so left it just as easy to attack theirs. In such an argument there would always be materials for answers, rejoinders [*duplications*], replications, triplications, quaduplications, and that infinite web of disputes that our lawyers have spun out as far as they could in favour of long lawsuits—‘We are beaten about, trading blows we weary our foe’ [Horace]—for the reasons have almost no foundation except experience, and the diversity of human events offers us infinite examples in all sorts of forms.

. . . . In arguments about politics, whatever role you are given your game is as easy as your opponent’s, provided you do not collide with principles that are too plain and obvious.

That is why to my mind in public affairs there is no system so bad (provided it is old and stable) that it is not better than change and commotion. Our *moeurs* are extremely corrupt and remarkably tending to get worse; many of our laws and customs are barbaric and monstrous; yet because of the difficulty of improving our condition and the risk of complete collapse, if I could put a block under our wheel and stop it at this point I would cheerfully do so. ^[B] ‘None of the examples we cite is so infamous and shameful that there are not worse to come’ [Juvenal]. ^[A] The worst thing I find in our state is instability, and the fact that our laws—like our clothes—cannot take any settled form. It is very easy to accuse a political system of imperfection, for all mortal things are full of it; it is very easy to instill in a nation contempt for its ancient observances—no-one ever tried that without succeeding—but as for replacing the structures one has pulled down by better ones, many who have tried to do *that* have failed.

^[C] In my own conduct I give my prudence only a small share; I readily let myself be led by the public order of the

world. Those who do what they are commanded to do without tormenting themselves about 'Why?', who let themselves gently roll with the rolling of the heavens, are happier than those who give the commands. Obedience is never tranquil or pure in someone who reasons and argues.

·GOOD SENSE, JUDGEMENT, UNDERSTANDING·

^[A] To get back to myself: the only quality for which I reckon I am worth anything is the one that no man ever thought himself deficient in; what I commend in myself is plebeian, commonplace and ordinary, for who ever thought he lacked sense [*sens*]? That would be a proposition implying its own contradiction. ^[C] It—i.e. lack of sense—is a malady that never exists where it is seen; it is tenacious and strong, yet the first glance from the sufferer's eye pierces it and dispels it, as the face of the sun dispels a dense mist. ^[A] In this matter, to accuse oneself would be to excuse oneself; and to condemn oneself would be to acquit oneself. There never was a porter or silly woman who did not think they had sense enough for their needs. In others we readily acknowledge an advantage in courage, in physical strength, in experience, in agility, in beauty; but an advantage in judgement [*jugement*] we concede to no-one. And when others come up with arguments that come from simple natural reasoning, it seems to us that we only needed to look at things from that angle for us to have discovered them too. We have no trouble seeing that the works of others surpass ours in knowledge, style and such qualities; but as for the simple products of the understanding [*l'entendement*], each man thinks that he has it in him to hit on things just like them, and finds it difficult to perceive their weight and difficulty ^[C] except when they are incomparably beyond him, and hardly even then. ^[A] So this ·book· is a kind of exercise for which very little commendation and praise should be expected, and a kind of writing with little renown.

And then, whom are you writing for? [At the start and end of this paragraph, Montaigne is addressing himself.] •The learned men who have jurisdiction over the world of books recognise no value but that of learning, and admit no activities for our minds except erudition and knowledge of rules. If you have mistaken one Scipio for the other, what is left for you to say that is worth saying? According to them, anyone who does not know Aristotle correspondingly does not know himself. •Common, ordinary souls do not see the grace and the weight of an agile argument. And those two species fill the world! •The third species, the one that falls to your lot, of souls that are intrinsically orderly and strong, is so small that we have no name or rank for it; labouring to please *them* is time half wasted.

^[A] It is commonly held that good sense is the gift that nature has most fairly shared among us, for there is nobody who is not satisfied with the share of it that nature has allotted him. . . . I think my opinions are good and sound, but who does not think as much of his? One of the best proofs that I have of their being so is ·their including· my **unfavourable view of** myself; for if these opinions had not been very firm they would easily have let themselves be duped by my singular **affection for** myself, being one who concentrates nearly all his affection on himself, not squandering much elsewhere. All the affection that others distribute to countless friends and acquaintances, to their glory, to their greatness, I devote entirely to the peace of my mind and to myself. Whatever escapes from me in other directions is not properly under the command of my reason: 'Trained to live healthily and for myself' [Lucretius].

Now, as for my opinions: I find them infinitely bold and tenacious in condemning my inadequacy. I am indeed a subject on which I exercise my judgement as much as on any other. People always look at one another; I turn my gaze

inwards, fixing it there and keeping it busy there. Everybody looks before himself: I look inside myself; my only business is with myself; I continually watch myself, I take stock of myself, I savour myself. . . .

My capacity—such as it is—for sifting the truth, and my free attitude of not easily enslaving my beliefs, I owe primarily to myself; for my firmest and most general ideas were, so to speak, born with me; they are natural and all mine. As I boldly and strongly came out with them, they were raw and uncomplicated but a little confused and unfinished. Since then I have confirmed and strengthened them by other men's authority and by the sound examples of the ancients with whom I found my judgement in agreement. These men have given me a firmer grip on my ideas and a clearer enjoyment and possession of them.

^[B] The recommendation that everyone seeks for liveliness and promptness of wit, I aspire to for orderliness; what they seek for some brilliant and notable action or some particular talent, I aspire to for the order, consistency and tranquillity of my opinions and *moeurs*: ^[C] 'If anything is becoming, nothing is more so than the even consistency of one's whole life and individual actions, which you cannot maintain if in imitating other men's natures you neglect your own' [Cicero].

[B] ·UNDER-RATING OTHERS·

^[A] So there you have the extent to which I feel guilty of the first characteristic I attributed to the vice of presumption [**A**] on page 63]. As for the second, **[B]**, which consists in not thinking highly enough of others, I do not know that I can plead so innocent to that—for, cost me what it will, I am determined to tell the facts about it.

Whether my continual association with the characters of the ancients, and the idea of those rich souls of past times, give me a distaste for others and for myself; or whether we

are indeed living at a time that produces only very mediocre things; at any rate, I know nothing ·today· worthy of great admiration. Also, I know hardly any men intimately enough to be able to judge them; and most of those whom my circumstances commonly bring me among are men who have little concern for the culture of the soul and to whom one can suggest no blessing but honour and no perfection but valour.

Whatever I see that is fine in others I am most ready to praise and to value. Indeed, I often go further than I really think, and permit myself to go that far in lying (I cannot invent an entire falsehood). I gladly testify for my friends to the praiseworthy qualities I find in them; and of one foot of value I am liable to make a foot and a half. But what I cannot do is to attribute to them qualities that they do not have; nor can I openly *defend* their imperfections.

^[B] Even to my enemies I straightforwardly render the testimony of honour that is due. ^[C] My sympathies change; my judgement, no. ^[B] And I do not confound my quarrel with other circumstances that have nothing to do with it. And I am so jealous for my freedom of judgement that I find it hard to give it up for any passion whatsoever. ^[C] By telling a lie I do more harm to myself than to the person I lie about. A laudable and noble custom is observed in the people of Persia: in speaking of their mortal enemies and in waging total war against them, they do so with such honour and equity as their virtue deserves.

^[A] I know plenty of men with various fine qualities—

- intelligence,
- courage,
- skill,
- conscience,
- eloquence,
- knowledge of some kind

— but as for an all-round great man who has so many fine qualities all at once, or has one of them to such a degree of excellence that we should wonder at him or compare him with those from times past whom we honour, I have not had the good fortune to meet even one. And the greatest man I have known in person—I mean great for the inborn qualities of his soul—was Etienne de La Boétie. He was indeed a full soul, handsome from every point of view; a soul of the old stamp, who would have achieved great results if fortune had willed it, having greatly added to this rich nature by learning and study.

I do not know how it happens ^[C] (though it certainly does) ^[A] that there is as much triviality and weakness of understanding in those who profess to have most ability and engage in the literary professions and tasks that depend on books as in any other kind of person. Perhaps it is that we cannot pardon everyday defects in them because we demand more from them and expect more than we do from other people, or perhaps the opinion that they are learned emboldens them to show off and reveal too much of themselves, whereby they ruin and betray themselves. A craftsman gives surer proof of his stupidity when he has some rich substance in his hands and prepares it and mixes it contrary to the rules of his art than when he is working on some cheap stuff; and we are more offended by defects in a statue made of gold than in one made of plaster. So too with the learned: when they display materials which in themselves and in their right place would be good, they use them without discernment, honouring their power of memory rather than their understanding. It is Cicero, Galen, Ulpian and St Jerome that they honour: themselves they make ridiculous.

I gladly return to the subject of the ineptitude of our education; its goal has been to make us not good and wise

but learned, and it succeeded. It has not taught us to seek and embrace *virtue* and *wisdom*; but it has imprinted on us the derivation and etymology of those two words. We know how to decline the Latin word for virtue; we do not know how to love virtue. If we do not know what wisdom is by practice and experience, we do know it by jargon and by rote. With our neighbours, we are not content with knowing their family, their kindred and their intermarriages; we want to have them as friends and set up some association and understanding with them. It—our educational system—has taught us the definitions, divisions and subdivisions of virtue as though they were the surnames and the branches of a family-tree, without any further concern for setting up between us and it any practice of familiarity or personal intimacy. It has chosen for our instruction not the books that contain the soundest and truest opinions but those that speak the best Greek and Latin, and amid its beautiful words it has poured into our minds the most worthless humours of antiquity. . . .

^[C] The least contemptible class of people seems to me to be those who because of their simplicity occupy the lowest rank; and they seem to show us relationships that are better ordered. The *moeurs* [see Glossary] and talk of peasants I find to be commonly more in conformity with the principles of true philosophy than those of our philosophers: ‘The common people are wisest, because they are as wise as they need to be’ [Lactantius].

^[A] The most notable men I have judged—doing this from outward appearances, for to judge them in my own preferred way I would need to see them more closely in a better light—are in war and military ability, the Duc de Guise who died at Orleans and the late Marshal Strozzi; and for ability and uncommon virtue, Olivier and l’Hôpital, chancellors of France. It seems to me that poetry too

has flourished in our century. We have a wealth of good craftsmen in that trade: Daurat, Beza, Buchanan, l'Hôpital, Montdoré, and Turnebus. As for those writing in French, I think they have raised poetry to the highest level it will ever reach. Ronsard and Du Bellay, in those qualities in which they excel, I find virtually up to the perfection of the ancients. Adrian Turnebus knew more, and knew it better, than any man in his own time or for many years before that.

[Now a [B]- and [C]-tagged paragraph with encomiums for the 'noble lives' of the duke of Alva and 'our Constable Montmorency' and the 'constant goodness' of Monsieur de La Noue.]

[A] The other virtues have been accorded little or no value these days; but bravery has become common through our civil wars, and where that is concerned there are among us souls that are firm to the point of perfection—so many of them that no selection is possible.

That is all the uncommon and exceptional greatness that I have known up to this moment.

18. Giving the lie

[The title of this essay announces a topic that starts at ■ on page 79.]

[A] Someone will sceptically tell me that this plan of using oneself as a subject to write about would be pardonable in exceptional, famous men whose reputation had had created some desire to know them. That is certainly true, I admit; and I am well aware that to see a man of the common sort, an artisan will hardly look up from his work; whereas to see at a great and famous personage arriving in town, men leave workshops and stores empty. It is unseemly for anyone to make himself known except someone who has qualities worth imitating and whose life and opinions can serve as a

model. In the greatness of their deeds Caesar and Xenophon had something to found and establish their narrative on, as on a just and solid base. . . .

That rebuke is very true, but it hardly touches me: 'I do not read this to anyone except my friends, and even then they have to ask me; not to all men or everywhere. Some men read their works to the public in the Forum or in the baths!' [Horace].

I am not preparing a statue to erect at a town crossroads or in a church or public square: [B] 'I do not intend to puff up my pages with inflated trifles; we are talking in private' [Persius]. [A] It is for some a nook in a library, and as a pastime for a neighbour, a relative, a friend who will find pleasure meeting up with me again and keeping company with me through this portrait. Others have had the courage to speak of themselves because they found their subject worthy and rich; I on the contrary because I find it so sterile and meagre that I cannot be suspected of showing off. . . .

What a satisfaction it would be to me to hear someone tell me in this way about the *mœurs*, the face, the expressions, the ordinary talk, and the fortunes of my ancestors! How attentive I would be! It would indeed come from a bad nature to despise even the portraits of our friends and predecessors, [C] the style of their clothes and their armour. I still have the handwriting, the seal, the prayer-book and a special sword that they used, and I have not banished from my study the long canes that my father ordinarily carried in his hands. 'A father's clothes or ring are dearer to his descendants the more they loved him' [Augustine of Hippo].

[A] However, if my own descendants have different tastes, I shall have ample means for revenge, for when that time comes they cannot possibly have less concern for me than I shall have for them!

The only dealing I have with the public in this book

is borrowing its printing-tools, . . . to free myself from the trouble of making several manuscript copies. [C] In return for this convenience that I have borrowed from the public, I may be able to do it a service: I can provide wrapping-paper to stop some slab of butter from melting in the market: [A] 'Let not wrappers be lacking for tunny-fish or olives, and I shall supply loose coverings to mackerel' [Martial].

[C] And if no-one reads me, have I wasted my time entertaining myself through so many idle hours with such useful and agreeable thoughts? Modelling this portrait on myself, I so often had to fashion and compose myself to bring myself out, that the original has grown firm and to some extent taken shape. By portraying myself for others I have portrayed my inward self in clearer colours than my original ones. I have no more made my book than my book has made me. A book consubstantial with its author,¹ concerned with myself, an integral part of my life; not concerned with some third-hand extraneous goal, like all other books.

Have I wasted my time by so continuously and carefully taking stock of myself? Those who go over themselves only in their minds and occasionally in speech do not go as deep, as does one for whom self-examination is his study, his work and his trade, who brings all his faith and strength to an account of his whole life.

The most delightful pleasures are inwardly digested; they avoid leaving any traces, and avoid being seen by the public or even by any one other person.

How often has this task diverted me from tiresome thoughts! And all trivial thoughts should be counted as tiresome. Nature has presented us with a broad capacity

for entertaining ourselves when alone; and often calls on us to do so, to teach us that we owe ourselves in part to society but in the best part to ourselves. To train my fancy even to daydream with some order and direction, and stop it from losing its way and wandering in the wind, all I need is to give it *body* by registering all the thoughts, however minor, that come to it. I listen to my daydreams because I have to record them. How many times, when irritated by some action which politeness and prudence forbade me to reprove openly, have I unburdened myself *here*—not without ideas of instructing the public! And indeed these poetic lashes—'Wham! in the eye, wham! on the snout, Wham! on the back of the lout'²—imprint themselves even better on paper than on living flesh.

What if I lend a slightly more attentive ear to books, being on the lookout to see whether I can steal something from them to adorn or support my own? I have not studied at all in the interests of writing a book, but I have studied somewhat in the interests of this book that I have already written, if it counts as 'studying somewhat' when I skim over this author or that, pinching him by his head or his feet; not in the least to form my opinions but, long after they have been formed, to help, back up, and serve them.

[A] ■ But in this debased age whom will we believe when he speaks of himself, given that there are few if any whom we can trust when they speak of others, where they have less to gain from lying? The first stage in the corruption of *moeurs* is the banishing of truth; for, as Pindar said, being truthful is the beginning of any great virtue, [C] and it is the first item that Plato requires in the governor of his Republic.

¹ This is a half-joking echo of the Christian doctrine that the *three persons* of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—are all *one substance*, i.e. are consubstantial with one another.

² From a poem by Clément Marot against his enemy François de Sagon, exploiting his name's likeness to *sagoin* = 'lout', rhyming with *groin* = 'snout'.

[A] Our truth nowadays is not •what is but •what others can be brought to believe; just as we call ‘money’ not only legal tender but also any counterfeit that gets by. Our nation has long been reproached for this vice; for Salvianus of Massilia, who lived in the time of the Emperor Valentinian, says that for the French lying and perjury are not a vice but a manner of speaking. Anyone who wanted to go this testimony one better could say that at the present time it is for them a virtue. People form and fashion themselves for it, as for an honorable practice; for dissimulation is one of the most notable qualities of our age.

So I have often reflected on what could have given birth to our scrupulously observed custom, when we are accused of that vice that is so commonplace among us, of feeling more bitterly offended than by any other accusation; and why for us it should be the ultimate verbal insult to accuse us of lying. On that question I find that it is natural for us to defend ourselves from •accusations of• the failings we are most tainted with. It seems that in resenting the accusation and being upset about it we unload some of the guilt; if we *have* it in fact, at least we *condemn* it for show. . . .

Lying is an ugly vice, which an ancient paints in shameful colours when he says that it gives evidence of contempt for God along with fear of men. It is not possible to express more fully its horror, its vileness, and its disorderliness. For what can be uglier than cowering before men and swaggering before God? Since our •mutual• understanding is brought about solely by means of the word, anyone who falsifies *that* betrays public society. It is the only tool by which our wishes and our thoughts are communicated; it is our soul’s interpreter; without it we no longer hold together, no longer know one another. If words deceive us, that breaks up all our relations and dissolves all the bonds of our society. . . .

. . . . I would like to know *when* the custom began of weighing and measuring words so exactly, and attaching our honour to them. For it is easy to see that it did not exist in ancient times among the Romans and the Greeks. It has often seemed to me novel and strange to see them giving each other the lie and insulting each other, without having a quarrel. Their laws of duty took some other path than ours. Caesar is called now a thief, now a drunkard, to his face. We see the freedom of invective that they use against each other—I am talking about the greatest war-leaders in both those nations, where words are avenged merely by words, with no further consequences.

19. The Emperor Julian

[Montaigne entitled this essay “Freedom of conscience”, but that topic is confined to its last two paragraphs.]

[A] It is quite ordinary to see good intentions, if pursued without moderation, push men to very wicked actions. In this controversy that is currently agitating France by civil wars, the better and sounder side is undoubtedly the one upholding the former religion and government of the country. However, among the good men who support that side—

for I am talking not about •people who use it as a pretext for settling private scores, satisfying their greed or courting the favour of princes but about •those who support it out of true zeal for their religion and a sacred desire to defend the peace and status of their fatherland

—we see many whom passion drives beyond the bounds of reason, making them sometimes adopt courses that are unjust, violent, and even reckless.

It is certain that in those early days when our religion began to be backed by the authority of law, zeal armed many

of those people against pagan books of every sort, which was a staggering loss to men of letters. I reckon that this excess did more harm to letters than all the bonfires of the barbarians. The historian Cornelius Tacitus is a good witness to this. His kinsman the Emperor Tacitus expressly commanded all the libraries of the world to be furnished with copies of his works, yet not a single complete copy could escape the rigorous search of those who wanted to abolish them because of five or six casual sentences contrary to our belief.

They also had this habit of heaping false praises on all the emperors who favoured us, and condemning absolutely *all* the actions of our adversaries. It is easy to see this in their treatment of the Emperor Julian, surnamed by Christians 'the Apostate'.

He was in truth a very great and rare man, being one whose soul was steeped in philosophical argument by which he claimed to regulate all his activities; and indeed he left behind notable examples of every sort of virtue. His whole life affords clear testimony of his chastity, including a practice like those of Alexander and Scipio: of the many very beautiful women captives, he refused so much as to look at one. And that was in the flower of his manhood, for he was only 31 when the Parthians killed him.

As for justice, he took the trouble to hear the disputants himself; and although out of curiosity he informed himself about what religion was professed by those who appeared before him, his hostility towards our own weighed nothing in the scales. He personally enacted many good laws, and severely pruned the subsidies and taxes that his predecessors had levied.

We have two good historians who were eyewitnesses of his actions. One of them, Marcellinus, in various places in his history sharply blames that ordinance of his by which

he barred the Christian schools and forbade teaching by all the Christian rhetoricians and grammarians, and says that he could wish that action of his to be buried in silence. It is likely that if Julian had done anything harsher against us, Marcellinus would not have overlooked it, being well disposed towards our side.

Julian was an enemy harsh towards us, it is true, but not cruel. Even our own side tell this story about him:

When he was walking one day about the city of Chalcedon, Maris, the bishop of the place, dared to call him a wicked traitor to Christ. He simply replied, 'Go away, you wretched man, and lament the loss of your eyesight!' The bishop retorted: 'I thank Jesus Christ for having taken away my sight; it stops me seeing your insolent face!'

In allowing this, they say, Julian was simply acting the patient philosopher. In any case what he did then cannot be squared with the cruelties he is said to have used against us. According to Eutropius, my other witness, he was an enemy of Christianity but without shedding blood.

To return to his justice: the only reproach to be made against it is the severe treatment which, at the beginning of his reign, he meted out to those who had supported the party of Constantius, his predecessor.

As for sobriety, he always lived a soldierly life. In times of total peace he ate like someone training and accustoming himself to the austerities of war. [Then a paragraph about Julian's use of night-time—less for sleep than for military matters and for study ('among his other rare qualities he was outstanding in every sort of literature').]

As for military ability, he was admirable in all the qualities of a great commander; and indeed he spent most of his life in the constant practice of war, mostly with us in France against the Germans and the Franks. There is hardly a man

on record who experienced more danger or who more often put his person to the test.

His death has something about it like that of Epaminondas; for he was struck by an arrow and tried to pull it out, and would have done so if the arrow had not been so sharp, cutting his hand and weakening his grasp. He kept insisting that he be carried, just as he was, back into the battle to encourage his soldiers. . . .

To philosophy he owed his remarkable contempt for his own life and for all things human. He firmly believed in the eternity of souls.

In matters of religion he was bad throughout. He was called ‘the Apostate’ for having abandoned our religion, but the most likely opinion seems to me to be that he had never had it at heart, merely pretending to do so and obeying the law until he held the Empire in his hand. In his own religion he was so superstitious that even contemporaries who accepted it made fun of him, saying that if he had been victorious over the Parthians his sacrifices would have exhausted the world’s entire stock of oxen! He was besotted with the art of divination, and gave authority to every sort of augury.

When he was dying, he said among other things that he was grateful to the gods and thanked them for not wanting death to take him by surprise (having long since warned him of the place and time of his end), and for not giving him a soft relaxed death more suitable for idle delicate people, nor yet a languishing, long and painful death; he thanked them for having found him worthy of dying in that noble fashion, in the course of his victories and the flower of his glory. He had a vision like that of Marcus Brutus, which first threatened him in Gaul and later re-appeared to him in Persia when he was on the point of dying.

[C] These words have been attributed to him as he felt himself struck: ‘You have conquered, Nazarene!’ or according

to others ‘Be satisfied, Nazarene!’ But if my authorities—Marcellinus and Eutropius—had believed that, they would not have overlooked them; they were present in his army, and noted even the slightest of his final gestures and words. Nor would they have overlooked certain other miracles now associated with his death.

[A] To come to the subject of my discussion: Marcellinus says that Julian had long nursed paganism in his heart but dared not reveal it because his army were all Christians. When at last he found himself strong enough to dare to proclaim his intentions, he ordered the temples of the gods to be opened and tried in every way to set up idolatry. To achieve his purposes, having found the people of Constantinople at odds and the bishops of the Christian Church divided, he had them appear before him in his palace, insistently admonished them to damp down these civic dissensions and ordered that every person should follow his own religion without hindrance and without fear. He made this solicitation very urgently, hoping that this freedom would increase the schism and factions that divided then, keeping the people from uniting and thus strengthening themselves against him by their harmony and unanimity. For he had learned from his experience of the cruelty of some Christians that *there is no beast in the world so much to be feared by man as man*. Those are his words, near enough.

It is worth considering that the Emperor Julian, in order to stir up civil strife, uses the same recipe of *freedom of conscience* that our kings have just been employing to quieten it. It could be said on one side that to give factions loose reins to hold on to their opinions is to scatter and sow dissension; it is almost lending a hand to increase it, there being no barrier or legal constraint to check or hinder its course. For the other side it could be said that to give factions loose reins to hold on to their opinions is to soften and relax them through

facility and ease, and to blunt the goad, whereas rareness, novelty and difficulty sharpen it. Yet I prefer to think, for our kings' reputation for piety, that having been unable to do what they wanted, they pretended to want to do what they could. [That is: they piously didn't want to allow freedom of conscience at all; but finding that they could not get away with suppressing it, they pretended to favour it in the interests of civil peace.]

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Essay 20. 'We do not taste [or enjoy the taste of] anything that is pure' devotes three pages to some theses about mixtures: •the best pleasures have a touch of pain, •there is some pleasure in sadness, •even in the best of men virtue has a 'human admixture' of something lower, •the laws of justice inevitably involve some injustice (he quotes Tacitus: 'Every exemplary punishment is unfair to individuals; that is counterbalanced by the public good'). And one thesis about unpureness that does not involve a mixture: •pure intellect is less apt for good management than intellect that is somewhat blunted and thickened.

* * * * *

21. Against indolence

^[A] The Emperor Vespasian, though ill (with an illness that eventually killed him), nevertheless wanted to know about the state of the Empire; even in bed he ceaselessly dealt with many matters of consequence; and when his physician scolded him for this as a thing harmful to his health, he said: 'An Emperor should die standing.' There you have a fine statement, in my opinion, one worthy of a great prince. The Emperor Hadrian used it later in this same connection. And

kings ought often to be reminded of it, to make them realise that the great task they have been given of commanding so many men is not a leisurely one, and nothing can so justly make a subject dislike exposing himself to trouble and danger in the service of his prince as to see the prince himself meanwhile loafing about in base and frivolous occupations, and to concern himself with the prince's protection when he sees him so careless of his subjects' interests.

^[C] If anyone wants to maintain that it is better for a prince to conduct his wars through others, fortune will provide him with enough examples of ones whose lieutenants successfully concluded great campaigns, and also of ones whose presence would have done more harm than good. But no virtuous and courageous prince can tolerate being given such shameful advice. Under colour of saving his head (like the statue of a saint) for the welfare of the state, the advice degrades him from his office, which consists entirely in military activity, declaring him incapable of it.

I know one prince who would much rather be beaten in battle than sleep while others fought for him, and who never saw without jealousy even his own men do anything great in his absence.

And it seems to me that Selim I was right in saying that victories won without the master are not complete. How much more readily would he have said that the master ought to blush with shame to claim a part in them for his own renown when he had contributed to them only his voice and his thinking—and not even *that*, seeing that in such tasks the only counsel and commands that bring honour are the ones given on the spot in the midst of the action. No pilot can do his job on dry land.

The princes of the Ottoman race (the first race in the world in the fortunes of war) have warmly embraced this opinion. Bajazet II and his son, who departed from it and

spent their time on the sciences and other stay-at-home occupations, thereby gave severe blows to their empire. And the one who reigns at present, Amurath III, following their example, has made a pretty good start at coming out the same way. . . .

And don't include me among those who want to count the kings of Castile and Portugal among the warlike and great-souled conquerors because they made themselves masters of the East and West Indies, doing this through the actions of their agents, while *they* were in their idle abodes twelve hundred leagues away! One may wonder whether they would even have had the courage to go there and enjoy them in person.

[A] The Emperor Julian went further, saying that a philosopher and a gallant man should. . . .grant to bodily necessities only what cannot be refused them, always keeping the soul and the body occupied in things that are fair, great and virtuous. He was ashamed to be seen spitting or sweating in public. . . .because he reckoned that exercise, continuous toil and sobriety should have cooked and dried up all such excess fluids. What Seneca said fits here, that the ancient Romans kept their youth standing; they taught their children nothing, he said, that had to be learned sitting down.

[C] It is a noble desire that even one's death should be useful and manly; but whether it *is* depends more on good luck than on good resolution. Hundreds have proposed to conquer or die fighting, and have failed to do either, wounds or prisons blocking this design and compelling them to stay alive. . . .

Moulay Moloch, king of Fez, who has just won against King Sebastian of Portugal that battle famous for the death of three kings and for the transfer of that great kingdom of Portugal to the crown of Castile, was already gravely ill when the Portuguese forced their way into his territory; and

from then on he grew steadily worse, moving towards death and foreseeing it. Never did a man employ himself more vigorously and splendidly. He realised that he was too weak to endure the ceremonial pomp of the entry into his camp—which according to their fashion is full of magnificence and crammed with action—so he surrendered that honour to his brother. But that was the only duty of a commander that he gave up; all the others, the necessary and useful ones, he carried out very strenuously and exactly; keeping his body reclining but his understanding and his courage standing and firm until the last gasp and, in a way, beyond that, as I now explain. He could have undermined his enemies, who had advanced indiscreetly into his territory, and it grieved him terribly that for lack of a little life and also for the lack of a substitute to manage that war and the affairs of his troubled kingdom, he had to go in search of a hazardous and bloody victory when a certain and clean one was within his grasp. However he made a wonderful use of his remaining time. [Montaigne admiringly gives details about the battle, and the dying king's energetic conduct in it. Then:] He started out of his swoon; to warn that his death must be kept quiet—the most necessary order he still had to give, so that news of his death should not arouse some despair in his men—he died holding his finger against his closed mouth, the common gesture meaning *Keep quiet!* (He gave the order in this way because he found himself physically unable to give it in any other.) Who ever lived so long and so far forward into death? . . .

The ultimate degree of treating death courageously, and the most natural one, is to face it not only without being stunned but without concern, freely continuing the course of life right into death. As Cato did, who spent his time in sleep and study while having in his head and heart a violent and bloody death, and holding it in his hand.

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Essay 22. 'Riding post' is a bit more than a page of anecdotes about feats of speed in conveying messages over long distances, with horses, homing birds, litter-bearers.

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23. Bad means to a good end

^[A] There is a wonderful relation and correspondence in this universal government of the works of nature, which well shows that it is neither accidental nor controlled by a variety of masters. The maladies 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 humours, whether good humours—

for the doctors also fear a surfeit of those; because there is nothing stable in us, they say that too sharp and vigorous a perfection of health should be artificially reduced and cut back for fear that our nature, being unable to remain fixed in any one place and having no room for further improvement, may retreat in disorder and too suddenly; which is why they prescribe for athletes purgings and bleedings to draw off ·in a more orderly and gradual way· this superabundance of health

—or bad ones, the surfeit of which is the usual cause of illness.

·BAD WAYS OF REDUCING SOCIAL/POLITICAL PRESSURE·

States are often seen to be sick from a similar surfeit, and various sorts of purges are customarily used for it. Sometimes, to take the load off the country, a great multitude of families are let go to seek living space elsewhere at the

expense of others. That is what happened when our ancient Franks left the depths of Germany and came and took over Gaul, driving out its first inhabitants; when that endless tide of men poured into Italy under Brennus and others; when the Goths and the Vandals and also the peoples who are now in possession of Greece abandoned their native lands to settle more spaciouly elsewhere. There are scarcely two or three corners in the world that have not experienced such migrations.

That was how the Romans built their colonies; seeing that their city was becoming excessively big, they relieved it of the people they needed least, sending them off to occupy and farm the lands they had conquered. Sometimes they deliberately kept up wars with certain of their enemies, not only to keep their men in condition, for fear that idleness, mother of corruption, might bring some worse trouble upon them—^[B] We suffer the ills of a prolonged peace; luxury, more savage than war, is crushing us' [Juvenal]—^[A] but also to serve as a blood-letting for their republic and to cool off a little the over-excited heat of their young men, to prune and clear the branches of that stock growing rampant from too much energy. They once used their war against the Carthaginians for this purpose.

In the treaty of Bretigny, King Edward III of England would not include in the general peace he made with our king the question of the contested duchy of Brittany; this was so that he could have a place to unload his soldiers, and not have the crowd of Englishmen who had served him on this side of the Channel rushing back into England. That was one of the reasons why our King Philip agreed to send his son John to the war in Outremer—to take with him a large number of the hot-blooded young men who were in his armed forces.

There are many today who reason in this way, wishing that this heated passion among us could be diverted into some war against our neighbours, for fear that these noxious humours that currently dominate our body, if they are not drained off elsewhere, may keep our fever still at its height and eventually bring our total ruin. And in truth a foreign war is a much milder evil than a civil one; but I do not believe that God favours so wicked an enterprise as our attacking and quarrelling with a neighbour simply for our own convenience. . . .

·OTHER KINDS OF BAD MEANS TO GOOD ENDS·

Yet the weakness of our condition often pushes us to the necessity of using bad means to a good end. Lysurgus, the most virtuous and perfect lawgiver there ever was, came up with a most iniquitous way of teaching his populace temperance: he compelled the Helots, who were their slaves, to get drunk, so that the Spartans should see them lost and wallowing in wine and so hold the excesses of that vice in horror.

Even more wrong were those who in ancient times allowed that criminals, whatever kind of death they had been condemned to, should be cut up alive by the doctors, to let them see our inner parts in their natural state and so establish more certainty about them in their art; for if we really must indulge in depravity, it is more excusable to do so for the health of the soul than for the health of the body. The Romans were doing the former when they trained their populace in valour and in contempt for dangers and death by those furious spectacles of gladiators and swordsmen who fought to the death, cutting up and killing each other while the people looked on. . . . It was indeed a wonderful

example, and very fruitful for the education of the people, to see every day before their eyes a hundred, two hundred or even a thousand pairs of men armed against one another, hacking each other to pieces with such extreme firmness of courage that they were never heard to utter a word of weakness or of pity, never turned their back or even made a cowardly movement to avoid their opponent's blow, but rather extended their necks to his sword and presented themselves for the blow. Many of them, covered with mortal wounds, sent to ask the spectators if they were pleased with their service, before lying down and giving up the ghost on the spot. They had to fight and die not only steadfastly but even cheerfully, so that they were booed and cursed if they were seen to struggle against accepting death.

^[B] Even the girls urged them on: 'The modest virgin is so delighted with the sport that she applauds the blow; and when the victor plunges his sword into the other's throat, she rejoices and gives command, thumb down, to rip the bosom of the fallen man' [Prudentius].

^[A] To provide such examples the first Romans used criminals; but later they used innocent slaves and even freemen who sold themselves for this purpose. ^[B] Eventually they came to include Roman senators and knights; and even women: 'Now they sell their heads to die in the arena: when all is at peace they find a foe to attack' [Manlius]. 'In these tumultuous new sports the gentle sex takes part, unskilled in arms, immodestly engaged in manly fights' [Statius].

^[A] I would have found this very strange and incredible if we had not become accustomed to seeing daily in our wars many thousands of foreigners engaging their blood and their lives for money in quarrels in which they have no stake.

24. The greatness of Rome

[A] I want to say only a word on this inexhaustible subject in order to show the simple-mindedness of those who compare Roman greatness with the present time's pitiful grandeurs.

In the seventh book of Cicero's *Letters to friends*¹ there is a letter from Cicero to Caesar, then in Gaul, in which he repeats these words, which were at the end of a letter that Caesar had written to him: 'As for Marcus Furius whom you have recommended to me, I will make him King of Gaul; and if you want me to advance some other friend of yours, send him to me.'

It was no novelty for a simple Roman citizen, as Caesar then was, to dispose of kingdoms, for he deprived King Deiotarus of his to give it to a nobleman named Mithridates of the city of Pergamum. And his biographers record several kingdoms that he *sold*; Suetonius says that at one stroke he extorted from King Ptolemy 3,600,000 crowns, which was close to selling his own kingdom to him! 'Price list: So much for Galatia, so much for Pontus, so much for Lydia' [Claudian].

Mark Antony said that the greatness of the Roman people showed itself not so much in what they took as in what they gave. [C] Yet about a century before Antony they had taken something with a wonderful show of authority that has no parallel in all their history. Antiochus possessed the whole of Egypt and was about to conquer Cyprus and other remnants of that empire. During the progress of his victories, Gaius Popilius came to him on behalf of the Senate and refused to take his hand until he had read the letters he was bringing. When the king had read them and said he would think about it, Popilius drew a circle around him with his stick and said: 'Before you step out of this circle give me

an answer that I can take back to the Senate.' Antiochus, astonished at the roughness of such a peremptory command, reflected for a while and then said: 'I shall do what the Senate commands me.' Thereupon Popilius greeted him as a friend of the Roman people. To have given up so great a monarchy and so fortunate and prosperous a career, under the impact of three lines of writing! He later informed the Senate through his ambassadors that he had received their command with the same respect as if it had come from the immortal gods; he was right to do that.

[B] All the kingdoms that Augustus acquired by right of war he either restored to those who had lost them or presented to third parties.

[A] In this connection Tacitus, talking of King Cogidunus of England, has a marvellous remark which makes us feel that infinite power. The Romans, he says, were from the earliest times accustomed to leave kings they had conquered in possession of their kingdoms, under their authority, 'so that they might have even kings as instruments of slavery'.

[C] It is likely that Suleiman, whom we have seen making a gift of the kingdom of Hungary and other states, was moved more by that consideration than by the one he was accustomed to cite, namely that he was glutted and overburdened by all the monarchies and power that his own efforts or those of his forebears had brought to him.

25. On not pretending to be ill

[A] There is an epigram of Martial's—one of the good ones, for there are all kinds in him—in which he jokingly tells the story of Cælius, who pretended to have gout so as to avoid paying court to some of the Roman grandees, being present

¹ Montaigne has a long aside on the proper title for that compendium, arguing that the one given here is preferable to the more usual *Familiar letters*.

at their levee, attending on them, and following them. To make his excuse more plausible he had his legs anointed and bandaged, and completely counterfeited the gait and bearing of a gouty man. In the end fortune favoured him by making him so in fact: 'How great is the power of counterfeiting pain! Cælius has stopped feigning the gout; he *has it*' [Martial].

I have read—somewhere in Appian, I think—a similar story of a man who, wanting to escape the proscription of the Roman triumvirate, kept himself hidden and disguised to avoid recognition by his pursuers, and added also the device of pretending to be blind in one eye. When he came to recover a little more liberty, and was willing to take off the plaster he had so long worn over his eye, he found that its sight had actually been lost under that mask. It is possible that the action of sight had been dulled through not being exercised for such a long time, and that the visual power had been wholly transferred to the other eye. For when we cover one eye we can plainly feel that it transfers to its fellow some part of its activity, so that the other swells and dilates. So also for Martial's gouty man, inactivity combined with the heat of the bandages and ointments may well have brought him some gouty humour.

Reading in Froissart of the vow of a troop of young English noblemen to keep their left eye covered until they had crossed into France and performed some exploit of arms against us, I have often been tickled by the thought that they might have been caught like those others and found themselves all one-eyed when they again saw the mistresses for whose sake they had undertaken this.

Mothers are right to scold their children when they imitate one-eyed, lame and cross-eyed people and other such

physical defects; for not only can their bodies, still so tender, take on a bad twist from this, but it seems that fortune (I do not know how) makes a game of taking us at our word; I have heard of many examples of people falling ill after pretending to be so.

[C] Whether riding or walking I have always held in my hand a rod or stick, even to the point of trying for elegance with it, leaning on it with a 'distinguished' look on my face. Many have warned me that one day fortune would turn this foppery into a necessity. If so. . . ., I would be the first of my family to have the gout!

[A] But let us lengthen this chapter and variegate it with another piece concerning blindness. Pliny tells of a healthy man who dreamed he was blind and woke the next morning to find that he was. The power of imagination can indeed contribute to 'things like' that, as I have said elsewhere, and Pliny seems to share this opinion; but it is more likely that the internal events in his body. . . .that took away his eyesight also caused the dream.

Let us add another story close to this subject, which Seneca tells in one of his letters. He wrote to Lucilius:

'Harpaste, my wife's *folle*,¹ has stayed at my house as a hereditary charge,

·not one I would have chosen to take on·, because I have no taste for these monsters, and if I want to laugh at a *fou* I do not have far to look for one: I laugh at myself.

She has suddenly become blind and (I am telling you something strange but true) she does not realise it! She keeps begging her keeper to take her outside; she thinks that my house is too dark.

¹ Feminine of *fou*, which can refer to someone who is employed as a clown or joker in a wealthy household. In some cases—Harpaste clearly being one of them—the clown is found to be funny because he/she is mentally incapacitated in some way.

‘What we laugh at in her I urge you to believe applies to each one of us. No-one realises that he is miserly, that he is covetous. At least the blind ask for a guide; we wander off alone. We say:

“I am not ambitious, but in Rome one cannot live otherwise.”

“I am no spendthrift, but the city requires great expense.”

“It is not my fault if I am short-tempered, if I have not yet settled down; it is the fault of my youth.”

Let us not go looking elsewhere for our disease; it is within us, rooted in our inward parts. The very fact that we do not realise we are ill makes the cure harder. If we do not *soon* begin to tend ourselves, when will we *ever* provide for so many sores and so many maladies? Yet philosophy provides a very sweet medicine; other cures are enjoyed only after they have worked; this one pleases and cures at the same time.’

That is what Seneca says. It has carried me away from my subject; but there is profit in change.

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Essay 26. ‘Thumbs’ is a page on that topic.

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27. Cowardice, the mother of cruelty

^[A] I have often heard it said that cowardice is the mother of cruelty. ^[B] And I have learned from experience that the bitterness and hardness of a malicious and inhuman heart are usually accompanied by womanish weakness. I have seen that some of the cruellest of men are given to weeping easily, and for frivolous reasons. Alexander, tyrant of Pheres,

could not allow himself to hear tragedies performed in the theatre for fear that his citizens might see him moaning over the misfortunes of Hecuba and Andromache—he who every day had pitilessly had so many people cruelly murdered! What makes such men so easy to bend to every extreme? Can it be weakness of soul?

^[A] Valour, which acts only to overcome resistance—‘And does not enjoy killing a bull unless unless it resists’ [Claudian]—stops when it sees the enemy at its mercy. But pusillanimity, in order to say that it is also in the game, having had little to do with the first role of fighting in battle, takes as its part the second role, that of massacre and bloodshed. Murders after victory are ordinarily done by the mob and the baggage-handlers. And what causes so many unheard-of cruelties in wars in which the people take part is that the common riff-raff become used to war and swagger about, up to their elbows in blood, hacking at a body lying at their feet, having no sense of any other kind of valour—^[B] ‘The wolves and base bears fall on the dying, and so do all the more ignoble beasts’ [Ovid]—^[A] like the cowardly curs which in the house tear and snap at the skins of wild beasts that they did not dare attack in the fields.

•THE CONCERN WITH KILLING•

What is it that makes all our quarrels mortal nowadays? Our fathers knew *degrees* of vengeance, but we begin at the ultimate and from the outset talk of nothing but killing—why? What is it, if it is not cowardice? Every man clearly feels that •there is more *braverie* [see Glossary] and disdain in beating his enemy than in finishing him off, in making him knuckle under than in making him die; and also that •the thirst for vengeance is better slaked and satisfied by these non-lethal means, for it aims only at making itself felt. That is why we do not attack a stone or an animal if it hurts us, since

they are incapable of feeling our revenge. To kill a man is to shelter him from our harm. . . .

'He will repent of it', we say. Do we really think our shooting him through the head will make him repent of what he did? On the contrary, if we look closely we will find that he pulls a face at us as he falls. He does not even hold it against us, so far he is from repenting. ^[C]And we do him the greatest favour of life, which is to make him die suddenly and painlessly. ^[A]We are busy hiding like rabbits, scuttling about and fleeing the officers of justice who are on our trail; he is at rest. Killing is good for preventing a future offence but not for avenging a past one. ^[C]It is an act more of fear than of *braverie*, more of precaution than of courage, more of defence than of attack. ^[A]It is obvious that by that act we give up both •the true end of vengeance and •our care for our reputation: •we show that• we are afraid that if the man lives he will renew the attack. ^[C]It is not *against him* that you get rid of him but *for yourself*—•your cowardly self•. . . .

^[A]If we thought that by valour we would always dominate our enemy and triumph over him at our pleasure, we would be very sorry if he were to escape—which is what he does when he dies. We want to conquer, but more safely than honourably, ^[C]and in our quarrel we seek an ending more than glory. [Then a paragraph about the cowardice of delaying a verbal attack until the target of it is dead.]

^[A]Our fathers contented themselves with avenging an insult by giving the lie, avenging being given the lie by a blow, and so on in order •up the scale•. They were valiant enough not to be afraid of their adversary, alive and outraged. We tremble with fear just from seeing him on his feet! And as proof of that, is it not one of our beautiful practices today to hound to death the man we have offended as well as the man who has offended us?

•THE MANAGEMENT OF DUELS•

^[B]It is also a type of cowardice that has introduced into our single combats this practice of our being accompanied by seconds, and thirds, and fourths. Formerly they were duels: nowadays they are encounters and battles. The first men who came up with this idea were afraid of being alone, ^[C]'since neither had the slightest confidence in himself' [Virgil]. ^[B]For it is natural that company of any sort brings comfort and relief in danger. Formerly third parties were brought in to guard against rule-breaking and foul play ^[C]and to bear witness to the outcome of the combat. ^[B]But since it has become the fashion for them—the third parties—to take part themselves, whoever is invited to the duel cannot honorably remain a spectator, for fear of being thought to lack either affection or courage.

Besides the injustice and baseness of such an action, bringing some valour or power other than your own into the defence of your honour, I find it a disadvantage for a good man who fully trusts in himself to involve his fortune with that of a second. Each man runs enough risk for himself without running it also for another, and has enough to do to assure himself in his own valour for the defence of his life without committing so dear a thing to other hands. For unless it has been expressly agreed to the contrary, it is a joint combat of the four—the original duellists and their seconds. If your second is downed, you have two on your hands, and rightly so.

[An aside on fairness in combat.] This may be said to be unfair, and so indeed it is—like attacking when well armed a man who has only the stump of a sword, or attacking when in good physical shape a man who is already grievously wounded. But if these are advantages you have won in fighting, there is nothing wrong with exploiting them. Disparity and inequality

are weighed and considered only with regard to the state of the combatants when the fray begins [this topic is returned to at ■ below]; from there on, take your complaint to fortune! And when you find yourself one against three after your two companions have let themselves be killed, no-one is wronging you, any more than I would do wrong in war if, with a similar advantage, I struck a blow with my sword at the enemy whom I found attacking one of our men. . . .

I have a private interest to declare in this discussion; for my brother the sieur de Matecoulom was called on in Rome to act as second for a gentleman [see Glossary] he hardly knew, who was the defender, having been challenged to the duel by another. In this combat he found himself by chance matched against a man who was closer and better known to him than the man whose second he was. (I wish someone would explain to me the rationale for these 'laws of honour' that so often clash with those of reason!) Having disposed of his man and seeing the two principals in the quarrel still on their feet and intact, he went to the relief of his companion. What less could he do? Should he have kept still and watched the defeat—if that is how it worked out—of the man for whose defence he had come to the combat? He had not done him any good up to there; the quarrel was undecided.

The courtesy that you can and should show to your enemy when you have reduced him to a sorry state and have him at a great disadvantage—I do not see how you can show it when it concerns somebody else, where you are only the second, where the dispute is not yours. He—my brother—could not be just or courteous at the expense of the one to whom he had lent himself. Accordingly he went back into the fight, was arrested for duelling, and was delivered from the prisons of Italy through a very prompt and solemn recommendation

of our king.

·AN ASIDE ON COURAGE VERSUS SKILL AND ACCESSORIES·

Immodest nation! Not content with letting the world know of our vices and follies by reputation, we go to foreign nations to display them in person! Put three Frenchmen in the Libyan deserts; they will not be together for a month without provoking and scratching each other. You would say that this peregrination of ours is an affair especially arranged to give foreigners—especially those who rejoice in our misfortunes and laugh at them—the pleasure of seeing us making spectacles of ourselves.

We go to Italy to learn fencing, ^[C] and put it into practice at the expense of our lives before mastering it. ^[B] Yet by the rules of the discipline we should put theory before practice. We betray ourselves as mere apprentices: 'Wretched first fruits of youth; harsh training for the future wars' [Virgil]. I know that fencing is an art ^[C] that is useful for its purpose, . . . and, as I know from experience, an art ^[B] that has swelled the hearts of some beyond their natural measure. ■ But this is not really valour, since it draws its support from skill and has its basis in something other than itself. The honour of combat consists in rivalry of courage, not of craft. That is why I have seen a friend of mine, renowned as a grand master in that exercise, choosing for his duels weapons that deprived him of the means of this advantage and made everything depend on fortune and steadfastness, so that his victory would not be attributed to his fencing skill rather than to his valour. In my childhood the nobility avoided a reputation as good fencers as insulting; they learned to fence in secret, as a cunning trade detracting from true and natural valour:

'They have no wish to dodge, parry or to make tactical retreats; skill has no part to play in their encounter;

they make no feints, or oblique blows, or shamming lunges; anger and fury strips them of their art. Just listen to the terrifying clash of striking swords, iron against iron; no foot gives way but stays planted firm: it is their arms that move; every thrust strikes home and no blow falls in vain' [Tasso; quoted in the original Italian].

Target-practice, tournaments, tilting—the image of warlike combat—were the exercise of our fathers. That other exercise, fencing, is all the more ignoble for having only a private end which teaches us to destroy each other, contrary to the laws and to justice, and in every way always produces harmful results. It is much more worthy and fitting to exercise oneself in things that strengthen our government rather than harming it, things that respect the public safety and the common glory.

[Montaigne develops this theme for another page, illustrating it with ancient anecdotes. He ends this with the confession: ^[B] But I am wandering away from my theme.]

•BACK TO COWARDICE AND CRUELTY•

^[A] The Emperor Maurice, having been warned by his dreams and several omens that he was to be killed by a certain Phocas, a soldier then unknown, asked his son-in-law Philip who was this Phocas, his nature, his traits, and his *moeurs*; when Philip told him among other things that he was cowardly and timorous, the emperor immediately concluded from this that he was therefore murderous and cruel.

What makes tyrants so bloodthirsty? It is concern for their own safety, and the fact that when they fear a *scratch* their cowardly heart provides them with no means of making themselves safe except exterminating all those who can harm them, women included: ^[B] 'He strikes at all because he fears all' [Claudian].

^[C] The first cruelties are done for their own sake; thence arises the fear of a just revenge, which then produces a string of new cruelties, each intended to smother its predecessors.

Philip, king of Macedon, the one who had so many bones to pick with the Roman people, agitated by the horror of the murders committed on his orders, and unable to make up his mind what to do against so many families harmed by him at various times, decided to seize all the children of those he had had killed, so as to kill them off, one by one, day after day, and thus ensure his peace of mind. [Montaigne devotes more than a page to a complex anecdote relating to this matter, admitting that this story, which he tells because he finds it 'beautiful', is off his present track.]

^[A] Tyrants, to do two things at once—killing and making their anger felt—have used all their ingenuity to find a way of prolonging death. They want their enemies to be gone, but not so fast that they have no time to savour their vengeance. They have a lot of trouble over this; for if the tortures are intense they are short, and if they are long they are not painful enough for the tyrant's liking; so there they go, dispensing their instruments of torture. We see a thousand examples of this in antiquity—and I wonder whether we do not, without realising it, still retain traces of such barbarity.

Everything that goes beyond simple death seems to me pure cruelty. Our justice cannot hope that the man who will not be kept from wrongdoing by fear of death by decapitation or hanging may yet be deterred by the thought of a slow fire or pincers or the wheel. And I do not know but that during this time we drive them to despair. For what can be the state of a man's soul as waits for death for twenty-four hours, broken on the wheel or (in the old fashion) nailed to a cross?

[The essay ends with a page of truly gruesome anecdotes about intense cruelty.]

28. There is a season for everything

[A] Those who liken Cato the Censor to the younger Cato who was his own murderer¹ [C] are likening two fine natures with similar forms. The former displayed his nature in more aspects, and did better in military exploits and in the usefulness of his public services. But the virtue of the younger—as well as being more vigorous (it is blasphemy to liken it in that respect to anyone else's)—was far more spotless. For who could acquit the Censor of envy and ambition, when he dared to attack the honour of Scipio, who in goodness and in all excellent qualities was far greater than him and than all other men of his time?

[A] What they tell of him among other things, that when in his extreme old age he set himself to learn the Greek language, with an ardent appetite as though to quench a long thirst, does not seem to me to be much in his honour. Strictly, it is what we call falling into second childhood.

There is a season for all everything, including the good things; I may say the Lord's Prayer at an inappropriate time; [C] as was the case of the general Titus Quintius Flaminius, who was denounced because he had been seen, *during* the conflict, on the sidelines praying to God in a battle that he won. [B] 'The sage sets limits even to virtuous things' [Juvenal].

[A] When Eudemondas saw the very old Xenocrates working hard at his school lessons, he remarked: 'If he is still *learning*, when will this man *know*?' [B] And Philopoemen said to those who were highly praising King Ptolemy for daily strengthening his body by the practice of arms: 'It is not praiseworthy for a king of his age to be practising them; from now on he should really use them!'

[A] 'The young man should make his preparations, the old man enjoy them', say the sages. And the greatest flaw they see in us is that our desires incessantly renew their youth. We are always *starting again* to live. Our study and our desire should sometimes savour of old age. We have one foot in the grave, yet our tastes and our pursuits are just being born: [B] 'On the edge of the grave itself you contract for cut marble, forget the tomb and build a house' [Horace].

[C] The longest of my projects is for less than a year; henceforth I think only of making an end, ridding myself of all new hopes and enterprises, saying my last farewell to all the places that I leave, and daily dispossessing myself of my belongings. 'I have long since ceased to lose or gain. I have more provisions ·for the road· than road' [Seneca]. 'I have lived, and run the course that fortune gave' [Virgil].

In short all the comfort I find in my old age is that it deadens within me many desires and cares that life is troubled by—care for how the world goes, care for riches, for grandeur, for knowledge, for health, for myself. [A] That man—Cato the Censor—is learning to speak when he ought to be learning to be silent forever. [C] We can always continue our studies, but not our school-work; what a stupid thing, an old man learning his alphabet! . . .

[A] If we must study, let us study something suitable to our condition, so that we can answer like the man who was asked why he conducted these studies in decrepit old age: 'So as to depart a better and more contented man.'

Such was the study of the younger Cato when, feeling that his end was near, he came across Plato's discussion of the eternity of the soul. Not, obviously, that he was not long since furnished with every sort of provision for such

¹ Before the edition of 1588 (the one whose additions are [C]-tagged) this sentence ended: 'do great honour, in my opinion, to the former; for I find them separated by an extreme distance.'

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. He occupied himself in this way not to ease his death (he would not even interrupt his sleep to think about such a matter), but as someone who simply got on with his studies, as with all the customary activities of his life, without choice or change.

[C] The night when he had just been rejected for the praetorship he spent in play; the one in which he was to die he spent in reading. Loss of life or loss of office, it was all one to him.

* * * * *

Essay 29. ‘Virtue’ is a seven-page miscellany, including (i) reflections on the revelation of character by ordinary daily conduct, with some anecdotes about the conduct of the sceptic Pyrrho; (ii) two stories about men who (for different reasons) emasculated themselves, and one about a woman who drowned herself to escape her husband’s abuse; (iii) reports on how death—and especially how women join their husbands in death—is managed in India and other ‘oriental nations’; and (iv) stories about how various men have acted on the basis of their belief in ‘fatal [see Glossary] necessity’ or predestination. The lead-in to (iv) is interesting: ‘Among our other disputes, that of *Fatum* has come in. To attach things to come (even our will) to a certain and inevitable necessity, people still use that age-old argument: “Since God foresees that all things are to happen thus, as he undoubtedly does, they *must* therefore happen thus.” To which our masters [the theology professors at the Sorbonne] reply that to see something happen—as we do, and God likewise (since all is present to him; he sees rather than foresees)—is not to force it to happen. Indeed, we see the things because they happen; they do not happen because we see them. The

event produces the knowledge, not the knowledge the event. What we see happen, happens; but it could have happened otherwise. And God, in the book of the causes of events which he has in his foreknowledge, also includes those we call fortuitous, and the voluntary ones that depend on the liberty he has given to our choice; he knows that we shall go astray because we shall have willed to do so.’

* * * * *

Essay 30. ‘A monster-child’ describes a small child whose physical form is radically abnormal. Montaigne offers a [C]-tagged remark: ‘What we call monsters are not so to God, who sees in the immensity of his creation the infinity of forms he has included in it. . . . Whatever happens contrary to custom we say is contrary to nature. **Nothing whatsoever is not in harmony with nature.** May nature’s universal reason drive out of us the error and astonishment that novelty brings us.’

* * * * *

31. Anger

[A] Plutarch is admirable throughout, but especially where he judges human actions. When he is comparing Lyncurgus with Numa we can see the fine things he says about our great foolishness in abandoning children to the government and care of their fathers.

[C] Most of our states, as Aristotle says, . . . leave to each individual man the guidance of his wife and children according to his foolish and thoughtless whims. Sparta and Crete are almost the only states that have entrusted the education of children to the laws. [A] Who does not see that everything in a state depends on their education and nurture? and yet this

is indiscriminately left to the mercy of the parents, however foolish or wicked they may be.

·BRUTALITY TOWARDS CHILDREN·

Among other things, how many times have I been tempted

the next phrase: *dresser une farce*

translated by Florio: to have a play or comedie made

by Cotton: to get up a farce

by Frame: to set up some trick

by Screech: to make a dramatic intervention

to avenge little boys whom I saw being flayed, knocked down and bruised by a parent in a fury and frenzy of anger! You can see the fire and rage flashing from his/her eyes—

^[B] ‘They are carried away by burning wrath, like boulders wrenched free from the cliff crashing down the precipitous slope’ [Juvenal]

(and according to Hippocrates the most dangerous maladies are those that contort the face)—^[A] with shrill wounding voices, often against children who are barely weaned. And then—look!—•children lamed and knocked stupid by blows, and •our judicial system taking no note of it, as though these maimings and dislocations were not being inflicted on members of our commonwealth: ^[B] ‘It is good to have given a citizen to the people and the state, if you make him fit for his country, good at farming, good in war and peace’ [Juvenal].

·ANGER AND THE JUDICIAL TEMPERAMENT·

^[A] No passion disturbs the soundness of our judgement as much as anger does. No-one would hesitate to punish with death a judge who had condemned someone as a criminal out of anger; why is it any more permissible for fathers and schoolmasters to whip and chastise children in anger? It is no longer correction, it is vengeance. Chastisement takes

the place of medicine for children; and would we tolerate a doctor who was worked up and angry with his patient?

We ourselves, to behave rightly, should never lay a hand on our servants as long as our anger lasts. While our pulse is beating and we can feel the emotion, let us put off the business; things will truly seem different to us once we have quieted and cooled down. Until then passion is in command, it is passion that speaks, not we ourselves. ^[B] Seen through anger, faults appear to us larger, like objects seen through a mist. Let a hungry man use meat; but someone who wants to use punishment should neither hunger nor thirst for it.

^[A] And then, the punishments that are inflicted with deliberation and discernment are received much better, and with more benefit, by the punished person. Otherwise he thinks he has been condemned unjustly by a man shaking with anger and fury; he cites in his own justification the extraordinary movements of his master, his inflamed face, his unaccustomed oaths, his excitement, and his precipitate haste. . . . Suetonius relates that Caius Rabirius, after being condemned by Caesar and having appealed to the people, won his appeal mainly because of the animosity and bitterness that Caesar had brought to that judgement.

·SAYING AND DOING·

Saying is one thing, doing another; the preaching and the preacher should be considered separately from one another. Those who in our time have tried to shake the truth of our Church through the vices of its ministers have given themselves an easy game; the Church gets its testimonies from elsewhere. That way of arguing is stupid; it would throw everything into confusion. A man of good *moeurs* can hold false opinions, and the truth can be preached by a wicked man—yes, even a man who does not believe it. It is doubtless a beautiful harmony when saying and doing go together, and

I don't mean to deny that saying has more authority and efficacy when followed by doing; as Eudamidas said on hearing a philosopher discoursing about war: 'Fine remarks, but the man who is making them is not to be believed, for he does not have ears accustomed to the sound of the trumpet.' And when Cleomenes heard a rhetorician declaiming about valour, he burst out laughing; the speaker took offence, but Cleomenes replied: 'I would do the same if it were a swallow speaking about that; but if it were an eagle, I would gladly hear him.'

I observe in the writings of the ancients, it seems to me, that he who says what he thinks drives it home much more forcefully than he who only pretends. Listen to Cicero speaking of the love of liberty, and listen to Brutus speaking of it—Brutus whose very writings ring out to you that he was a man to buy liberty at the price of his life. Let Cicero, the father of eloquence, treat the contempt for death; and let Seneca treat it too; the former drags it out lifelessly and you feel that he is trying to make you decide on something that he himself has not decided on. He does not put courage into you, for he himself he has none. Seneca animates and inflames you.

I never read an author, especially one of those who treat of virtue and conduct, without carefully inquiring into what sort of man he was. ^[B]The ephors of Sparta, seeing a dissolute man making a useful proposal to the people, ordered him to stop and asked a man in good standing to claim the proposal as his own and to speak for it.

·A DIGRESSION·

^[A]Plutarch's writings, if savoured properly, reveal him to us well enough, and I think I know him even into his soul; yet I wish we had some memoirs of his life. And I have embarked on this digression because of the gratitude I feel towards

Aulus Gellius for having left us in writing this account of Plutarch's *moeurs* [see Glossary], which brings us back to my subject of anger.

A slave of his, a bad and vicious man, but one whose ears were pretty well filled with the lessons of philosophy, having been stripped for some fault by order of Plutarch, at first while being whipped muttered that there was no reason for this and that he had not done anything wrong; but eventually he started to shout and insult his master in good earnest, accusing him of not being a philosopher as he boasted; since he had often heard him say that it was ugly to get angry—indeed, had written a book about it—and the fact that right then, immersed in anger, he was having him cruelly flogged completely gave the lie to his writings. To which Plutarch, quite cool and calm, replied:

'What makes you think, ruffian, that I am angry at this time? Does my face, my voice, my colouring or my speech give you any evidence that I am excited? I do not think that my eyes are wild, my face agitated, or my voice terrifying. Am I flushed? Am I foaming at the mouth? Do words escape me that I will later regret? Am I quivering? Am I shaking with rage? For I tell you, those are the true signs of anger.'

Then turning to the man who was doing the flogging he said 'Carry on with your job, while this fellow and I are arguing.' That is Gellius's account.

·ANGER AND PUNISHMENT·

On returning from a war in which he had been captain-general, Archytas of Tarentum found everything in a mess in his household, and his lands lying fallow through the bad management of his steward. He sent for him and said: 'Go. If I were not so angry I would give you a good thrashing.' So too Plato: inflamed against one of his slaves he handed

him over to Speusippus for punishment, excusing himself from putting his hand to it himself on the grounds 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 at once.'

It is a passion that takes pleasure in itself and flatters itself. How often, when we are all worked up for a wrong reason and are then offered some good defence or excuse, we are vexed even at truth and innocence! I recall an amazing example of this from antiquity. Piso, a person of notable virtue in everything else, was moved to anger against one of his soldiers. Returning alone from foraging, the soldier could give no account of where he had left his comrade; Piso was convinced that he had murdered him, and promptly condemned him to death. When he was at the gallows, along comes the lost comrade! At this the whole army was overjoyed and after many hugs and embraces between the two men the executioner brought them both into the presence of Piso, everyone present expecting that Piso himself would be delighted. Quite the contrary: for, through embarrassment and vexation, his continuing fury doubled and, by a quibble that his passion promptly provided him with, he found the three men guilty. . . . , •the first soldier because there was a sentence against him, •the second, the one who had gone missing, because he was the cause of his comrade's death, and •the executioner for not having obeyed the command that had been given to him. . . .

•CONTROLLING ONE'S ANGER•

Of the most choleric man in France (and it is always a defect, but more excusable in a military man, for in that profession there are situations that cannot do without it) I often say that he is the most long-suffering man I know in curbing his anger; it agitates him with such violence and frenzy—

'as when, beneath a brazen cauldron, the fire roars noisily into flame and licks its sides, the water boils with the heat and, madly foaming in its prison, breaks over the edge and can contain itself no longer, sending black fumes off into the air' [Virgil]

—that he has to constrain himself cruelly to moderate it. For my part, I know of no passion that I could ever make such an effort to conceal and resist. I would not rate wisdom at so high a price. I look not so much at what a man does as at what it costs him not to do worse.

Another was boasting to me of the self-control and mildness of his *moeurs*, which is indeed notable. I said to him that it was indeed something, especially in people of eminent rank like himself, whom everyone watches, to present themselves to the world always as even-tempered; but that the main thing was to provide inwardly for oneself, and that for my taste it was not good management of one's affairs to eat one's heart out. I was afraid he was doing just that, so as to maintain that mask, that outward appearance of control.

By hiding our anger we drive it into our bodies; as Diogenes said to Demosthenes, who for fear of being seen in a tavern kept drawing back further inside: 'The further back you go, the deeper in you go!' I advise that it is better to give one's valet a slap on the cheek a little out of season than to torture oneself so as to put on an appearance of ·calm· wisdom. And I would rather *produce* my passions than brood over them to my cost. They grow weaker when they are vented, expressed. It is better for them to be jabbed outwards than for them to be turned against us. [C] 'All defects are lighter in the open, and most pernicious when concealed beneath a pretence of soundness' [Seneca].

[B] I warn those of my family who have the right to show their anger, firstly •to husband their anger and not scatter it

at random for that impedes its effect and its weight. Heedless and continual scolding becomes habitual, which makes everyone discount it. The scolding you give a servant for stealing is not felt, because it is the same as he has seen you use against him a hundred times already, for having badly rinsed a glass or badly placed a stool. Secondly, •not to get angry in the void, and to see to it that their reprimand reaches the person they are complaining about; for ordinarily they are yelling before he is in their presence and go on yelling for ages after he has gone, 'and petulant madness turns against itself' [Claudian]. They go at their own shadows, and carry this tempest into places where no-one is punished or affected by it, except such as cannot stand the racket of their voice. . . .

·MONTAIGNE'S HANDLING OF HIS OWN ANGER·

When I get angry it is as keenly, but also as briefly and privately, as I can manage. I lose my temper in haste and in violence, but not in such a state of agitation that I go hurling about all sorts of insults at random, heedless of whether I land my arrows pertinently where I think they will hurt the most (for I ordinarily use only my tongue). My servants get off more easily on big occasions than on small ones. The small ones take me by surprise, and bad luck will have it that once you are over the edge, no matter what gave you the shove, you always go right to the bottom. The fall provides its own rushing and excitement and confusion. On the big occasions I have this satisfaction, that they are so just that everyone expects to see a reasonable anger arise; I glory in disappointing their expectations. I prepare and brace myself against those occasions; they dig into my brain and threaten to carry me very far if I follow where they lead. It is easy to prevent myself from getting into this passion, and I am

strong enough, if I am expecting it, to repel its onslaught, however violent its cause; but once it takes over and grips me, it carries me away, no matter how trivial its cause.

This is the bargain I strike with those who may have a dispute with me: When you sense that I am the first to get excited, let me go my way, right or wrong; I will do the same for you in return. The tempest is bred only by the concurrence of angers, which are prone to produce one another and are not born at the same instant. Let us allow each to run its course; then we always have peace. A useful prescription but hard to carry out.

It sometimes happens that without any real emotion I put on an act of anger in order to govern my household. As age makes my disposition more sour, I make an effort to oppose it; and I shall succeed from now on, if I can, in being all the less peevish and hard to please as I shall have more excuse and inclination to be so, although hitherto I have been among those who are least so.

[A] One more word to close this chapter. Aristotle says that anger sometimes serves as a weapon for virtue and valour. That is likely; yet those who deny it have an amusing reply: it must be some new-fangled weapon; for we wield the other weapons, this one wields us; our hand does not guide it, it guides our hand; it holds us, we do not hold it.

32. In defence of Seneca and Plutarch

[A] My familiarity with these two great men and the help they give to my old age—[C] and to my book, which is built entirely out of their spoils—[A] oblige me to espouse their honour.

As for Seneca, among the thousands of little books that those of the so-called reformed religion¹ circulate in

¹ *la Religion pretendue reformée*, the French Catholic church's official name for Calvinism.

defence of their cause (which sometimes come from good hands—what a pity they aren't occupied on a better subject!), I once saw one which extended and filled out the likeness the author wanted to find between the rule of our poor late King Charles IX and that of Nero, by likening the late Cardinal of Lorraine to Seneca: their fortunes, having both been first in the governments of their monarchs, and along with that their *mœurs*, their endowments and their conduct. In my opinion that comparison honours the Cardinal; for—

although I am one of those who highly esteem his mind, his eloquence, his zeal for religion and for the King's service, and his good fortune in being born in an age when it was so new, so rare and at the same time so necessary for the public good to have an ecclesiastical personage of such nobility and dignity, competent and capable of his charge

—to tell the truth I don't consider his ability nearly as great, or his virtue as clear and entire and firm, as Seneca's.

Now, this book I am speaking of, to attain its purpose, offers a deeply insulting description of Seneca, having borrowed these slurs from Dion the historian, whose testimony I simply do not believe. For—

apart from the fact that Dion is inconsistent: he calls Seneca very wise and also a mortal enemy of Nero's vices, yet later makes him mean, given to usury, ambitious, cowardly, voluptuous, and playing the philosopher on false pretences

—Seneca's virtue is so evidently alive and vigorous in his writings, which themselves provide such a clear defence against some of these imputations, such as that of his wealth and excessive spending, that I will not accept any testimony to the contrary. Moreover, it is more reasonable in such matters to believe the Roman historians than to believe the Greeks and foreigners. Well, Tacitus and the others speak

very honourably both of his life and of his death, portraying him to us as in all things a very excellent and very virtuous person. And I will make no criticism of Dion's judgement except this one, which is unavoidable: his sense of Roman affairs is so *diseased* that he ventures to champion the causes of Julius Caesar against Pompey, and of Antony against Cicero.

Let us come to Plutarch. Jean Bodin is a good contemporary author, endowed with far better judgement than the mob of scribblers of Plutarch's century, and deserves to be judged and considered. I find him a bit rash in that passage in his *Method of History* where he accuses Plutarch not only of ignorance (on which I would let him have his say, for that is not my quarry) but also of frequently writing 'things that are incredible and entirely fabulous' (those are his words). If he had simply said 'things otherwise than they are', that would have been no great censure; for what we have not seen we take from the hands of others and on trust; and I see that he sometimes deliberately tells the same story in different ways. For example, Hannibal's judgement of the three best generals that ever lived appears in one way in Plutarch's 'Life of Flaminius' and another way in his 'Life of Pyrrhus'. But to charge him with having accepted incredible and impossible things as genuine coin is to accuse the most judicious author in the world of lack of judgement.

And here is Bodin's example. 'As', he says, 'when he relates that a Spartan boy allowed his whole stomach to be torn up by a fox-cub he had stolen, and kept it hidden under his robe until he died, rather than disclose his theft.' In the first place I find that a badly chosen example, since it is hard indeed to prescribe limits to the powers of the faculties of the soul, whereas with bodily powers we have more basis for setting bounds to them and knowing them. For that reason if I had to choose an example I would have taken one of

the second (·bodily·) sort, some of which are less credible. Among others, what Plutarch narrates about Pyrrhus: that, all wounded as he was, he gave such a great blow with his sword to an enemy clad in full armour that he split him from top to bottom so that his body fell into two parts.

In Bodin's own example I find no great miracle, nor do I accept the excuse that he makes for Plutarch, that he added the words 'so they say', to warn us to keep our belief in check. For he would not himself have accepted, or invited us to believe, intrinsically incredible things (apart from things accepted on authority and reverence for antiquity or religion). And that here he is not using 'so they say' for that purpose is easy to see from what he relates elsewhere concerning the powers of endurance of Spartan boys, things that happened in his own time and are even harder to accept. . . . [Montaigne gives examples, and continues through two pages of episodes—not all from ancient Sparta, and some from his own day—in which horrible tortures are endured; followed by an oddly placed ^[B]-tagged paragraph about 'the stubbornness of women' in maintaining their opinions, closing with the remark that 'stubbornness is the sister of constancy, at least in vigour and firmness'.]

As I have said elsewhere, we should not judge what is possible and what is not by what *we* find credible or incredible. And it is a great error into which most people fall (^[C]I am not saying this about Bodin) ^[A]to project onto others their beliefs about what they could not do ^[C]or would not do. It seems to each man that the ruling pattern of nature is in him, and that everyone else should follow it. Behaviours that do not square with his are counterfeit and artificial. When thinking about anyone else's actions or faculties, he starts by thinking about his own example: matters go with all the world as they go with him. What brutish stupidity!

^[A]As for me, I consider some men far above me, especially among the ancients; and although I clearly recognise my inability to follow them on foot, I nevertheless follow them with my eyes and judge the springs that raise them so high, ^[C]the seeds of which I somewhat perceive in myself (as I do also ·the seeds of· the ultimate baseness in minds, which does not surprise me and which I do not disbelieve either). I can clearly see the spiral by which those great souls wind themselves higher; ^[A]and I wonder at their greatness. Those flights that I find very beautiful I embrace; and if my powers do not reach them, at least my judgement applies itself to them very gladly.

The other example Bodin cites of 'things that are incredible and entirely fabulous' said by Plutarch is the statement that Agesilaus was fined by the ephors for having drawn his citizens' heart and will to himself personally. I do not know what mark of falsity he finds in that; but at any rate Plutarch is speaking there of things that must have been much better known to him than to us; and it was no novelty in Greece for men to be punished and exiled simply for being too well liked by their citizens. . . .

In the same place there is another accusation that annoys me on Plutarch's behalf. It is where Bodin says that Plutarch showed good faith in his matching Romans with Romans and Greeks among themselves, but not in ·matching· Romans with Greeks. Witness, he says,

- Cicero and Demosthenes,
- Cato and Aristides,
- Sulla and Lysander,
- Marcellus and Pelopidas,
- Pompey and Agesilaus,

reckoning that he favoured the Greeks by giving them such different companions [i.e. by treating them as comparable with men who were so clearly their superiors]. That is to attack precisely

what is most excellent and praiseworthy in Plutarch. For in those comparisons (which are the most admirable part of his works, and in my opinion the one he took special satisfaction in) the fidelity and sincerity of his judgements equals their depth and weight. He is a philosopher who teaches us virtue. Let us see whether we can protect him from this accusation of prevarication and falsehood.

What I can think of as having given rise to this judgement is the great and dazzling lustre that the Roman names take on in our minds. It does not seem to us that Demosthenes can ever equal the glory of someone, Cicero, who was a consul, proconsul and quaestor of that great republic. But considering the truth of the matter and the men in themselves, which was Plutarch's chief aim, and comparing them in respect of their *moeurs*, their natures, their abilities, rather than how well things went for them, I think, contrary to Bodin, that Cicero and the older Cato fall short of their parallels Demosthenes and Aristides. For his purpose I would rather have chosen the younger Cato compared to Phocion; for in that pair it would be more plausible to find an inequality to the advantage of the Roman.

As for Marcellus, Sulla and Pompey, I quite see that their exploits in war are more expansive, glorious and splendid than those of the Greeks Plutarch compares them with; but no more in war than anywhere else are the finest and most virtuous actions always the most famous. I often see the names of captains smothered under the splendour of other names of less merit; witness Labienus, Ventidius, Telesinus and many others. And if I had to look at things in such a way as to complain on behalf of the Greeks, might I not say that Camillus is far less to be compared to Themistocles, the Gracchi to Agis and Cleomenes, and Numa to Lycurgus? But it is folly to try to judge by one feature things with so many aspects.

When Plutarch compares them, he is not making them equal. Who could bring out their differences more clearly and conscientiously than he does? When he comes to match Pompey against Agesilaus in terms of victories, martial exploits, the might of their armies, and triumphs, this is what he says: 'I do not believe that even Xenophon, if he were alive and allowed to write all he wished in favour of Agesilaus, would dare to judge them to be comparable.' When he speaks of matching Lysander to Sulla, he says: 'There is no comparison, either in the number of victories or in the risks they ran in battle; for Lysander won only two naval battles. . . ' and so on.

That is not taking anything away from the Romans. By simply placing them beside the Greeks he cannot have wronged them, whatever disparity there may be between them. Plutarch does not weigh them against each other in the lump; there is no over-all preference; he compares and judges the parts and the circumstances one after another. So anyone who wanted to convict him of partiality would have to pick to pieces one particular judgement of his, or complain in a general way that he was wrong to match this Greek against that Roman since there were others that resembled each other more closely and were better fitted for comparison.

33. Ambition and lust

[Montaigne called this essay 'The story of Spurina', but that story has just one paragraph at ■ on pages 104–105.]

[A] Philosophy does not think it has used its resources badly when it has given reason the sovereign mastery of our soul and the authority to hold our appetites in check.

·TWO KINDS OF APPETITE·

Those who judge that there are no appetites more violent than the ones that love engenders have this in favour of their opinion: those appetites affect the body and the soul; the whole man is possessed by them, health itself depends on them, and medicine [here meaning 'the medical profession'] is sometimes constrained to pander to them.

But on the opposite side it could also be said that this bodily element somewhat lessens and weakens them; for such desires are subject to satiety, and are capable of material remedies. Some men, having wanted to deliver their souls from the continual alarms caused by this appetite, have resorted to the amputation of the parts that were depraved by arousal. Others have quite beaten down their strength and ardour by frequent applications of cold things such as snow and vinegar. Our ancestors' haircloths were used for this purpose; they are made of woven horsehair, which some made into shirts and others into girdles to torture their loins.

Not long ago a prince told me that in his youth, on a solemn feast-day at the court of King Francis I, where everyone was dressed up, he had the idea of wearing the hair-shirt (he still has it) of his father; but for all his devoutness he could not endure waiting until night-time to take it off, and it made him ill for a long time. He added that he did not think that there was any youthful heat so sharp as not to be mortified by the use of this remedy. But perhaps he had not experienced the most burning heats, for experience shows us that such an emotion often maintains itself under rough and wretched garments, and that hair-shirts [*haires*] do not always make those who wear them wretched [*heres*].

Xenocrates set about it more rigorously; for when his disciples, to test his continence, smuggled into his bed the beautiful and famous courtesan Lais, quite naked apart from . . . the weapons of her beauty and her wanton charms,

Xenocrates felt that despite his reasonings and his rules his recalcitrant body was beginning to mutiny; so he burned the members of his that had lent an ear to this rebellion.

On the other hand, the passions that are entirely in the soul—ambition, avarice and so on—give much more work to *reason*, because where they are concerned it has nothing to back it up except its own resources. Also, those appetites are not capable of satiety—indeed they are sharpened and increased by enjoyment.

The example of Julius Caesar, all by itself, can show us the disparity of these appetites, for never was a man more addicted to sexual pleasure; . . . but the other passion of ambition, with which he was also infinitely smitten, coming into conflict this one, immediately made it give way. [The ellipsis replaces a page of details of Caesar's care over his physical appearance and a list of seven of his mistresses, two of them queens.]

[C] Remembering Mohammed II in this connection—the one who subjugated Constantinople and finally extinguished the Greek name—I know of no better case of these two passions being evenly balanced, equally indefatigable as lecher and as soldier. But when the two occur together in his life, the quarrelsome ardour always dominates the amorous one. And the latter did not regain sovereign authority until—though this was out of its natural season—he was very old and no longer able to carry the burden of war. . . .

·JULIUS CAESAR'S MANY VIRTUES AND ONE VICE·

I return to Caesar. [A] His pleasures never made him steal a single minute, or turn aside one step, from opportunities to aggrandise himself. This passion ·of ambition· ruled so sovereignly in him over all the others, and possessed his soul with such full authority, that it carried him wherever it wanted to go. That vexes me when I reflect on the greatness of this person in all other respects and on his marvellous

gifts; he was so competent in every sort of learning that there is hardly any realm of knowledge on which he has not written. He was such an orator that many preferred his eloquence to Cicero's; and he himself, in my opinion, did not think himself much inferior to him in that endowment; his two *Anti-Catos* were mainly written as a counterweight to Cicero's fine style in his *Cato*.

As for the rest, was there ever a man's soul so vigilant, so active and so enduring of labour as his? And without doubt it was also embellished with many seeds of virtue—living, natural ones I mean, not counterfeit. He was singularly sober, and so unpicky about food that Oppius tells that one day when he was served with medicated oil in mistake for salad oil he ate heartily of it so as not to embarrass his host. Another time he had his baker whipped for supplying him with bread other than the ordinary sort.

Cato himself used to say that Caesar was the first sober man to set out on the road to the ruin of his country. As for the fact that this same Cato called him a drunkard once, what happened was this. They were both in the Senate, where the conspiracy of Cataline—which Caesar was suspected of being involved in—was being discussed; a sealed letter was brought in to Caesar; and Cato, thinking it was some warning from the conspirators, demanded that he hand it over, which Caesar was forced to do to avoid further suspicion. It happened to be a love letter that Cato's sister Servilia had written to him. Cato read it and tossed it back to him saying 'Take it, drunkard!' This, I say, was a term of angry disdain rather than an express accusation of drunkenness. . . . I would add that the vice Cato reproached him with is a wonderfully close neighbour to the one in which he had surprised Caesar; for Venus and Bacchus are prone to go together, according to the proverb; ^[B] though in my case Venus is more lively when accompanied by sobriety.

^[A] There are countless examples of his mildness and clemency toward those who had harmed him—I mean besides those he provided when the Civil War was still in progress; he himself makes clear enough in his writings that in those he acted so as to cajole his enemies, making them less fearful of his future victory and domination. But it must be said that if those examples do not suffice to show us his natural mildness, they show us at least a marvellous confidence and greatness of courage in that man. It often happened that he sent whole captured armies back to his enemy after having vanquished them, without even deigning to make them swear binding oaths if not to support him at least to refrain from making war on him. He took certain of Pompey's captains three or four times, and as many times set them free. Pompey declared that all those who did not fight by his side were his enemies; Caesar had it proclaimed that all those who kept still and did not actually take up arms against him were his friends. To those of his captains who deserted him to take service elsewhere he sent their arms, horses and equipment. The cities he had taken by force he left free to follow which side they pleased, leaving no garrison with them except the memory of his mildness and clemency. On the day of his great battle at Pharsalia he forbade laying hands on Roman citizens except as an ultimate extremity.

These are very hazardous traits, in my judgement; it is not surprising that in the civil wars we are undergoing, those who are fighting against their country's former constitution, as he was, do not imitate his example. They are extraordinary methods, which only Caesar's fortune and admirable foresight could manage successfully. When I reflect on the incomparable greatness of that soul, I pardon victory for being unable to shake free of him, even in that very unjust and very iniquitous cause.

To return to his clemency: we have many genuine examples of it during the time of his ascendancy when, having everything under his thumb, he had no further need to dissemble. Caius Memmius had written some very forceful orations against him, to which he had replied sharply; yet soon afterwards he helped to make him consul. [After three more examples:] He feared his enemies even less than he hated them. When certain conspiracies against his life were revealed to him, he contented himself with a public edict stating they were known to him, without further prosecuting those responsible.

As for his concern for his friends: when Caius Oppius was taken ill while travelling with him, he let him have the only available lodging and spent the night on the hard ground in the open.

As for his justice: he had a servant of whom he was particularly fond put to death for having slept with the wife of a Roman knight, although no-one had complained.

Never did a man show more moderation in victory or more resolution in adversity.

But all these fine dispositions were spoiled and stifled by that furious passion of ambition, which he let himself be carried away by—so forcibly that one may easily maintain that its hand was on the tiller that steered all his actions. It changed him from a liberal man into public thief, to provide for his profusion and largesse; it brought him to make that base and wicked statement that if the worst and most abandoned men in the world had done him faithful service in his rise to grandeur he would cherish and advance them by his power as well as the most worthy men; it intoxicated him with a vanity so extreme that he ventured

- to boast in the presence of his fellow-citizens that he had made that great Roman Republic a name without form and without a body,

- to declare that his replies must henceforth serve as laws,
- to remain seated in receiving the Senate when it came to call on him in a body, and
- to allow himself to be worshipped as a god and have divine honours paid to him in his presence.

To sum up, this one vice, in my judgement, ruined in him the finest and richest nature there ever was, making his memory abominable to all good men because he willed to seek his own glory in the ruin of his country, the subversion of the most powerful and flourishing republic the world will ever see.

On the opposite side, many examples could be found of great public figures—Mark Antony and others—whose lust made them forget the conduct of their affairs; but whenever sexual love and ambition were evenly balanced and came to blows with similar forces, I have not the least doubt that the latter would win the victor's prize.

·THE WRONG WAY TO CONTROL LUST·

.... It is a considerable thing to rein in our appetites by reasoned argument, or to compel our members, by violence, to keep to their duty. But to flog ourselves in the interests of our neighbours—not merely

- to rid ourselves of that sweet passion that tickles us and of the pleasure we feel in seeing that we are attractive to others and loved and courted by everyone,

but

- to loathe and abhor our charms that provoke such things, condemning our own beauty because someone else is inflamed by it

—I have seen hardly any examples of that. Here is one.

■ In Tuscany there was a youth called Spurina...who was endowed with singular beauty, so extreme that the

chastest of eyes could not chastely endure its brilliance. Not content with merely *not encouraging* the feverish fire that he kindled everywhere, he entered into a furious rage against himself and against those rich gifts that nature had endowed him with, as if they should be blamed for the fault of others, and deliberately slashed and disfigured with the scars of his wounds the perfect proportion and symmetry that nature had so carefully observed in his face.

^[C]To speak my mind about this: I wonder at such actions more than I honour them; those extremes are enemies to my rules. Its purpose was fine, conscientious, but in my opinion a little lacking in wisdom. What if his ugliness came to provoke others to the sin of •scorn or hatred, or of •envy of the glory of so rare a merit, or of •calumny, interpreting this impulse of his as frantic ambition? Is there any form [here = 'kind of face'] from which vice cannot, if it wants to, draw an opportunity to exercise itself in some manner? It would have been more just and glorious to have made these gifts of God a basis for exemplary virtue and orderly living.

·THE DIFFICULTY OF MODERATION·

Those men who evade the common duties and the countless thorny and many-faceted rules that bind a punctiliously decent man in civil life spare themselves a great deal, in my opinion, however fierce the penalty they inflict on themselves. It is a kind of *dying* in order to escape the trouble of *living well*. They may win some other prize, but it has never seemed to me that they would get the prize for difficulty. There is nothing more arduous than standing upright amid the floods of this pressing world, loyally responding to and satisfying all the parts of one's charge.

It may be easier to do without the whole ·female· sex altogether than to behave rightly in every respect in relation to one's wife; and one can live a more carefree life in poverty

than in a properly managed abundance. Using something in a reasonable way is harder than abstaining from it. Moderation is a virtue that keeps one busier than suffering does. The younger Scipio's way of living rightly has a thousand aspects; Diogenes' has only one. Diogenes' life surpasses ordinary lives in innocence by as much as very accomplished lives surpass his in usefulness and power.

34. Julius Caesar's methods of waging war

^[A]We read that many leaders in war held particular books in special esteem, for example Alexander the Great—Homer; ^[C]Scipio Africanus—Xenophon; ^[A]Marcus Brutus—Polybius; Charles V—Philippe de Commines. And it is said that in our day Machiavelli is still in repute in other countries. But the late Marshal Strozzi, who took Caesar for his choice, undoubtedly chose better; for in truth he should be the breviary of every warrior, as being the true and sovereign model of the military art. And God knows with what grace and beauty he embellished that rich material in a style so pure, so delicate and so perfect that there are, to my taste, no writings in the world comparable with his in this respect.

I want to record here certain individual and unusual features, on the subject of his wars, that have remained in my memory.

·DIFFERENT USES OF DECEIT·

When his army was in some dismay because of the rumour then current about the great forces King Juba was leading against him, he assembled his troops to reassure them and put heart into them. Instead of playing down the opinion his soldiers had formed and minimising his enemy's resources, he took a course quite opposite to the one we are accustomed to: he told them not to take any more trouble trying to find

out what forces the enemy was leading, as he had very certain information about that, and then told them that the enemy's army numbered—and then he gave a number much greater than the true one and than the one that had figured in the rumours in his army. In this he was following the opinion of Cyrus (as reported by Xenophon) that being wrong on such a matter is better when it leads to the enemy's being found weaker than had been expected than when it leads to finding that in reality they are stronger.

He trained his soldiers above all to simply obey orders, without getting involved in criticising or discussing their captain's plans, which he told them about only at the last moment; and if they discovered anything about them he took pleasure in changing them on the spot in order to fool them; and often for this purpose after appointing a certain place to camp he would march right past it and lengthen the day's march, especially in bad and rainy weather.

At the beginning of his wars in Gaul, the Swiss sent envoys to him asking for leave to cross through Roman territory; having already decided to stop them by force, he put on a friendly face and delayed replying for a few days so as to have time to assemble his army. Those poor folk did not know what an excellent manager of *time* he was; he often said that the most sovereign parts of a commander's equipment are •knowledge of how to seize opportunities at the right moment and •speed in execution, which in his exploits was truly unheard-of and incredible.

·RELATIONS WITH HIS SOLDIERS·

If he was scarcely scrupulous in that affair ·with the Swiss·, getting the advantage over his enemy under colour of a treaty of agreement, he was as little so in not requiring in his soldiers any virtue but valour, and punishing hardly any vice

except mutiny and disobedience. Often after his victories he would give them free rein for licentiousness, releasing them for a while from the rules of military discipline, adding that he had soldiers so well trained that even when perfumed and musked they would still go furiously into combat. Indeed he liked them to be richly armed, getting them to wear armour engraved in gold and silver, so that their concern not to lose it would make them fiercer in self-defence.

When he spoke to them he called them 'comrades', a term we still use. His successor, Augustus, changed that, believing that Caesar had done it to meet practical needs, to flatter the heart of men who followed him only as volunteers,. . . but that this usage was beneath the dignity of an emperor and general of an army; and he restored the practice of calling them simply 'soldiers'.

With this courtesy, however, Caesar combined great severity in keeping men in check. When the ninth legion mutinied near Placentia, he broke it¹ and put it to shame, although Pompey was then still afoot; and he restored it to favour only after many entreaties. He appeased his men more by authority and by audacity than by gentleness.

When he talks of his crossing of the river Rhine into Germany he says that, considering it unworthy of the dignity of the Roman people to bring his army across in boats, he had a bridge built so that he could cross on foot. It was there that he built that astonishing bridge, the construction of which he described in detail; for in no place is he so prone to dwell on his achievements as in showing us the subtlety of his inventions in manual works of this kind.

·HIS ELOQUENCE·

I have also noticed that he sets great store by his exhortations to the soldiers before battle; for when he wants to show

¹ *il la cassa*, perhaps meaning that he kicked it out of the army; there is scholarly debate over how Caesar ended the Placentia mutiny.

that he was taken by surprise or hard pressed, he always mentions that he did not even have time to harangue his army. Before that great battle against the Turones, he says:

'Caesar, having seen to everything else, ran at once to wherever fortune took him to exhort his people; meeting the tenth legion he only had time to tell them to remember their accustomed valour, not to be thrown into confusion, and boldly to withstand the adversaries' charge. Then, as the enemy were already within bow-shot, he gave the signal to engage; he at once crossed the field to encourage others, but found that they had already joined battle.'

That is what he says about it—i.e. about addressing the troops—in that place.

In truth, his tongue did him notable services in many places; and even in his own time his military eloquence was so highly esteemed that many in his army wrote down his speeches; which led to the compiling of several volumes of them that long outlived him. His speech had particular graces, so that his intimates, including Augustus, when they heard readings from them recognised things—right down to phrases, to words—that were not his.

·HIS SPEED·

The first time that he left Rome with a public command, he reached the river Rhone in eight days, having in his coach •in front of him a secretary or two continually writing [to his dictation?] and •behind him the man who carried his sword. And certainly, even if one were merely travelling and doing nothing else, one could hardly equal the speed with which—always victorious—having left Gaul and pursuing Pompey to Brundisium, he subjugated Italy in eighteen days; returned from Brundisium to Rome; from Rome he went right into the heart of Spain, where he surmounted extreme

difficulties in the war against Afranius and Petreius, and then to the long siege of Massilia. From there he returned into Macedonia, and beat the Roman army at Pharsalia; pursued Pompey to Egypt, which he subjugated; went on from there to Syria and the region of Pontus, where he fought Pharnaces; and from there to Africa, where he defeated Scipio and Juba; and retraced his steps through Italy into Spain, where he defeated the sons of Pompey: ^[B] 'Swifter than lightning and a tigress defending her young' [Lucan]. 'It was like a landslide rushing down the mountain slopes when land is uprooted by the wind or loosened by the lashing rain or undermined by the force of passing years: as the huge mass crashes down into the void, it makes the earth tremble and bears away forests with their herds and herdsmen' [Virgil].

^[A] Talking of the siege of Avaricum, he says that it was his custom to stay night and day with the workers he was employing. In all his important undertakings he did his own reconnoitring, and never brought his army into a place that he had not first looked over. . . .

He was accustomed to say that he liked a victory won by thought better than a victory won by force. In the war against Petreius and Afranius, when fortune presented him with an obvious opportunity to gain the advantage he rejected it, hoping, he says, to finish off his enemies with a little more time but less risk. . . .

·HIS CONTEMPT FOR DANGER·

^[A] I find him a little more restrained and deliberate in his enterprises than Alexander, who seems to seek out dangers and run headlong at them like a rushing torrent that runs into and attacks everything it encounters, without discrimination or choice. . . . Also, when he was occupied in war he was in the flower and first ardour of his youth, whereas Caesar took to war when he was already mature and well

along in years. Besides, Alexander was of a more sanguine, choleric and ardent temperament, and he further stimulated this humour with wine, which Caesar took very sparingly. But whenever the present occasion necessitated it, when the action itself required it, there was never a man who held his life more cheaply than Caesar did.

For my part, it seems to me I read in many of his exploits a determined resolve to get killed so as to avoid the disgrace of being beaten. In that great battle against the Turones, seeing the van of his army wavering, he ran to meet the front ranks of the enemy, without armour, just as he was; and this happened several other times. Hearing that his men were surrounded, he passed in disguise through the enemy army to strengthen them by his presence. Having crossed over to Dyrrachium with very small forces, and seeing that the rest of his army (which he had left to Antony to lead) was slow in following him, he undertook to sail back alone during a very great storm; he made this journey to resume command of the rest of his forces surreptitiously, because the harbours on that side and the whole sea were held by Pompey.

As for exploits carried out with small armed forces, there are many in which the risks he ran exceed anything that military reasoning could justify; for with what feeble means did he undertake to subjugate the kingdom of Egypt and then go on to attack the forces of Scipio and Juba, ten times greater than his own! People like him have had some kind of superhuman confidence in their fortunes; ^[B] and he said that high enterprises should be carried out, not deliberated over.

^[A] After the battle of Pharsalia, having sent his army ahead into Asia, he was crossing the straits of Hellespont with a single ship when he met Lucius Cassius sailing with ten great warships; he had the courage not merely to wait for him but

to head straight for him and summon him to surrender; and he got the better of him.

When he had undertaken that furious siege of Alesia, where the defenders numbered 80,000, and all Gaul had risen up to attack him and raise the siege, gathering an army of 109,000 ¹ horses and 240,000 infantry, what boldness and maniacal confidence it was to continue with the siege and tackle two such problems at the same time! And he did withstand them; after winning that great battle against the forces outside, he soon reduced to submission those he held under siege. . . .

·UNUSUAL CONDUCT, GOOD AND BAD, BY GAULS·

I want to note here two rare and extraordinary events concerning that siege of Alesia. **(i)** One was that the Gauls who had assembled to march on Caesar first counted all their troops and then decided in council to reduce that huge crowd considerably, fearing that they might fall into confusion. This is a novel thing, fearing that one's numbers are too *large*; but looked at it the right way it is indeed likely that an army's size should be kept within limits, whether for the difficulty in feeding it or for the difficulty of leading it and keeping it in order. At least it would be very easy to prove by examples that those monstrously large armies have hardly ever achieved anything worthwhile.

^[C] According to the saying of Cyrus in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, the advantage lies not in the number of men but in the number of good men, the remainder serving to hinder rather than to help. And Bajazet based his decision to give battle to Tamberlane, against the advice of all his captains, mainly on the fact that the uncountable number of the enemy gave him assured hope of their falling into confusion. . . .

¹ Actually, 8,000; Montaigne is thought to have miscopied *IIX milibus* as *CIX milibus*.

[A] The **(ii)** other event was the decision of Vercingetorix, who was named general-in-chief of all the rebelling tribes of Gaul, to go and shut himself up in Alexia. This seems to be contrary both to usage and to military thinking; for a man in command of an entire country should never tie himself down, except in the extreme case where his last position is at stake and there is nothing more to hope for except in defending it. Otherwise he should keep himself free, so as to be able to provide in general for all the regions he controls.

·BACK TO CAESAR·

To get back to Caesar: in the course of time he became (as his friend Oppius testifies) a little more slow and deliberate, thinking that he should not lightly risk the honour of so many victories, which one misfortune could make him lose. When the Italians want to reprove that rash bravery found in young men they call them 'needy of honour', *bisognosi d'honore*; and ·say· that since they are still in such a great famine and dearth of reputation, they are right to seek it at any price—which those who have already acquired a store of it ought not to do. With any appetite there can be a just moderation, in this case between desire for glory and satiety. Plenty of people deal with it in this way.

He was far removed from the scrupulousness of the ancient Romans, who wanted to win in their wars only through simple and natural valour. But he brought to war more conscience than we would nowadays, and did not approve of every sort of means to victory. In the war against Ariovistus, when he was parleying with him, a disturbance broke out between the two armies, started through the fault of Ariovistus's cavalry. During the confusion Caesar found that he had a real advantage over his enemies; but he would not avail himself of it, for fear that he might be accused of having proceeded in bad faith [in offering to talk with Ariovistus].

He customarily wore rich accoutrements in battle, brilliantly coloured so as to make himself stand out.

When approaching the enemy he kept his soldiers on a shorter, tighter rein.

When the ancient Greeks wanted to accuse anyone of extreme incompetence, they would say in common parlance that he could 'neither read nor swim'. Caesar had this same opinion, that the ability to swim was very useful in war, and he derived many advantages from it. When he needed to hurry he ordinarily swam across any rivers he encountered for, like the great Alexander, he liked to travel on foot. In Egypt, when he was forced to escape in a small boat, so many jumped in with him that it was in danger of sinking; he chose to jump into the sea and *swim* out to his fleet, which was more than two hundred yards away, holding his tablets above the water in his left hand and dragging his armed tunic along with his teeth to prevent the enemy from getting the use of it. He was then well on in years.

Never did a general inspire so much trust in his soldiers. At the beginning of his civil wars, each of his centurions offered to pay out of his own purse for one armed man, and the foot-soldiers offered to serve him at their own expense, the better-off ones undertaking further to defray the expenses of the needier.

The late Admiral de Chastillon recently provided a similar case in our own civil wars, for the Frenchmen in his ·Protestant· army provided out of their own purses the pay of the foreigners who accompanied him. There would hardly be found examples of such ardent and such spontaneous devotion among those who follow the old ·Catholic· order, under the old established laws. . . .

[A] Having had the worst of it near Dyracchium, Caesar's soldiers came of their own accord and offered themselves to be chastised and punished, so that he needed to console

rather than rebuke them. One single cohort of his withstood four of Pompey's legions for over four hours, until it was almost completely wiped out with arrows; over 130,000 thousand shafts were found in their trench. One soldier named Scæva, who commanded one of the approaches, maintained himself there, invincible, with one eye transfixed, a pierced shoulder and thigh, and 230 cuts in his shield.

Many of his soldiers who were taken prisoner accepted death rather than promise to join the other side. When Granius Petronius had been captured by Scipio in Africa, Scipio had his companions put to death and then sent word to him that he was giving him his life because he was a man of rank and a quaestor. Petronius replied that Caesar's soldiers were accustomed to giving life to others, not to being given it, and at once killed himself with his own hand.

·A RARE INCIDENT·

There are countless examples of their loyalty. We must not forget the action of the men who were besieged at Salona (a town on Caesar's side against Pompey), for a rare incident that occurred there. Octavius held them besieged; and they were reduced to the extreme necessity in everything: •to make up for their lack of men (since most of them were killed or wounded), they freed all their slaves; •to be able to use their catapults they had to cut off the hair of all the women to make ropes; in addition to which •there was a staggering shortage of food. Yet they resolved never to surrender.

When they had dragged this siege out for so long that Octavius had grown more careless and less attentive to his campaign, they picked one day at about noon, stationed their women and children on the walls so that things should look normal, then sallied out against the besiegers with such fury that they broke through the first, second, and third rank of their guards, then the fourth, then the rest, forcing them to

abandon their entrenchments and driving them right back to their ships; and Octavius himself fled to Dyrrachium, where Pompey was.

Right now I cannot recall having seen any other case where the besieged rout the whole body of the besiegers and win mastery of the field, or where a sortie led to a clear and total victory in battle.

35. Three good wives

^[A] They do not come by the dozen, as everyone knows, and especially in the duties of marriage; for that is a bargain full of so many thorny details that it is hard for a woman's will to stay *whole* in it for long. ·Even· the men, although they are in it on slightly better terms, find it hard to do so.

^[B] The touchstone of a good marriage, and its real proof, is how long the association lasts, and whether it has been constantly pleasant, loyal and agreeable. In our century women more commonly reserve the displays of their good offices and the intensity of their affection for their *late* husbands; ^[C] and then at least they try to bear witness to their good will. Tardy and unseasonable witness! What they show by that is rather that they love their husbands only when they are dead.

^[B] Life is full of fireworks; death ·is full· of love and courtesy. Just as fathers hide their love for their children, so do wives hide theirs for their husbands, so as to maintain a decent respect. This ritual is not to my taste! It is no good their tearing their hair and clawing their faces; I go straight to the ear of a chambermaid or a secretary, 'How did they get on? What were they like when living together?' It always reminds me of that good remark: 'They wail most ostentatiously who grieve least' [Tacitus]. Their glum looks are

odious to the living and useless to the dead. We husbands will cheerfully let them laugh afterwards if they will only laugh with us while we are alive.

[C] If she who spat in my face while I existed comes to massage my feet now that I do not, isn't that enough to make one return from the dead out of vexation? [B] If there is some honour in weeping for husbands, it belongs only to those who have smiled upon theirs; let those who wept when their husbands were alive smile—outwardly as well as inwardly—when they are dead.

So take no notice of those moist eyes and that piteous voice; attend to that bearing, that colouring, the plumpness of those cheeks under those great veils; it is by those that she speaks plain French! There are few widows who do not improve in health, a quality that cannot lie. . . .

So as not to be totally out of step with our usage, I have chosen three wives who on the death of their husbands employed the force of their goodness and affection. But in these the affection is a little different from today's examples; it is so urgent that it leads to a bold sacrifice of life.

·1. A WOMAN (NO NAME GIVEN) 'OF LOW ESTATE'·

[A] The younger Pliny had a neighbour near a house of his in Italy who was appallingly tormented by ulcers that formed on his genitals. His wife seeing him languishing for so long begged him to allow her to examine—very closely, and not hurrying—the state of his malady, and then to tell him, more frankly than anyone else would, what he could expect from it. She obtained this permission, and carefully examined him; she found that it was impossible for him to be cured and that all he could expect was to drag out for a long time a painful and lingering life. So she advised him, as the most sure and sovereign remedy, to kill himself. Finding him a little soft for such a stern measure, she said:

'Do not think, my dear, that the pains I see you suffer do not affect me as much as you, and that I am unwilling to deliver myself from them by taking this medicine that I am prescribing for you. I want to accompany you in the cure as I have in the illness; put aside this fear and think that we shall have only pleasure in this passage that is to free us from such torments. We shall go away happily together.'

Having said this and warmed up her husband's courage, she resolved that they should throw themselves into the sea from a window in their house that opened onto it. And to maintain to her end that loyal and vehement love with which she had embraced him in life, she also wanted him to die in her arms; but fearing that those arms might fail her and that the clasp of her embrace might be loosened by the fall and by fear, she had herself tied to him, tightly bound by their waists. And thus she gave up her life for the repose of her husband's.

This woman was of low estate; among people of that condition it is not so novel to find some sign of rare goodness: 'When Justice finally left this earth, it took its last steps through them' [Virgil]. The other two are noble and rich; examples of virtue rarely lodge among people like that.

·2. ARRIA: *Paete non dolet*·

Arria was the wife of Caecina Paetus, a great man of consular rank. . . . When her husband had been taken prisoner by the Emperor Claudius's men after the defeat of Scribonianus, whose faction he had supported, begged the men who were taking him as a prisoner to Rome to allow her onto their ship, where she would be much less expense and trouble to them than the many people they would need to look after her husband, since she alone would take care of his room, his cooking and all other chores. They refused her this; so she hired a fisherman's boat on the spot, jumped into it, and

used it to follow her husband from Sclavonia.

One day in Rome in the presence of the Emperor she was familiarly approached by Junia, the widow of Scribonianus, because of their shared misfortunes; but she roughly thrust her away with these words: 'Should I even talk to you or listen to you when Scribonianus has died in your lap and you are still alive?' These words and several other signs made her relatives realise that, unable to endure her husband's misfortune, she aimed to do away with herself. Her son-in-law Thrasea begged her not to want to kill herself, saying: 'What? If I incurred a similar misfortune to Caecina's, would you want my wife, your daughter, to do likewise?' 'What! Would I?' she replied. 'Yes, yes, I would, if she had lived as long and in as good accord with you as I have with my husband.' Such answers increased their concern about her and led to their watching her behaviour more closely.

[After an account of a suicide attempt in which she failed:] The end of so admirable a virtue was this: Since her husband Paetus did not have, unaided, a firm enough heart to kill himself as the Emperor's cruelty required him to do, one day she used the appropriate arguments and exhortations to support her advice to him that he should do this, and then she seized the dagger her husband was wearing, and holding it drawn in her hand she concluded her exhortation thus: 'Do this, Paetus', and at that same instant, having struck herself a mortal blow in the stomach, she wrenched the dagger from her wound and offered it to him, ending her life as she did so with these noble, great-souled, immortal words *Paete, non dolet*. All she had time to utter were those three words with such a beautiful substance: 'You see, Paetus: it didn't hurt me.' . . .

Pætus at once struck himself through with that same blade, ashamed, in my opinion, at having needed so dear and precious a lesson.

·3. POMPEIA PAULINA·

Pompeia Paulina, a young and very noble Roman lady, had married Seneca in his extreme old age. Nero, that fine pupil of his, sent messengers to him to announce that he was sentenced to death.

(Such sentences were carried out in this way: when the Roman emperors of that time had condemned any man of rank, they dispatched their officials to tell him to select some death at his choice and to carry it out within such time as they prescribed, shorter or longer depending on the intensity of their anger; giving him time to put his affairs in order, or sometimes depriving him of the means to do that by the shortness of the time. If the condemned person resisted their command, they brought in suitable men to carry it out, either by slashing the veins in his arms and legs or forcing him to swallow poison. But men of honour did not wait for such compulsion, and used their own doctors and surgeons to do the deed.)

Seneca heard their charge with a peaceful and resolute countenance, then asked for paper to write his will; when that was refused by the captain, Seneca turned towards his friends and said: 'Since I can leave you nothing else out of gratitude for what I owe you, I shall at least leave you the finest thing I have, namely the picture of my *moeurs* [see Glossary] and of my life, which I beg you to preserve in your memory; so that by doing so you will acquire the glory of true and sincere friends.' At the same time with gentle words he quietened the bitter anguish he saw they were suffering, sometimes hardening his voice to rebuke them for it: 'Where are those fine precepts of philosophy? What has become of those provisions against the accidents of fortune that we have been laying up over so many years? Did we not know of Nero's cruelty? What could we expect from a man who killed

his mother and his brother, if not that he would also put to death his tutor who educated him and brought him up?’

Having spoken these words to them all, he turned to his wife and—embracing her tightly, as her heart and strength were yielding under the weight of her grief—begged her to bear this event a little more patiently for love of him, and said that the time had come for him to show the fruit of his studies not by arguments and discussions but by action, and that he really embraced death not only without sorrow but cheerfully. ‘So do not dishonour it with your tears, my dear,’ he said, ‘lest it should seem that you love yourself more than my reputation. Appease your sorrow and console yourself with the knowledge you have had of me and of my actions, spending the rest of your life in those honourable occupations you are devoted to.’

To this Paulina, having somewhat recovered her spirits and rekindled the magnanimity of her heart by a very noble affection, replied: ‘No, Seneca. I am not one to leave you companionless in such great need. I do not want you to think that the virtuous examples of your life have not yet taught me how die well; and when could I ever die better, or more honourably, or more as I would wish to, than with you? So be assured that I shall go along with you.’ Then Seneca, welcoming such a fine and glorious resolve by his wife, and also to rid himself of his fear of leaving her to the tender mercies of his cruel enemies after his death, replied: ‘I once advised you, Paulina, about what would let you live your life contentedly, but now you prefer the honour of death. Truly I will not begrudge you that. The constancy and resolution of our common end may be equal; but the beauty and the glory are greater on your side.’

That done, they both together had the veins in their arms cut. [Now half a page about how much time and trouble it took to procure Seneca’s death.]

Nero, informed of all this, fearing that he might be blamed for the death of Paulina—who was one of the best-connected Roman ladies, and for whom he had no particular enmity—sent with all speed to have her wounds bandaged, which her people did, without her knowledge because she was already half-dead and unconscious. And so against her own design she lived on, most honourably and as befitted her virtue, showing by the pallor of her face how much life had flowed out of her wounds.

There are my three very true stories, which I find as entertaining and as tragic as the ones we make up at will to give pleasure to the public. I am amazed that those who engage in that business do not instead choose some of the ten thousand fine historical accounts to be found in books, which would give them less trouble and would bring more pleasure and profit. Anyone who wanted to construct a single interconnected unity out of these ‘bricks’ would need to provide from his own resources only the mortar—like solder between bits of metal. In this way he could bring together many genuine events of all sorts, arranging and diversifying them as the beauty of the work required, somewhat as Ovid sewed and pieced together his *Metamorphoses* out of a great number of varied fables.

In regard to the last couple, it is also worth pondering on the fact that •Paulina willingly offers to give up living for love of her husband, and that •her husband had once given up dying for love of her. [The final page of the essay tells the story of Seneca’s taking more care of his health because Paulina urged him to so do, and quotes from a letter of his about this, including: ‘Sometimes we should •lend ourselves to our friends and when we would like to die for ourselves •break off our plans on their account’; also, more cheerfully, ‘What can be more delightful than to be so dear to your wife that you become dearer to yourself for her sake?’]

36. The most excellent of men

[A] If I were asked my pick of all the men who have come to my knowledge, I find three who seem to excel all others.

·1. HOMER·

One is Homer. It may be that Aristotle or Varro (for example) are as learned as he. And perhaps Virgil is comparable to him even as an artist; I leave that to be judged by those who know both. I who know only one—my Greek not being good enough for me to appreciate Homer's poetry properly—can only say that as far as I can tell the Muses themselves could not surpass the Roman poet: [B] 'On his learned lyre he sings verses such as Cynthian Apollo chants when he attunes his strings to his plucking fingers' [Propertius]. [A] However in making this judgement one should not forget that it is chiefly from Homer, his guide and his schoolmaster, that Virgil derives his ability, or that one single incident in the *Iliad*

what comes next: *a fourny de corps et de matiere*

literally meaning: provided body and matter

the distinction that this involves: ??

for that great and divine *Aeneid*. That is not the way I reckon; I bring in several other circumstances that make this personage admirable to me, almost as though he were above the human condition. And in truth I am often astonished that he who created many deities and got people to believe in them by his authority has not himself gained the rank of a god. Being blind and poor, living before the sciences were reduced to rules and certain observations, he knew them so well that those who have since taken it upon themselves to establish governments, to conduct wars, or to write on religion or philosophy. . . .or about the arts have used him

as their master, most perfect in the knowledge of all things, and his books as a seed-bed for every kind of competence:

'Better and more fully than Chrysippus and Crantor he says what is beautiful, what is ugly, what is profitable, what is not' [Horace].

'From whose perennial spring the poets come to wet their lips in the Pierian waters' [Ovid].

'To these add the companions of the Muses, of whom Homer alone was made into a star' [Lucretius].

'From whose abundant source all posterity have drawn their songs, dividing his one river into their many rivulets, each poet rich in the wealth of one single man' [Manilius].

In creating the most excellent work there can be, he went against the order of nature; for ordinarily things at birth are imperfect; they gain in size and strength as they grow. He made the infancy of poetry and of several other arts to be mature, perfect, and accomplished. That is why he can be, as he was, called 'the first and the last of poets'. Before him there was no-one he could imitate, and after him there was no-one who could imitate him. According to Aristotle, his words are the only ones that have movement and action; they are the only substantial words.

When Alexander the Great came across a rich coffer among the spoils of Darius, he commanded that it be set aside for him to keep his copy of Homer in, saying that he was the best and most faithful counsellor he had in his military affairs. For the same reason Cleomenes, son of Anaxandridas, said that Homer was the poet of the Spartans, because he was a very good master in the military art. This singular and particular tribute to him has also come down to us: Plutarch's judgement that he is the only author in the world who has never bored or disgusted men, always showing himself to his readers as something different, always

flourishing in new grace. . . . Xenophanes was complaining one day to Hiero, the tyrant of Syracuse, that he was so poor that he could not afford to feed two servants: 'What!', he replied: 'Homer who was far poorer than you feeds more than ten thousand of them, dead though he is.' ^[C] And when Panaetius called Plato 'the Homer of philosophers', what more was there to say?

^[A] In addition to that, what *glory* can be compared with his? There is nothing so alive in the mouths of men as his name and his works; nothing so well known and accepted as Troy, Helen, and his wars, which perhaps never existed. Our children are still given names that he invented over three thousand years ago. Who does not know Hector and Achilles? Not only certain individual families but most *nations* seek their origins in his inventions. The Turkish Emperor Mahomet II, writing to our Pope Pius II, says: 'I am amazed that the Italians should band against me, seeing that we both have a common origin in the Trojans and that I, like the Italians, have an interest in avenging the blood of Hector on the Greeks, whom they are supporting against me.' Isn't it a noble *farce* in which kings, commonwealths and emperors keep playing their parts through so many centuries, with this great universe serving as the theatre?

Seven towns of Greece—Smyrna, Rhodes, Colophon, Salamis, Chios, Argos and Athens—squabbled over his birthplace, so much honour did his very obscurity bring him.

·2. ALEXANDER THE GREAT·

Another is Alexander the Great. For **anyone who considers**

- the age at which he started his enterprises;
- the meagre resources with which he achieved such glorious design;
- the authority he gained as a boy over the greatest and most

experienced captains in the world, who followed him;

- the extraordinary favour with which fortune embraced him and favoured his hazardous—I almost said rash—exploits;. . .

- his greatness in having passed victorious through all this inhabitable earth by the age of 33, and ^[B] having attained in half a lifetime the utmost achievement of human nature, so that you cannot imagine him living the normal span and continuing throughout it to grow in valour and fortune without imagining something superhuman;

^[A] •his making so many royal branches sprout from among his soldiers, leaving the world divided at his death among his four successors—mere generals in his armies whose descendants remained for so long in control of those great possessions;

- so many excellent virtues in him, ^[B] justice, temperance, liberality, faithfulness to his word, love for his people, humaneness towards the vanquished ^[A] for his *moeurs* seem to have been flawless, ^[B] though some of his individual actions—rare and untypical ones—were not

(but it is impossible to conduct such great movements according to the rules of justice; such men have to be judged overall, by the dominant aim of their actions; it is rather hard to excuse such outbursts as his destruction of Thebes and the murders of Menander, of Hephaestion's doctor, of so many Persian prisoners at one stroke, of a troop of Indian soldiers (breaking his word), and of the Cosseians, right down to their little children; but in the case of Cleitus [whom he killed in a drunken quarrel] he made amends beyond the gravity of the offence; and that action as much as any other testifies to a generous character, a character excellently formed for goodness; ^[C] it was ingeniously said of him that he had his virtues from nature, his

vices from fortune; ^[B] as for the fact that he was a bit boastful, a bit too impatient of hearing ill said of himself, and that he scattered his mangers, weapons and bridles all over India, it seems to me that all these things might be pardoned in the light of his age and the remarkable prosperity of his fortune);

- so many military virtues that he had—diligence, foresight, endurance, self-discipline, subtlety, magnanimity, resolution, good fortune—in which he was the first among men (even if Hannibal had not taught us this);

- ^[A] the rare beauty and endowments of his person, downright miraculous;

- ^[B] his way of carrying himself, and that venerable bearing his beneath a face so young, ruddy, and radiant—'Shining like the morning star that Venus loves above all others when, bathed in Ocean's waves, it raises up its sacred face in the heavens and drives away the darkness' [Virgil];

- ^[A] the excellence of his learning and his capacities;

- how great and long-lasting his glory was—pure, clean, and free from spot or envy;

- ^[B] the fact that long after his death it was a matter of religious belief to hold that his medallions brought good luck to those who wore them;

- the fact that more kings and princes have written of his exploits than other historians have written of the exploits of any king or prince whatever;

- ^[C] the fact that even today the Mahometans, who despise all other biographies, honour his by a special dispensation;

—^[A] **anyone who considers** all that, taken together, will admit that I was right to prefer him even to Caesar, who alone was able to make me hesitate over my choice. ^[B] It cannot

be denied that Caesar's exploits owe more to Caesar, while Alexander's owe more to fortune. ^[A] In many things they were equal; Caesar may even have been greater in a few.

^[B] They were two fires, or two torrents, ravaging the world in various places: 'Like two forest-fires raging in different parts of a forest of laurel trees full of crackling twigs; or like two foaming torrents rushing down the mountain-sides with a roar, charging across the plains, sweeping everything before them' [Virgil]. But even if Caesar's ambition was more moderate in itself, it was so disastrous—coalescing with something abominable, the collapse of his country and the worsening of the entire world—that ^[A] when all is put together and weighed in the balance I cannot help coming down on the side of Alexander.

·3. EPAMINONDAS·

The third, and I think the most excellent, is Epaminondas.

Of glory he has nowhere near as much as others (nor is it part of the substance of the thing¹); of resolution and valour—not the kind that is sharpened by ambition but the kind that wisdom and reason can implant in a well-ordered soul—he had all that can be imagined. He has given as much evidence of this virtue, in my opinion, as Alexander himself and as Caesar; for though his exploits in war are not so frequent or so grand, they are nevertheless, if considered thoroughly and in all their circumstances, as important and as vigorous ·as those of the other two·, and provide as much evidence of boldness and military skill. The Greeks did him the honour of unanimously naming him the first man among them; and to be first among the Greeks is to be easily the best in the world.

As for his knowledge and ability, this ancient verdict has

¹ He means that someone's glory is not an intrinsic property of him but rather a relation between him and other people, comparable with indebtedness (say) rather than with height or intelligence.

come down to us, that never did a man know as much or speak as little as he did. [C] For he belonged to the Pythagorean sect. And what he did say, no-one ever said better; an excellent orator and very persuasive.

[A] But as for his *moeurs* and conscience, he far surpassed all those who have ever engaged in the affairs of state; for in that aspect—which must principally be considered, [C] and which alone truly reveals what we are and which for me outweighs all the other qualities put together—[A] he yields to no philosopher, not even to Socrates.

[B] In this man innocence is a key quality, sovereign, constant, steady, incorruptible. In comparison, it appears in Alexander as subordinate, uncertain, spasmodic, weak and subject to chance.

[C] Antiquity judged that if one studies minutely all the other captains, each will be found to have some special quality that makes him illustrious; whereas in Epaminondas—and in him alone—there is a virtue and competence, full and equal throughout, that leaves nothing to be desired in any of the functions of human life, whether in public or private occupations, in peace or in war, whether in living or in dying greatly and gloriously. I know of no man's form or fortune that I can regard with such honour and love.

It is quite true that I find his stubbornly persisting in poverty, as depicted by his best friends, somewhat over-scrupulous. And that conduct alone, though lofty and most admirable, is rather too sour, I feel, for me even to *want to want* to imitate his form of it.

[Now a brief interlude about two other men Montaigne admired, Scipio Aemilianus and Alcibiades.]

But as for Epaminondas, [A] I want to cite here a few of his opinions, to provide an example of his excellent goodness.

[B] The sweetest contentment he had in all his life, he testified, was the pleasure he gave his father and mother by his victory at Leuctra. It says a lot that he should put their pleasure ahead of his own full and rightful pleasure in such a glorious battle.

[A] He did not think it was permissible, even to restore freedom to his country, to kill a man without knowing the case against him, which is why he was so cool towards the project of his companion Pelopidas for the deliverance of Thebes by assassinating Theban politicians who favoured Sparta. He also held that in battle one should avoid encountering a friend who was on the opposing side, and should spare him.

[C] And when his humaneness, even towards his enemies, had made him suspect to the Boeotians—

because 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 was content to strike straight through their middle without hounding them to death

—he was deposed from his rank of commander-in-chief. To be dismissed for such a cause did him much honour, as did their their shame in *having to* reinstate him in his rank and to admit how much their glory and their safety depended on him, victory following him like a shadow wherever he led. His country's prosperity died as it had been born: with him.

37. Health and the medical profession¹

[A] This jumble of so many disparate pieces is made in the following way. I set my hand to it only when pressed to do so by too lax an idleness, and only when I am at home. So it is assembled irregularly, with interruptions, because occasions

¹ The relevance of Montaigne's title for this essay, 'The resemblance of children to fathers', starts at ■ on page 120 and fades away quite quickly.

sometimes keep me away for several months. Moreover, I do not correct my first thoughts by second ones—^[C] well, yes, perhaps the odd word, but to vary it, not to remove it. ^[A] I want to show my humours as they develop, revealing each element at its birth. I wish I had begun earlier, and studied more closely the course of the changes I have undergone. . . .

·MONTAIGNE'S CHRONIC PAINFUL ILLNESS·

I am seven or eight years older than when I began these essays—not without some new acquisition. Those years have generously introduced me to colic [see Glossary]; familiarity and long acquaintance with the years do not readily pass without some such benefit! I could wish that, of all the gifts they have for those who spend a long time in their company, the years had chosen one more acceptable to me; for they could not have given me one that I have held in greater horror ever since childhood. Of all the misfortunes of old age that was precisely the one I feared most. I often thought to myself that I was going too far [i.e. living too long], and that on such a long road I was sure to be caught up in some nasty encounter. I thought—and often enough *said*—that it was time to leave, and that life should be cut off at the point where it is alive and healthy, following the surgeons' rule when they have to amputate a limb. ^[C] And that anyone who does not repay his debt to nature on time usually find that it exacts a stiff rate of interest.

^[A] But I was so far from being ready to take the step then that after about eighteen months in this unpleasant state I have already learned to adapt myself to it. I have made a compact with this colicky life; I find in it material for consolation and hope. Men are so wedded to their wretched existence that there is no condition so harsh that they won't accept it to stay alive.

^[C] Listen to Maecenas: 'Make me lame in my hand, lame

in foot and thigh, shake out my loosened teeth; while life remains, all is well' [quoted by Seneca]. And Tamberlane threw a cloak of humaneness over his astonishing cruelty to lepers, having all that came to his knowledge put to death—in order, he said, to free them from the painful life they were living. This was stupid, because there was not one of them who would not rather have been thrice a leper than not exist.

And when Antisthenes the Stoic was very sick he cried out 'What will free me from these evils?' Diogenes, who had come to see him, offered him a knife and said 'This, if you wish, very quickly.' 'I do not say from life', he replied, 'I say from evils.'

^[A] The sufferings that affect us simply through the soul afflict me much less than they do most other men. Partly through judgement, for the majority think many things to be horrible, or to be avoided at the cost of life, that hardly matter to me at all. Partly because of my stolidly unfeeling attitude to accidents that do not come at me head on, a temperament that I regard as one of the best parts of my natural condition. But I feel very keenly the really essential *bodily* sufferings. Yet in other days when I used to foresee them through a vision that was weak, delicate, and softened by the enjoyment of that long and blessed health and repose that God has lent me for the better part of my life, I imagined them as so unbearable that in truth I had more *fear of* them than I have found *pain in* them; which strengthens my ever-growing belief that most of the faculties of our soul, ^[C] as we employ them, ^[A] disturb our life's repose more than they serve it.

I am grappling with the worst of all maladies, the most sudden ·in its onset·, the most painful, the most fatal and the most incurable. I have already experienced five or six very long and painful bouts of it. However, either I flatter myself or else even in this condition there is enough to bear a man

up if his soul is free of the burden of the fear of dying and the burden of all the threats, diagnoses and prognoses that medicine [here = 'the medical profession'] stuffs into our heads. The pain itself is not so shrill, harsh and stabbing as to drive a well-poised man to madness and despair. I get at least this profit from my colic: whatever I had not yet been able, unaided, to do to reconcile myself completely to death and familiarise myself with it, will be brought to completion by the colic; for the more it presses me and troubles me, the less will death be something to fear. I had already achieved this much: to hold to life only for what life has to offer; my illness will undo even this compact; and God grant that at the end, if the harsh pain finally overcomes my strength it does not drive me to the other extreme (no less wrong) of loving and desiring to die. 'Fear not the final day, nor wish for it' [Martial]. Those are two passions to be feared, but one has its remedy much nearer at hand than the other.

·BEARING UP UNDER PAIN·

And another thing: I have always regarded as *ceremonieux* [here = 'a mere contribution to etiquette'] that precept which so rigorously and precisely requires that pain be endured with a good countenance and a disdainful and composed bearing. Why does philosophy, which has regard only for a person's core and his actions, waste time on these external appearances? [C] Let it leave this concern to the clowns and teachers of rhetoric, who set so much store by our gestures! Let philosophy boldly grant to pain this cowardice in the voice, provided it is neither in heart or in the stomach, and classify these voluntary complaints with the sighs, sobs, tremblings and pallors that nature has placed beyond our control. Provided the heart is without fear, the words without despair, let it be content! What does it matter if we twist our arms, provided we do not twist our thoughts? It trains us for

ourselves, not for others; for being, not for seeming. [A] Let philosophy confine itself to governing our understanding, which it has undertaken to instruct. In the attacks of colic, let it preserve the soul's ability to know itself, to follow its accustomed path; fighting the pain and bearing it, not shamelessly grovelling at its feet; stirred and aroused for battle, not subdued and overthrown; [C] capable to some extent of conversation and of other occupations.

[A] In such extreme misfortunes it is cruelty to require of us so composed a bearing. If we play a good game, it matters little if we make a bad face. If the body finds relief in complaining let it do so; if it likes agitation, let it tumble and toss at its pleasure; if it thinks that forcing out violent cries can somewhat evaporate the pain (as some doctors say it helps pregnant women in their deliveries), or if that distracts it from the torment, just let it shout out. . . . We have enough work dealing with the pain, without working to obey these superfluous rules.

I say this to excuse those whom we commonly see thrown into turmoil by the shocks and assaults of this illness; ·not to excuse myself·, for I have so far been through it with a slightly better countenance, and have been content to groan without roaring. Not that I take any trouble to maintain this external decorum, for I do not think much of such an achievement. In this respect, I concede whatever my illness demands; but either my pains are not so excessive or I bring to them more firmness than most. I complain, I fret, when the stabbing pains afflict me, but I do not come to despair. . . .

[C] When the illness is at its worst, I test myself, and have always found myself capable of talking, thinking and replying as correctly as at any other time, but not as steadily because I am troubled and distracted by the pain. Often when I am thought to be most stricken and those around me are sparing me, I test my powers by applying them to topics

that are utterly remote from my condition. I can bring off anything with a sudden effort; but do not ask it to last long!

If only I were like that dreamer in Cicero who dreamed he had a wench in his arms and found that he had discharged his stone in the sheets! Mine utterly unwench me. [For 'stone', see 'colic' in the glossary.]

[A] In the intervals of this excessive pain, [C] when my ureters are sick but are not eating into me, [A] I return at once to my accustomed form, since my soul takes no alarm except what comes from the senses and the body. I certainly owe *that* to the care I have taken to prepare myself by reason for such accidents: [B] 'No toils present themselves new or unforeseen: I have seen them coming and been through them already in my mind' [Virgil].

[A] I am tested, however, pretty roughly for a beginner, by a very sudden and very rough change, having fallen all at once from a most gentle and happy condition of life into the most painful and grievous one imaginable. This is an illness to be dreaded on its own account, but my attacks of it are much sharper and harder than most people's. They recur so often that I hardly feel perfect health any more. Yet up to now I have kept my mind in such a state that, provided I can hold to it, I find myself in a considerably better condition of life than a thousand others who have no fever or illness but what they inflict on themselves by faulty reasoning.

·HEREDITY·

■ There is a certain kind of subtle humility that is born of presumption. This for instance: we acknowledge our ignorance of many things, and are polite enough to confess that the works of nature have some qualities and conditions that are imperceptible and whose means and causes we are not equipped to discover. We hope that this honest and conscientious declaration will lead to our being believed

concerning things that we do claim to understand. ·Yet· we have no need select miracles and remote difficulties; it seems to me that among the things we see quite regularly there are wonders so incomprehensible that they surpass all that is problematic in miracles.

What a prodigious thing it is that the drop of semen that brings us forth bears in itself the impressions not only of our fathers' bodily form but of their thoughts and preferences! Where does that drop of fluid house this infinite number of forms? [B] And how do they convey these resemblances so randomly that the great-grandson will correspond to the great-grandfather, the nephew to the uncle? . . .

[A] I probably owe to my father this stony propensity, for he died dreadfully afflicted by a large stone in the bladder. He did not perceive his malady until he was 67; he had experienced no threat or symptom of it beforehand, in his loins or his sides or anywhere else. Until then he had lived in good health, very little subject to diseases; and he lasted another seven years with that affliction, painfully dragging out the last years of his life.

I was born more than twenty-five years before he fell ill, during his most vigorous period, the third of his children. Where was the propensity for this affliction hiding through all that time? And when his illness was so far off, how did that little piece of his own substance with which he made *me* carry such a strong impression of it? And how was it so hidden that I started to feel it forty-five years later—so far the only one to do so out of so many brothers and sisters, all from the same mother? If anyone will enlighten me about this process, I will believe him about as many other miracles as he likes; provided that he does not palm off on me (as they do) some explanation that is more difficult and fantastic than the thing itself.

·HOSTILITY TO THE MEDICAL PROFESSION·

Doctors will have to pardon my liberty a bit ·when I mention· my loathing and contempt for their teachings, which I received through that same fatal [see Glossary] ejaculation and penetration. This antipathy I have for their art is hereditary in me. My father lived to 74, my grandfather to 69, my great-grandfather to nearly 80, without having tasted any sort of medicine. Among them, anything that was not in ordinary use counted as a drug.

·The art of· medicine is built from examples and experience; so is my opinion. Have I not just cited a very definite experience that strongly supports me? I doubt if the annals of medicine can provide an example of three generations born, bred and dying at the same hearth, under the same roof, who lived for that long under doctors' orders. They should grant me that if reason does not support me at least fortune does; and, well, for doctors fortune is more valuable than reason!

Let them not take advantage of me now, or threaten me after I have been struck down: that would be unfair. The fact is that I have won a solid victory over them with the examples from my family, even if it stops with them. Human affairs do not have so much constancy; it is only eighteen years short of two centuries that this test of ours has lasted, for the first of them was born in the year 1402. It is truly quite normal that this experiment should begin to run out on us. Let them not hold against me the infirmities that have a stranglehold on me now; is it not enough that I stayed healthy for forty-seven years? Even if this is the end of my career, it is one of the longer ones.

Some unexplained natural inclination gave my forebears an aversion to medicine; for the mere sight of drugs filled my father with horror. The seigneur de Gaviac was an uncle of mine on my father's side; he was in holy orders, sickly from

birth, but made that frail life last till he was 67. He once fell victim to a great and violent continual fever [see Glossary]; the doctors ordered that he be informed that if he did not call in aid (what they call 'help' ' is more often harm), he would certainly be dead. Terrified though he was by this horrible sentence, the good man replied 'Then I am dead'; but soon afterwards God made this prognosis vain.

^[B] I had four brothers; the youngest, born long after the others, was the sieur de Bussaguet. He was the only one to submit to the art of medicine, doing so I think because of his dealings with the other arts (he was counsellor in the court of Parlement). It turned out so badly for him that, despite apparently having a stronger constitution, he died long before the others with the sole exception of the sieur de Saint-Michel.

·THE HOSTILITY IS NOT WHOLLY INHERITED·

^[A] It is possible that I inherited from my ancestors this natural aversion to medicine, but if that had been the whole story I would have tried to overcome it. For all those predispositions that arise in us without reasons are bad; they are a kind of disease that ought to be fought against. I may have inherited this disposition, but I have supported and strengthened it by reasoned arguments, which are the basis for my opinion about this matter. For I also hate the idea of refusing medicine because of the bitterness of its taste. That would hardly be like me—I consider health to be worth purchasing by all the most painful cauteries and incisions that can be made. ^[C] And following Epicurus it seems to me that sensual pleasures are to be avoided if they result in greater pains, and pains are to be welcomed if they result in greater pleasures.

^[A] Health is a precious thing; and the only one, in truth, that merits our devoting to its pursuit not only time, sweat, toil and wealth but even life itself; for without it life becomes

oppressive to us—pleasure, wisdom, scholarship and virtue lose their lustre and fade away. To the strongest and most rigorous arguments that philosophy tries to impress on us to the contrary we have only to oppose the picture of Plato being struck down by epilepsy or apoplexy, and on this supposition challenge him to get help from the rich faculties of his soul.

For me, no road leading to health can be called arduous or expensive. But I have certain other notions that make me extremely suspicious of all this merchandise. I do not deny that there may be some art in it, that among so many works of nature there are things suited to the preservation of our health—there certainly are. ^[B] I quite understand that there is some simple that moistens, some other that dries; I know from experience that horseradish produces flatulence and that senna leaves loosen the bowels; and I know many other things from experience, such as that mutton nourishes me and wine warms me. (Solon used to say that eating was like other remedies: it was a cure for a disease called hunger.) I do not reject practices drawn from the ·natural· world; I am confident of the power and fertility of nature and of its applicability to our needs. I see quite well that nature does well by pikes and swallows. What I am suspicious of are the inventions of our minds, of our science and art, in favour of which we have abandoned nature and its rules, and on which we are unable to impose moderation or limits.

·MEDICINE—IDEAL V. ACTUAL, AND NATURAL V. ARTIFICIAL·

^[C] Just as we call ‘justice’ the hodgepodge of laws that first fall into our hands, dispensed and applied often very ineptly and iniquitously; and just as those who mock and revile it are not maligning that noble virtue [justice] but only condemning the abuse and profanation of that sacred title [‘justice’]; so also with ‘medicine’, I honour that glorious name, its purpose, its promise, so useful to the human race; but what it designates

among us I neither honour nor esteem.

^[A] In the first place, experience makes me fear it; for as far as my knowledge goes, I see no group of people whose illnesses are as early, and whose cures are as late, as those who are under the jurisdiction of medicine. The constraints of their regimens [see Glossary] actually impair and corrupt their health. Not content with having control over sickness, the doctors turn health into sickness, so as to prevent the patient from ever escaping their jurisdiction. From constant perfectly good health don’t they derive an argument for a great illness to come?

I have been ill often enough, and without their help I have found my illnesses (and I have experienced virtually every sort) as easy to bear and as brief as anyone else’s. . . . My health is free and complete, with no rule or discipline except my habits and my pleasure. Any place is good for me to stop at ·when travelling·, because I need no more conveniences when I am ill than when I am well. I am not upset at being without a doctor, without an apothecary, and without help—which I see afflict most people more than the illness itself. Why, do doctors have such long and happy lives that they are clear evidence for the effectiveness of their discipline?

There is no nation that has not been without medicine for many centuries—and those were the first centuries, i.e. the best and the happiest ones—and even today a tenth of the world makes no use of it. Countless nations have no knowledge of it, and live more healthily than we do here, and longer. And among us the common folk manage happily without it. The Romans existed for six hundred years before accepting it; then after a trial they drove it out of their city through the intervention of Cato the Censor, who showed how easily he could do without it, having lived to be 85 himself and keeping his wife to an extreme old

age—not without medicine [*sans medecine*] but without medical practitioners [*sans medecin*], for everything that is found to be healthful for our life can be called ‘medicine’. [Then some details regarding natural remedies variously employed by Cato, the ancient Arcadians and Libyans, and Montaigne’s contemporaries in the villages in his vicinity.]

And truly of all that diversity and confusion of prescriptions what other purpose and result is there after all than to empty the bowels, which many homely simples can do?

^[B] And I do not know whether this is as beneficial as they say, and whether our nature does not need, to a certain extent, the presence of its excrements, just as wine needs its lees for its preservation. You often see healthy men having attacks of vomiting or diarrhoea from some external cause, evacuating a great deal of stuff without any prior need or subsequent benefit—indeed with impairment and damage. ^[C] It is from the great Plato that I recently learned that of the three sorts of movements we can undergo the last and the worst is that of purgations, which only a fool would undertake except in extreme necessity. The disease is disturbed and activated by being attacked head on. It should be gently weakened and brought to its end by the ‘patient’s’ way of life. The violent struggles between the drug and the disease are always at our expense, since the quarrel is fought out inside us, and the drug is an unreliable support, by its nature an enemy to our health and having access to our constitution only through disturbance.

·LETTING THE ORDER OF NATURE TAKE THE LEAD·

Let us let go a little; the **order** that provides for fleas and moles also provides for men who, like the fleas and moles, allow themselves to be governed by it. Shouting *Giddyup!* is pointless: it will make our throats sore but won’t move anything along. It is a proud and un pitying order. Our fear

and despair disgust it and slow it down in coming to our aid. It is obliged to let disease, as well as health, run its course. It will not be bribed to favour one at the expense of the rights of the other, for then it would fall into **disorder**. Let us follow, for God’s sake, let us follow! It *leads* those who follow; as for those who do not follow it, it *drags* them along, and their rage and their medicine too. ·To them I say· order a purge for your brain; it will be better employed there than in your stomach. . . .

·A TIRADE AGAINST THE MEDICAL PROFESSION·

^[A] ·Returning to the topic of medical practitioners·: They they have this luck, ^[B] according to Nicocles, ^[A] that the sun shines on their successes and the earth hides their failures. In addition to which they have a very convenient way of turning all sorts of outcomes to their own advantage; for medicine has the privilege of taking the credit for every improvement or cure (and the number of those is infinite) brought about by fortune, nature or some other extraneous cause in a patient who is under doctors’ orders. The factors that have cured me, and cure a thousand others who do not call in medical help, the doctors *usurp* in the case of their patients. And when things go wrong, either **(i)** they disclaim responsibility by blaming the mishap on the patient, for reasons so feeble that they need never fear running out of them: ‘he bared his arm’, ‘he heard the noise of a coach’, ‘someone opened his window’, ‘he has been lying on his left side’, ‘he let some painful thought run through his head’—in short a word, a dream, a glance, strike them as sufficient to clear them from blame; or **(ii)** they choose to take advantage of that set-back, advancing their business by another ploy that can never let them down: when the illness has been heated up by their treatment, they palm us off with the assurance that without their remedies it would have been even worse. They take

a man with a bad cold, turn it into a quotidian fever [see Glossary], then claim that without them it would have been a continual fever. They need not worry about doing their work badly, because the damage they do turns to their profit. They are certainly right to require their patients to favour them with their trust. It truly has to be trust—and a pliant trust too—to cling to notions so hard to believe.

[After a couple of pages of ancient quotations and anecdotes relating to this topic, ending with a scornful account of how doctors suggest ‘mystery and sorcery’ by their choice of ingredients for their medicines, ‘and similar apish trickery that looks more like magic spells than solid knowledge’, Montaigne continues sarcastically:] Where they went wrong after such a good start was in not making their assemblies and deliberations more religious and more secret: no outsider ought to have had access to them, any more than to the secret ceremonies of Aesculapius. The result of this error is that when their uncertainties and the weakness of their arguments, prognoses and premises, as well as the bitterness of their disagreements (full of hatred, jealousy and self-interest) have all been revealed to everybody, one would have to be *blind* not to feel at risk in their hands.

Who ever saw a doctor using a colleague’s prescription without cutting out or adding something? That gives their art away, and shows us that they are more concerned with their own reputation, and consequently their profit, than with the well-being of their patients. Wiser than them was the doctor [Mohammad Ibn Zakariya al-Razi, 865-925] who long ago decreed that each patient should be treated by only one doctor; for if he does no good, the failure of one man will be no great reproach to the art of medicine, whereas if he is lucky, the glory of this will be great. When many are involved, however, they discredit their trade at every turn, especially since they manage to do more harm than good. They should

have been content with the constant disagreement to be found among the opinions of the great masters and ancient authorities of this science, which only bookish men know about, without revealing to the public the controversies and inconsistencies of judgement that they foster and continue among themselves.

Do we want an example of medical disagreement among the ancients? [He cites idiosyncratic opinions of seven ancient doctors, four of them named again in the next paragraph. Then:] A friend of theirs whom they know better than I do [Pliny] exclaims in this connection that the most important science that we use, being the one in charge of our preservation and health, is unfortunately the most uncertain, the most unstable and the one shaken by the most changes. There is no great harm done if we miscalculate the height of the sun or the fractions in some astronomical computation; but here, where our whole being is at stake, it is not wise to abandon ourselves to the mercy of so many contrary gales.

·HISTORY OF THE UPS AND DOWNS OF MEDICINE·

Before the Peloponnesian War there was not much news of this science. Hippocrates brought it into repute; everything he had established was overturned by Chrysippus; then everything Chrysippus had written about it was overturned by Erasistratus, Aristotle’s grandson. After them came the Empirics, who adopted a completely different method from his predecessors in the handling of this art. When their reputation began to grow shaky, Hierophilus got a new kind of medicine accepted, which Asclepiades came to attack and annihilate in his turn. Then successively the opinions of Themison gained authority, then Musa’s, then later still those of Vexius Valens (the doctor famous for his closeness to Messalina). At the time of Nero, the empire of medicine fell to Thessalus, who abolished and condemned everything that

had been accepted before his time. His doctrine was struck down by Crinas of Massilia, who re-introduced the regulation of medical procedures by positions of heavenly bodies and movements of the stars, ·making men· eat, sleep and drink at the times when it would please the moon and Mercury for them to do so. His authority was soon supplanted by that of Charinus, also a doctor in Massilia; he fought not only against the old medicine but also against the centuries-old public institution of hot baths. He had men take cold baths even in winter, plunging the sick into streams of fresh water.

Up to Pliny's time no Roman had yet condescended to practise medicine; it was done by foreigners and Greeks, as among us French it is done by Latinisers. For, as a very great doctor has said, we do not easily accept *the medicine that we understand*, any more than ·we trust· *the drug that we gather*. If the countries from which we get guaiacum, sarsaparilla and chinaroot have doctors, just think how this same recommendation of foreignness, rarity and costliness must make them esteem our cabbages and our parsley! for who would dare to despise plants sought in such distant lands at the risk of such long and perilous journeys?

Since those medical upheavals among the ancients there have been countless others up to our own times, mostly complete and universal upheavals like those recently produced by Paracelsus, Fioravanti and Argenterius; for they change not merely one prescription but (I am told) the whole contexture and government of the medical corpus, accusing those who professed it before them of being ignorant charlatans. I leave you to think where that leaves the poor patient.

If we could only be sure that their mistakes did us no harm even if they did no good, it would be a reasonable bet to chance gaining something without putting oneself in danger of loss. ·But that is not how things stand·. ^[B] Aesop

tells how a man bought a Moorish slave and thought that his colour was incidental, brought on by ill-treatment from his former master; so he had him very carefully treated with many baths and beverages, with the result that the Moor was not cured of swarthinness but wholly lost his former health.

·MEDICINE IS IMPOSSIBLY DIFFICULT·

^[A] How often do we see doctors blaming each other for the deaths of their patients! I remember a very dangerous and mortal epidemic in the towns in my neighbourhood a few years ago. When this storm was over, having swept away countless people, one of the best-known doctors in the whole region published a booklet on the subject, in which he regrets their having used bloodletting and confesses that that was one of the principal sources of the harm that was done. Moreover, medical authors hold that there is no medicine that doesn't have something harmful in it. If even the ones that help us also harm us somewhat, what must be the effect of the ones that are applied to us entirely inappropriately? . . .

[This paragraph is a sarcastic account of how difficult medical practice must be, given the doctors' own accounts of what is involved in it.] Now, if the doctor's mistake is dangerous, we are in a very bad way, for he will probably often fall into it again. To shape up his treatment correctly, he needs too many details, considerations, and circumstances. He must know the **patient's** constitution, his temperament, his humours, his inclinations, his actions, even his thoughts and his fancies. He must be responsive to **external circumstances**, the nature of the locality, the condition of the air and the weather, the position of the planets and their influences. In the **disease** he must know the causes, the symptoms, the effects, the critical days. Regarding the **drug** he needs to know the dosage, the strength, the country of origin, the appearance, the age, the way of dispensing it. And he must know how to combine

those elements in the right proportions so as to produce a perfect balance. If he gets any one of them ever so slightly wrong, if among so many springs there is a single one that that pulls askew, that is enough to destroy us. God knows how hard it is to know most of these details; for example, how will he find the proper symptom of the disease, when each disease can have an infinite number of them? How many disputes and doubts do they have over the analysis of urines? How, otherwise, could we explain their ceaseless wrangling over their diagnosis of the disease? . . . In the illnesses I have had, however little difficulty there was, I never found three doctors to agree.

I more readily note the examples that concern me. Recently there was a gentleman [see Glossary] in Paris who was cut for the removal of a stone on doctor's orders; no stone was found in his bladder any more than in his hand! Similarly, a close friend of mine, a bishop, was insistently urged by the doctors he consulted to have himself cut; trusting in others, I joined in the persuasion; once he was dead they opened him up and found that his only trouble had nothing to do with stones, and was something to do with his kidneys. They have less excuse with this malady, because it is in a way palpable. That is why surgery seems to me much more certain, because it it sees and feels what it is doing, with less conjecture and guesswork. Whereas the medical men have no *speculum matricis* [see Glossary] to reveal to them the passages of our brains, our lungs or our livers.

The very promises of medicine are incredible. For having to provide against different and contrary maladies that often afflict us at the same time and have an almost necessary relation—such as a heated liver and a chilled stomach—they try to persuade us that of their ingredients this one will warm the stomach while that one will cool the liver. One is said to go straight to the liver—indeed, even to the bladder—without

doing anything along the way, conserving its powers and its efficacy throughout that long turbulent journey right to the place that its occult property destines it for! Another will dry the brain, still another will moisten the lungs.

After a potion has been concocted out of all this stuff, is it not somewhat *fanciful* to hope that the virtues contained in that chaotic mixture will separate and sort themselves out, running on such different errands? I would be infinitely afraid that they might lose or switch their tags and get muddled about their quarters. And who could suppose that the various properties in that liquid jumble would not corrupt, counteract and spoil one another? And what about the fact that the prescription has to be made up by another practitioner, to whose good faith and mercy we again entrust our lives?

[C] Just as we have doublet-makers and breeches-makers to **clothe** us, and are served better by them because each performs only his own specialty and needs only a more restricted and limited skill than does a tailor who undertakes everything; and just as, when it comes to **food**, great households find it convenient to have specialists in soups or in roasts, which cannot be prepared so exquisitely by a cook with a responsibility for everything; so also with **cures**—the Egyptians were right to reject the general practice of medicine and to split the profession up, with separate workers for each illness and each part of the body, each being treated much more appropriately and less haphazardly by someone who made it his specialty. Our doctors do not realise that he who provides for everything provides for nothing, and that the entire government of this microcosm is more than they can manage. In fearing to stop a dysentery lest it bring on a fever, they killed a friend of mine—Etienne de La Boétie—who was worth more than the whole lot of them. They put their prognoses into the scales against the present illnesses; so

as not to cure the brain at the expense of the stomach, they harm the stomach and make the brain worse by these disorderly and quarrelsome drugs.

·CONTRADICTIONARY ADVICE ABOUT MANAGING COLIC·

[A] Conflicting and unsound reasoning is more apparent in this art than in any other. Aperient substances are useful for a man with colic, because by dilating and distending the passages they move along the sticky matter that can build up into gravel or stone, so evacuating whatever is beginning to gather and to harden in the kidneys. Aperient substances are dangerous for a man with colic, because by dilating and distending the passages they move towards the kidneys the matter whose property is to build up the gravel, for which the kidneys have a propensity so that they will hardly fail to retain much of what reaches them. . . .

They are equally firm in the advice they give us about healthy living. It is good to pass water often, for experience shows us that by allowing it to stagnate inside the body we give it time to dump impurities and lees, which will serve as matter to form the stone in the bladder. It is good not to pass water often, for the heavy impurities borne along in it will be discharged only if evacuated violently (we know from experience that a rushing torrent scours the bed it passes through more thoroughly than a sluggish, debilitated stream).

Similarly, it is good to lie frequently with women, because that opens the passages and moves the sand and gravel. It is also bad, for it heats the kidneys, tires and weakens them.

It is good to take hot baths at the spas, because they relax and soften the places where the sand or stone is lurking; it is also bad, because the application of external heat helps the kidneys to bake, harden and petrify the matter that is deposited there.

For those who are at the spas, it is healthier to eat little in the evening, so that the waters they are to take the next morning can have more effect, finding the stomach empty and unobstructed. On the other hand, it is better to eat little at the midday meal, so as not to disturb the workings of the water which are not yet completed and not burden the stomach so soon after that other work, and so as to leave the function of digesting to the night, which can do it better than the day, when the body and the mind are in perpetual movement and action.

That is how they go juggling and trifling at our expense in all their reasonings. [B] They could not give me one proposition against which I could not oppose one of equal force.

[A] Stop railing then at those who, amid such confusion, ignore the medical profession and allow themselves to be gently led by their feelings and by the counsels of nature, committing themselves to the common lot.

·BATHS·

My travels have provided occasions for seeing almost all the famous baths of Christendom; and I have been using them for some years now. For in general I reckon that bathing is healthy, and I believe that our health has suffered several quite serious inconveniences since we lost the habit (that was formerly observed in almost all nations and still is in many) of washing one's body every day; I can only think that we are much the worse for having our limbs encrusted and our pores blocked up with filth.

As for drinking the waters at the spas, firstly fortune has not made this in any way hostile to my taste, and secondly it is natural and simple and at least not dangerous, even if it does no good. I take as warrant for that the countless people of all sorts and constitutions who assemble there. And although I have never seen any extraordinary and miraculous

effect there—

but rather, on investigating a little more thoroughly than is usual, I have found to be ill-founded and false all the rumours of such effects that are scattered about in those places and are believed (since people easily fool themselves about things that they desire)

—I have seen almost no-one made worse by these waters; and it cannot be honestly denied that they stimulate the appetite, help the digestion and liven us up a bit (unless you are already too weak when you go there, something I advise you not to do). They cannot rebuild massy ruins, but they can prop up a leaning wall or provide against the threat of some deterioration.

Anyone who does not bring to them enough cheerfulness to be able to enjoy the pleasure of the company gathered there, and of the walks and relaxations we are invited to by the beauty of the places where most of these spas are situated, will certainly lose the best and surest part of their effect. For this reason I have so far chosen to stay at and make use of those that offer most in the way of location, lodgings, food and company. [He names some of them, in four countries, following this with half a page on how different countries use spas differently though ‘in my experience the effects are virtually identical’, summing up:] So you see how this branch of medicine—the only one I have availed myself of—though it is the least artificial also has a good share of the confusion and uncertainty that is seen everywhere else in that art. [He adds two Latin epigrams, which he says make his point ‘with more eloquence and grace’; he could have said also that they make it rather obscurely. Then he tells ‘two stories’ occupying more than two pages. The first concerns a region of France where things were well-nigh perfect for centuries, but which came to grief when first a lawyer and then a doctor settled there.

The second expresses scepticism about commonly accepted medicines.]

·‘MY QUARREL IS NOT WITH THEM’·

For the rest, I honour doctors. . . .for themselves, having known many honourable and lovable men among them. My quarrel is not with them but with their art, and I do not blame them much for profiting from our stupidity, for most people do. Many vocations, both less and more worthy than theirs, have no other foundation or support than the abuse of the public. When I am ill I call them in if they happen to be around at the right time; I ask them for treatment and pay up like anyone else. I grant them authority to order me to wrap up warmly if I prefer that to being cold; they can choose between leeks and lettuce to make my broth, and prescribe for me white wine or claret—and so on, for anything that my appetite and habits don’t care about either way. . . .

How many of the doctors we see are of my disposition, disdaining medicine for their own use and adopting an unfettered way of life quite contrary to the one they prescribe for others! If that is not shamelessly exploiting our simple-mindedness, what is? For their life and health are as dear to them as ours are to us, and they would practise what they preach if they did not know that it is false.

What blinds us so is our fear of death and pain, impatience [see Glossary] with illness, and a frenzied and indiscriminate thirst for a cure; it is pure cowardice that makes our belief so soft and pliable. [C] Even then, most people do not so much believe ·in medical treatments· as endure and acquiesce ·in them·; for I hear them complaining and talking about medicine as I do. But they end up deciding ‘What else can I do?’ As if impatience were an intrinsically better remedy than patience! [A] Among those who acquiesce in this miserable subjection is there anyone who does not surrender

equally to every sort of imposture, putting himself at the mercy of anyone shameless enough to promise him a cure?

·BASING MEDICINE ON ANECDOTES·

[C] The Babylonians carried their sick into the public square; the doctor was the populace; each passer-by was required out of humanity and civility to inquire into their condition and to give them some salutary advice according to his own experience. We do much the same. [A] There is not the simplest little woman whose spells and amulets we do not use; and, for my taste, if I had to accept any medicine I would prefer to accept theirs, since at least there are no ill-effects to fear. [C] What Homer and Plato said of Egyptians, that they were all doctors, applies to all peoples; there is nobody who does not boast of prescription and try it out on his neighbour if he is willing to trust it.

[A] The other day I was in company when a fellow-sufferer—it doesn't matter who—brought news of a new kind of pill compounded from a hundred-odd carefully counted ingredients. There was great rejoicing and singular consolation; for what rock could withstand the impact from such a numerous battery ·of guns·? However, I understand from those who tried the pill that not even the tiniest grain of gravel deigned to be dislodged by it.

I cannot cut myself loose from this essay without saying this one word about the fact that they guarantee the reliability of their drugs by citing the experiments they have conducted. The greater part (over two-thirds, I think) of the virtues of medicines consists in the quintessence or hidden properties of *simples*; only practical usage can instruct us about that, for quintessence is nothing but a quality whose cause cannot be explained by our reason.

Those of their proofs that doctors say they owe to revelations from some daemon or other I am content to accept (for I never touch miracles); the same goes for proofs based on things we use every day for other purposes; for example, if the wool we use to clothe us is found by accident to have some hidden power of desiccation that cures the blisters on our heels; or if the horseradish we eat for food is found to have some laxative action. Galen reports that a leper was cured by drinking wine from a jar into which a viper had chanced to slip. We find in this example the means and a likely method for this sort of experiment, as also in the ones that the doctors say they were led to by the example of certain animals.

But in most of the other experiences¹ they say they were led to by fortune with luck as their only guide, I cannot believe that they actually *advanced* their knowledge that way. [Montaigne imagines someone looking at the natural world for cures for epilepsy, grappling with the infinitely complex problems of fully understanding any substance proposed for a cure and the infinitely complex problem of getting clearly about exactly epilepsy *is*,] being guided in all this not by argument or by conjecture or by example or by divine inspiration but only by the movement of fortune; well, it would have to be a fortune that was perfectly workmanlike, regular, and methodical! And then, even if a cure is achieved, how can he—the doctor—be sure that this was not because the malady had run its course, or a result of chance, or the effect of something else the patient had eaten, drunk or touched that day, or the merit of his grandmother's prayers? Furthermore, even if that proof had been perfect, how often was it repeated? How often was that long string of chances

¹ This translates *experiences*, translated previously by 'experiments'. In this passage, Montaigne *glides* from experiments they have conducted to experiences they have undergone.

and coincidences strung again so that a rule could be derived from it?

^[B] When the rule is derived, who derives it? Out of so many millions, only three men—Hippocrates, Galen and Avicenna—have taken the trouble to record their experiences. Will chance have alighted precisely on one of those? What if another man—a hundred other men—have contrary experiences? Perhaps we would see some light if all men's judgements and reasonings were known to us. But that three witnesses—three doctors—should make rules for the whole human race is not reasonable. . . .

·ADDRESSED TO MARGUERITE DE DURAS·

^[A] To Madame de Duras. Madame, you found me at this point when you called to see me recently. Because these clumsy essays may fall into your hands one day, I would also like them to testify that their author feels most honoured by the favour you will be doing them. In them you will recognise the same bearing and the same tone that you have seen in his conversation. Even if I had been able to adopt some style other than my usual one, and some better and more honourable form, I would not have done so; for all I want from these writings is for them to recall me to your memory plain and unadorned. I want to take those characteristics and faculties that you have been familiar with and have favoured, Madame, with more honour and courtesy than they deserve, and lodge them without alteration in a solid body that can outlive me by a few years, or a few days, in which you will find them again when you want to refresh your memory of them, without otherwise taking the trouble to remember them, as indeed they are not worth it. What I want is for you to go on favouring me with your friendship for the same qualities that first aroused it.

I have not the least desire to be better loved and esteemed

dead than alive. ^[B] That disposition of Tiberius which made him more concerned to be widely honoured in the future than to make himself esteemed or liked in his own day is ridiculous, though common enough. ^[C] If I were one of those to whom the world owes praise, I would settle for half of what was owed if I was paid in advance. Let praise rush to pile up all around me, thickly not thinly spread, plentiful rather than long-lasting. And let it abruptly switch off, together with my consciousness of it, when its sweet sound will no longer reach my ears.

·CONTEMPT FOR LITERARY FAME·

^[A] At this moment when I am ready to give up dealings with men, it would be a stupid fancy to present myself to them as worthy of esteem in some new way—such as my authorship of these essays—. I will not acknowledge receipt of any goods not delivered for use during my lifetime.

Whatever I may be, I want to be it somewhere other than on paper! My art and industry have been employed in making *me* worth something; my studies, in teaching me to *do*, not to *write*. I have put all my efforts into forming my life. That is my trade, my work. I am less a maker of books than of anything else. I have wanted enough for my present and essential needs, not to lay up a stock and reserve for my heirs.

^[C] If a man has any good in him, let him show it in his *moeurs*, in his ordinary talk, in the way he loves or quarrels, at play, in bed, at table, in the way he conducts his business and runs his house. Those whom I see writing good books in torn breeches would have first mended their breeches if they had taken my advice. Ask a Spartan if he would prefer being a good orator to being a good soldier! Personally, I would not prefer it to being a good cook, if I did not already have the services of one.

^{1A1} *Mon Dieu*, Madame, how I would hate the reputation of being clever at writing but stupid and useless at everything else! I would rather be stupid at writing *and* at everything else than have chosen so badly where to employ my ability. Far from expecting to acquire some new honour by this silly nonsense—these essays—I shall have done well if it does not make me lose the little I have. For this dead and mute portrait not only gives a washed-out picture of my natural being but also comes from me not in my best state but only when I have fallen far from my original vigour and cheefulness, beginning to grow withered and rancid. I am at the bottom of the barrel, where it begins to taste of the sediment and the lees.

·BACK TO MEDICINE·

Moreover, Madame, I would not have ventured to disturb the mysteries of medicine so boldly, considering the trust that you and so many others have in it, if I had not been led to this by their very own authors. I think there are only two of these among the ancient Latins: Pliny and Celsus. If you read them some day, you will find that they speak to their trade far more roughly than I do. I give it a pinch; they slaughter it. Among other things Pliny mocks doctors who, when they have come to the end of their tether, have thought up the fine escape sending off the patients they have uselessly agitated and tormented with their drugs and diets, some •to get help from vows and miracles, the others •to hot-spring spas. (Do not be offended, Madame: he wasn't speaking of the ones on our side of the border, which are under the protection of your family. . . .) And they have a third way of getting rid of us and escaping the reproaches we could launch at them for the lack of improvement in our illnesses that they have been treating for so long that they have run out of ideas, namely sending us away •to some

other region to discover how good the air is there! Enough of this, Madame. You will allow me to pick up the thread of my argument, from which I had digressed from in order to talk with you.

I think it was Pericles who, when was asked how he was getting on, replied 'You can judge from this', pointing to amulets that he had attached to his neck and his arm. He meant to imply that he was very ill, having reached the point of resorting to such silly things and letting himself be decked out in that fashion. I do not say that I may not one day be swept away by the ridiculous idea of entrusting my life my health to the mercy and government of the doctors; I might well fall into that madness; I cannot vouch for my future firmness. But if in that case someone asks how I am getting on, I shall be able to answer as Pericles did, 'You can judge from this', showing him my hand full of six drams of opiate. That will be a very clear sign of a violent illness; my judgement will be extraordinarily unhinged. If fear and intolerance of pain ever get that much hold on me, that will support the diagnosis that I have a very fierce fever in my soul.

I have taken the trouble to plead this cause, which I do not understand well, to support a little and strengthen the natural aversion to drugs and to the practice of our medicine which I have derived from my ancestors, so that it should have a little more *form* than a mere stupid and thoughtless inclination; and also so that those who see me firmly set against the persuasions and menaces addressed to me when my maladies oppress me do not think that this is pure stubbornness or be so nasty as to conclude that I am pricked on by vainglory. What a well-aimed ambition *that* would be, wanting to be honoured for something I have in common with my gardener and my mule-driver! Surely my heart is not so swollen or so windy that I would go about

exchanging a solid, meaty, marrowy pleasure like good health for a pleasure that is imaginary, immaterial, and airy. . . .

Those who like our medicine may also have their own good, great, strong reasons; I do not hate ideas that are contrary to mine. I am so far from being scared off when I see others' judgements clashing with mine, and from disliking the society of men who are of a different sentiment and party from mine, that on the contrary I always *expect* to find

myself in the presence of disagreement. Just as the most general style followed by nature is *variety*—^[C] even more in minds than in bodies, since minds are of a more supple and variable substance—^[A] I find it much rarer to see our humours and purposes coincide. And there never were in the world two opinions exactly alike, any more than two hairs or two grains. The most universal quality of things is diversity.¹

¹ *Leur plus universelle qualité, c'est la diversité.* He is saying that what things most have in common is being unlike another!