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Montaigne's Essays

In Three Books. With Notes and Quotations. And an Account of The Author's Life ; With a short Character of the Author and Translator, by the late Marquis of Halifax; With the Addition of A Complete Table to each Volume

Montaigne, Michel Eyquem de

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Chap. 17. Of Presumption.

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C H A P. XVII.

Of Presumption.

T Here is another Sort of *Glory*, which is the having *too good an Opinion* of our own Worth. 'Tis an inconsiderable Affection, with which we flatter ourselves, and that represents us to ourselves different from what we truly are. Like the Passion of Love, that lends Beauties and Graces to the Person belov'd; and that makes those who are caught with it, with a deprav'd and corrupt Judgment, consider the Thing they love, more perfect than it is. I would not, nevertheless, for fear of failing on the other Side, that a Man should not know himself aright, or think himself less than he is, the Judgment ought in all Things to keep itself upright and just: 'Tis all the Reason in the World he should discern in himself, as well as in others, what Truth sets before him; if he be *Cæsar*, let him boldly think himself the greatest Captain in the World. We are nothing but Ceremony; Ceremony carries us away, and we leave the Substance of Things: We hold by the Branches, and quit the Trunk. We have taught the Ladies to blush when they hear but that nam'd, which they are not at all afraid to do: We dare not call our Members by their right Names, and are not afraid to employ them in all Sort of Debauches. Ceremony forbids us to express by Words Things, that are lawful and natural, and we obey it: Reason forbids us to do Things unlawful and ill, and no body obeys it. I find myself here fetter'd by the Laws of Ceremony; for it neither permits a Man to speak well of himself nor ill. We will leave her there for this Time. For they whom Fortune (call it good or ill) has made to pass their Lives in some eminent Degree, may by their publick Actions manifest what they are: But they whom she has only employ'd in the Crowd, and of whom no body will say a Word, unless they speak themselves, are to be excus'd, if they

they take the Boldness to speak of themselves to such whose Interest it is to know them; by the Example of *Lucilius*,

*Ille velut fidis arcana sodalibus olim
Credebat libris, neque si bene: Quo sit ut omnis
Votiva pateat veluti descripta tabella
Vita senis*.* —————

His Way was in his Books to speak his Mind
As freely, as his Secrets he would tell
To a try'd Friend, and took it ill, or well,
He held his Custom. Hence it came to pass,
The old Man's Life is there, as in a Glas.

He always committed to Paper his Actions and Thoughts, and there pourtrayed himself such as he found himself to be. *Nec id Rutilio, & Scauro citra fidem, aut obtreptione fuit †.* Nor were *Rutilius* or *Scarus* misbeliev'd, or condemn'd for so doing. I remember then, that from my Infancy there was observ'd in me I know not what Kind of Carriage and Behaviour, that seem'd to relish of Pride and Arrogancy. I will say this by the Way, that it is not inconvenient to have Propensities so proper and incorporated into us, that we have not the Means to feel and beware of them. And of such natural Inclination the Body will retain a certain Bent, without our Knowledge or Consent. It was an Affectation confederate with his Beauty, that made *Alexander* carry his Head on one Side, and *Alcibiades* to lisp; *Julius Caesar* scratch'd his Head with one Finger, which is the Fashion of a Man full of troublesome Thoughts: And *Cicero*, as I remember, was wont to tweak his Nose, a Sign of a Man given to Scoffing. Such Motions as these may imperceptibly happen in us: There are other artificial ones which I meddle not with; as Salutations and Congees, by which Men for the most part unjustly acquire the Reputation of being humble and courteous; or perhaps, humbly out of Pride. I am prodigal enough of my Hat, especially in Summer, and never am so saluted, but I pay it again, from Persons of what Quality soever, unless they be in my own Dependance. I should make it my Request to some Princes that I know, that they should be more sparing of

* *Hor. lib. 2. Sat. 1.*

† *Tacitus.*

that Ceremony, and bestow that Courtesy where it is more due; for being so indiscreetly and indifferently conferr'd on all, they are thrown away to no Purpose; if they be without respect of Persons, they lose their Effect: Amongst irregular Countenances, let us not forget that severe one of the Emperor *Constantius*, who always in publick held his Head upright and steady, without bending or turning on either Side, not so much as to look upon those who saluted him on one Side, planting his Body in a stiff immoveable Posture, without suffering it to yield to the Motion of his Coach; not daring so much as to spit, blow his Nose, or wipe his Face before People. I know not whether the Gestures that were observ'd in me were of this first Quality, and whether I had really any Secret Propensity to this Vice, as it might well be; and I cannot be responsible for the Motions of the Body: But as to the Motions of the Soul, I must here confess, that I am sensible of something of that

Presumption Kind there. This Glory consists of two
divided into Parts, the one in setting too great a Va-
two Parts. lue upon ourselves, and the other in set-
ting too little a Value upon others. As to the one, methinks these Considerations ought in the first place to be of some Force. I feel myself importun'd by an Error of the Soul that displeases me, both as it is unjust, and as it is troublesome. I attempt to correct it, but I cannot root it out, which is, that I lessen the just Value of Things that I possess, and over-value others, because they are foreign, absent, and none of mine. This Humour spreads very far. As the Prerogative of the Authority which makes Husbands look upon their own Wives with a vicious Disdain, and many Fathers their Children, so do I: And betwixt two equal Merits should always be sway'd against my own. Not so much that the Jealousy of my Preferment, and the bettering of my Affairs does trouble my Judgment, and hinders me from satisfying myself, as that Dominion of itself begets a Contempt of what is our own, and over which we have an absolute Command. Foreign Governments, Manners and Languages insinuate themselves into my Esteem; and I am very sensible that *Latin* allures me by the Favour of its Dignity, to value it above its due, as it does Children, and the common Sort of People. The *Oeconomy, House and Horse* of my Neighbour, tho' no bet-
ter

ter than my own, I prize above my own; because they are not mine. Besides that, I am very ignorant in my own Affairs; I am astonish'd at the Assurance that every one has of himself: Whereas there is not almost any Thing that I am sure I know, or that I dare be responsible to myself that I can do: I have not my Means of doing any Thing stated and ready, and am only instructed after the Effects, as doubtful of my own Force as I am of another's; whence it comes to pass, that if I happen to do any Thing commendable, I attribute it more to my Fortune than Industry: Forasmuch as I design every Thing by Chance, and in Fear. I have this also in general, that of all the Opinions Antiquity has held of Men in gross, I most willingly embrace, and most adhere to those that most condemn and undervalue us. Methinks *Philosophy* has never so fair a Game to play as when it falls upon our Vanity and Presumption; when it most lays open their Irresolution, Weakness and Ignorance. I look upon the too good Opinion that Man has of himself, to be the nursing Mother of all the false Opinions, both publick and private. Those People who ride astride upon the *Epicycle of Mercury*, who see so far into the Heavens, are worse to me than a Tooth-drawer that comes to draw my Teeth: For in my Study, the Subject of which is Man, finding so great a Variety of Judgments, so great a Labyrinth of Difficulties one upon another; so great Diversity and Incertainty, even in the School of Wisdom itself, you may judge, seeing those People could not resolve upon the Knowledge of themselves, and their own Condition, which is continually before their Eyes, and within them, seeing they do not know, how that moves which they themselves move, nor how to give us a Description of the Springs they themselves govern and make use of; how can I believe them about the Ebbing and Flowing of the *Nile* *. *The Curiosity of knowing Things has been given to Man for a Scourge*, says the Holy Scripture. But to return to what concerns myself; I think it very hard, that any other

* Montaigne is to be excused here; he wrote according to the State of Learning in his Time, when *Philosophy* and *Mathematicks* were very low, in comparison to what Sir Isaac Newton has raised them to.

should have a meaner Opinion of himself; nay, that any other should have a meaner Opinion of me than I have of myself. I look upon myself as one of the common Sort, saving in this, that I have no better Opinion of myself; guilty of the meanest and most popular Defects, but not disown'd or excused, and do not value myself upon any other Account, than because I know my own Value. If there be any Glory in the Case, 'tis superficially infused into me by the Treachery of my Complexion, and has no Body that my Judgment can discern. I am sprinkled, but not dyed. For, in Truth, as to the Effects of the Mind, there is no Part of me, be it what it will, with which I am satisfied; and the Approbation of others makes me not think the better of myself; my Judgment is tender and fickle, especially in Things that concern myself; I feel myself float and waver by reason of my Weakness. I have nothing of my own that satisfies my Judgment: My Sight is clear and regular enough, but in opening it, it is apt to dazzle; as I most manifestly find in Poetry. I love it infinitely, and am able to give a tolerable Judgment of other Men's Works: But, in good earnest, when I apply myself to it, I play the Child, and am not able to endure myself. A Man may play the Fool in every Thing else, but not in Poetry.

————— *Mediocribus esse Poetis*

Non dii, non homines, non concessere columnæ.*

But neither Men, nor Gods, nor Pillars meant
Poets should ever be indifferent.

I would to God this Sentence was writ over the Doors of all our *Printers*, to forbid the Entrance of so many *Rhimers*.

————— *verum*

Nihil securius est malo Poeta †.

————— but the Truth is this,

Nought more secure than a bad Poet is.

Why have not we such People? *Dionysus*, the Father, va-
lued himself upon nothing more than his *Poetry*. At the
Olympick Games, with Chariots surpassing the others in Mag-
nificence,

* *Horace de Art. Poet.* † *Mart. l. 12. Epig. 64.*

nificence, he sent also *Poets* and *Musicians* to present his Verses with Tents and Pavilions royally gilt and hung with Tapistry. When his Verses came to be recited, the Excellency of the Pronunciation did at first attract the Attention of the People; but when they afterwards came to poise the Meanness of the Composition, they first enter'd into Disdain, and continuing to nettle their Judgments, presently proceeded to Fury, and ran to pull down and tear to Pieces all his Pavilions; and in that his Chariots neither perform'd any Thing to purpose in the Course; and that the Ship which brought back his People fail'd of *making Sicily*, and was by the Tempest driven and wreck'd upon the Coast of *Tarentum*, they did certainly believe was thro' the Anger of the *Gods*, incensed, as they themselves were, against that paltry *Poem*; and even the Mariners who escap'd from the Wreck, seconded this Opinion of the People. To which also the *Oracle*, that foretold his Death, seem'd to subscribe; which was, *That Dionysius should be near his End when he should have overcome those who were better than himself*; which he interpreted of the *Carthaginians*, who surpassed him in Power; and having War with them, often declin'd the Victory, not to incur the Sense of this Prediction. But he understood it ill; for the *God* pointed at the Time of the Advantage, that by Favour and Injustice he obtain'd at *Athens* over the Tragick Poets, better than himself, having caused his own Play, call'd the *Leineicus*, to be acted in Emulation. Presently after which Victory he died, and partly of the excessive Joy he conceived at the Success. What I find tolerable of mine, is not so really, and in itself; but in comparison of other worse Things, that I see are well enough receiv'd. I envy the Happiness of those that can please and hug themselves in what they do, for 'tis a very easy Thing to be so pleased, because a Man extracts that Pleasure from himself, especially if he be constant in his Self-conceit. I know a Poet, against whom both the Intelligent in Poetry, and the Ignorant, Abroad and at Home, both Heaven and Earth, exclaim, that he understands very little in it; and yet for all that, he has never a whit the worse Opinion of himself; but is always falling upon some new Piece, always contriving some new Invention, and still persists; by so much the more obstinate as it only concerns him to stand up in his own Defence.

My Works are so far from pleasing me, that as oft as I re-
vive them they disgust me :

*Cum relego, scripsisse pudet, quia plurima cerno,
Me quoque qui feci, judice digna lini* *.

When I peruse, I blush at what I've writ,
Seeing 'tis only for the Fire fit.

I have always an *Idea* in my Soul, which presents me a bet-
ter Form than what I have made use of; but I cannot catch
it, nor fit it to my Purpose; and yet even that *Idea* is but
of the meaner Sort, by which I conclude, the Productions
of those great Souls of former Times, as very much beyond
the utmost Stretch of my Imagination, or my Wish; their
Writings do not only satisfy and fill me, but they astonish
me, and ravish me with Admiration. I judge of their
Beauty, I see it, if not to the utmost, yet so far at least as
'tis possible for me to aspire. Whatever I undertake I owe
a Sacrifice to the *Graces*, as *Plutarch* says of some one, to
make a Return for their Favour.

— *si quid enim placet,
Si quid dulce hominum sensibus insuit,
Debentur lepidis omnia gratiis.*

If any Thing does please that I do write,
Into Men's Minds if it infuse Delight,
All's to the lovely *Graces* due.

They abandon me throughout: All I write is rude, Polli-
shing and Beauty are wanting: I cannot set Things off to an
Advantage, my handling adds nothing to the Matter; for
which Reason I must have it forcible, very full, and that
has Lustre of its own. If I pitch upon Subjects that are
popular and gay, 'tis to follow my own Inclination, who
do not affect a grave and ceremonious Wisdom, as the
World does; and to make myself more spritely, but not
to make my Stile more wanton, which I
Montaigne's *Stile*. would rather have grave and severe, at least,
if I may call an inform and irregular Way
of Speaking, a vulgar Jargon, and a Proceeding without
Definition, Division, and without Conclusion, perplexed

* *Ovid de Ponto, lib. 1. Eleg. 6.*

like that of *Amasanius* and *Raberius*, a Stile. I can neither please nor delight, much less ravish any one: The best Story in the World would be spoil'd by my handling. I cannot speak but in earnest; and am totally unprovided of that Facility which I observe in many of my Acquaintance, of entertaining the first Comers, and keeping a whole Company in Breath, or taking up the Care of a *Prince* with all Sorts of Discourse, without being weary; they never wanting Matter, by reason of the Faculty and Grace they have in taking hold of the first Thing is started; and accommodating it to the Humour and Capacity of those with whom they have to do. *Princes* do not much affect solid Discourses, nor I to tell Stories. The first and easiest Reasons, which are commonly the best taken, I know not how to employ. I am an ill *Orator* to the common Sort. I am apt of every Thing to say the utmost that I know. *Cicero* is of Opinion, that in *Treatises of Philosophy* the Exordium is the hardest Part: Which, if it be true, I am wise in sticking to the Conclusion. And yet we are to know how to wind the String to all Notes, and the sharpest is that which is the most seldom touch'd. There is at least as much Perfection in elevating an empty, as in supporting a weighty Thing. A Man must sometimes superficially handle Things, and sometimes push them home. I know very well, that most Men keep themselves in this lower Form, for not conceiving Things otherwise than by this Bark: But I likewise know, that the greatest Masters, and *Xenophon* and *Plato*, are often seen to stoop to this low and popular Manner of Speaking and Treating of Things, and maintaining them with Graces, which are never wanting to them. As to the rest, my Language has nothing in it that is facile and fluent: 'Tis rough, free and irregular: And therefore best pleases not my Judgment, but Inclination. But I very well perceive, that I sometimes give myself too much Rein; and that by Force of Endeavour to avoid Art and Affectation, I fall into the other Inconvenience.

———— *brevis esse laboro,*
Obscurus fio *.

* *Hor. Art. Poet.*

I strive Prolixity t' evade,
And by that Means obscure am made.

Plato says, that the Long, nor the Short are not Properties that either take away, or give Lustre to the Language. Should I attempt to follow the other more moderate and united Style, I should never attain unto it: And tho' the short round Periods of Sallust best suit with my Humour, yet I find Cæsar much greater, and much harder to imitate; and tho' my Inclination would rather prompt me to imitate Seneca's Way of Writing, yet I do nevertheless more esteem that of Plutarch. Both in Silence and Speaking I simply follow my own natural Way; from whence, perhaps, it falls out, that I am better at Speaking than Writing. Motion and Action animate Words, especially in those who lay about them briskly, as I do, and grow hot. The Countenance, the Voice, the Robe and the Tribunal, will set off some Things, that of themselves, and so consider'd, would appear no better than Prating. Messala complains, in Tacitus, of the Straightness of some Garments in his Time, and of the Fashion of the Pews where the Orators were to declaim, that were a Disadvantage to their Eloquence. My French Tongue is corrupted both in Pronunciation, and elsewhere, by the Barbarism of my Country. I never saw a Man who was a Native of any of the Provinces on this Side of the Kingdom, who had not a Twang of his Place of Birth, and that was not offensive to Ears that were purely French. And yet it is not that I am so perfect in my Perigordin; for I can no more speak it than High Dutch, nor do I much care. 'Tis a Language, as the rest about me on every Side of Poitou, Xaintongue, Angoulesme, Limosin and Avergne, are a scurvy, drawling, dirty Language. There is indeed above us, towards the Mountains, a Sort of Gascon spoke, that I am mightily taken with, blunt, brief, significant, and, in Truth, a more Manly and Military Language than any other I am acquainted with; as finewy, insinuating and pertinent, as French is graceful, neat and luxuriant. As to the Latin, which was given me for my Mother-Tongue, I have by Discountenance lost the Use of speaking it, and indeed of writing it too, wherein I formerly had a particular Reputation; by which you may see how inconsiderable I am on that Side. Beauty is a Thing of

of great Recommendation in the Correspondency amongst Men; 'tis the principal Means of acquiring the Favour and good liking of one another, and no Man is so barbarous and morose, that does not perceive himself in some Sort struck with its Attraction. The Body has a great share in our Being, has an eminent Place there, and therefore its Structure and Symmetry are of very just Consideration. They who go about to disunite and separate our principal Parts from one another, are to blame: We must on the contrary reunite and rejoin them. We must command the Soul, not to withdraw to entertain itself apart, not to despise and abandon the Body (neither can she do it, but by some ridiculous Counterfeit) but to unite herself close to it, to embrace, cherish, assist, govern and advise it, and to bring it back, and set it into the true Way when it wanders; in sum, to espouse and be a Husband to it; forasmuch as their Effects do not appear to be diverse and contrary, but uniform and concurring. *Christians* have a particular Instruction concerning this Connexion; for they know, that the Divine Justice embraces this Society and Junction of Body and Soul, even to the making the Body capable of eternal Rewards; and that God has an Eye to every Man's Ways, and will have him receive entire the Chastisement or Reward of his Demerits. The *Sett* of the *Peripateticks*, of all others the most sociable, attributes to Wisdom this sole Care, equally to provide for the Good of these two associate Parts: And the other *Setts*, in not sufficiently applying themselves to the Consideration of this Mixture shew themselves to be divided, one for the Body, and the other for the Soul, with equal Error: And to have lost their Subject, which is Man, and their Guide, which they generally confess to be *Nature*. The first Distinction that ever was amongst Men, and the first Consideration that gave some Preheminence over others, 'tis likely was the Advantage of Beauty.

— *agros divisere, atque dedere*

Pro facie cujusque, & viribus, ingenioque:

Nam facies multum valuit, viresque vigebant.*

* *Lucr. l. 5.*

Then

Then Cattle too was shar'd, and steady Bounds
 Mark'd out to every Man his proper Grounds ;
 Each had his proper Share, each one was fit,
 According to his Beauty, Strength, or Wit ;
 For Beauty then, and Strength had most Command,
 Those had the greatest Share in Beasts and Land.

Now I am of something lower than the middle Stature, a Defect not that only borders upon Deformity, but carries withal a great deal of Inconvenience along with it, especially to those who are in Command ; for the Authority which a graceful Presence and a Majestick Mein beget, is wanting. *C. Marius* did not willingly list any Soldiers that were not Six Foot high. The Courtier has, indeed, Reason to desire a moderate Stature in the Person he is to make, rather than any other ; and to reject all Strangeness that should make him be pointed at. But in chusing, he must have a Care in this Mediocrity, to have him rather below than above the common Standard : I would not do so in a Soldier, *Little Men*, says *Aristotle*, are pretty, but not handsome : And Greatness of Soul is discover'd in a great Body, as Beauty is in a conspicuous Stature *. The Ethiopians and Indians, says he, in chusing their Kings and Magistrates, had a special Regard to the Beauty and Stature of their Persons. They had Reason ; for it creates Respect in those that follow them, and is a Terror to the Enemy, to see a Leader of a brave and goodly Stature march in the Head of a Battalion,

*Ipse inter primos præstanti corpore Turnus
 Vertitur, arma tenens, & toto vertice supra est †.*

The grateful *Turnus*, tallest by the Head,
 Shaking his Arms, himself the Van up led.

Our Holy and Heavenly King, of whom every Circumstance is most carefully, and with the greatest Religion and Reverence to be observ'd, has not himself refused Bodily

* This is false ; the greatest Souls have been in Men of low Stature : Witness, Alexander, &c. The Contrast in Scripture between David and Goliath is beautiful.

† *Virg. Æneid. l. 7.*

Recommendation, *Speciosus forma præ filiis hominum* *.
 He is fairer than the Children of Men. And Plato with
 Temperance and Fortitude, requires Beauty in the Conser-
 vators of his *Republick*. It would vex you, that a Man
 should apply himself to you amongst your Servants to en-
 quire where *Monsieur* is, and that you should only have the
 Remainder of the Compliment of the Hat that is made to
 your Barber, or your Secretary; as it happen'd to poor
Philopæmen, who arriving the first of all his Company at an
 Inn where he was expected, the Hostess, who knew him
 not, and saw him an unsightly Fellow, employ'd him to go
 help her Maids a little to draw Water, or make a Fire
 against *Philopæmen's* Coming: The Gentlemen of his Train
 arriving presently after, and surpriz'd to see him busy in this
 fine Employment (for he fail'd not of obeying his Land-
 lady's Command) asked him, what he was doing there? *I*
am, said he, *paying the Penalty of my Ugliness*. The other
 Beauties belong to Women, the Beauty of Stature is the
 only Beauty of Men. Where there is a contemptible Stature,
 neither the Largeness and Roundness of the Fore-head, nor
 the Whiteness and Sweetness of the Eyes, nor the moderate
 Proportion of the Nose, nor the Littleness of the Ears and
 Mouth, nor the Evenness and Whiteness of the Teeth, nor
 the Thickness of a well-set brown Beard, shining like the
 Husk of a Chestnut, nor curl'd Hair, nor the just Propor-
 tion of the Head, nor a fresh Complexion, nor a pleasant
 Air of a Face, nor a Body without any offensive Scent, nor
 the just Proportion of Limbs, can make a handsome Man.
 I am, as to the rest, strong and well knit. *The Author's*
 My Face is not puffed, but full, and my *Stature*.
 Complexion betwixt jovial and melanco-
 lick, moderately sanguine and hot.

Unde rigent setis mihi crura, & pectora villis †.

Whence 'tis my Thighs so rough and bristled are,
 And that my Breast is so thick set with Hair.

My Health vigorous and sprightly, even to a well advanced
 Age, and rarely troubled with Sickness. Such I was; for
 I do not now make any reckoning of myself; now, I say,

* *Psal. iv. 8.*

† *Mart.*

that

that I am engag'd in the Avenues of Age, being already past Forty,

——— *minutatim vires, & robur adultum
Frangit, & in partem pejorem liquitur etas* *.

Thence by Degrees, our Strength melts all away,
And treacherous Age creeps on, and Things decay.

What shall be from this Time forward, will be but a half
Being and no more me; I every Day escape and steal
away from myself;

Singula de nobis anni prædantur euntes †.

I find I am grown old, and every Year
Steals something from me ———

Agility and Address I never had; and yet am the Son of a very active and sprightly Father, and that continued to be so to an extreme old Age. I have seldom known any Man of his Condition his Equal in all bodily Exercises: As I have seldom met with any who have not excell'd me, except in Running, at which I was pretty good. In Musick or Singing, for which I have a very unfit Voice, or to play on any Sort of Instrument, they could never teach me any Thing. In Dancing, Tennis, or Wrestling, I could never arrive to more than an ordinary Pitch; in Swimming, Fencing, Vaulting and Leaping, to none at all. My Hands are so clumsy, that I cannot so much as write so as to read it myself, so that I had rather do what I have scribbled over again, than to take upon me the Trouble to correct it; and do not read much better than I write. I cannot handsomely fold up a Letter, nor could ever make a Pen, or carve at Table worth a Pin, nor fiddle a Horse, nor carry a Hawk, and fly her, nor hunt the Dogs, nor lure a Hawk, nor speak to a Horse. In fine, my bodily Qualities are very well suited to those of my Soul, there is nothing spritely, only a full and firm Vigour. I am patient enough of Labour and Pains, but it is only when I go voluntary to the Work, and only so long as my own Desire prompts me to it.

Mollitur austerum studio fallente laborem ‡.

* *Lucr. l. 2.* † *Hor. l. 2. Ep. 2. J. D.* ‡ *Id. l. 2. Sat. 2.*
Whilft

Whilst the Delight makes you ne'er mind the Pain.

Otherwise, if I am not allur'd with some Pleasure, or have other Guide than my own pure and free Inclination, I am there good for nothing: For I am of an Humour, that Life and Health excepted, there is nothing for which I will bite my Nails, and that I will purchase at the Price of the Torment of Mind and Constraint;

————— *tanti mihi non sit opaci*

Omnes arena Tagi, quodque in Mare volvitur Aurum *.

Rich *Tagus* Sand's so dear I would not buy,
Nor all the Gold that in the Sea doth lie.

extremely idle, and extremely given up to my own Inclination both by Nature and Art. I would as willingly lend a Man my Blood as my Pains. I have a Soul free and entirely its own, and accustomed to guide itself after its own Fashion; having hitherto never had either Master or Governor imposed upon me. I have walked as far as I would, and the Pace that best pleased myself. This is it that has render'd me of no Use to any one but myself; and for that there was no Need of forcing my heavy and lazy Disposition; for being born to such a Fortune, as I had Reason to be contented with (a Reason nevertheless that a Thousand others of my Acquaintance would have rather made use of for a Plank upon which to pass over to a higher Fortune, to Tumult and Disquiet) I fought for no more, and also got no more:

*Non agimur tumidi ventis, Aquilone secundo,
Non tamen adversis etatem ducimus austris,
Viribus, ingenio, specie, virtute, loco, re,
Extremi priorum, extremis usque priores* †.

————— I neither am oppress'd
With Storms, nor flat at all with Calms; my Sails
Are fill'd with equal and indifferent Gales;
For Health, Wit, Virtue, Honour, Wealth, I'm plac'd;
Short of the Foremost, but before the Last.

* *Juven. Sat. 3.*

† *Hor. l. 2. Epist. 2.*

I had

I had only Need of what was sufficient to content me; which nevertheless is a Government of Soul, to take it right, equally difficult in all Sorts of Conditions; and that by Custom, we see more easily found in want than abundance: Forasmuch, perhaps, as according to the Course of others Passions, the Desire of Riches is more sharpened by the Use we make of them, than by the Need we have of them; and the Virtue of Moderation more rare than that of Patience. I never had any Thing to desire, but happily to enjoy the Estate that *God* by his Bounty had put into my Hands: I have never known any Thing of Trouble, and have had little to do in any Thing but the Management of my own Affairs: Or, if I have, it has been upon Condition to do them at my own Leisure, and after my own Method, committed to my Trust by such as had a Confidence in me, that did not importune me, and that knew my Humour. For good Horsemen will make a Shift to get Service out of a rusty and broken-winded Jade. Even my Infancy was train'd up after a gentle and free Manner, and even then exempt from any rigorous Subjection: All which have help'd me to a Complexion delicate and incapable of Solitude, even to that Degree, that I love to have my Losses, and the Disorders wherein I am concern'd, conceal'd from me; so that in the Account of my Expences, I put down what my Negligence costs me in feeding and maintaining myself.

— *hæ nempe supersunt,
Quæ dominum fallunt, quæ prosunt furibus* *.

The House is much unfurnish'd where there are
Not many Things superfluous, and to spare;
Goods which the Owner knows not of, but may
Be unconcern'd when they are stole away.

I do not love to know what I have, that I may be less sensible of my Loss. I entreat those that serve me, where Affection and Integrity are wanting, to deceive me with something that may look tolerably handsome. For want of Constancy enough to support the Shock of the adverse Accidents, to which we are subject, and of Patience seri-

* *Hor. l. 1. Epist. 6.*

ously to apply myself to the Management of my Affairs, I nourish as much as I can this in myself, wholly leaving all to Fortune; to take all Things at the worst, and to resolve to bear that worst with Temper and Patience. That is the only Thing I aim at, and to which I apply my whole Meditation: In a Danger, I do not so much consider how I shall escape it, as of how little Importance it is whether I escape it or no: Should I be left dead upon the Place, what matter? Not being to govern Events, I govern myself, and apply myself to them, if they will not apply themselves to me. I have no great Art to evade, escape from, or to force Fortune, and by Prudence to guide and incline Things to my own Biass. I have the least Patience of all to undergo the troublesome and painful Care therein required; and the most uneasy Condition for me is to be suspended in urgent Occasions, and to be agitated betwixt Hope and Fear. Deliberation, even in Things of lightest Moment, is very troublesome to me; and I find my Mind more put to it to undergo the various Tumbling and Tossing of Doubt and Consultation, than to set up its Rest, and to acquiesce in whatever shall happen after the Die is thrown. Few Passions break my Sleep, but of Deliberations the least will do it. As in Roads, I willingly avoid those that are sloping and slippery, and put myself into the beaten Track, how dirty or deep soever, where I can fall no lower, and there seek my Safety: So I love Misfortunes that are purely so, that do not torment and teaze me with the Incertainty of their growing better; but that at the first Push plunge me directly into the worst that can be expected.

Dubia plus torquent mala.*

Doubtful Ills do plague us worst.

In Events, I carry myself like a Man, in the Conduct, like a Child. The Fear of the Fall more astonishes me than the Fall itself. It will not quit Cost. The Covetous Man has a worse Account of his Passion than the Poor, and the Jealous Man than the Cuckold; and a Man oft-times loses more by defending his Vineyard, than if he gave it up. The lowest Walk is the safest; 'tis the Seat of Constancy:

* *Seneca. Agamemnon.*

There

There you have need of no one but yourself, 'tis there founded, and wholly stands upon its own Basis. Has not this Example of a Gentleman very well known, some Air of *Philosophy* in it? He married, being well advanc'd in Years, having spent his Youth in good Fellowship, a great Talker, and a great Jeerer; calling to Mind how much the Subject of Cuckoldry had given him Occasion to talk and scoff at others, to prevent them from paying him in his own Coin, he married a Wife from a Place where any may have Flesh for his Money; *Good-morrow, Whore, Good-morrow, Cuckold*; and there was not any Thing where-with he more commonly and openly entertain'd those that came to see him than with this Design of his, by which he stopp'd the private Muttering of Mockers, and defended himself from this Reproach. As to Ambition, which is Neighbour, or rather Daughter to Presumption, Fortune, to advance me, must have come and taken me by the Hand; for to trouble myself for an uncertain Hope, and to have submitted myself to all the Difficulties that accompany those who endeavour to bring themselves into Credit in the Beginning of their Progress, I could never have done it.

— *Spem pretio non emo* *.

I will not purchase Hope with Money.

I apply myself to what I see, and to what I have in my Hand, and go not very far from the Shore:

Alter remus aquas, alter tibi radat arenas †.

Into the Sea I plunge one Oar,
And with the other rake the Shore.

And besides, a Man very seldom arrives to these Advancements, but in first hazarding what he has of his own: And I am of Opinion, that if a Man has sufficient to maintain him in the Condition wherein he was born and brought up, 'tis a great Folly to hazard that upon the Incertainty of augmenting it. He to whom *Fortune* has deny'd wherein to set his Foot, and to settle a quiet and composed Way of living, is to be excused if he does venture what he has, because, happen what will, Necessity puts him upon striving for himself.

* *Terence.*

† *Prop. l. 1. Eleg. 2.*

Capitula

Capienda rebus in malis præcepta via est *.

A desperate Case must have a desperate Course.

And I rather excuse a younger Brother to expose what his Friends have left him to the Courtesy of Fortune, than him with whom the Honour of his Family is intrusted, that cannot be necessitous, but by his own Fault. I have found a much shorter and more easy Way, by the Advice of the good Friends I had in my younger Days, to free myself from any such Ambition, and to sit still.

Cui fit conditio dulcis, sine pulvere palmæ †.

Whose Sword hath won him Honour in true Fights,
Dusty Olympick Lawrels that Man flights.

Judging right enough of my own Forces, that they were not capable of any great Matters; and calling to Mind the Saying of the late Chancellor *Olivier*, *That the French were like Monkies, that swarm up a Tree from Branch to Branch, and never stop till they come to the highest; and there shew their ugly bald Breach.*

Turpe est quod nequeas capiti committere pondus,

Et pressum inflexo mox dare terga genu ‡.

It is a Shame to load the Shoulders so,
That they the Burden cannot undergo;
And the Knees bending with the Weight, to quit
The pond'rous Load, and turn the Back to it.

I should find the best Qualities I have useles in this Age. The Facility of my Manners would have been call'd Weakness and Negligence, my Faith and Conscience, if such I have, Scrupulousness and Superstition; my Liberty and Freedom would have been reputed troublesome, inconsiderate and rash; *Ill Luck is good for something* ||. It is good to be born in a very deprav'd Age; for so, in comparison of others, you shall be reputed virtuous without costing you much Pains. He that in our Days is but a *Parricide*, and a *sacrilegious* Person, is an honest Man, and a Man of Honour.

* *Seneca. Agara.* † *Hor. l. i. Epist. i.* ‡ *Propertius.*

|| *Proverb.*

*Nunc si depositum non inficiatur amicus,
Si reddat veterem cum tota ærugine follem,
Prodigiosa fides, & Thuscis digna libellis,
Quæque coronata lustrari debeat agna*.*

Now if a Friend does not deny his Trust,
But does th' old Purse restore, with all its Rust;
'Tis a prodigious Faith, that ought in Gold
Amongst the *Thuscan* Annals be enroll'd,
And a crown'd Lamb should sacrificed be
To such an exemplary Integrity.

And never was 'Time or Place wherein *Princes* might propose to themselves more certain Rewards for their Virtue and Justice. The first that shall make it his Business to get himself into Favour and Esteem by those Ways, I am much deceiv'd if he do not, and by the best Title outstrip his Concurrents. Force and Violence can do some Things, but not always all: We see *Merchants*, *Country Justices* and *Artizans*, go cheek by jowl with the best Gentry in Valour and Military Knowledge. They perform honourable Actions both in publick Engagements and private Quarrels, they fight Duels, and defend Towns in our present Wars. A Prince stifles his Renown in this Crowd. Let him shine bright in Humanity, Truth, Integrity, Temperance, and especially in Justice; Marks rare, unknown, and exil'd; 'tis by no other Means but by the sole Good-will of the People that he can do his Business, and no other Qualities can attract their Good-will like those, as being of greatest Utility to them. *Nil est tam popolare quam bonitas* †. *Nothing is so popular as Goodness*. By this Proportion I had been great and rare, as I find myself now a Pigmy, and popular by the Proportion of some past Ages; wherein, if other better Qualities did not concur, it was ordinary and common to see a Man moderate in his Revenges, gentle in resenting Injuries, in Absence religious of his Word, neither double nor too supple, nor accommodating his Faith to the Will of others, or the Turns of Times: I would rather see all Affairs go to wrack and ruin than falsify my Faith to secure them. For as to this Virtue of Dissimulation, which

* *Juven. Sat. 13.*† *Cicero.*

is now in so great Request, I mortally hate it; and of all Vices, find none that shew so much Baseness and Meanness of Spirit. 'Tis a cowardly and servile Humour to hide and disguise a Man's self under a Vizard, and not to dare to shew himself what he is. By that our Followers are train'd up to Treachery: Being brought up to speak what is not true, they make no Conscience of a Lye. A generous Heart ought not to belie its own Thoughts, but will make itself seen within, all there is good, or at least manly: Aristotle reputes it the Office of Magnanimity, openly and professedly to love and hate, to judge and speak with all Freedom; and not to value the Approbation or Dislike of others, in comparison of Truth: Apollonius said, it was for Slaves to lye, and for Freeman to speak Truth. 'Tis the chief and fundamental Part of Virtue, we must love it for itself. He that speaks Truth, because he is oblig'd so to do, and because he serves; and that he is not afraid to lye when it signifies nothing to any Body, is not sufficiently true. My Soul naturally abominates Lying, and hates the Thought of it. I have an inward Bashfulness, and a short Remorse, if sometimes a Lye escape me, as sometimes it does, being surpriz'd by Occasions that allow me no Premeditation. A Man must not always tell all; for that were Folly: But what a Man says should be what he thinks, otherwise 'tis Knavery. I do not know what Advantage Men pretend to by eternally counterfeiting and dissembling, if not, never to be believ'd when they speak the Truth. This may once or twice pass upon Men; but to profess concealing their Thoughts, and to brag, as some of our Princes have done, that they would burn their Shirts if they knew their true Intentions; which was a Saying of the ancient Mitellus, of Macedon; and, that who knows not how to dissemble, knows not how to rule: Is to give warning to all who have any Thing to do with them, that all they say is nothing but Lying and Deceit. *Quo quis versutior, & callidior est, hoc invidiosior & suspectior, detracti opinione probitatis**. By how much any one is more subtle and cunning, by so much is he hated or suspected, the Opinion of his Integrity being lost and gone. It would be a great Simplicity in

Lying condemned.

* Cicero de off. l. 1.

any one to lay any Strefs either on the Countenance or Word of a Man that has put on a Resolution to be always another Thing without than what he is within, as *Tiberius* did; and I cannot conceive what Interest one can have in the Conversation with such Men, seeing they produce nothing that is current and true. Whoever is disloyal to Truth, is the same to Falshood also. Those of our Time, who have consider'd in the Establishment of the Duty of a *Prince*, the Good of his Affairs only, and have prefer'd that to the Care of his Faith and Conscience; might say something to a *Prince* whose Affairs *Fortune* had put into such a Posture, that he might for ever establish them by only once breaking his Word: But it will not go so, they often buy in the same Market, they make more than one Peace, and enter into more than one Treaty in their Lives. Gains tempts them to the first Breach of Faith, and almost always presents itself, as in all other ill Acts, Sacrileges, Murders, Rebellions, Treasons, as always undertaken for some Kind of Advantage. But this first Gain has infinite mischievous Consequences; throws this *Prince* out of all Correspondence and Negotiation, by this Example of Infidelity. *Solyman*, of the *Ottoman* Race, a Race not very solicitous of keeping their Words and Articles, when in my Infancy he made his Army land at *Otranto*, being inform'd that *Mercurino de Gratinare*, and the Inhabitants of *Castro* were detain'd Prisoners, after having surrendred the Place, contrary to the Articles of their Capitulation, sent Orders to have them set at Liberty, saying, *That having other great Enterprizes in hand in those Parts, the Disloyalty, tho' it carry'd a Shew of present Utility, would for the future bring on him a Disrepute and Diffidence of infinite Prejudice.* Now, for my part, I had rather be troublesome and indiscreet than a Flatterer and a Dissembler. I confess, that there may be some Mixture of Pride and Obstinacy in keeping myself so upright and open as I do, without any Consideration of others; and methinks I am a little too free, where I ought least to be so, and that I grow hot by the Opposition of Respect; and it may be also, that I suffer myself to follow the Propensity of my own Nature for want of Art; using the same Liberty of Speech and Countenance towards great Persons, that I bring with me from my own House: I am sensible how much it declines towards Incivility and Indif-

Indiscretion: But besides that, I am so bred, I have not a Wit supple enough to invade a sudden Question, and to escape by some Evasion, nor to feign a Truth, nor Memory enough to retain it so feign'd; nor truly Assurance enough to maintain it, and play the Brave out of Weakness. And therefore it is that I abandon myself to Candor, always to speak as I think, both by Complexion and Design, leaving the Event to Fortune. *Aristippus* was wont to say, that the principal Benefit he had extracted from Philosophy, was, that he spoke freely and openly to all. Memory is a Faculty of wonderful Use, and without which the Judgment can very hardly perform its Office: For my Part, I have none at all: What any one will propose to me, he must

Memory very useful to the Judgment.

do it by Parcels, for to answer a Speech consisting of several Heads, I am not able. I could not receive a Commission by Word of Mouth, without a Note-Book: And when I have a Speech of Consequence to make, if it be long, I am reduc'd to the miserable Necessity of getting Word for Word what I am to say by heart; I should otherwise have neither Fashion nor Assurance, being in fear that my Memory would play me a slippery Trick. But this Way is no less difficult to me than the other. I must have three Hours to learn three Verses. And besides, in a Work of a Man's own, the Liberty and Authority of altering the Order, of changing a Word, incessantly varying the Matter, makes it harder to stick in the Memory of the Author. The more I mistrust it, the worse it is; it serves me best by Chance, I must negligently solicit it; for if I press it 'tis astonish'd, and after it once begins to stagger, the more I sound it, the more it is perplex'd; it serves me at its own Hour, not at mine. And the same Defect I find in my Memory I find also in several other Parts. I fly Command, Obligation and Constraint. That which I can otherwise naturally and easily do, if I impose it upon myself by an express and strict Injunction, I cannot do it. Even the Members of my Body, over which a Man has a more particular Jurisdiction, sometimes refuse to obey me, if I enjoin them a necessary Service at a certain Hour. This tyrannical and compulsive Appointment baffles them, they shrink up either thro' Fear or Spite, and fall into a Trance. Being once in a Place where it is look'd upon as the greatest Dis-

courtesy imaginable not to pledge those that drink to you, tho' I had there all Liberty allow'd me, I try'd to play the Good-fellow out of respect to the Ladies that were there, according to the Custom of the Country; but there was Sport enough; for this Threatning and Preparation that I was to force upon myself, contrary to my Custom and Inclination, did so stop my Throat, that I could not swallow one Drop; and was depriv'd of drinking so much as to my Meat. I found myself gorg'd, and my Thirst quench'd, by so much Drink as my Imagination had swallow'd. This Effect is most manifest in such as have the most vehement and powerful Imagination: But it is natural, notwithstanding, and there is no one that does not, in some Measure, find it. They offer'd an excellent *Archer*, condemn'd to die, to save his Life, if he would shew some notable Proof of his Art, but he refused to try, fearing least the too great Contention of his Will would make him shoot wide, and that instead of saving his Life, he should also lose the Reputation he had got of being a good Marksman. A Man that thinks of something else, will not fail to take over and over again the same Number and Measure of Steps, even to an Inch in the Place where he walks: But if he makes it his Business to measure and count them, he will find, that what he did by Nature and Accident, he cannot so exactly do by Design. My *Library*, which is of the best Sort of Country *Libraries*, is situated in a Corner of my House: if any Thing comes in my Head that I have a mind to look on, or to write, lest I should forget it in but going cross the Court, I am fain to commit it to the Memory of some other. If I venture in speaking to digress never so little from my Subject, I am infallibly lost, which is the Reason that I keep myself strictly close in Discourse. I am forc'd to call the Men that serve me either by the Names of their Offices, or their Country; for Names are very hard for me to remember. I can tell, indeed, that there are three Syllables, that it has a harsh Sound, and that it begins or ends with such a Letter, but that's all: *Memories quite lost.* And if I should live long, I do not think but I should forget my own Name, as some others have done. *Messala Corvinus* was two Years without any Trace of Memory; which is also said of *Gorgius Trapezuntius*. For my own Interest, I often meditate what

what a Kind of Life theirs was, and if, without this Faculty, I should have enough left to support me with any Manner of Ease, and prying narrowly into it; I fear that this Privation, if absolute, destroys all the other Functions of the Soul. M

Plenus rimarum sum, hac atque illac perfluo *.

I'm full of Chinks, and leak out every Way.

It has befall'n me more than once to forget the *Word* I had three Hours before given or received, and to forget where I had hid my Purse: Whatever *Cicero* is pleased to say, I help myself to lose what I have a particular Care to lock safe up. *Memoria certe non modo Philosophiam, sed omnis vitæ usum, omnesque artes, una maxime continet* †. *The Memory is the Receptacle and Sheath of all Science*; and therefore mine being so treacherous, if I know little, I cannot much complain; I know in general the Names of the Arts, and of what they treat, and nothing more. I turn over Books, I do not study them; what I retain I do not know to be another's, and is only what my Judgment has made its Advantage of; Discourses and Imaginations in which it has been instructed. The Author, Place, Words, and other Circumstances, I immediately forget, and am so excellent at Forgetting, that I no less forget my own Writings and Compositions than the rest. I am very often quoted to myself, and am not aware of it; and whoever should enquire of me where I had the Verses and Examples that I have here huddled together, would puzzle me to tell him, and yet I have not borrow'd them but from famous and known Authors, not satisfying myself that they were rich, if I moreover had them not from rich and honourable Hands, where there is a Concurrence of Authority as well as Reason. It is no great Wonder if my Book runs the same Fortune that other Books do, and if my Memory loses what I have writ, as well as what I have read, and what I give, as well as what I receive. Besides the Defect of Memory, I have others which very much contribute to my Ignorance; I have a slow and heavy Wit, the least Cloud stops its Pro-

The Author's Memory.

His Apprehension.

* *Ter. Eun. Act 1. Scene 2.*

† *Cicero.*

gress, so that, for Example, I never propos'd to it any never so easy a *Riddle* that it could find out. There is not the least idle Subtilty that will not gravel me. In Games, where Wit is requir'd, as *Chess*, *Draughts*, and the like, I understand no more but the Motions of the Men, without being capable of any Thing of Design. I have a slow and perplex'd Apprehension, but what it once apprehends it apprehends well, for the Time it retains it. My Sight
His Sight. is perfect, entire, and discovers at a very great Distance, but is soon weary, which makes me that I cannot read long, but am forc'd to have one to read to me. The younger *Pliny* can inform such as have not experienced it themselves, what, and how important in Impediment this is to those who addict themselves to Study. There is not so wretched and so illiterate a Soul wherein some particular Faculty is not seen to shine; no Soul so buried in Sloth and Ignorance, but it will fall at one End or another. And how it comes to pass that a Man blind and asleep to every thing else, shall be found sprightly, clear and excellent in some one particular Effect, we are to enquire of our Masters: But the beautiful Souls are they that are universal, open and ready for all Things, if not instructed, at least capable of being so. Which I say to accuse my own; for whether it be thought Infirmary or Negligence (and to Neglect that which lies at our Feet, which we have in our Hands, and what nearest concerns the Use of Life, is far from my Doctrine) there is not a Soul in the World so awkward as mine, and so ignorant of several vulgar Things, and such as a Man cannot without Shame be ignorant of. I must give some Examples, I was born and bred up in the Country, and amongst Husbandmen; I have had Business and Husbandry in my own Hands ever since my Predecessors, who were Lords of the Estate I now enjoy, left me to succeed them: And yet I can neither cast Accounts, nor reckon my Counters; most of our current Money I do not know, nor the Difference between one Grain and another, either growing or in the Barn, if it be not too apparent; and scarcely can distinguish the *Cabbage* and *Lettuce* in my Garden. I do not so much as understand the Names of the chief Instruments of Husbandry, nor the most ordinary Elements of *Agriculture*, which the very Children know; much less the mechanick Arts, Traffick, Merchandise,

Merchandise, the Variety and Nature of Fruits, Wines and Vines: Nor how to make a Hawk fly, nor to physick a Horse, or a Dog. And, since I must publish my whole Shame, 'tis not above a Month ago that I was trapt in my Ignorance of the Use of Leaven to make Bread, or to what End it was to keep Wine in the Vat. They conjectur'd of old at *Athens* an Aptitude to the *Mathematicks* in him they saw ingeniously baven up a Burthen of Brushwood. Indeed they would draw a quite contrary Conclusion from me; for, give me the whole Provision and Necessaries of a Kitchen, I should starve. By these Features of my Confession Men may imagine others to my Prejudice: But whatever I deliver myself to be, provided it be such as I really am, I have my End; neither will I make any Excuse for committing to Paper such mean and frivolous things as these. The Meanness of the Subject compels me to it. They may if they please accuse my Project, but not my Progress. So it is, that without any Body's needing to tell me, I sufficiently see of how little Weight and Value all this is, and the Folly of my Design. 'Tis enough that my Judgment does not contradict itself, of which these are the Essays.

*Nasutus sit usque licet, sis denique nasus,
Quantum noluerit ferre rogatus Atlas;*

Et passis ipsum tu deridere Latinum,

Non potes in nugas dicere plura meas,

Ipse ego quam dixi: Quid dentem dente juvabit

Reddere? Carne opus est, si satur esse velis.

Ne perdas operam, qui se mirantur, in illos

Virus habe, nos hæc novimus esse nihil †.

Be nos'd, be all Nose, 'till thy Nose appear

So great, that *Atlas* it refuse to bear;

Tho' even against *Latinus* thou inveigh,

Against my Trifles thou no more can't say

Than I have said myself: Then to what End

Should we to render Tooth for Tooth contend?

You must have Flesh if you'll be full, my Friend, }

† *Mart. l. 13. Epig. 2.*

Lose not thy Labour ; but on those that do
 Admire themselves, thy utmost Venom throw,
 That these Things nothing are, full well we know. }

I am not oblig'd to utter no Absurdities, provided I am not deceiv'd in them, and know them to be such ; and to trip knowingly, is so ordinary with me, that I seldom do it otherwise, and rarely trip by chance. 'Tis no great Matter to add ridiculous Actions to the Temerity of my Humour, since I cannot ordinarily help supplying it with those that are vicious. I was present one Day at *Barleduc*, when

The Picture of Rene, King of Sicily, drawn by himself.

King *Francis* the Second, for a Memorial of *Rene* King of *Sicily*, was presented with a Picture he had drawn of himself. Why is it not in like Manner lawful for every one to draw himself with a Pen as he did with a *Crayon* ? I will not therefore omit this

Blemish, 'tho very unfit to be publish'd, which is Irresolution ; a very great Defect, and very incommodious in the Negotiations of the Affairs of the World ; in doubtful Enterprizes, I know not which to chuse.

Ne si ne no, nel cormi suona intero.

I can maintain an Opinion, but I cannot chuse one, by reason that in human Things, to what *Seet* soever a Man inclines many Appearances present themselves that confirm us in it, and the Philosopher *Chrysippus* said, *That he would of Zeno and Cleanthes, his Masters, learn their Doctrines only ; for as to Proofs and Reasons, he should find enough of his own* : Which Way soever I turn, I still furnish myself with Causes, and Likelihood enough to fix me there, which makes me detain Doubt and the Liberty of choosing 'till all Occasion presses ; and then, to confess the Truth, I, for the most part, *throw the Feather into the Wind*, as the Saying is, and commit myself to the Mercy of Fortune ; a very light Inclination and Circumstance carries me along with it.

Dum in dubio est animus, paulo momento huc atque illuc impellitur †.

† *Terence. Andr. Act. 1. Scen. 3.*

My Mind being in Doubt, in a short Space,
With nimble Turns, this Way and that Way fways.

The Incertainty of my Judgment is so equally ballanced in most Occurrences, that I could willingly refer it to be decided by the Chance of a Dye. And observe, with great Consideration of our Human Infirmity, the Examples that the Divine *History* itself has left us of this Custom of referring to Fortune and Chance the Determination of Elections in Doubtful Things: *Sors cecidit super Matthiam**. *The Lot fell upon Matthias*. Human Reason is a 'Two-edg'd and a dangerous Sword: Observe in the Hand of *Socrates*, her most intimate and familiar Friend, how many several Points it has. I am also good for nothing but to follow and suffer myself to be easily carried away with the Crowd; I have not Confidence enough in my own Strength to take upon me to command and lead. I am very glad to find the Way beaten before me by others. If I must run the Hazard of an uncertain Choice, I am rather willing to have it under such a one as is more confident in his Opinions than I am in mine, whose Ground and Foundation I find to be very slippery and unsure, and yet I do not easily change, by Reason that I discern the same Weakness in contrary Opinions. *Ipsa consuetudo assentiendi periculosa esse videtur, & lubrica* †. *The very Custom of assenting seems to be dangerous and slippery*. Especially in politicick Affairs there is a large Field open for Contestation.

*Iusta pari premitur velati cum pondere libra,
Prona nec hac plus parte sedet, nec surgit ab illa* ||.

Like a just Ballance press'd with equal Weight,
Nor dips, nor rises, but the Beam is fraight.

Machiavel's Writings, for Example, were solid enough for the Subject, yet were they easy enough to be controverted; and they who have taken up the Cudgels against him, have left as great a Facility of controverting theirs. There was never wanting in that Kind of Argument Replies upon Replies, and as infinite a Contexture of Debates as our wrangling Lawyers have extended in Favour of long Suits.

* *Acts*, 1. † *Cicero. Acad. lib. 4.* || *Tibullus. l. 4.*
Cædimur,

Cædimur, & totidem plagis consumimus hostem *.

————— This is a War,
Wherein by Turns we beat, and beaten are.

The Reasons having little other Foundation than Experience, and the Variety of Human Events, presenting us with infinite Examples of all Sorts of Forms. An understanding Person of our Times says; *That whoever would in Contradiction to our Almancks write Cold, where they say Hot, and Wet where they say Dry, and always put the contrary to what they foretel; if he were to lay a Wager, he would not care which Side he took, excepting where no Incertainty could fall out; as to promise excessive Heats at Christmas, or Extremity of Cold at Midsummer, which cannot possibly be.* I have the same Opinion of these politick Controversies; be on which Side you will, you have as fair a Game to play as your Adversary, provided you do not proceed so far as to jostle Principles that are too manifest to be disputed. And yet, in my Conceit, in publick Affairs there is no Government so ill, provided it be ancient, and has been constant, that is no better than Change and Alteration. Our Manners are infinitely corrupted, and wonderfully incline to the worst: Of our Laws and Customs, there are many that are barbarous and monstrous: Nevertheless, by reason of the Difficulty of Reformation, and the Danger of stirring Things, if I could put something under to stay the Wheel, and keep it where it is, I would do it with all my Heart.

Numquam adeoque pudendis

Utimur exemplis, ut non pejora supersint †.

Th' Examples we produce are not so plain
And smutty but behind far worse remain.

The worst Thing that I find in our *State* is the Instability of it; and that our Laws, no more than our Cloaths, cannot settle in any certain Form. It is very easy to accuse a Government of Imperfection, for all mortal Things are full of it: It is very easy to beget in a People a Contempt of ancient Observances, never any Man undertook it but he

* *Hor. lib. 2. Epist. 2.*

† *Juvenal.*

did it; but to establish a better Regimen in the stead of that a Man has overthrown, many who have attempted that, have been founder'd in the Attempt. I very little consult my Prudence in my Conduct; I am willing to let it be guided by the publick Rule. Happy People, who do what they are commanded better than they who command, without tormenting themselves with the Causes, who suffer themselves gently to roul after the Cœlestial Revolution: Obedience is never pure nor calm in him who argues and disputes. In fine, to return to myself, the only Thing by which I esteem myself to be something, is, that wherein never any Man thought himself to be defective; my Recommendation is vulgar and common; for who ever thought he wanted Sense? It would be a Proposition that would imply a Contradiction in itself, 'tis a Disease that never is where it is discern'd, 'tis tenacious and strong, but that the first Ray of the Patient's Sight does nevertheless pierce thro' and disperse, as the Beams of the Sun do thick and obscure Mists. To accuse one's self would be to excuse in this Case, and to condemn, to absolve. There never was Porter, or the silliest Girl, that did not think they had Sense enough to do their Business. We easily enough confess an Advantage of Courage, Strength, Experience, Activity and Beauty in others; but an Advantage in Judgment we yield to none; and the Reasons that simply proceed from the natural arguing of others, we think, if we had but turn'd our Thoughts that Way, we should ourselves have found out, as well as they. Knowledge, Stile, and such Parts as we see in others Works, we are soon aware of, if they excel our own; but for the simple Products of the Understanding, every one thinks he could have found out the like, and is hardly sensible of the Weight and Difficulty, if not (and then with much ado) in an extreme and incomparable Distance. And whoever should be able clearly to discern the Height of another's Judgment, would be also able to raise his own to the same Pitch. So that it is a Sort of Exercise, from which a Man is to expect very little Praise, a Kind of Composition of small Repute. And besides, for whom do you write? The Learned, to whom the Authority appertains of judging Books, know no other Value but that of Learning, and allow of no other Proceeding of Wit, but that of Erudition and Art; if you have
mistaken

mistaken one of the *Scipio's* for another, what is all the rest you have to say worth? Whoever is ignorant of *Aristotle*, according to their Rule, is in some sort ignorant of himself. Heavy, ill-bred and vulgar Souls, cannot discern the Grace of a delicate Stile. Now these two Sorts of Men take up the World. The third Sort, into whose Hands you fall, of Souls that are regular and strong of themselves, is so rare, that it justly has neither Name nor Place amongst us; and 'tis so much Time lost to aspire unto it, or to endeavour to please it. 'Tis commonly said, that the justest Dividend *Nature* has given of her Favours, is that of Sense; for there is no one that is not contented with his Share: Is it not Reason? For whoever should discern beyond that, would see beyond his Sight. I think my Opinions are good and sound; but who does not think the same of his? One of the best Proofs I have that mine are so, is the small Esteem I have of myself; for had they not been very well assur'd, they would easily have suffered themselves to have been deceiv'd by the peculiar Affection I have to myself, as one that place it almost wholly in myself, and do not let much run by. All that others distribute amongst an infinite Number of Friends and Acquaintance, to their Glory and Grandeur, I dedicate to the Repose of my own Mind, and to myself. That which escapes thence is not properly by my Direction.

Mibi nempe valere, & vivere doctus *.

To love myself I very well can tell,
So as to live content, and to be well.

Now I find my Opinions very bold and constant, in condemning my own Imperfection; and to say the Truth, 'tis a Subject upon which I exercise my Judgment, as much as upon any other. The World looks always opposite; I turn my Sight inwards, there fix and employ it: Every one looks before him, I look into myself; I have no other Business but myself; I am eternally meditating upon myself, controul and taste myself; other Men's Thoughts are ever wandering abroad, if they set themselves to thinking, they are still going forward.

* *Plaut.*

*Nemo in sese tentat descendere**.

No Man attempts to dive into himself.

For my Part, I circulate in myself: and this free Humour of not over easily subjecting my Belief I owe principally to myself; for the strongest and most general Imaginations I have, are those, that, as a Man may say, were born with me; they are natural, and entirely my own. I produc'd them crude and simple, with a strong and bold Production, but a little troubled and imperfect; I have since establish'd and fortify'd them with the Authority of others, and the sound Examples of the Ancients, whom I have found of the same Judgment: They have given me faster hold, and a more manifest Fruition and Possession of that I had before embrac'd; the Reputation that every one pretends to, of Vivacity and Promptness of Wit, I speak in Regularity; the Glory they pretend to from a brave and honourable Action, or some particular Excellency, I claim from Order, Correspondence, and Tranquility of Opinions and Manners. *Omnino si quidquam est decorum, nihil est perfecto magis quam æquabilitas universæ Vitæ, tum singularum actionum, quam conservare non possis, si aliorum naturam imitans omittas tuam †.* If any thing be entirely decent, nothing certainly can be more, than an Equability in the whole Life, and in every particular Action of it; which thou can'st not positively observe and keep, if imitating other Men's Natures, thou layest aside thy own. Here then you see to what Degree I find myself guilty of this first Part, that I said was in the Vice of Presumption. As to the Second, which consists in not having a sufficient Esteem for others, I know not whether or no I can so well excuse myself; but whatever comes on't, I am resolv'd to speak the Truth. And whether perhaps it be, that the continual Frequentation I have had with the Humours of the Ancients, and the Idea of those great Souls of past Ages, put me out of Taste, both with others and myself; or that, in Truth, the Age we live in does produce but very indifferent

* *Perfius Sat. 4.*

† *Cicero de Offic. lib. 1.*

Things;

Things ; yet so it is, that I see nothing worthy of any great Admiration ; neither indeed have I so great an Intimacy with many Men as is requisite to make a right Judgment of them ; and those with whom my Condition makes me the most frequent, are, for the most Part, Men that have little Care of the Culture of the Soul ; but that look upon Honour as the Sum of all Blessings, and Valour as the Height of all Perfection. What I see that is handsome in others, I very readily commend and highly esteem ; nay, I often say more in their Commendation than I think they really deserve, and give myself so far leave to lye ; for I cannot invent a false Subject. My Testimony is never wanting to my Friends in what I conceive deserves Praise ; and where a Foot is due, I am willing to give them a Foot and a half ; but to attribute to them Qualities that they have not, I cannot do it, nor openly defend their Imperfections. Nay, I frankly and ingenuously give my very Enemies their due Testimony of Honour. My Affection alters, my Judgment does not ; and I never confound my Animosity with other Circumstances that are foreign to it ; and am so jealous of the Liberty of my Judgment, that I can very hardly part with it for any Passion whatever. I do myself a greater Injury in Lying than

*Enemies
honour'd by
the Persians
for their
Virtue.*

did deserve. I know Men enough that have several fine Parts ; one Wit, another Courage, another Address, another Conscience, another Language ; one, one Science, another, another ; but a Man generally great, and that has all these brave Parts together, or any one of them to such a Degree of Excellence that we should admire him, or compare him with those we honour of Times past, my Fortune never brought me acquainted

*Praise of
Stephen
Boetius.*

with ; and the greatest I ever knew, I mean, for the natural Parts of the Soul, was *Stephen Boetius* ; his was a full Soul indeed, and that had every Way a beautiful

tiful Aspect: A Soul of the old Stamp, and that had produc'd great Effects, had Fortune been so pleas'd; having added much to those great natural Parts by Learning and Study. But how it comes to pass I know not, and yet it is certainly so, there is as much Vanity and Weakness of Judgment in those who profess the greatest Abilities, who take upon them learned Callings and bookish Employments, as in any other Sort of Men whatever; either because more is required and expected from them, and that common Defects are inexcusable in them; or because the Opinion they have of their own Learning makes them more bold to expose and lay themselves too open, by which they lose and betray themselves. As an Artificer more betrays his want of Skill in a rich Matter he has in his Hand, if he disgrace the Work by ill Handling, and contrary to the Rules requir'd, than in a Matter of less Value; and Men are more displeas'd at a Disproportion in a Statue of Gold, than in one of Alabaſter; so do these, when they exhibit Things that in themselves, and in their Place, would be good: For they make use of them without Discretion, honouring their Memories at the Expence of their Understanding, and making themselves ridiculous to honour *Cicero*, *Galen*, *Ulpian*, and *St. Hierom*. I willingly fall again into the Discourse of the Vanity of our Education; the End of which is not to render us good and wise, but learned; and she has obtain'd it. She has not taught us to follow and embrace Virtue and Prudence, but she has imprinted in us their Derivation and Etymology. We know how to decline Virtue, we know not how to love it. If we do not know what Prudence is really, and in Effect, and by Experience, we have it however by Heart. We are not content to know the Extraction, Kindred and Alliances of our Neighbours, we will moreover have them our Friends, and will establish a Correspondency and Intelligence with them: But this Education of ours has taught us Definitions, Divisions, and Partitions of Virtue, as so many Surnames and Branches of a Genealogy, without any further Care of establishing any Familiarity or Intimacy betwixt her and us. She has cull'd out for our initiary Instruction, not such

Books as contain the soundest and truest Opinions, but those that speak the best *Greek* and *Latin*; and by these quaint Words has instill'd in our Fancy the vainest Humours of Antiquity. A good Education alters the Judgment and Manners; as it happen'd to *Polemon*, a young lewd and debauch'd *Greek*, who going by chance to hear one of *Xenocrates's* Lectures, did not only observe the Eloquence and Learning of the Reader, and not only brought away the Knowledge of some fine Matter, but a more manifest and a more solid Profit, which was the sudden Change and Reformation of his former Life. Who ever found such an Effect of our Discipline?

—*faciasne quod olim*

*Mutatus Polemon, ponas insignia morbi,
Fasciolas, cubital, focalia: Potus ut ille
Dicitur ex collo furtim carpsisse coronas,
Postquam est impransu correptus voce Magistri*.*

Pray tell me, can you do like *Polemon*?
Who being drunk, ran with a Garland on,
Into the School of grave *Xenocrates*,
With Ribbons, Cushions, Handkerchiefs; all these
He privately took off and threw away,
When he heard what that temperate Man did say.

That seems to me to be the least contemptible Condition of Men, which by its Plainness and Simplicity is seated in the lowest Degree, and invites us to a more regular Conversation. I find the Manner and clownish Language of Country People commonly better suited to the Rule and Prescription of true *Philosophy* than those of our Philosophers themselves. *Plus sapit vulgus, quia tantum quantum opus est, sapit †.* The Vulgar are so much the Wiser, because they only know what is needful for them to know. The most remarkable Men, as I have judg'd by outward Appearances (for to judge of them according to my own Method, I must penetrate a great deal deeper) for Soldiers and Military Conduct, were the Duke of *Guise*, who dy'd at *Orleans*, and the late

* *Hor. l. 2. Sat. 3.*

† *Lactant. Instit. l. 2.
Marechal*

Marschal *Strozzy*. And for Gunmen of great Ability, and no common Virtue, *Olivier*, and *de l' Hospital*, Chancellors of *France*. Poesy too, in my Opinion, has flourish'd in this Age of ours. We have abundance of very good Artificers in the Trade, *Aurat*, *Beze*, *Buchanan*, *l' Hospital*, *Montdore* and *Turnebus*. As to the *French* Poets, I believe they have rais'd it to the highest Pitch to which it can ever arrive; and in those Parts of it wherein *Ronsard* and *du Bellay* excel, I find them little inferior to the ancient Perfection. *Adrian Turnebus* knew more, and what he did know, better than any Man of his Time, or long before him. The Lives of the last Duke of *Alva*, and of our Constable *de Montmorency*, were both of them great and noble, and that had many Resemblances of Fortune; but the Beauty and Glory of the Death of the last, in the Sight of *Paris*, and of his King, against his nearest Relations, in their Service, at the Head of an Army, thro' his Conduct, Victorious, and by a Blow of Hand in so extreme an old Age, merits, methinks, to be recorded amongst the most remarkable Events of our Times. As also the constant Virtue, Sweetness of Manners, and conscientious Facility of *Monsieur de la Noue*, in so great an Injustice of armed Parties (the true School of Treason, Inhumanity and Robbery) wherein he always kept up the Reputation of a good Man, and a great and experienc'd Captain. I have taken a Delight to publish in several Places the Hopes I have of *Mary de Gournay le Jars*, my Daughter of Alliance; and certainly belov'd by me with more than a Paternal Love, and mew'd up in my Solitude and Retirement as one of the best Parts of my own Being. I have no Regard to any Thing in this World but her; and if a Man may presage from her Youth, her Soul will one Day be capable of very great Things; and amongst others, of the Perfection of the Sacred Friendship, to which we do not read that any of her Sex could ever yet arrive; the Sincerity and Solidity of her Manners are already sufficient for it, and her Affection towards me more than superabundant, and such as that there is nothing more to be wish'd, if not that the Apprehension she has of my End, being now Five and Fifty

Years old, might not so much afflict her. The Judgment she has made of my first *Essays*, being a Woman so young, and in this Age, and alone in her own Country, and the famous Vehemency wherewith she lov'd, and desired me upon the sole Esteem she had of me, before she ever saw my Face, is an Accident very worthy of Consideration. Other Virtues have little or no Credit in this Age; but Valour is become popular by our *Civil Wars*; and in this, we have Souls brave, even to Perfection, and in so great Number, that the Choice is impossible to be made. This is all of extraordinary and not common, that has hitherto arriv'd at my Knowledge.



C H A P. XVIII.

Of Giving the Lye.

WELL, but some one will say to me, *This Design of making a Man's self the Subject of his Writing were excusable in rare and famous Men, who by their Reputation had given others a Curiosity to be fully inform'd of them.* It is most true, I confess it, and know very well that a Tradesman will scarce lift his Eyes from his work to look at an ordinary Man, when they will forsake their Business and their Shops to stare at an eminent Person, when he comes to Town: It misbecomes any other to give his own Character, but such a one who has Qualities worthy of Imitation, and whose Life and Opinions may serve for Examples. *Cæsar* and *Xenophon* had whereon to found their Narrations in the Greatness of their own Performances, as a just and solid Foundation. And it were also to be wish'd, that we had the Journal Papers of *Alexander* the Great, the Commentaries that *Augustus*, *Cato*, *Sylla*, *Brutus*, and others have left of their Actions. Men love and contemplate the very Statues of such Men both in Copper and Marble.