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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**

**London, 1743**

Chap. VIII. Of the Art of Conferring,

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to end where I begun : The Emperor *Adrian* disputin<sup>g</sup> with the Philosopher *Favorinus* about the Interpretatio<sup>n</sup> of some Word : *Favorinus* soon yielded him the Victory ; for which his Friends rebuking him ; *You talk simply*, said he, *would you not have him wiser than I, who commands thirty Legions ?* *Augustus* wrote Verses against *Asinius Pollio*, and I said *Pollio*, say nothing, for it is not Prudence to write in contest with him who has Power to proscribe : And he was in the right ; for *Dionysius*, because he could not equal *Philoxenus* in Poetry, and *Plato* in Discourse, condemn'd one to the Quarries, and sent the other to be sold for a Slave in the Island of *Ægina*.



CHAP. VIII.

Of the Art of Conferring.

**T**IS the Custom of our Justice to condemn some for a Warnings to other. To condemn them for having done amiss, were Folly, as *Plato* says, for what is done can never be undone ; but 'tis that they may offend no more, and that others may avoid the Example of their Offence : we do not correct the Man we hang, we correct others by him. I do the same. My Errors are sometimes natural, incorrigible and irremediable : but the Good which virtuous Men do the Publick in making themselves imitated, I perhaps may do in making my Manners avoided.

*Nonne vides Albi ut malè vivat filius utque  
Barras inops ? magnum documentum, ne patriam  
Perdere quis velit\*.*

Do but observe the wealthy *Albius*' Son,  
Into what Want he is by Wildness run ;

\* *Horace, l. 1. Sat. 4.*

See what a shabby Fellow *Barrus* is grown,  
*Barrus*, the ranting'st Gallant of the Town;  
 A good Instruction for young *Heirs* that they  
 Should not their Patrimony fool away\*.

While I publish and accuse my own Imperfections, some body will learn to be afraid of them. The Parts that I most esteem in myself derive more Honour from decrying, than from commending my own Manners: which is the Reason why I so often fall into, and so much insist upon that Strain. But, when all is summ'd up, a Man never speaks of himself without Loss. A Man's Accusations of himself are always believ'd, his Praises never. Perhaps there may be some of my own Complexion, who better instruct me by Contrariety than Similitude, and more by avoiding than imitating. The elder *Cato* had a regard to this sort of Discipline, when he said, *that the Wise may learn more of Fools, than Fools can of the Wise*; and *Pausanias* tells us of an ancient Player upon the *Harp*, who used to make his Scholars go to hear one that played very ill, and liv'd over-against him, that they might learn to hate his Discords and false Measures. The Horror of Cruelty more inclines me to Clemency, than any Example of Clemency could possibly do. A good *Rider* does not so much mend my Seat, as an awkward Attorney, or a *Venetian* on Horseback; and a clownish Way of Speaking does more reform mine, than the quaintest *Dialect*. The ridiculous and simple Look of another does always advertise and advise me; that which pricks, rouzes, and incites much better than that which tickles. The Time is now proper that we should reform backward, more by dissenting than agreeing, by differing than consenting. Profiting little by good Examples, I make use of those that are ill, which also are every where to be found; I endeavour to render myself as agreeable as I see others offensive, as constant as I see others fickle, as affable as I see others rough, and as good as I see others evil. But I propose to myself invincible Measures, The most fruitful and natural Exercise of the Mind, in my Opinion,

\* *Mr. Alexander Brome.*

is Conference; I find the Use of it more sweet than of any other Action of Life: And for that Reason it is, that if I were now compell'd to choose, I should sooner, I think, consent to lose my Sight, than my Hearing and Speech. The *Athenians*, and also the *Romans*, kept this Exercise in great Honour in their *Academies*. The *Italians* retain some Footsteps of it to this Day to their great Advantage, as is manifest by the Comparison of our Understandings with theirs. The Study of Books is a languishing and feeble Motion, that heats not, whereas Conference teaches and exercises at once. If I confer with an understanding Man, and a rude Jester, he presses hard upon, and wounds me on both sides; his Imagination raises up mine to a more than ordinary pitch. Jealousy, Glory, and Contention, stimulate and raise me up to something above myself; and a Consent of Judgment is a Quality totally offensive in Conference. But, as our Minds fortify themselves by the Communication of vigorous and regular Understandings; 'tis not to be express'd how much they lose and degenerate by the continual Commerce and Frequency we have with those that are mean and low. There is no Contagion that spreads like that: I know sufficiently by Experience what 'tis worth a Yard. I love to discourse and dispute, but it is but with few Men, and for myself; for to do it as a Spectacle and Entertainment to great Persons, and to vaunt of a Man's Wit and Eloquence, is, in my Opinion, very unbecoming a Man of Honour. Impertinency is a scurvy Quality, but not to be able to endure it, to fret and vex at it, as I do, is another sort of Disease, little inferior to Impertinence itself; and is the Thing that I will accuse in myself. I enter into Conference, and dispute with great Liberty and Ease, forasmuch as Opinion meets in me with a Soil very unfit for Penetration, and wherein to take any deep Root: no Propositions astonish me, no Belief offends me, though never so contrary to my own. There is no Fancy so frivolous and extravagant that does not seem to me suitable to the Product of Human Wit. We, who deprive our Judgments of the Right of Determining, look indifferently upon various Opinions, and

*Conference of  
greater Advantage than the  
Reading of  
Books.*

if we incline not our Judgments to them, yet we easily give them the Hearing. Where one Scale is totally empty, I let the other waver under old Wives Dreams. And I think myself excusable, if I rather chuse the odd Number, *Thursday*, rather than *Friday*; and if I had rather be twelfth or fourteenth, than the thirteenth at Table; if I had rather on a Journey see a *Hare* run by me than cross my way; and rather give my Man my left Foot than my right, when he comes to dress me. All such Whimsies as are in Use amongst us, deserve at least to be hearkned unto. For my Part, they only with me import Inanity, but they import that. Moreover, vulgar and casual Opinions are considered as Things of Moment, and are indeed something more than nothing in Nature; and who will not suffer himself to proceed so far, perhaps falls into the Vice of Obstinacy, to avoid that of Superstition. The Contradictions of Judgments then do neither offend nor alter, they only rouze and exercise me. We evade Correction, whereas we ought to offer and present ourselves to it, especially when it appears in the Form of Conference, and not of Authority. At every Opposition, we do not consider whether or no it be just, but right or wrong, how to disengage ourselves: instead of extending the Arms, we thrust out our Claws. I could suffer myself to be rudely handled by my Friend, so much as to tell me that I am a Fool, and talk I know not of what. I love stout Expressions amongst brave Men, and to have them speak as they think. We must fortify and harden our Hearing against this Tenderness of ceremonious Sound of Words. I love a strong and manly Familiarity and Conversation; a Friendship that flatters itself in the Sharpness and Vigour of its Communication; like Love, in biting and scratching. It is not vigorous and generous enough, if it be not quarrellous, if civiliz'd and artificial, if it treads nicely, and fears the Shock. *Neque enim disputari sine reprehensione potest\**, Neither can a Man dispute, but he must reprehend. When any one contradicts me, he raises my Attention, not my Anger; I advance towards him that controverts and instructs me. The Cause of Truth ought to be the common Cause

\* *Cicero de Finib. l. 1.*

both of one and the other : What will he answer ? The Passion of Anger has already confounded his Judgment ; *Amazement* has usurp'd the Place of Reason. It were not amiss, that the Decision of our Disputes should pass by Wager : that there might be a material Mark of our Losses, to the End we might the better remember them ; and that my Man might tell me, *Your Ignorance and Obstinacy cost you last Year, at several times, an hundred Crowns.* I embrace and care for *Truth* in what Hand soever I find it, and chearfully surrender myself, and my conquer'd Arms, as far off as I can discover it : and, provided it be not too imperiously, take a Pleasure in being reprov'd, and accommodate myself to my Accusers, very often more by Reason of Civility than Amendment, loving to gratify and nourish the Liberty of Admonition, by my Facility of submitting to it. Nevertheless it is hard to bring the Men of my Time to it. They have not the Courage to correct, because they have not the Courage to suffer themselves to be corrected, and speak always with Dissimulation in the Presence of one another. I take so great Pleasure in being judg'd and known, that it is upon the Matter indifferent to me in which of the two Forms I am so : My Imagination does so often contradict and condemn itself, that 'tis all one to me if another do it, especially considering that I give his Reprehension no greater Authority than what I will myself. But I break with him, who carries himself so high, as I know some do, that repents his Advertisement, if not believ'd, and take it for an Affront if it be not immediately follow'd. In that *Socrates* always receiv'd smiling the Contradictions oppos'd against his Arguments, a Man may say his Strength of *Reason* was the Cause, and the Advantage being certain to fall on his side, he accepted them as Matter of new Victory. Nevertheless, we see on the contrary, that nothing in Argument renders our Sentiments so delicate, as the Opinion of Preheminency and Disdain of the Adversary ; and that in Reason, 'tis rather for the Weaker to take in good Part the Oppositions that correct him and set him right. Indeed I chuse the frequenting those that ruffle me rather than those that fear me. 'Tis a dull and hurtful Pleasure to have to do with People who admire us, and approve

of

of all we say. *Antisthenes* commanded his Children, never to take it kindly, or for a Favour from any Man that commended them. I find I am much prouder of the Victory I obtain over myself, when even in the Ardour of Dispute, I make myself submit to my Adversaries Force of Reason; then I am pleas'd with the Victory I obtain over him through his Weakness. In fine, I receive and admit of all manner of Attacks that are direct, how weak soever: but I am too impatient of those that are made out of Form. I care not what the Subject is, the Opinions are to me all one, and I am as indifferent whether I get the better or the worse: I can peaceably argue a whole Day together, if the Argument be carried on with Order. I do not so much require Force and Subtilty, as Method. I mean the Order which we every Day observe in the wrangling of Shepherds and Apprentices, but never amongst us. If they start from their Subject, 'tis an Incivility, and yet we do it. But their Tumult and Impatience never puts them out of their *Theme*. Their Argument still continues its Course. If they prevent and do not stay for one another, they at least understand one another very well. Any one answers too well for me, if he answers what I say. But when the Dispute is irregular and perplex'd, I leave the thing, and insist upon the Form with Anger and Indiscretion; and fall into a wilful, malicious, and imperious Way of Disputation, of which I am afterwards ashamed. 'Tis impossible to deal honestly and fairly with a Fool. My Judgment is not only corrupted under the Hand of so impetuous a Master, but my Conscience also. Our Disputes ought to be interdicted, and punish'd as well as other verbal Crimes. What Vice do they not raise and heap up, being always govern'd and commanded by Passion? We first quarrel with their Reasons, and then with the Men. We only learn to dispute, that we may contradict, and so every one contradicting, and being contradicted, it falls out that the Fruit of Disputation is to lose and nullify *Truth*; and therefore it is that *Plato* in his *Republick* prohibits this Exercise to Fools and ill-bred People. To what End do you go about to enquire of him who knows nothing to purpose? A Man does no Injury to the Subject, when he leaves it to seek how he may defend it.

I do not mean by an artificial and scholastick Way, but by a natural one, with a sound Understanding. What will it be in the End? One flies to the *East*, the other to the *West*, they lose the Principal, and wander in the Crowd of Incidents. After an Hour of Tempest they know not what they seek: One is low, the other high, and a third wide. One catches at a Word and a *Simile*; another is no longer sensible of what is said in Opposition to him, and thinks of going on at his own Rate, not of answering you. Another finding himself too weak to make good his Rest, fears all, refuses all, and, at the very Beginning, confounds the Subjects: or in the very Height of the Dispute stops short, and grows silent: by a peevish Ignorance affecting a proud Contempt; or by an unreasonable Modesty shuns any further Debate. Provided that this strikes, he cares not how much he lays himself open; the other counts his Words, and weighs them for Reason. Another only brawls, and makes use of the Advantage of his Lungs. Here's one that learnedly concludes against himself, and another that deafs you with Prefaces. and senseless Digressions: Another falls into downright Railing, and seeks a ridiculous Quarrel, to disengage himself from a Wit that presses too hard upon him: And a last Man sees nothing into the Reason of the Thing, but draws a Line of Circumvallation about you of *Dialectick* Clauses, and the *Formula's* of his *Art*. Now who would not enter into Distrust of Sciences, and doubt whether he can reap from them any solid Fruit for the Service of Life; considering the Use we put them to? *Nihil sanantibus literis*. Who has got Understanding by his Logick? Where are all her fair Promises? *Nec ad melius vivendum, nec ad commodius differendum*\*; it neither makes a Man live better, nor dispute more commodiously. Is there more Noise or Confusion in the Scolding of Fish-Wives, than in the publick Dispute of Men of this Profession; I had rather my Son should learn in a *Tap-House* to speak, than in the *School* to prate. Take a Master of Arts, confer with him, Why does he not make us sensible of

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\* *Seneca.*

this



this artificial Excellence? Why does he not ravish Women, and Ignorants, as we are, with Admiration at the Steadiness of his *Reasons*, and the Beauty of his Order? Why does he not sway and persuade us to what he will? Why does a Man who has so great Advantage in Matter, mix Railing, Indiscretion, and Fury in his Disputation? Strip him of his Gown, his Hood, and his Latin; let him batter our Ears with *Aristotle*, who is wholly pure, and wholly believ'd, you will take him for one of us, or worse. Whilst they torment us with this Complication and Confusion of Words, it fares with them, methinks, as with Jugglers; their Dexterity imposes upon our Senses, but does not at all work upon our Belief; this *Legerdemain* excepted, they inform nothing that is not very ordinary and mean: For being the more Learn'd they are nevertheless Fools. I love and honour Knowledge, as much as they that have it. And in it's true Use, 'tis the most noble, and the greatest Acquisition of Men: But in such as I speak of (and the Number of them is infinite) who build their fundamental Sufficiency and Value upon it; who appeal from their Understanding to their Memory, *sub aliena umbra latentes*; and who can do nothing but by Book; I hate it, if I may dare to say so, worse than Stupidity itself. In my Country, and in my Time, Learning improves Fortunes enough, but not Minds. If it meet with those that are dull and heavy, it overcharges and suffocates them, leaving them a crude and undigested Mass: If airy and fine, it purifies, clarifies, and subtilizes them, even to Examination. 'Tis a Thing of almost indifferent Quality; a very useful Accession to a well-born Soul, but hurtful and pernicious to others; or rather, a Thing of very precious Use, that it will not suffer itself to be purchased at an Under-rate. In the Hand of some 'tis a *Scepter*, in that of others a *Fool's Barrow*. But let us proceed, What greater Victory can you expect, than to make your Enemy see and know that he is not able to encounter you? When you get the better of your Argument, 'tis *Truth* that wins; when you get the Advantage of Fame and Method, 'tis then you that win. I am of Opinion, that in *Plato* and *Xenophon*, *Socrates* disputes more in favour of Disputants,

putants, than in favour of the Dispute, and more to instruct *Euthydemus* and *Protagoras* in the Knowledge of their Impertinence, than in the Impertinence of their Art. He takes hold of the first Subject, like one that has a more profitable End than to explain it, namely, to clear the Understanding, that he takes upon him to instruct and exercise. To hunt after Truth is properly our Business, and we are inexcusable if we carry on the Chace impertinently and ill: to fail of seising it is another Thing. For we are born to inquire after *Truth*, it belongs to a greater Power to possess it. It is not, as *Democritus* said, hid in the Bottom of the Deeps; but rather elevated to an infinite Height in the divine Knowledge. The World is but a School of Inquisition. It is not who shall carry the *Ring*, but who shall run the best *Courses*. He may as well play the Fool who speaks true, as he that speaks false; for we are upon the Manner, not the Matter of Speaking. 'Tis my Humour as much to regard the *Form* as the *Substance*, and the *Advocates* as much as the *Cause*; as *Alcibiades* order'd we should: And every Day pass away my Time in reading *Authors*, without any Consideration of their Learning; their Method is what I look after, not their Subject; how, not what they write: And just so to do I hunt after the Conversation of an eminent Wit, not that he may teach me, but that I may know him; and that being acquainted, if I think him worthy of Imitation, I may imitate him. Every Man may speak Truly, but Methodically, and Prudently, and Fully, is a Talent that few Men have. The *Falsity* also that proceeds from Ignorance does not offend me, but the *Foppery* of it. I have broken off several Treaties that would have been of Advantage to me, by reason of the Impertinence of those with whom I treated. I am not mov'd once in a Year at the Faults of those over whom I have Authority; but upon the Account of the ridiculous Obstinacy of their Excuses, we are every Day going together by the Ears: They neither understand what is said, nor why, and answer accordingly, which would make a Man mad. I never feel any Hurt upon my Head but when 'tis knock'd against another, and

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more easily forgive the Vices of my Servants, than their Boldness, Importunity, and Folly. Let them do less, provided they understand what they do. You live in Hopes to warm their Affection to your Service; but there is nothing to be had or to be hop'd for from a Log. But what if I take Things otherwise than they are? perhaps I do: and therefore it is that I accuse my own Impatiencē; and hold in the first Place, that it is equally vicious both in him that is in the Right, and him that is in the Wrong; for 'tis always a tyrannick Sourness, not to endure a Form contrary to ones own: And besides, there cannot in Truth be a greater, more constant, nor more irregular Folly, than to be mov'd and angry at the Follies of the World, for it principally makes us quarrel with our selves; and the old *Philosopher* never wanted Occasion for his Tears, whilst he consider'd himself. *Miso*, one of the seven *Sages*, of a *Timonian* and *Democritick* Humour, being asked, \* *what he laughed at, being alone?* *That I do laugh alone*, answered he. How many ridiculous Things, in my own Opinion, do I say, and answer every Day that comes over my Head? and then how many more, according to the Opinion of others? If I bite my own Lips, what ought others to do? In fine, we must live amongst the Living, and *let the River run under the Bridge*, without Care, or at least, without our Alteration. To speak the Truth, why do we meet a Man with a hump Back, or any other Deformity, without being mov'd, and cannot endure the Encounter of a deform'd Mind without being angry? This vicious Sourness relishes more of the Judge than the Crime. Let us always have this Saying of *Plato* in our Mouths; *Do not I think Things unsound, because I am not sound my self? Am I not my self in Fault? may not my Observation reflect upon my self?* A wise and divine Saying, that lashes the most universal and common Error of Mankind; not only the Reproaches that we throw in the Faces of one another, but our Reasons also, our Arguments and Controversies are

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\* *Heraclitus*.

rebound-

reboundable upon us, and we wound our selves with our own Weapons. Of which Antiquity has left me grave Examples enough. It was ingeniously, and home said, by him who was the Inventor of this Sentence,

*Stercus cuique suum bene olet* \*.

We see nothing behind us. We mock our selves a hundred times a Day, when we deride our Neighbour, and detest in others the Defects which are more manifest in us, and admire them with a marvellous Inadvertency and Impudence. It was but Yesterday, that I saw a Man of Understanding, as pleasantly as justly scoffing at the Folly of another, who did nothing but torment every Body with the Catalogue of his Genealogy and Alliances above half of them false, (for they are most apt to fall into such ridiculous Discourses, whose Qualities are most dubious, and least sure;) and yet, would he but have look'd into himself, he would have discern'd himself to be no less intemperate and impertinent, in extolling his Wife's Pedigree. Oh importunate Presumption, with which the Wife sees her self arm'd by the Hands of her own Husband! Did he understand *Latin*, we should say to him,

*Age, si hæc non insanit satis sua sponte, instiga †.*

If of her self she be not made enough,  
Faith urge her on unto the utmost Proof.

I do not say, that no Man should accuse who is not clean himself, for then no one would ever accuse, because none is absolutely clean from the same Sort of Spot; but I mean, that our Judgment, falling upon another whose Name is then in Question, does not at the same Time spare our selves, but sentences us with an inward severe Authority. 'Tis an Office of Charity, that he who cannot reclaim himself from a Vice,

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\* *Erasm. Adag.*

† *Teren. And. Act. 4. sc. 2.*

should nevertheless endeavour to remove it from another, in whom perhaps it may not have so deep and malignant a Root. Neither do I think it an Answer to the purpose, to tell him, who reproves me for my Fault, that he himself is guilty of the same. What by that? The Reproof is notwithstanding true, and of very good use. Had we a good Nose, our own Ordure would stink worse to us, forasmuch as it is our own. And *Socrates* is of Opinion, that whoever should find himself, his Son, and a Stranger guilty of any Violence and Wrong, ought to begin with himself, to present himself first to the Sentence of Justice, and to purge himself, implore the Assistance of the Hand of the Executioner; in the next Place he should proceed to his Son, and lastly, to the Stranger. If this Precept seems too severe, he ought at least to present himself the first to the Punishment of his own Conscience. The Senses are our proper and first Judges, which perceive not Things but by external Accidents; and 'tis no wonder, if in all the Parts of the Service of our Society, there is so perpetual and universal a Mixture of Ceremonies, and superficial Appearance; insomuch that the best and most effectual Part of our Policies consist therein; 'Tis still Man with whom we have to do, of whom the Condition is wonderfully Corporal. Let those, who of these late Years would erect for us so contemplative and immaterial an Exercise of Religion, not wonder if there be some who think it had vanish'd and melted through their Fingers, had it not more upheld itself amongst us as a Mark, Title and Instrument of Division and Faction, than by itself. As in Conference, the Gravity, Robes and Fortune of him that speaks, often give Reputation to vain Arguments and idle Words; it is not to be presum'd, but that a Man so attended and fear'd has in him more than ordinary Sufficiency; and that he to whom the King has given so many Offices and Commissions, so supercilious and proud, has not a great deal more in him, than another that salutes him at so great a Distance, and who has no Employment at all. Not only the Words but the four Looks also of these People are considered and recorded; every one making it his Business to give them some  
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fine and solid Interpretation. If they stoop to common Conference, and that you offer any thing but Approbation and Reverence, they then knock you down with the Authority of their Experience; they have heard, they have seen, they have done so and so, you are crush'd with Examples. I should tell them, that the Fruit of a *Chirurgion's* Experience is not the *History* of his Practices, and his remembering that he has cur'd four People of the *Plague*, and three of the *Gout*, unless he knows how from hence to extract something whereon to form his Judgment, and to make us sensible that he is become more skilful in his Art. As in a Concert of Instruments, we do not hear a *Lute*, a *Harpical*, or a *Flute* alone, but one intire Harmony of all together. If Travel and Offices have improv'd them, 'tis a Product of their Understanding to make it appear. 'Tis not enough to reckon Experiments, they must weigh and sort them, digest and distil them, to extract the Reasons and Conclusions they carry along with them. There were never so many *Historians*. It is indeed good, and of use to read them; for they furnish us every where with excellent and laudable Instructions from the Magazine of their Memory, which doubtless is of great Concern to the Relief of Life; but 'tis not that we seek for now: We examine whether these Relators and Collectors of Things are commendable themselves. I hate all Sorts of Tyranny, whether verbal or effectual. I am very ready to oppose these vain Circumstances that delude our Judgments by the Senses; and whilst I lye upon my Guard from these extraordinary Grandeurs, I find that, at best, they are but Men, as others are;

*Rarus enim ferme Sensus communis in illa  
Fortuna* \*.

————— For 'tis rare  
If mighty Fortunes common Sense can share †.

\* *Juven. Sat. 8.*  
VOL. III.

† *Sir Robert Stapleton.*  
M Perhaps

Perhaps we esteem and look upon them far less than they are, by reason they undertake more, and more expose themselves, they do not answer the Charge they have undertaken. There must be more Vigour and Strength in the Bearer, than the Burden; he who has not lifted as much as he can, leaves you to guess, that he has still a Strength beyond that; and that he has not been try'd to the utmost of what he is able to do; he who sinks under his Load makes a Discovery of his best, and the Weakness of his Shoulders. This is the Reason that we see so many silly People amongst the Learned, and more than those of the better Sort: they would have made good Husbandmen, good Merchants, and good Artizans: their natural Vigour was cut out to that Proportion. Knowledge is a Thing of great Weight, they faint under it: their Understanding has neither Vigour nor Dexterity enough to set forth and distribute, to employ or make use of this rich and powerful Matter. It has no prevailing Virtue but in a strong Nature, and such Natures are very rare. And the weak ones, says *Socrates*, spoil the Dignity of *Philosophy* in the handling. It appears useless and vicious, when lodg'd in an ill contriv'd Mind. They spoil and make Fools of themselves.

*Humani qualis simulator simius oris,  
Quem puer aridens, pretioso stamine serum  
Velavit, nudasque nates, ac terga reliquit  
Ludibrium mensis* \*.

Just like an Ape, that in his Face does bear  
Of Man the counterfeited Character,  
Whom wanton Boys to Table-laughter move,  
Have dizen'd up in richest Silks above,  
And the Ape more ridiculous to show,  
The raw, bald Buttocks naked left below.

Neither is it enough for those who govern and command us, and have all the World in their Hand to have a common Understanding, and to be able to do the same that we can. They are very much below us, if they be not

\* *Claudian.*

infinitely

infinitely above us. As they promise more, so they are to perform more, and yet Silence is to them not only a Countenance of Respect and Gravity, but very often of good Husbandry too: for *Megabyfus* going to see *Apelles* in his Painting Room, stood a great while without speaking a Word, and at last began to talk of his Paintings, for which he received this rude Reproof; *Whilst thou wast silent, thou seem'dst to be some extraordinary Person, by reason of thy Chain and Rich Habit, but now that we have heard thee speak, there is not the meanest Boy in my Shop that does not despise thee.* Those princely Ornaments, and that mighty State, did not permit him to be ignorant with a common Ignorance, and to speak impertinently of Painting; he ought to have kept this external and presumptive Knowledge silent. To how many Pup-pies of my time has a sullen and silent Behaviour procur'd the Opinion of Prudence and Capacity? Dignities and Offices are of necessity conferred more by Fortune than upon the Account of Merit, and we are to blame, to condemn *Kings* when they are misplaced. On the contrary, 'tis a wonder they should have so good Luck where there is so little Skill;

*Dignities more distributed by Fortune than Merit.*

*Principis est virtus maxima, nosse suos\*.*

There's of a Prince's Virtues none  
So great as that he knows his own.

For Nature has not given them a Sight that can extend to so many People, to discern which excels the rest, nor to penetrate into our Bosoms, where the Knowledge of our Wills and best Value lies. They must chuse us by conjecture and by groping; by the Family, Wealth, Learning, and the Voice of the People, which are all very feeble Arguments. Whoever could find out a way that a Man might judge by Justice, and chuse Men by Reason, would in one thing establish a perfect Form of Government. Ay, but he brought this great Affair to a very good pass. That is indeed to say something, but

\* *Martial.*

M 2

not



not to say enough. For this Sentence is justly receiv'd, *That we are not to judge of Counsels by Events.* The *Carthaginians* punish'd the ill Counsels of their Captains, though the Issue was successful, and the People of *Rome* have often deny'd a *Triumph* for great and very advantageous Victories, because the Conduct of the *General* was not answerable to his good Fortune. We ordinarily see in the Actions of the World, that *Fortune*, to shew us her Power in all Things, and that she takes a Pride to abate our Presumption, seeing she could not make Fools wise, she has made them fortunate in Envy of Virtue; and favours those Executions most, the Web of which is most purely her own. Whence it is that we daily see the simplest amongst us bring to pass great Business, both publick and private. And, as *Syrannex* the *Persian* answer'd those who wonder'd that his Affairs succeeded so ill, considering that his Deliberations were so wise, *that he was sole Master of his Designs, but that the Success was wholly in the Power of Fortune.* These may answer the same, but with a contrary Bias, most worldly Affairs are govern'd and perform'd by her.

*Fata viam inveniunt* \*.

The Event does often justify a very foolish Conduct. Our Interposition is nothing more than as it were a running on by Rote, and more commonly a Consideration of Custom and Example, than of Reason. Being astonish'd at the Greatness of the Execution, I have formerly been acquainted with their Motives and Address by those who have perform'd it, and have found nothing in it, but very ordinary Counsels; and the most vulgar and useful are also perhaps the most sure and convenient for Practice, if not for Shew. And what if the plainest Reasons are the best seated? the meanest, lowest, and most beaten more adapted to Affairs? To maintain the Authority of the Counsels of Kings, 'tis not fit that profane Persons should participate of them, or see farther into them than the

*How the Authority of the Counsels of Kings is to be preserv'd.*

\* *Virg. Æn. l. 3.*

outermost Bar. He that will husband his Reputation, must be reverenc'd upon Credit, and taken altogether. My Consolation gives the first Lines to the Matter, and considers it lightly by the first Face it presents: The Strefs and Main of the Business I have still referr'd to Heaven:

*Permitte divis cætera* \*.

good and ill Fortune are in my Opinion two Sovereign Powers. 'Tis Folly to think that human *Prudence* can play the Part of *Fortune*; and vain is his Attempt, who presumes to comprehend Causes and Consequences, and by the Hand to conduct the Progress of his Design; and most especially vain in the Deliberations of War. There was never greater Circumspection and military Prudence, than sometimes is seen amongst us: Can it be that Men are afraid to lose themselves by the Way, that they reserve themselves to the End of the Game? I do moreover affirm, that our Wisdom itself, and wisest Consultations, for the most part commit themselves to the Conduct of Chance. My Will and my Reason is sometimes mov'd by one Breath, and sometimes by another; and many of those Movements there are that govern themselves without me: my Reason has uncertain and casual Agitations and Impulsions.

*Vertuntur species animorum, & pectora motus  
Nunc alios, alios dum nubila ventus agebat  
Concipiunt †.*

Their Thoughts are chang'd, the Motions of their Mind Inconstant are, like Clouds before the Wind †.

Let a Man but observe who are of greatest Authority in Cities, and who best do their own Business, we shall find that they are commonly Men of the least Parts: Women, Children, and Madmen have had the Fortune to govern great *Kingdoms* equally well with the wisest *Princes*: and *Thucydides* says, that the stupid more fre-

\* *Hor. l. 1. Ode 1.* † *Virg. Georg. lib. 1.*

‡ *Mr. Ogilby.*

quently do it than those of better Understandings. We attribute the Effect of their good Fortune to their Prudence.

*Ut quisque fortuna utitur,  
Ita præcellet; atque exinde sapere illum omnes dicimus\*.*

Men, as they husband their Estate, we prize,  
And who are Rich are still reputed wise.

Wherefore I say, that in all Sorts of Fortune, Events are a very poor Testimony of our Worth and Parts. Now I was upon this Point, that there needs no more, but to see a Man promoted to Dignity, though we knew him but three Days before a Man of no Regard; yet an Image of Grandeur, and some extraordinary Parts insensibly steals into our Opinion, and we persuade ourselves, that being augmented in Reputation and Attendants, he is also increased in Merit. We judge of him not according to his Value, but as we do by Counters, according to the Prerogative of his Place. If it happens so that he falls again, and be mix'd with the common Crowd, every one enquires with Admiration into the Cause of his having been raised so high. *Is it he? say they, could he make no better Provision for himself when he was in Place? Do Princes satisfy themselves with so little? Really we were in good Hands.* This is a Thing that I have often seen in my time. Nay, so much as the very Disguises of Grandeurs represented in our *Comedies*, does in some sort move and deceive us. That which I myself adore in Kings, is the Crowd of Adorers. All Reverence and Submission is due to them, except that of the Understanding: my Reason is not oblig'd to bow and bend, my Knees are. *Melanthius* being ask'd, what he thought of the Tragedy of *Dionysius*? I could not see it, said he, it was so clouded with Language: so the most of those who judge of the Discourses of great Men, ought to say, I did not understand his Words, he was so clouded with Gravity, Majesty, and Greatness. *Antisthenes* one Day intreated the *Athenians* to give order that their Asses might

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\* *Plaut. Pseud.*

as well be employ'd in tilling the Ground as the Horses were: To which it was answer'd, that those Animals were not destin'd for such a Service: *That's all one*, reply'd he, *it only sticks at your Command*: for the most ignorant and incapable Men you employ in your Commands of War, immediately become worthy enough because you employ them. To which the Custom of so many People who canonize the *Kings* they have chosen out of their own Body, and are not content only to honour, but adore them, comes very near. Those of *Mexico* after the Ceremonies of his Coronation dare no more presume to look him in the Face; but, as if they had *deified* him by his *Royalty*, among the Oaths they make him take to maintain their *Religion* and *Laws*, to be valiant, just, and mild, he moreover swears to make the *Sun* run his Course in his wonted Light, to drain the Clouds at a fit Season, to confine Rivers within their Channels, and to cause all things necessary for his People to be landed upon the Earth. I differ from this common Fashion, and am more apt to suspect his Capacity, when I see it accompanied with that Grandeur of Fortune and publick Applause. We are to consider, of what Advantage it is to speak when he pleases, to chuse the Subject he will speak of, to interrupt or change other Mens Arguments with a magisterial Authority; to protect himself from the Oppositions of others by a Nod, a Smile, or Silence, in the Presence of an Assembly that trembles with Reverence and Respect. A Man of a prodigious Fortune, coming to give his Judgment upon some slight Dispute that was foolishly set on foot at his Table, begun in these Words, *It can be no other but a Liar or a Fool that will say otherwise than so and so*. Pursue this philosophical Point with a Dagger in your Hand. There is another Observation I have made, from which I draw great Advantage: which is, that in Conferences and Disputes, every Word that seems to be good is not immediately to be accepted. Most Men are rich in borrow'd Sentences, without understanding the Force of them themselves. That a Man does not perfectly understand all he borrows, may perhaps be verified in myself. A Man must not always

*Deification and Adoration of the Kings of Mexico.*

presently yield, what Truth or Beauty soever may seem to be in the Argument. Either a Man must stoutly oppose it, or retire, under colour of not understanding it, to try on all Parts how it is lodg'd in the Author. It may happen that we may run upon the Point, and meet the Truth that we could not otherwise reach. I have sometimes, in the Necessity and Heat of the Combat, made Falsities that have gone through and through, beyond my Expectation and Design. I only gave them in Number, they were received in Weight. As when I contend with a vigorous Man, I please myself with anticipating his Conclusions, I ease him of the Trouble of explaining himself; I strive to prevent his Imagination, whilst it is yet springing and imperfect: the Order and Pertinency of his Understanding warms and threatens me afar off: I deal quite contrary with these; I must understand, and pre-suppose nothing but by them. If they determine in general Words, *this is good, that is naught*, and that they happen to be in the right, see if it be not Fortune that hits it off for them. Let them a little circumscribe and limit their Judgment, why, or how it is so. These universal Judgments, that I see so common, signify nothing. These are Men that salute a whole People in a Crowd together; they who have a real Acquaintance, take Notice of, and salute them particularly and by Name. But 'tis a hazardous Attempt; and from which I have more than every Day seen it fall out, that weak Understandings, having a mind to appear ingenious in taking notice, as they read a Book; of that which is best, and most to be admired, fix their Admiration upon something so very ill chosen, that instead of making us discern the Excellency of the Author, they make us see their own Ignorance. This Exclamation is safe enough, *This is fine*, after having heard a whole Page of *Virgil*: and by that the cunning sort of Fools save themselves. But to undertake to follow him Line by Line, and with an expert and approv'd Judgment, to observe where a good Author excels himself, weighing the Words, Phrases, Inventions, and various excellencies, one after another; take heed of that, *Videndum est, non modo quid quisque loquatur, sed etiam, quid quisque sentiat,*

*sentiat, atque etiam qua de causa quisque sentiat* \*. A Man is not only to examine what every one says, but also what every one thinks, and for what Reason every one thinks. I every Day hear Coxcombs say Things that are not foolish: They say a good Thing, let us examine how far they understand it, whence they have it, and what they mean by it. We help them to make use of this fine Expression, of this fine Sentence, which is none of theirs, they only have it in Keeping; they have spit it out at a Venture, we bring it for them into Credit and Esteem. You take them by the Hand when you see them falling. To what Purpose? They do not think themselves obliged to you for it, and become more Fools still. Never take their Part, let them alone; they will handle the Matter like People who are afraid of burning their Fingers, they neither dare change it's Seat nor Light, nor break into it; shake it never so little, it slips through their Fingers; they give up their Cause, be it never so strong, or good however. These are fine Arms, but ill mounted. How many times have I seen the Experience? Now, if you come to explain any Thing to them, and to confirm them, they presently catch at it, and presently rob you of the Advantage of your Interpretation; *it was what I was about to say; it was just my Thought, and if I did not express it so, it was for want of Language.* Very pretty! Malice itself must be employed to correct this proud Ignorance. *Hegias* his Doctrine, that we are neither to hate, nor accuse, but instruct, has Reason elsewhere; but here 'tis Injustice and Inhumanity to relieve and set him right, who stands in no need on't, and is the worse for't. I love to let them step deeper into the Dirt; and so deep, that if it be possible, they may at least discern their Error. Folly and Absurdity are not to be cur'd by bare Admonition. And what *Cyrus* answered to him, who importun'd him to *harangue* his Army, upon the Point of Battle, that Men do not become valiant and warlike upon a sudden, by a fine Oration, no more than a Man becomes a good Musician by hearing a fine Song, may properly be said of such an Admonition as

*Folly not to be cur'd by Admonition.*

\* *Cic. Offic. lib. 1.*

this.

this. These are Apprenticeships that are to be served before-hand, by a long and continued Education. We owe this Care, and this Assiduity of Correction and Instruction to our own; but to go preach to the first Passer-by, and to lord it over the Ignorance and Folly of the first we meet, is a Thing that I abhor. I rarely do it, even in particular Conferences, and rather surrender my Cause, than proceed to these supercilious and magisterial Instructions. My Humour is unfit either to speak or write for Beginners; but for Things that are said in common Discourse, or amongst other Things, I never oppose them, either by Word or Sign, how false or absurd soever. As to the rest, nothing vexes me so ill in Folly, as that it pleases itself more than any Reason can reasonably please itself. 'Tis ill Luck, that Prudence forbids us to satisfy and trust in ourselves, and always dismisses us timorous and discontented; whereas Obstinacy and Temerity fill those who are possessed with them with Joy and Assurance. 'Tis for the Ignorant to look at other Men over the Shoulder, always returning from the Combat full of Joy and Triumph. And moreover, for the most Part, this Arrogancy of Speech, and Gaiety of Countenance gives them the better of it in the Opinion of the Audience, which is commonly ignorant, and incapable of well-judging and discerning the real Advantage. Obstinacy of Opinion, and Heat in Argument are surest Proofs of Folly. Is there any Thing so assur'd, resolute, disdainful, contemplative, serious, and grave as an Ass? May we not mix with the Title of Conference and Communication, the quick and sharp Repartees which Mirth and Familiarity introduces amongst Friends, pleasantly and wittily jesting with one another? An Exercise for which my natural Gaiety renders me fit enough; which if it be not too long and serious, as the other I just spoke of, 'tis no less smart and ingenious, nor of less Utility, as *Lycurgus* thought. For my Part I contribute to it more Liberty than Wit, and have therein more of Luck than Invention; but I am perfect in suffering, for I endure a Revenge, that is not only tart, but indiscreet to boot, without being moved at all. And whoever attacks me, if I have not a brisk Answer immediately

*Obstinacy a Testimony of Folly.*

mediately ready, I do not study to pursue the Point with a tedious and impertinent Contest, bordering upon Obstinacy, but let it pass, and defer my Revenge to another and some better Time. There is no Merchant that always gains. Most Men change their Countenance and their Voice where their Wit fails; and by an unseasonable Indignation, instead of revenging themselves, accuse at once their own Folly and Impatience. In this Jollity we sometimes pinch the private Strings of our Imperfection, which, at another Time, when more temperate, we cannot touch without Offence, and profitably give one another a Hint of our Defects. There are other Sports of Hand, rude and indiscreet, after the *French* manner, that I mortally hate; my Skin is very tender and sensible: I have in my Time seen two Princes of the Blood *inter'd* upon that very Account. 'Tis unhandsome to fall out and fight in Play. As to the Rest, when I have a Mind to judge of any one, I ask him how much he is satisfied with himself, to what Degree his speaking or his Work pleases him. I will have none of these fine Excuses, *I did it only in Sport.*

*Ablatum mediis opus est incudibus istud\*.*

This Work unfinished from the Anvil came.

*I was not an Hour about it; I have never revis'd it since.* Well then, say I, lay these aside, and give a perfect one, such a one as you would be measured by: And then, what do you think is the best Thing in your Work; is it this Part or that? the Grace, or the Matter, the Invention, the Judgment, or the Learning? For I find that Men are commonly as wide of the Mark in judging of their own Works, as those of others; not only by Reason of the Kindness they have for them, but for want of Capacity to know and distinguish them. The Work, by it's own Force and Fortune, may second the Workman, and sometimes outstrip him, beyond his Invention and Knowledge. For my Part, I do not judge of the Value of other Men's Works more obscurely than of my

\* *Ovid. Trist. lib. 1. El. 6.*



own; and prize my *Essays* now high, now low, with great Doubt and Inconstancy. There are several Books that are useful upon the Account of their Subjects, from which the Author derives no Praise; and good Books, as well as good Works, that shame the Workman. I may write the Manner of our Feasts, and the Fashion of our Clothes, and may write them ill; I may publish the *Edicts* of my Time, and the Letters of *Princes* that pass from hand to hand; I may make an *Abridgment* of a

*The Epitomizing of Books a foolish Undertaking, and without Honour to the Undertaker.*

good Book, (and every *Abridgment* upon a good Book is a foolish *Abridgment*), which Book shall come to be lost, and in that Case Posterity will derive a singular Utility from such Compositions; but what Honour shall I have, unless by great good Fortune? A great Part

of the most famous Books are in this Condition. When I read *Philip de Comines*, several Years ago, doubtless a very good Author, I there took Notice of this for no vulgar Saying, *That a Man must have a Care of doing his Master such great Service, that at last he will not know how to give him his just Reward.* I ought to commend the Inventor, not him, because I met with it in *Tacitus* not long since: *Beneficia eo usque læta sunt, dum videntur exolvi posse, ubi multum anteverere, pro gratia odium redditur* \*. Benefits are so far acceptable, as they are in a Capacity of being returned; but once exceeding that, Hatred is returned instead of Thanks. And *Seneca* boldly says, *Nam qui putat esse turpe non reddere, non vult esse cui reddat* †. For he who thinks it a Shame not to requite, would not have that Man live to whom he owes Return. Q. *Cicero* says more faintly, *Qui se non putat satisfacere, amicus esse nullo modo potest.* Who thinks himself behind-hand in Obligation, can by no means be a Friend. The Subject, according to what it is, may make a Man looked upon as learned, and of good Memory, but to judge him in the Parts that are most his own, and the most worthy, the Vigour and Beauty of his Soul; a Man must first know what is his own, and what is not; and in that which is

\* *Tacit. Ann. lib. 4.*

† *Sen. Ep. 81.*

not his own, how much we are obliged to him for the Choice, Disposition, Ornament, and Language he has there presented us with. What if he has borrowed the Matter, and spoiled the Form? as it oft falls out; we who are little read in Books are in this Streight, that when we meet with a great Fancy in some new *Poet*, or some strong Argument in a Preacher, we dare not nevertheless commend it, till we have first informed ourselves of some learned Man, if it be his own, or borrowed from some other; until that, I always stand upon my Guard. I lately came from reading the History of *Tacitus* quite through, without interrupting it with any thing else; (which but seldom happens with me, it being twenty Years since I have stuck to any one Book an Hour together) and I did it at the instance of a Gentleman for whom *France* has great Esteem, as well for his own particular Worth, as upon the Account of a constant Form of Capacity and Virtue, which runs through a great many Brothers of them. I do not know any Author that in a publick Narration mixes so much Consideration of Manners, and particular Inclinations. And I am of a quite contrary Opinion to him, which is, that being especially to follow the Lives of the Emperors of his Time, so various and extreme in all Sorts of Forms, and so many notable Actions

*The Character of Tacitus.*

as their Cruelty particularly produced in their Subjects, he had a stronger and more attracting Matter to treat of, than if he had been to describe Battles, and universal Commotions: so that I oft find him sterile, running over those brave Deaths, as if he feared to trouble us with their Multitude and Length. This Form of *Histories* is by much the most useful: publick Commotions depend most upon the Conduct of *Fortune*, private ones upon our own. 'Tis rather a Judgment, than a Deduction of *History*; there are in it more *Precepts* than *Stories*; it is not a Book to read, 'tis a Book to study and learn; 'tis so full of Sentences, that right or wrong, they are right in Muster; 'tis a Nursery of *Ethicks* and *poli-tick Discourses*, for the Use and Ornament of those who have any Place in the Government of the World. He always pleads by strong and solid Reasons, after a tart and subtle

Manner,

Manner, according to the affected Stile of that Age; and was so in Love with a sound Stile, that where Quickness and Subtilty was wanting in Things, he supplied them with lofty and swelling Words. It is not much unlike the Stile of *Seneca*. I look upon *Tacitus* as more sinewy and *Seneca* more sharp. His Pen seems most proper for a troubled and sick Estate, as ours at present is; you would often say, that he deciphers and points at us. They who doubt of his Fidelity, sufficiently accuse themselves of being his Enemy upon some other Account. His Opinions are sound, and lean for the most part towards the *Roman* Affairs: And yet I am angry at him, for judging more severely of *Pompey*, than suited with the Opinion of those worthy Men that lived in the same Time, and treated with him; and to have reputed him equal with *Marius* and *Sylla*, excepting that he was more close. Other *Writers* have not acquitted his Intention in the Government of Affairs, from Ambition nor Revenge; and even his Friends were afraid that his Victory would have transported him beyond the Bounds of Reason, but not to so immeasurable a Degree: There is nothing in his Life that has threatened us with so express Cruelty and Tyranny. Neither ought we to proportion Suspicion to Evidence; and that makes me that I do not believe his Narratives to be ingenuous and true; but that he might add a little in this very Thing, that they are not always applied to the Conclusions of his Judgments, which he follows according to the Inclination he has taken, very often beyond the Subject he treats of, which he will not deign to look upon with so much as one Glance of Favour. He needs no Excuse, for having approved the Religion of his Time, according as the Laws enjoined, and to have been ignorant of the true; this was his Misfortune, not his Fault. I have principally considered his Judgment, and am not very well satisfied throughout, at these Words in the Letter, that *Tiberius* being old and sick, sent to the Senate. *What shall I write to you, or how should I write to you, or what should I not write to you at this Time? May the Gods and the Goddesses lay a worse Punishment*

*Tiberius his trouble of Conscience about the Religion of his Time.*

*at these Words in the Letter, that Tiberius being old and sick, sent to the Senate. What shall I write to you, or how should I write to you, or what should I not write to you at this*

*Time? May the Gods and the Goddesses lay a worse Punishment*

nishment upon me, than I am every Day tormented with, if I know. I do not see why he should so positively apply them to the sharp Remorses that tormented the Conscience of *Tiberius*: At least, when I was in the same Condition, I perceived no such Thing. And this also seemed to me a little mean in him, that being to say, he had born honourable Offices in *Rome*, he excuses himself, that he does not speak it out of Ostentation: This seems a little too mean for such a Soul as his; for, not to speak roundly of a Man's self, implies some want of Courage; a rough and lofty Judgment, and that judges soundly and surely, makes Use of his own Example upon all Occasions, as well as those of others, and gives Evidence as freely of himself, as of a third Person: We are to pass by these common Rules of Civility in Favour of Truth and Liberty. I dare not only speak of my self, but speak only of my self. When I write of any Thing else, I miss my Way, and wander from my Subject; yet am I not so indiscreetly enamoured of myself, that I cannot distinguish and consider myself apart, as I do a Neighbour, or a Tree. 'Tis equally a Fault, not to discern how far a Man's Worth extends, and to say more than a Man discovers in himself. We owe more Love to God, than to our selves, and know him less; and yet speak of him as much as we will. If the Writings of *Tacitus* relate any thing true of his Qualities, he was a great Man, upright and bold, not of a superstitious, but a philosophical and generous Virtue. A Man may think him a little too bold in his Relations; as where he tells us, that a Soldier carrying a Burthen of Wood, his Hands were so frozen and so stuck to the Load, that they there remained clos'd and dead, being sever'd from his Arms. I always in such Things submit to the Authority of so great Witnesses. What he also says, that *Vespasian*, by the Favour of the God *Serapis*, cured a blind Woman by anointing her Eyes with his Spittle, and I know not what other Miracles: He

*A Soldier's  
Hands perished  
with Cold carrying  
a Burthen  
of Wood.*

*A blind Woman cur'd by  
Vespasian.*

does

does it by the Example and Duty of all good *Historians*. He records all Events of Importance; and amongst publick Accidents are the common Rumours and Opinions: 'Tis their Part to recite common Beliefs, not to regulate them: That Part concerns *Divines* and *Philosophers*, who are the Guides of Conscience. And therefore it was, that this Companion of his, and as great a Man as himself, very wisely said; *Equidem plura transcribo quam credo; nam nec affirmare sustineo, de quibus dubito, nec subducere quæ accepi*\*. Truly, I set down more Things than I believe, for I can neither endure to affirm Things whereof I doubt, nor smother what I have heard. And this other, *Hæc neque affirmare, neque refellere operæ pretium est; famæ rerum standum est*, 'Tis neither worth the while to affirm, nor to refute these Things; we must stand to Report. And writing in an Age wherein the Belief of Progidies began to decline, he says, he would nevertheless forbear to insert in his Annals, and to give a Relation of Things received by so many worthy Men, and with so great Reverence of Antiquity. 'Tis very well said. Let them deliver us History, more as they receive than believe it; I, who am *Monarch* of the Matter whereof I treat, and who am accountable to none, do not nevertheless always believe myself; I often hazard fallies of my own Wit, for which I very much suspect myself, and certain Quibbles, at which I shake my Ears; but I let them go at a Venture, I see that others get Reputation by such Things: 'Tis not for me alone to judge. I present myself standing, and lying on my Face, my Back, my right Side, and my left, and in all my natural Postures. Wits, though equal in Force, are not always equal in Taste and Application. This is what my Memory has presented me in *Gros*, and with Incertainty enough. All Judgments in *Gros*, are weak and imperfect.

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\* *Quint. Curtius.*



## C H A P. IX.

## Of Vanity.

**T**Here is not perhaps a more manifest Vanity, than to write so vainly. That which Divinity has so divinely expressed to us, ought to be carefully and continually meditated by understanding Men. Who does not see that I have taken a Road, in which, incessantly and without Labour I shall proceed, so long as there shall be Ink and Paper in the World? I can give no Account of my Life by my Actions; Fortune has placed them too low: I must do it by my Fancies. And yet I have seen a Gentleman that only communicated his Life by the Workings of his Belly: You might see in his House a shew of a Row of Basons of seven or eight Days Excrements; that was all his Study, all his Discourse; all other Talk stung in his Nostrils. These here, but not so nauseous, are the Excrements of an old Mind, sometimes thick, sometimes thin, and always indigested; and when shall I have done representing the continual Agitation and Change of my Thoughts, as they come into my Head, seeing that *Diomedes* wrote six thousand Books upon the sole Subject of *Grammar*? What then ought Prating to produce, since Pratling, and the first Beginning to speak, stuffed the World with such a horrible Number of Volumes? So many Words about Words only. O *Pythagoras*, why didst not thou allay the Tempest! They accused one *Galba* of old for living idly; he made Answer, *That every one ought to give Account of his Actions, but not of his Leisure.* He was mistaken, for *Justice* takes Cognizance, and will have an Account even of those that glean, which is one of the laziest Employments. But there should be some Restraint of Law against foolish