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THOUGHTS FROM MONTAIGNE

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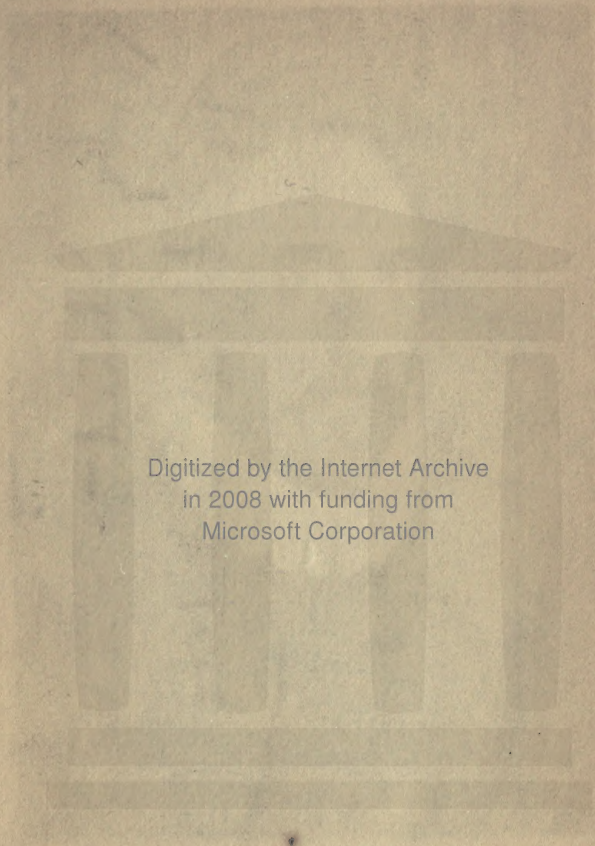
THOUGHTS FROM MONTAIGNE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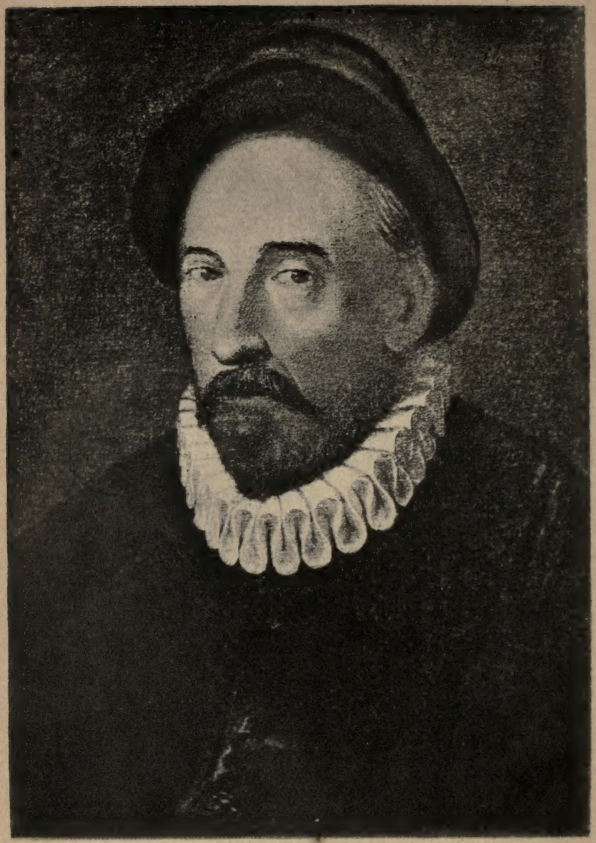

Michel de Montaigne.

THOUGHTS FROM MONTAIGNE

SELECTED BY

CONSTANCE COUNTESS DE LA WARR

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

FOREWORD BY

EGERTON CASTLE

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FOREWORD

IT has, nowadays, become a fashion in publishing to introduce the greater and some of the lesser men of the past to the present world through the medium of a sort of gentleman-usher or literary groom-of-the-chamber, who shall inform the reader of their exact title to consideration. In the case of the lesser men, the small fry of letters, the office is useful. Nay, the reading public will often put up with the society of a comparatively dull fellow for the sake of the attributes of an elegant and witty attendant. Again, it may be a pretty courtesy enough in the case of a shy daughter of the moorlands, such as Charlotte Brontë, or of a modest, unassertive maiden lady, such as Jane Austen ; but the giants, one would think, might well be left to pursue their way unaided. It seems, however, as if even so familiar a genius as a Scott, a Thackeray, or a Dickens cannot make a friendly call in a new coat but he must be pre-

sented afresh by some busy chamberlain of the pen.

And here am I, asked to introduce a man whom three centuries have pronounced one of the very best companions in the world. . . . What a sentence of humorous moralising might not the situation have suggested to that genial exponent of the everlasting discrepancies of life's circumstances !

What, indeed, can the literary herald most enamoured of his office proclaim, now, of Montaigne, that will not sound brazen impudence? Who wants to be taught to love the man or to taste the philosopher ; to know him deliciously human, yet incomparably far-seeing?

I vow I find myself—to change the simile—induced into an office as futile, perhaps as irritating, as that of the watchman of old braying to a world that has eyes to see and ears to hear, that the moon shines overhead and the church clock has struck the hour.

But when a lady asks, it is our misfortune—it is our privilege—to be unable to say nay. And, stay ; here do I perceive a graceful retreat. I am not after all the blatant crier-up of a great man, entrapping the listener into the tedium of

a twice-told tale : I am (infinitely more gracious situation) usher to a fair admirer of the kindly Renaissance sage—sage and kindly in a day when benevolent wisdom was little known.

It is she who introduces him here—I but give her my hand across the threshold. With the generosity of her sex, she forgives him his poor opinion of it : indeed, after woman's pretty way of forgiving, she will not admit the offence. And she would fain that others should know and love him as she does, fain bring this "classic" within reach even of sister-students as yet too young to reach the shelf where stands, in many volumes, the entire wisdom of Montaigne.

EGERTON CASTLE.

September 1904.

PREFACE

MONTAIGNE, the great essayist and philosopher, is comparatively so little known, so seldom studied, by the English reading public, that I have interested myself in selecting and translating extracts from his work which strike me as giving the truest insight into the character and feelings of that wonderful man. Preface

Knowing that many people have been deterred from a study of Montaigne by the voluminous character of his essays, that others have been alarmed by the mistaken idea that his teachings are of an atheistical character, it seems to me that this little work may have its use. I humbly offer it to the public. May it inspire in those who read it a desire to know Montaigne in his entirety—may such as have been led to distrust him see for themselves how unfounded is such a feeling!

I have prefaced the extracts with a short account of his career; also with a

few thoughts and reflections which have come to me personally while studying his life and writings. I cannot but think that all who are once brought into contact with this great thinker will return again and again to his society, that they will grow to love him : I know that they cannot but be influenced for good by his pure and noble teaching, and his elevated views on all that concerns the guidance of life. Many, no doubt, will echo Madame de Sévigné's cry :

"Oh ! what capital company he is, the dear man ; he is my old friend, and just for the reason that he is so, he always seems new. My God ! how full of sense is that book !"

CONSTANCE DE LA WARR.

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HIS FIRST YEARS

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE'S family dated definitely from the beginning of the fifteenth century, and was founded by a rich merchant established at Bordeaux. There are some obscure records that the name existed in the fourteenth century, and was then borne by a merchant in the little town of St. Macaire, and it is certain that "the honourable man, Ramon Eyquem," merchant of the parish of St. Macaire, and citizen of Bordeaux, acquired on October 18, 1477, the noble domains of Montaigne with its vineyards, woods, lands, meadows and windmills, for the sum of 900 francs.* He also added to it the domain of Bellay, by simply taking forcible possession of it and turning the former proprietor out. Michel's father, Pierre, succeeded in due course to the estates, and was devoted to them, looking after his property in a most admirable way; though, at the same time, he did not neglect public duties.

Michel had a great love for his father, and in his Essays is perpetually speaking of him with the utmost respect and veneration; he

* Th. Malvezin, "Michel de Montaigne, his Origin and Family," p. 234.

was ever grateful for the excellent education which, as we shall see later on, he received.

The elder Montaigne, after serving some years in the army, married at the age of thirty-three a young lady of Jewish origin, Antoinette de Lousses, the daughter of a rich merchant, by whom the well-being of the family was increased. Pierre Eyquem came more and more into public notice, successively passed through all the degrees, and finally rose to be Mayor of Bordeaux, an office of far more distinction and value then (when each town had almost to govern and act for itself, amid the many political factions which surrounded it) than now. Among other prerogatives, the mayor kept the seal of the city. He was mayor for two years.

The Lord of Montaigne spared himself no trouble, and Michel says his father took his duties too much to heart, neglecting his own interests (and his health) for those of the town. Many privileges had been taken away from the city of Bordeaux by Henri IV. and Eyquem on several occasions journeyed to Paris (in those days no small matter)

to try and reobtain them for his good co-citizens. A clever man, he neglected nothing that could make his case more sure of success ; but being more confident in the persuasion of good wine than argument, he always took with him twenty barrels of his Bordeaux vintage to give as presents to such gentlemen who were favourable to the cause.*

But we find him equally active in the town itself. He receives the new Archbishop, Francis de Maury,† on his first entry into the town, in a beautiful red and white damask suit (according to the fashion of the day), and makes him welcome. He greatly developed education at Bordeaux, and improved the College of Guyenne, to the care of which he later on entrusted his son. With all this, his love of his own home was great, and his greatest delight was in embellishing it. He replaced the original small house by a noble castle, which he obtained permission to fortify, for the old commander had no idea of being at the mercy of the

* Jean Darual, "Supplément de Chroniques de Bordeaux (1620)," p. 40.

† "Archives de la Gironde," vol. vi. p. 222.

His First Years.

first marauder, and armed his dwelling with engines capable of defending it. Doubtless some pride entered into his plans for making Montaigne a place worthy to be visited and admired; and it was after the completion of these works that the name of "Eyquem" was lost in that of Montaigne, to gain in the person of his son a world-wide renown.

Michel de Montaigne was the third child, and was born, as he himself tells us, in the Château of Montaigne, not far from Bordeaux, on February 28, 1533, between eleven and twelve o'clock in the morning. His two elder brothers having died in infancy, from his earliest years he was surrounded by all the care due to the heir of the estate. He was baptized there under the name of Michel, and passed his earliest years in its country surroundings. One of the poorest of the peasants was his godfather; this was a custom of the day; a practical lesson to the young not to look down on their inferiors. More than a century afterwards Montesquieu was held at the font by a beggar of the parish and was christened Charles after him, so that "his godfather should remind him all his life that the poor

are his brothers." This teaching does not seem to have been lost on either writer, and it is interesting to note the event in the lives of two celebrities who have so many points of resemblance between them. Pierre Eyquem even went beyond the usual practice in order to bring up his son in all humility ; he placed him out to nurse, and kept him for some time in a small village that he should know the life of the poor. Montaigne certainly gained thereby modest tastes and desires : all his life he liked simple food and despised rich meats ; he tells us that, unlike other children, sweets never had any attraction for him.

Notwithstanding his hardy bringing up he was not a robust boy and never enjoyed very good health, though special care was given him by his father, who even spared him the thrashings so liberally bestowed on children in those days. When he was old enough to learn, Pierre Eyquem had him brought home, where the child was taught Latin orally by a German tutor, Horstanus,* who could speak no French. He was also

* R. Dezeimeres, "De la Renaissance des Lettres de Borieux," p. 35.

taught Greek, because in the schools and colleges of the time Greek was almost put on one side and Latin alone taught thoroughly.

At the early age of six, Michel was sent to the College of Guyenne at Bordeaux, then at the height of its reputation and boarding 2000 scholars. We can well imagine what an immense advantage the young boy had over his schoolfellows, entering so well grounded. The masters themselves were surprised and, it is said, afraid of questioning him. The college was then, fortunately, in the hands of a celebrated professor, a Portuguese, Andrea de Goven, from the College of St. Barbe in Paris. He was a wonderful trainer of youth, and, under his influence and with the aid of the good teachers whom he brought with him, the establishment rose to a great height of perfection. He directed it till 1547—all the time that Montaigne was there. The latter was a scholar for seven years, entering the college at six and leaving at the age of thirteen, passing successively through the various degrees and taking the lead in all Latin classes.

Buchanan, afterwards teacher to James I.,

was among his masters, also Muretus, one of the first scholars of the day. In the beginning Montaigne seemed rather inclined to idleness, and, after the out-of-door life to which he had been accustomed, the confinement of classes was a strain on him. However, his excellent pedagogue shook him out of this laziness; and, at the age of eight, the boy translated the whole of Ovid, and became so charmed with poetry that he passed on to Virgil, Terence and Plato, and then to Italian comedies, "lured by the beauty of the subject." The spark had grown to fire; his indolent nature was aroused. "If he had been so mad as to check me in these inclinations," said Montaigne of his preceptor, "I am certain I should have brought back from college the same hatred of books that do most of our nobility." The bent of a mind soon shows itself, and Montaigne gives all the credit to his wise professor for perceiving and cultivating his taste.

Theatrical representations formed part of the system of education at Guyenne, and Montaigne entered into them with zest. A large theatre was provided; Italian plays were acted; and, on festivals, the boys' relations

came to Bordeaux (and many strangers besides) to see them act. On certain occasions, deep and serious pieces—"Jeptha," "Médée," "Alceste," &c.—were performed before magistrates and other learned people. But all the pieces selected had a strong moral teaching, so that the education of the pupils still progressed unperceived, and the masters made all use of this opportunity of enforcing their lessons. Greek was not well taught at Guyenne: "Thus I have very little knowledge of it," says Montaigne. But, as was stated above, the omission was rectified by the instruction his father gave him at home.

Montaigne is silent about himself after leaving Guyenne. But, having regard to his great desire to prepare himself for being a magistrate, it is almost certain that he went to study law at Toulouse, for which branch of teaching its university was famous. This seems the more likely, as his mother, Antoinette de Lousses, had some near relations living in a good position at Toulouse. We also find that Montaigne mentions several of the masters at that time teaching at Toulouse, among them

Turnèbe, "who knew more and knew better what he knew than any man of his century"; the humanitarian, Pierre Bunel; Simon Thomas, the great doctor; and we further know that several of his friends were there—Henri de Mesmes, Paul de Foix, &c.

Life at the university was by no means easy. Henri de Mesmes gives us a picture of it which is rather interesting:*

"We had to rise at 4 a.m., and having said our prayers, at five we began our studies, going to the classes with our big books under our arms, our writing things and our candles in our hands. Without any interruption for five hours, lectures were listened to. This lasted till 10 a.m., and before going to dinner, notes taken during the lectures had to be looked over. After dinner we read, by way of recreation, Sophocles, Aristophanes, and sometimes Demosthenes, Cicero, Virgil or Horace. One hour after dinner the lessons recommenced, continuing till 5 p.m. We then only returned to our rooms to put all our papers in order, and to verify the passages of authors cited

* "Memoires de Henri de Mesmes," p. 139.

in the classes by the professors ; this lasted more than an hour. Then came supper, after which we read Greek or Latin."

Certainly the day was well employed and ended as it had begun. On Sundays, after Mass and Vespers, the pupils were allowed to go for walks or to visit any relations and friends. "Sometimes," says de Mesmes, "we went to dine with our relations who invited us to do so whenever we could be taken to them." The discipline of college life was far more severe, it would seem, in those days than it is now.

When Michel was considered sufficiently educated he left the college ; he was obliged, like his father, to serve for a time in the army, and we hear that he was present at the siege of Thionville.

At the early age of twenty-one we find him forming one of the Parliament at Bordeaux, and also doing work as a magistrate. In 1559 it is mentioned that Montaigne is "absent for the service of the King, and by leave of the Court of Magistrature," upon the occasion of his first visit to Paris. This visit was followed by several others, during one of which Charles IX. made him gentle-

man-in-ordinary and conferred on him the order of the collar of St. Michael. He was also much favoured by Catherine de Medici and the Guises. A long dissertation addressed to her son Charles IX. on the art of governing and on his mode of life, ostensibly by Catherine, really emanated from Montaigne's brain.

In 1565 he married Françoise de la Chassaigne, but did so more to please his father than himself, he only looking on marriage as a social necessity. He compared the marriage state to a bird-cage. "Free birds long to enter in, the imprisoned ones long to get out." "I should have hesitated marrying Wisdom herself," he said, "if she had desired it." Montaigne knew well that marriage brought with it many duties; and, looking into his conscience, he must have asked himself whether he would have the strength to meet them. . . . "It is no use thinking of release once you have let yourself be caught." . . . He, doubtless, exaggerated his fears and, evidently, his family thought him more fit to be married than he himself considered. Perhaps, with his peculiar temperament, it was

wiser to settle things for him, trusting to his sweet nature and philosophic temper to make the best of the inevitable. In any case it was certainly his parents who married him: his father was growing old and wanted to see his son settled before he died. The heir of Montaigne had every right to look out for a good connection: and no better choice could have been made for him than Françoise de la Chassaigne, whose family lived in the neighbourhood, and whose relations had, at various times, taken an active part in politics, her grandfather being a celebrated lawyer.

Montaigne, seeing it was decreed that he should follow the rule (namely, marriage and not celibacy), made the best of the situation; and the young Françoise, clever and agreeable, and by no means bad looking, fortunately won her way into his heart. There were no money difficulties, as Pierre had assigned to his son one quarter of the income of his property, and Françoise's father had given her a dowry of £7000, equal in those days to 300,000 francs. The marriage took place on September 23, 1565. Would it bring the happiness the parents desired?

Montaigne said laughingly : " A marriage, to succeed, ought to unite a blind woman and a deaf man," meaning that a woman should shut her eyes to her husband's delinquencies and he, his ears to her gossip. He assures us that he kept the marriage law far more strictly than he ever thought to have done. We gather that he was not free from occasional lapses ; but on the part of his wife he never had any reason to complain of interference or gossip. As a wife, she was everything that could be desired : from the first she took her place firmly yet gently, and exercised a good influence on all who came near her. She had a loving heart, strong common sense, and a great talent for management—a quality much needed with a husband like Montaigne, who lived in a dream and could not even cast up an account. Montaigne had sought for a strong, honest affection in his marriage, and this he found. That in his writings he rarely speaks of his domestic life or of his wife, in no way proves that harmony was wanting between them. On the contrary, it may merely point to his reluctance to bring his home relations under the public gaze. There are

many proofs that he and Françoise were the best comrades possible: no one can read the Essays without perceiving his satisfaction in her. A thread of domestic placidity runs through the whole work, showing that their lives were passed on pleasant lines. She, by taking entire charge of the household and income, left him at liberty to dream, think and write as he pleased. In fact, she had the tact, finding herself married to so eccentric a man of genius, not to worry him with outside matters, giving him all opportunity of enjoying his solitude in peace. Montaigne lets us see how much confidence he had in her judgment, when he says that if he had had boys (he only had daughters), he would have placed them completely under her control: the most direct compliment, surely, that a man could pay his wife!

Montaigne's father died three years after his son married; and, as the marriage was childless for five years, he had not the satisfaction of embracing a grandchild. On his death, Michel succeeded to all the domains and became the head of his family. He behaved very well to his mother, settling

that she should live in the castle with him. She was not, however, to have anything to do with the management of the property, which he was determined to undertake himself, carrying all on as in his father's time. There was indeed no request of the departed he did not fulfil. While the old man was alive Montaigne called him "That most excellent of fathers," now that he was gone the son felt still more bound by filial duty. This bereavement became the turning-point in his life, since it gave him the excuse (besides that of his health, which, as we said before, had never been very good) to retire from public life and its multifarious and fatiguing duties. Having succeeded to his possessions, he decided, at any rate, for a time, to devote himself to study and repose: for, he said, he had no wish for power or glory in the world, and he preferred to be second or third at Perigueux than first in Paris. The castle was large and majestic; and the property was a lucrative one, so there was no lack of revenue.

Montaigne's first literary occupation was to fulfil a desire of his father's: namely, to continue a translation from the Latin

of the famous work of Raimon de Sebonde, which the old man had begun before his death. It was a heavy task, but Michel successfully accomplished it. The object of the work in question—"Théologie naturelle, Sive liber creaturarum"—was to prove the existence of God by rational demonstration. Michel's translation appeared in a few months and, after seeing it through the press, he devoted himself to collecting and publishing the literary remains of La Boétie, a former comrade. La Boétie, who was Montaigne's dearest friend, had died seven years before, leaving him all his books and papers; but, owing to his public life, Montaigne had never had time to put them together. This was indeed a labour of love. The collection of the writings thus made is most interesting, but cannot be further referred to here, beyond saying that the "Discours de la servitude volontaire," and the "Réveille des français," are the best known among them.

La Boétie, whose acquaintance Montaigne had made at Bordeaux in 1557, evoked in him—next to his father—the deepest affection he was to know. Alas! their friendship was not of long duration; for La

Boétie died in 1563. Nevertheless, it formed the great episode in Montaigne's moral life. All his works show what an influence it had on him for good, and La Boétie—"so virtuous and so good a soul of the old type, excellent not for such and such a superior quality but in everything," became the object, not only of his tender devotion, but of his profound veneration. The two great passions of his life were thus for friend and father; the only tenderness he admits is for parent or comrade! "I have a strong dislike to those affections which are developed in us without reason, and without judgment." Love of women, or their love for him, was a pastime, never a passion. "I pleased myself in this market, but never forgot myself."

Montaigne assisted at the last moments of La Boétie and relates all the circumstances of his friend's death, his noble words. He says: "He told me his illness was slightly contagious and begged me to be with him only at intervals; but I was with him as much as possible. I did not abandon him. Time, the sovereign cure of all wounds of sentiment, has not the same power to dissipate the

sorrow of those bereavements in which our reason has been profoundly associated." Montaigne was never consoled for this loss. Seventeen years afterwards, writing to a friend, he says, " All of a sudden I fell into thinking so sadly of M. Boétie, and was so long in recovering myself, that I felt quite ill."

On the frieze of his library, Montaigne inscribed this touching inscription to the memory ever present in his heart : " Michel de Montaigne, having been deprived of the most tender, most dear and intimate friend, of the best and most wise, and most agreeable companion and the most perfect man that our age has seen, wishing to cement the remembrance of their mutual affection by a particular testimony of gratitude, and not being able to do so in a more expressive manner, has dedicated to his remembrance all this learned collection of literature which makes his own happiness."

His pious literary labours accomplished, Michel's one desire now was to enjoy life in his beloved home, following the peaceful pursuits of his ease. An inscription in the well-known library shows how quietude became

the keynote of his life. It reads thus : "In the year of Christ 1571 at the age of 38, the eve of the Ides of March, and the anniversary of his birth, Michel de Montaigne, already long since tired of the slavery of a Parliament house, and of public offices, desires to retire and rest on the breast of virgin doctrines in calmness and security ; and here to spend the remainder of the days he has to live. Trusting that Destiny will allow him to perfect this habitation, these sweet paternal retreats, he has resigned to them his liberty, his tranquillity and his leisure."

He gives us a description of his own appearance about this time, and we gather that he was of small stature, which much mortified him, especially when, on account of the insignificant effect he produced, visitors to the castle often took him for his servant, asking him : " Where is monsieur ?" According to himself he had a wide forehead, gentle eyes, a small mouth, white teeth, a well-poised head, a good complexion, an agreeable expression, a brown beard and a thick moustache. In character he was gay and melancholy, sociable and dreamy, silent

and talkative—all in turn. He enjoyed bright companionship, yet loved solitude. Frankness and straightforwardness were the dominant characteristics of his physiognomy. "I open myself out to my belongings as much as I can." He loved to think he had never had a hidden thought from La Boétie. He abominated falsehood, and did not admit that any cheating, "even in games of chance," was permissible. Inhumanity excepted, he held nothing in more horror than hypocrisy and disloyalty. His whole soul was so simple and full of candour that he was easily imposed upon. He never could believe in the malice of others and always "turned all things to good." "I cannot believe in perverse and vicious inclinations unless forced to do so by undeniable evidence. I ever wish to consider that all has been done for the best." Unable himself to deceive, being "quite open and outspoken" he disdained justifying himself when unjustly accused, remaining silent, or meeting the accusation by an ironical and laughing confession. He said, all ought to be able to read his soul.

Montaigne was most hospitable, but,

although delighted to receive visitors and friends, he claimed freedom, while leaving his guests perfect liberty on their own account, to follow his own life, and to be silent or gay just as he felt inclined. He was devoted to his home, and his greatest pleasure was to "ennoble this habitation, this sweet paternal retreat."

We can imagine him now, established in his castle, in which there is a chapel on the ground floor, with an opening into his room so arranged as to enable him to hear Mass. On the floor above this is his famous library All that remains of it are the naked walls and the ceilings on which are traced fifty-four Latin and Greek sentences, taken from the Bible and philosophical books, resolving in themselves the whole moral life of man ; counselling moderation in desires, reminding him of the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the necessity of seeking Divine Wisdom. We can picture the happiness of the philosopher in the retreat he so loved. It was situated in one of the towers of the castle, and only to be got at by a private staircase. A turret room, small indeed, but possessing the comfort of a

fireplace, led out from the large apartment, destitute of this luxury. He took special care of, and interest in, this little nook. The walls were covered with pictures of a certain value, and its whole aspect was cheerful and pleasing. From its windows there was a most beautiful view over the surrounding country, and Montaigne's arm-chair was placed between the fireplace and the window, with his writing-table close to him. In the larger room, besides the inscription to his friend already quoted, the ceilings were covered, as we have seen, with scrolls of all the maxims and proverbs he loved best. Not that he always wrote them accurately, for he would scratch out and modify the sentences as fresh ideas struck him. To quote a few of them: "Let us enjoy the present without occupying ourselves too much about the future, which does not belong to us." "Man is nothing but a fragile vase, a cinder, a shadow: he passes and leaves no more trace than the wind, why therefore should he be proud? Why should he wish to know everything since his nature is circumscribed and his ignorance incurable—he, who can never

explain what he sees; who finds to every reason a contrary reason?" "Do not let us embarrass ourselves with vain meditations." "Let us be wise with sobriety, let us have the knowledge of our weaknesses and do not let us go out of our limited sphere." "Let us await our last hour without desiring or fearing it, and in the meantime guide our life according to custom and our reason." "Do not let us judge hastily, for appearances are deceitful, and yet men only perceive through appearances."

Horace Walpole said, that "Life is a comedy for those who think, and a tragedy for those who feel." This was also Montaigne's opinion: he preferred to analyse everything in life rather than to be a slave to it; and in this turret room thought, pondered and wrote on all its mysteries in calm solitude, while the rest of France was rent asunder by fierce disturbances. What a contrast was his quiet existence to that of his compatriots, torn to pieces by the rival factions of Catholic and Protestant! His beloved books, counted by hundreds, were his companions, and as they comprised

works by every well-known author of ancient days and of the period, his library might well have been looked upon, not only by himself but also by the whole neighbourhood, as invaluable.

It would be interesting, were it possible, to know exactly which among the many were Montaigne's favourite books and which more especially influenced his own writings. That the classics did so to a great extent there is no doubt, but poetry also must have had its share, for his Essays are full of poetical and graceful thoughts. He always made notes in the books he read, as is proved by those few which are still in existence. It was also his habit to enter in each book the day he began to read and the date when he finished it. A copy of Cæsar's "Commentaries" which belonged to him has on its title-page in his writing: "Began on February 28, 1578, finished five months after, July 21, 1578." More than 600 of his notes appear throughout the volume, and at the end of the work is a dissertation, a "Judgment of Cæsar." He sifted the life of the conqueror, neither exaggerating his virtues nor hiding his vices. The analysis of

character, impartial as it is, shows how thoroughly Montaigne had studied the Commentaries. Indeed, whenever he perused an important work, he did so with the minutest care and attention; books of a lighter kind he skimmed, but had the faculty of seizing on all that was best to be culled.

Montaigne's eyesight was never very good, and reading tired him quickly; to reduce the whiteness of the paper he would put a piece of glass over the page. Often he made his valet read aloud to him, and dictated his reflections to him. The ideas that came to him were put down instantly; the celebrated Essays were written in this way, in the library which daily seemed more dear to him. The more he sat in it the calmer and sweeter grew his thoughts. To understand thoroughly and appreciate his reflections one must try and realise the surroundings in which they were conceived; try and behold in fancy the philosopher sitting in his favourite chair, his eye wandering with a loving glance towards his well-filled bookshelves, then see him rise to draw forth the best-beloved volume of his moment's mood; watch him open it with

reverence, and, after finding some passage that strikes him, return to his table and with rapid strokes of his pen write down the thought which coincides with his own!

Eight years of his life were passed in such studious peace, and during this period five daughters were born to him, of whom, however, only one survived infancy. His literary pursuits, we may be sure, did not interfere with his domestic life. To his daughter Leonore he was devoted. At first he left her entirely to his wife's care, saying that "female policy used mysterious means, and that children must be confided to women." He was fond of youth, but had great ideas on discipline and education, though at the same time he deprecated the stiffness and cold ceremony in use between parents and children at that time. He loved to join in games with his wife and daughter, and was a most indulgent master, wishing his servants as well as his family to call him "Father." "Where I could have made myself feared I prefer to make myself loved," he cries. That was ever his desire: to be loved by all, especially by his own. He succeeded, it need not be said, in gaining fully the

complete devotion of his household, as he deserved, for his desire for solitude and peace in no way altered his constant thought of others.

These eight years of peaceful retirement past, Montaigne, whose health had been increasingly affected, was persuaded by the doctors to turn his thoughts to travelling. He endured internal pain which much aged him. Indeed, the last eighteen months of the writing of his Essays were spent in such suffering that his character became quite changed for the time and he often had to drop his pen. He himself says, "I have aged seven or eight years since I began my Essays, but it has not been without a new acquisition. I have gained 'colique' through the liberality of time."

The period, however, had not been unproductive of other real benefits: unsought honours were lavished upon him, and we realise in what a high opinion the philosopher was held when we learn that these were bestowed by rival princes. We have narrated how in Paris he had been made (October 13, 1562) "Chevalier of the Order of St. Michael" on account of his merits and

virtues; six years later he received the collar of the order at the hands of Gaston de Foix. In 1567 Henry IV. appointed him by Letters Patent a gentleman of his bed-chamber.

Though Montaigne was well acquainted with all the crises his country was passing through, he looked on them with the spirit of a philosopher. He ever aimed at and advocated a tolerant wisdom, and prayed for liberty of conscience. His favourite text was "tolerance." Living quite apart from the factions of party strife at a period when "justice was dead" and "religion served as pretext" he tried to keep his home free from "the public tempest," not as a coward who fears to take any side, but as a wise man who deprecates useless quarrels and the shedding of blood. While his neighbours were fortifying their habitations his castle remained open to all comers. "I have," he said, "no guides or sentinels except those the stars* provide for me." He maintained that "guarding your house only makes people eager to break in, while absolute confidence defies the assailants

* Essay 15, book ii.

unless they are very devils." Unfortunately such devils do exist. One day he found this to his cost, for a number of armed men entered the castle: when they saw the master, however, his face and simplicity so abashed them that they retired without doing any damage.

Montaigne conducted his private affairs with a curious mixture of extravagance and economy. He developed at one period a strong theory that a proprietor should be almost parsimonious, and he, who had till then lived just as he liked, with no thought of money, now began to think of every penny, and for a while made himself quite morose over his desire to save. He admits this deterioration of character himself, and says he has become a slave to the "box which contained my riches," adding, "I made a secret of it all, and I, who do not mind what I say of myself, spoke of my money untruthfully."

Fortunately after two or three years of avarice he took a better turn. He discovered also how unfit he was to look after his patrimony himself, or to bring down his mind to the level of small domestic affairs.

According to his own account, his ignorance on practical matters was disgraceful. He could hardly distinguish a cabbage from a lettuce. This was not said in affectation or vain glory; "it is simply stupidity," he admits.

He was too indifferent to attend fairs or markets, too indolent or self-indulgent even to trouble over the failings of his servants so long as they did not disturb him. Figures bothered him, and he hated puerile discussions. It is here that the great qualities of his wife came out prominently, and his confiding trust in her began to grow daily more and more. It was owing to her that his affairs were kept in decent order. Her tact and energy in seeing to them were unending, and in her deep affection for him, she divined all the needs of the great man, freed him from all the petty details of household management, and secured for him the peaceful freedom he so much coveted. Full of unselfishness, she made no demur at the prospect of his leaving her for the journey recommended by the doctors. To accompany him would have been the desire of her heart, but for him it would have complicated

the matter; besides which their child was too young to be left behind, and the care of the domains could not have been entrusted to any one but herself. So, with a sad yet brave heart, Montaigne's wife helped him in all his preparations for departure, and on June 22, 1580, he left his castle (accompanied by one of his brothers and three other friends) not to return to it till September 30, 1581.

MONTAIGNE'S JOURNEYS

THE philosopher, once having decided to make the move and to embark on his journey, determined to do things thoroughly, to cull all the information he possibly could, and to visit every spot of interest. Montaigne's Journeys

The Essays, written afterwards, bear the impress of his "greedy desire for uncommon and unknown things." His journeys were the means of satisfying this curiosity, and though health was the main reason for them, he was pleased with the prospect of seeing the world. "Journeys," he said, "worry me only because of their expenses." As St. Beuve * remarks, Montaigne's Journal of his travels has no literary value, but from the moralist's point of view, in its knowledge of men and human nature, it is of infinite value and interest. Montaigne is a delightful traveller, thoroughly entering into all the details of the road, which in those days must have taken many unexpected turns and been full of surprise and change. Not even a stage-coach and fleet horses then—much less corridor-train or motor to rattle you through countries which the rapid transit prevents your even beholding—no

* St. Beuve, "Nouveaux lundis," vol. ii. p. 156.

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electric-lighted palatial hotel rooms awaiting your arrival at a certain fixed hour! In the sixteenth century there was an element of uncertainty in all travel which added to its charm. No one was in a hurry; but twenty or thirty miles at the outside might the traveller hope to cover in one day, either in a "coche" or in the saddle. Small and primitive inns in which to rest his weary bones were all he could expect to find, and the simplest of food with which to appease his appetite. But to counterbalance this he had the best of attendance. Each individual guest was a special object of respect, interest and attention to his host; indeed that he should be able to travel at all marked him as a person of note—though it might be likewise one of suspicion. Even then, at least, he was some one, and not a mere number as in the present day. Incomparable times in which to study the interest and individuality of men and places, and to drink to the full the beauty of art and nature!

Montaigne was worthy of all he saw. Nothing escaped his observant eye. All interested him. He fell in with the habits of

every country and studied the character of its inhabitants.

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He started by Paris, there making a short stay to present the first series of his Essays to Henri III. For any book to be a success then it was necessary that it should have the King's approval: with Montaigne's work Henri III. deigned to signify his satisfaction.

In Paris he made a pleasant, whimsical but life-long friendship with Marie Le Jens, demoiselle de Gournay, one of the most learned ladies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Though quite young, she had conceived such an admiration for his learning that she travelled from a distant province to Paris to make his acquaintance. He and his wife became so attached to her that they gave her the title of "fille d'alliance" (adopted daughter), which she bore proudly to the end of her long life. To her we owe a great deal of what we know of Montaigne: her services to his literary fame are incalculable. Immediately after his death she repaired to the château and, with his wife, collected all his writings; his mother gave her the original MS. of his Essays:

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and with unfailing zeal and energy Mademoiselle de Gournay pieced them all together and published them at Bordeaux. Unfortunately the original edition is lost, but various reprints edited by men of note have appeared in succeeding generations.

After Paris Montaigne proceeded to Plombières, where he did the cure in eleven days (drinking nine glasses of the waters a day) instead of the usual month. The regularity of the life worried him. He continued his journey to Switzerland, stopping at Mulhouse in the canton of Basle, where he admired "the freedom and the good police," and praised the equality which reigned, citing as an instance that the landlord of his inn came, from presiding at a sitting in the chamber of the town, to wait on his guests at dinner. While in Switzerland Montaigne regrets three things: first, that he had not brought a cook with him so that he might have collected the German receipts for use on his return home; secondly, that he had not engaged a German valet, or had some gentleman of the country with him in order to be free from the tender mercies of the loquacious guides; thirdly, that he had not

studied a history of the country before starting, or at least brought a "Munster" (the sixteenth-century equivalent to Baedeker) with him. "Basle," he says, "is a beautiful town, and its wines are good and can be drunk without water"; but he goes on to complain that the cooks overroast the meat, while he likes it underdone, and of the want of cleanliness in the rooms of his hotel. He had long conversations at Basle with the Huguenot "François Hotman" and with the famous herb-doctor "Felix Platter." At Baden he is struck by the devotion with which the Catholics practise their religion, which confirms him in his opinion that all religions are more deeply valued by people when they are practised under the eye of a different faith, Baden being essentially a place of Huguenot tendency. Sketches of various other towns follow each other rapidly, as Montaigne did not care to linger long in any one spot. He often started off at a moment's notice in the early morning without breakfast, carrying a piece of bread with him to eat on the way, sometimes adding to it the grapes which he picked as he went through the vineyards. He made occasional

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excursions to "certain beautiful towns of Germany," and in this manner visited Augsburg, "which is considered the finest town of Germany, as Strasburg is considered the strongest."

He had meant to continue as far as the Danube; but, winter approaching, he had to abandon this plan and make for the Tyrol, "where," he says, "we entered into the centre of the Alps by an easy road, beautifully and commodiously kept, the fine and mild weather helping us on." Here the picturesqueness of the surroundings inspired him with great admiration. "The scenery," writes his secretary, "seemed to represent to M. de Montaigne the most beautiful country he had ever seen, the mountains now closing in and touching each other, and then opening and spreading apart."

Each day brought fresh enjoyments; Montaigne, for ever analysing his impressions, says at this juncture that, during his whole life he had mistrusted the judgment of others upon foreign countries, each person only looking at them according to the custom and the usage of his own village. He therefore had taken little heed of the

warnings he had received from travellers, and now ridicules the stupidity of those who complained that the crossing of the Alps was a difficult enterprise, that the manners of the inhabitants were strange, the lodgings bad, the climate intolerable. As to the air, he thanks God that he has found it so mild, and remarks that he would just as soon have had his daughter, aged eight years, wandering therein, as in his garden at home. As to lodgings, he has never, he says, seen a country where they are better arranged, and he has hitherto always lodged in fine cities and been well supplied with food and wine. He confided to his friend, François Hotman, that he left Germany with regret although he was going to Italy, for throughout the country he had been treated with invariable courtesy and respect, and had travelled with a great sense of security. Landlords doubtless had been exacting, but this was everywhere the case, and he thought that these extortions could have been modified if he had freed himself from the guides, who, he felt sure, participated in the profits. (We may suspect as much in our day : in some countries, Greece and Turkey to wit, guides,

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tradesmen and landlords all seem to unite in a league to rob the traveller !)

Montaigne would have pushed on to less-explored countries, but for his companions. In the Journal of the journey his secretary writes : " Indeed, I believe that M. de Montaigne, if he had had his own way, would rather have gone to Poland, or to Greece by land than have made the tour in Italy. But the pleasure he took in visiting unknown countries, forgetting his age and his health, he could not inspire to those with him : they ever wanted to retreat. As to Rome, the aim of the others, he desired to go there less than to other places, on account of its being known to every one ; there was not a servant, he said, who could not give them accounts of it, as also of Florence or Ferrara, &c."

When we study Montaigne as a traveller, the great simplicity of his character becomes very clear to us. He loves to visit new sights and strange people. It is not only the rare and beautiful that pleasures him. All novelty amuses him, and the excitement of discovery fascinates him. He loves travelling for travelling's sake. His appetite

for it comes with the eating. He looks forward to the changes and adventures of each day with the eagerness of a child, letting himself be led by fantasy, and delighting to study the various habits of the people.

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But whatever may have been the philosopher's inclination, he gives way to his companions, and decides to go to Rome. On his route he visits Verona, Padua and Venice, "for," as he says, "I could not have rested in Rome, or any other town in Italy, without having seen Venice." In Venice, then, they remained a week, sufficient for Montaigne to gain some idea of the laws of the Venetian Republic and its customs, all new to him. He soon discovered that women played a great part in Italian politics, and that Venice especially was the city of love and intrigue. On the whole, however, Venice did not impress him to the extent he had anticipated, though he did full justice to its arsenal, the Piazza of St. Marco, and the Palace of the Doges, and marvels at the efficiency of its police and the crowds of people in the streets. "I found the city different to what I had imagined and not

so beautiful. But I look forward to return there at some future day, and to study it more at leisure." At Ferrara, Montaigne paid a visit of sad memory to the poet Tasso, mad and imprisoned. "I felt," he says in his Essays, "more of shame than even of compassion at seeing him in so piteous a state, out-living himself, and neither knowing himself nor his works; which, without his understanding, but yet, as it were, in his sight, are being published, unfinished and incorrect."

Montaigne would have continued his journey to Rome by way of Ancona, Loretto, &c., but the road was infested with robbers, and therefore the route through Florence was selected. There he much admires the Italian gardens, but cannot understand why Florence should be surnamed "The most beautiful." He does not consider her more so than Bologna, nor much more so than Ferrara, nor at all equal to Venice in beauty. But he admires the panorama of the city as seen from the dome of the cathedral, and "the view of the fair hills, covered by a multitude of small houses, and the wonderful fertile plain on which the town reposes."

He is much interested in Siena, the next halt, and finally, on November 13, after exploring the country between Siena and Rome, "without any trees, perfectly flat, and with very few houses," he and his companions enter the "Eternal City" by the "Porta del Popolo." Here they repair to the inn of "Orso," then the fashionable resort for strangers. It still exists, but is now only frequented by commercial travellers.

Montaigne stayed in the hotel but three days; he then found a suitable apartment, "where," he says, "we are well lodged." He tells us himself, "we have very beautiful rooms, saloon, dining-room, stables, kitchen, all for twenty crowns a month." Once settled, he lost no time in studying the city, desiring as usual to see all in detail. What he really wanted in Rome, was Rome, and he complained of finding too many French people there. The French, he said, were bad travellers and were never so happy as when they fell in with "compatriots in Hungary" or "a Gascon in Sicily," looking upon "all strangers as barbarians!" "Why barbarians?" he asks; "because they don't talk French!"

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In contradistinction to his compatriots, Montaigne loved to mix with the natives, refused to be served in French fashion, and desired to follow all the customs of the country he was visiting. But with all his philosophy, he never could get over his repugnance to the beer in Germany, and laughed at "the little flag of half a foot square," which the Swiss gave him for a napkin ; indeed, as he habitually ate with his fingers, never using spoon or fork, the want of something more voluminous must have been grievously felt !

He did not wish to study Rome as the home of antiquities, but as that of human life ; ever desirous to feel his keen brains in contact with those of others. He was no archæologist, nor did he care to learn how many feet long or wide was any particular building, or what difference of size there might be between Nero's nose on one medal or another. Chateaubriand, Stendhal and others reproach him with his indifference to the works of art in Italy, but his inclinations did not tempt him in this direction, and we must remember that the love for painting and sculpture did not then hold so great a

place in France as beyond the Alps. France was far behind in these respects, though intellectually so superior to the rest of the world. Rabelais, who visited Rome before Montaigne, remained equally cold to her artistic side. Doubtless Montaigne lost much of the pleasure Italy affords, but at the same time, he daily gathered information, and his mind, which, till this journey had been unavoidably circumscribed, expanded correspondingly. He neglected no opportunity of interest. On Christmas Day he went to St. Peter's to hear the solemn Mass, but was shocked to see "that the Pope and the Cardinals remained seated, with their heads covered, during the ceremony." These ceremonies indeed seem to have been more magnificent than devotional. Four days afterwards the French Ambassador obtained for him an audience of the Pope, Gregory XIII. The description Montaigne gives of the prelate might with very little alteration apply to the late beloved Leo XIII.

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"He is a fine, old man of upright and medium stature: has a face full of majesty, a long, white beard: his age is over eighty;

the most vigorous and healthy being for that age that it is possible to imagine, without gout, without 'colique' or any other ailment: of a sweet nature, not troubling himself much about the affairs of the world; a great builder—and in this respect he will leave in Rome and elsewhere singular honour to his memory. A great almsgiver, I say beyond all measure so. Public offices are troublesome to him. He throws them voluntarily on the shoulders of others, flying from the trouble. He gives as many audiences as people like. His answers are short and firm, and one would but lose one's time did one endeavour to dispute his decisions. What he judges to be just he believes."

One other proof of the vigour of this old man Montaigne forgot to mention. Gregory XIII. loved to ride on horseback through the town, and, notwithstanding his great age, mounted without the help of his groom.

Being determined to see everything for himself, Montaigne, in Rome, does not omit being present at the execution of a criminal, the circumcision of a Jew, and the exorcism

of an evil spirit. All the changing aspects of the streets he notes with care; he fully enters into the pleasures of the Carnival, but he only mixes in the public life at certain times; for the better part he prefers to give himself up to the pleasures of study and to wander alone with his reflections among the ruins or in the vineyards of some rich proprietor. These vineyards were among the great attractions of sixteenth-century Rome, and Montaigne describes them as "gardens and places of pleasure of most singular beauty; beauties open to everybody who likes to make use of them." In his studies he devotes much attention to the ancient life and thought; and the Vatican Library, which was under the careful custody of Cardinal Sirleto, opened all its treasures willingly to him. There he saw MSS. remarkable for their antiquity; namely, one of Seneca, one of Plutarch, and one of Virgil—also a breviary of St. Gregory, autograph notes of St. Thomas d'Aquinas—"who wrote badly—small writing, worse than mine," says Montaigne—a polyglot Bible of Plantain, &c. All this was a great delight to the traveller, and the new life he led,

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with its varied interests, at first contributed greatly to the improvement of his health; he had not the same leisure to analyse it, to be thinking of its details, its fluctuations. "I have no greater enemy," he says, "than weariness and idleness. Then I had always some occupation, if not always as pleasant as I might have desired, at least sufficient to take me out of myself." At Rome his sentiments were deep and calm, he felt admiration mingled with regret for this unique city of the world. He dictated to his secretary eloquent rhapsodies on the decadence of its grandeur. He did not interest himself very much in pontifical Rome, but he was not destined to escape its interest in him. The papal police, having heard that his opinions were not altogether orthodox, took possession of his papers, among them of some of his Essays. These, however, were all restored to him after four months, blamed according to the opinions of the learned monks who had examined them, but only in the mildest degree. He was, among other details, gently reproached for so often using the word "fortune." The whole adventure finished to Montaigne's advantage, for the

Church did not then censure the Essays (the volume was not put on the index till much later—June 12, 1676). Soon after he obtained, to his great joy, an honour ardently coveted : the diploma of a Roman citizen. It was not lavishly given, and he had all the more reason to be proud. "Not being the citizen of any town," he writes, "I am delighted to be made one of the most noble city that ever has existed, or ever will exist."

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When, after a sojourn of four months and a half, the time came for departure, he started, on April 19, 1581, carrying with him many grateful remembrances. Montaigne bid the "Eternal City" farewell with the less regret, however, that he was fully determined to revisit it soon again. He wended his way towards Loretto, Sporetto, and on to Ancona. By this route he traversed the Apennines, which were a source of delight to him. "We took the mountain roads," he writes, "and were ever finding fair plains, either on their heights or at their feet. Sometimes, above our heads, far away, behold ! a beautiful village, and beneath our feet, as if at the Antipodes, another, each

having its several and divers beauties. It does not even spoil the impression to see, among these fertile hills, the Apennines raise their frowning and inaccessible heads and send their many torrents in fury into the valleys, for these waters soon transform themselves into very sweet and pleasant rivers. It does not seem to me possible that any picture could represent so rich and beautiful a country."

At Loretto, Montaigne does not fail to visit the Santa Casa and make his devotions. He offers to the Madonna, in remembrance of his journey, a silver picture representing himself, his wife and his daughter kneeling at the feet of the Holy Virgin, as if imploring her protection. Above is a Latin inscription with their names. From Loretto he continued his journey to Ancona and, passing through Florence, finally alighted at the Baths of Lucca, where he was to "make the cure," much needed for his health, which had again become affected. Here he gave a great ball to the bathers and the peasants, followed by supper and the bestowal of prizes on the best dancers. He was trying to divert his mind from his sufferings, which

were very great. His Journal indeed becomes a mere medical report of his ailments and their treatment; he omits no detail, but we must conclude he had no idea of making it public property. His disease, no doubt, tended to melancholy; but his disposition was so unselfish that, even in the midst of his illness, he constantly thought of what he could do for others. Not content with generous entertainments to all classes, he took on himself the special care and charge of a poor peasant woman, Divizia, an improvisatrice, who had no means, and was suffering from the same illness as he.

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Montaigne spent four months at Lucca, but at intervals he went to Florence and also to Pisa, much interested in the curiosities of the latter town. On September 7 a great surprise awaited him. Letters were placed into his hands written from Bordeaux on August 2, announcing that he had been elected Mayor by the Council. He was far from expecting this honour, which was one, indeed, he had never desired; and the news upset all his plans of travel. But, still determined to return to Rome, Montaigne left Lucca five days afterwards for that city.

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He remained but a fortnight, for letters once more reached him, ordering his immediate return. Montaigne had this time no choice but to resign himself and set off again, traversing Piacenza and Pavia to reach Milan on October 26. Here he halted for a day, remarking that the town, which did not possess any of the fine palaces of Rome or Florence, resembled Paris and was very similar to other towns of France. He then proceeded to Turin and so across the Mont Cenis, " a pleasant amusement, offering no danger whatsoever." He traversed it on horseback part of the way, in a chair carried by four men the remainder. " They carried me on their shoulders. The ascent on horseback takes two hours, and is stony and rough for horses not accustomed to it, but otherwise neither difficult nor dangerous." Then passing through Chambéry, Lyons (which latter place so pleased him that he remained a week), Thiers and Limoges, he finally reached Montaigne on November 30, 1581, after an absence of seventeen months and eight days.

We can imagine what a sweet and warm welcome awaited him from wife and child,

as well as from his servants, whose devotion to their "Father" was very great. All must have gone through many hours of intense anxiety on his account during his absence. On arriving home, whatever hope he may have had as to being able to escape from the honour of a position he did not covet, came to an end. A letter from Henri III. (who, still believing him to be in Italy, addressed it to the château to be forwarded) made it impossible for him to decline the mayoralty. The letter run thus :

"Monsieur de Montaigne, holding as I do in great esteem your fidelity and zealous devotion to my service, I have heard with great pleasure of your having been elected Mayor to my city of Bordeaux, and I have authorised and confirmed this election all the more willingly that it has been made without any design on your part, during your long absence. On this account my intention is, also my desire and command, that you should return as soon as possible, without delay or excuse, and take up the service of your charge to which you have been so legitimately called. In doing

this, you will do what is greatly agreeable to me and the contrary will greatly displease me."

This was naturally an order which could not be disobeyed; there was nothing for it but submission. So ends the period of Montaigne's travels. The outlines of his public life and of his latter days in his own home will be briefly given in another chapter.

MONTAIGNE'S LAST YEARS

HAVING acceded to Henri III.'s desire that he should become Mayor of Bordeaux, Montaigne proceeded thither soon after his arrival home, at the end of November 1581. As we know, he did not accept the post eagerly. Although as Mayor he was not burdened with much responsibility, he had to submit to a publicity which was hardly to his taste. He had to assist at all civic ceremonies, clad in velvet and brocade, preceded by four archers dressed in red, and followed by all the dignitaries of the town. The good citizens delighted in display, and very few townships of the time could boast of so much civic pomp. Montaigne had furthermore to watch over all the external interests of Bordeaux, which at that time were very complicated. Three heads of factions were fighting for their different causes: Henri, Duc de Guise, chief of the "Ligue"; Henri, King of Navarre; and Henri III. of France. Montaigne steered his course so cleverly between them all that he gained universal praise, and at the end of his first year of office was, by unanimous request, re-elected for another four years. Thus he was condemned to sacrifice much

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of the solitude, the peaceful life, he so much loved. But, whenever possible, he slipped away for a few days to his beloved home. He had always said public functions were none of his fame ; yet he held Bordeaux in high esteem and felt he ought, if only for his dead father's sake, to sacrifice his private inclination to public good. "I am of opinion," he writes, "that the most noble and just ambition is to serve the people and to be useful to the many." But the Mayor of Bordeaux and Michel de Montaigne must ever remain two distinct personages. "My father," he proceeds, "whom I never can say how much I loved, took the public interest so much to heart that he profoundly agitated his soul and that his health suffered. I should be very sorry if anything made such an impression on me." And then, in substance, he tells his co-citizens they may rely upon him to be worthy of their confidence, that he will honourably fulfil the duties of his office, giving them "his attention, his time, his words, his blood and even his life if necessary" ; but at the same time he writes : "I bade them learn that they must accept me as I am, without memory, without vigilance,

without experience and without vigour ; also without hatreds, without ambition, without avarice and without violence, so that they were well informed and instructed as to what they had to expect from me." He also warned them that he could not put himself into the skin of a Mayor to such a degree that the man could not be distinguished from the magistrate, "without care, thought, virtue or talent outside those of his magistrature." He said, "We are here only as actors in a dream which is no creation of ours : we must ever reserve an inner side in ourselves where each must judge himself, and think over all he has to do and suffer. Because a man is an advocate or a financier it does not follow that he must deny the cheating there is in these functions ; all occupations are foolish, one may follow them yet understand their folly. How often I have seen persons inflated with importance ! That is what I have no idea of imitating." The objects to which he chiefly devoted himself during his time of office were the improvement of the conditions of the hospitals and homes for poor children and the alleviation of the miseries which fell

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upon the peasantry during this period of civil war and discord. Montaigne learnt through his charitable functions much about resignation and the practice of philosophy. "Let us look at the earth," he cries, "and at the poor people whom we see upon it, their heads bending towards their labour; they know neither Aristotle nor Cato, nor example nor precept, yet it is from them that nature, every day, draws out examples of constancy and patience, more pure and more firm than those we study so carefully at school." He then points out how the poor will work to the last extremity, even in their pain and illness, till the actual moment when strength fails them. All he could do to mitigate the prevalent distress he did. In concert with his colleagues, he addressed a strongly worded petition to the King, in which he implored him to take some steps to assist his unfortunate subjects, giving him a vivid picture of how in most of the towns and villages even persons of high class were reduced to beggary; of how the very fields were peopled with a mad multitude of starving wretches. He concluded his petition by urging the King to insist upon

the enforcing of the old edict that every parish should nourish its own poor, and to reduce the taxes which fell so heavily on the lower classes. Montaigne's Last Years

Towards this time (the second period of his mayoralty) the agitation in the country became so great that it was very difficult for Montaigne to steer his course clearly; the political state of parties was in great confusion, and around Bordeaux the conflict was particularly serious and involved. Henri of Navarre, the heretical prince, had the governing of Guyenne, while the Maréchal de Matignon, who was at Bordeaux, was Lieutenant-Governor to Henri III. When the Duc d'Anjou died, the King of Navarre became heir-presumptive to the throne of France, and the Ligue consequently made a violent movement. At Bordeaux it had a dangerous partisan in the person of the Baron de Vaillac, governor of "Château Trompette." We must remember that as the party of the King was Catholic, and that of Henri of Navarre Protestant, to oppose errors of Catholic zeal was to be accused of being a heretic, while to go against the King of Navarre was to compro-

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mise the future. At the same time the King of France himself had been several times on the point of calling in the aid of the Huguenots to free himself from the Guises. In such complications, where there is even more difficulty in knowing what your duty is than in performing it, Montaigne maintained that it was permissible for an honest man not to throw in his lot with one side or the other. "An honest man," he says, "must always expect, if he is moderate, to be blamed by the extreme parties." Thus was he called alternately heretic and orthodox, Guelf and Ghibelline, Catholic and Huguenot! Montaigne indeed served Church and throne with a reason and moderation which offended all the fanatics. He had, besides, heretics in his own family; his brother-in-law, the Seigneur of Beauregard, was a Huguenot; and it must be owned that the King of Navarre had a special charm for the philosopher; similarity of mind and character drawing these two great Frenchmen irresistibly towards each other.

When Montaigne acted as mediator between the Duc de Guise and the King of Navarre, his judgment on these two

princes is that of a man who, being accustomed to Courts, has learnt how to pull off the masks of others and see the faces beneath. "As to the religion," he says, "of which they both make parade, it is a good pretext by which to attract followers, but its interest neither touches the one nor the other. The fear of being abandoned by the Protestants prevents the King of Navarre from following the religion of his fathers, and the Duke would be quite willing to join the 'Confession of Augsburg' if in any way he could do so without prejudicing his interests."

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Finally, when in 1589, through the murder of Henri III., Henri of Navarre came to the throne, Montaigne was able to give full play to his real sympathies for the latter, though at the same time the philosopher would not accept any invitation to Court. If he had served Henri III. it was more from affection than duty. "I serve my Prince more cheerfully because I do so with the free election of my judgment and reason and not from my private obligation." "Princes," he says in his Essays, "give me ample favour so long as they do not deprive me of my time."

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The King of Navarre visited Montaigne at his château in 1584 and 1587. Montaigne notes the events of the first visit in the "Ephemerides" (the precious work discovered by Docteur Payen, and published in 1855). "The King of Navarre came to visit me at Montaigne, where he had never been, and remained two days, only waited on by my people, and not by any of his officers. He had no different food from ourselves, nor separate table, and he slept in my bed. He brought thirty-four people with him, including valets, pages and the soldiers of his guard; as many more slept in the villages."

The end of Montaigne's term of office at Bordeaux was marked by a most painful circumstance; a fearful epidemic of plague burst over the town, bringing desolation with it. Bad sanitation caused the infection to spread with extraordinary rapidity; by June 30, 1585, nearly every one had abandoned the place. Montaigne has been blamed for not remaining in the infected spot till the date of his retirement from office, on July 31. The fact is, however, that he did not leave the town on account of the plague;

he happened to be absent when it broke out. True, he did not return. Whether it was his duty to do so or not, who can say? He writes a letter to the town, excusing himself on the plea that it would not be right for him to leave the pure air of Montaigne for one of infection, that he would thus be more liable than another to take the malady and carry the contagion back to his family. He asks whether he will not serve the people better by guarding his health and thus being able to superintend, from a distance, the measures taken to alleviate the pestilence? We must remember at least, before we condemn him, that at that time the care of the sanitary conditions of the city did not fall to the Mayor, but was under the control of the police. If, nevertheless, we are bound to conclude that he failed in bravery here, the remembrance of the noble rôle he played during all the other stormy times of office must make us indulgent to him. Montaigne did not, however, escape all risk of the malady, for it soon spread through the villages around; he was obliged to carry away his family, and for six months they wandered from place to place trying to find

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safety. Happily after that time the malady abated, and once more he was able to return with his beloved ones to his peaceful home.

Here Montaigne spent the last few years of his life, varied by a few visits to Paris—happy hours devoted to his friend Charron and his adopted daughter, Mademoiselle de Gournay. On one occasion he passed some time at Blois for the meeting of the States General, when he enjoyed interesting conversations with Pasquier and De Thou. It was during this meeting that the murder of the Duc de Guise took place. Fortunately Montaigne had returned home before that dire event. The rest of his time he spent at Montaigne in the bosom of his family. Though ever in more failing health, he gave his energies to the completion of his Essays, enjoying nevertheless as much as possible the peacefulness of country life. In 1590 one great wish of his was fulfilled, when, at the age of nineteen, his only daughter, Léonore, espoused M. François de la Tour; his last consolation was to see the fruit of this union. In 1591 Madame de la Tour gave birth to a daughter who was given the name of Françoise. After this date the poor

philosopher's strength daily diminished. The troubles of his unhappy country weighed heavily on him, and all the interests with which he surrounded himself could not distract his thoughts from "that poor vessel, which the winds, the waves and the pilot draw such contrary ways."

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Montaigne, when the end drew near, viewed it with no apprehension; his fearlessness astonished his family and friends. They saw the so-called sceptic meet death as a believer; he had, indeed, never abandoned his religion. The early part of September 1592 found him rapidly failing; three days before the end, paralysis of the tongue set in; thus, unable to speak to any around him, he had to write down all his wishes. On the 13th, feeling the end imminent, he begged his wife, in a little note, to call a few of his neighbours that he might bid them farewell. All being assembled, he had mass celebrated in his room; and, according to Pasquier, "When the priest came to the elevation of the host, the poor gentleman raised himself as well as he could in his bed and, joining his hands together in this last act, he gave up his soul to God."

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Thus closed the life of this remarkable man. He had seen the reigns of Francis I., Henri II., Francis II., Charles IX., Henri III. and Henri IV.

He was buried in the chapel of the College de Bordeaux, having lived 54 years, 7 months and 11 days. He died in the year of grace 1592, in "the Ides of September."

His wife's grief at his death was intense: so great was the affection with which he had inspired her that thirty years afterwards we find her bemoaning the loss of him "who was all the world to her"; and in November 1621, on All Souls' Day, her mind still dwells with grief and sorrow on him. From the moment of his death she devoted herself heart and soul to collecting his writing, and in this task she was helped by her own daughter and, as we know, the "fille d'alliance," Mdlle. de Gournay, who equalled them in their affection and devotion. But the wife did not rest till she had erected a monument over his tomb in the church at Bordeaux and made arrangements for masses to be said on certain days in the year. The inscription on the monument, after giving a testimony to his character, ends thus:

"Françoise de la Chassaigne, left, alas, a prey to a perpetual mourning, has erected this monument to the memory of a husband so lamented and so regretted. He had no other wife, she could not have had any other husband."

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Madame de Montaigne lived her thirty-five years of widowhood at Montaigne, peacefully, yet not free from further sorrow, for there died before her her son-in-law, her daughter and their only child; she had, however, the consolation of a second little grandchild, her daughter having married again, very shortly before her death, Charles de Gamache. This grand-daughter closed the eyes of the old woman, who died at the age of eighty-three, in March 1627. In taking the inventory of the property of the defunct a collar of the Order of St. Michael was found, which she had treasured in memory of the husband she had so much honoured.

After the Revolution, in 1800, the people of Bordeaux, desiring to carry all that remained of Montaigne to the town museum, unearthed a coffin, and, thinking it was his, conveyed it thither with great pomp. Later

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on, however, it was found that the wrong sleeper had been disturbed ; and Montaigne's relics were fortunately left in their first resting-place, where they lay till May 1871, when a fire made it necessary to remove his coffin to the entrance of the "Facultés de Bordeaux," built on the site of the convent and of the church. It can be seen there now, but the little vessel containing the heart of the great philosopher, which was placed in the Church of St. Michel de Montaigne, has never been found.

REFLECTIONS ON THE ESSAYS

MONTAIGNE'S Essays, in number no less than ninety-three, treat of all subjects — literature, religion, philosophy, social and everyday life. In a short address to the reader he opens with these words: "C'est ici un livre de bonne foy, lecteur"; and thereafter proceeds to say that it is not written for fame or glory, for had it been so, he would have adorned it with borrowed beauties. His intention is simply to leave to his family and friends a record of his thoughts and feelings so that after his death they may preserve, more entire and more lifelike, the knowledge they had of him in life. Any one who has studied his works, even cursorily, knows how fully he has carried out this design, reaching yet so much further than his purpose.

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The Essays are not classified in any way; and, as each one has been written on the spur of an idea, the subjects are naturally most diverse. To cite but a few of their titles: "By different means one arrives at the same end"; "No one should judge himself till the hour of his death"; "The happiness of one is the unhappiness of another"; "On Sadness"; "On Friend-

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ship"; or when the mood was fantastic: "On Fleas"; "On the Art of Dressing"; "On Pigs."

Two volumes were completed in 1580 and a third in 1588; this last is longer than either of the previous books, but, though it bears the impress of the author's foreign travels, it is identical in spirit. The complete writings may be said to be second to none in the influence they have had on the world, though, as so often happens, Montaigne's genius failed to obtain due recognition from his contemporaries. His ideas were too new, too much in advance of the age, but the enlightenment of each succeeding generation has appreciated their merits more and more fully. No such work had appeared before his time, although it has been compared to Plutarch's "Morals" and to some writings of Lucian.

The Essays are so pithy that, though he never dwells on any subject, he seems to exhaust it in a few words. The charm of his style lies in its great ease and flexibility; even when he deals with the everyday thoughts of life he is inspiring in his originality and earnestness; every word seems to

spring from his heart to that of his reader. His thoughts are sometimes tinged with melancholy, it is true ; but, who that studies humanity is not melancholy ? And when we reflect on his bad health and the troublous times in which he lived, when every one's hand was lifted against his neighbour in the fierce conflict of religious fanaticism and intolerance, we are rather tempted to wonder at his constant serenity and courage.

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The grand strain of philosophy that runs through all his work has given rise to the idea that he was deficient in religious belief. The Roman municipality has put a tablet over the house where he lived, with these words : " The founder of a new philosophy." It Italy this is tantamount to saying that Montaigne was not Christian. But this assumption is not based on fact. The general tone of his teaching is in complete contradiction to irreligion ; and it may be noted that the motto now associated with him —the celebrated " Que sais-je ?"—does not appear on the title-page of his books until some time after his death. A philosopher who occupies himself, as he does, with every detail of life, ought to have escaped the

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charge of representing it as a mere passing vapour. True, he sifts all beliefs to their foundation; his analytic mind, his keen vitality led him to try and probe the secrets of existence, past, present and future. Yet, what are his conclusions? Surely not unbelief. It is no sceptic who writes of the Lord's Prayer with the tender reverence we know; no sceptic who pleads for mercy to the criminal, because after torture the soul is in no state to meet its Maker! He is careful more than once to assure his readers that in the Faith of his Fathers it is his purpose to live and die; and his last conscious movement was indeed an act of prayer. Much of his philosophic attitude towards the problems of existence, ascribed to scepticism and doubt, might be more clearly understood if we reflected upon the state of thought and society around him. The French people were in a state of anarchy; in the hands of fanatics, who confounded religion with bigotry and liberty with licence. Montaigne, calm in the midst of the general agitation, stands out in striking contrast. He seems to hold aloof; yet the scenes of violence and the acts of rebellion

to which he is witness strengthen in his heart those sentiments of justice and loyalty, the want of which is the shame and ruin of nations. Everywhere he beholds intolerance of sect and pride of false knowledge united to sustain error. "The more one departs from truth, the more one imagines one is finding it."

Therefore Montaigne hides himself and seeks to penetrate into the road of wisdom, abandoned by the world. He consults books, to gather to himself some truth from the mass of untruth. He traces human passions to their origin, that he may understand the violence of the motives that convulse his neighbours' lives. Nothing escapes his imagination—time, men, events. He uncovers the human heart and analyses its every foible.

His power of language was great; he expressed "all he wished, as he wished," with a firmness and strength unknown to his day. His deep study and knowledge of those writers of antiquity who were celebrated for their clearness and terseness of style no doubt inspired him. Like them, he enveloped his soul in no veil; a noble frank-

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ness revealed itself in every page that he wrote. Injustice, crime and vices, even the petty errors of life were condemned by him; he desired to train his conduct to virtue and goodness. His Essays were, he tells us, partly undertaken with the object of self-examination and self-knowledge, and he hoped to teach himself, while teaching others, the beauty of a noble life. We know one instance at least of the value of his influence. There is in the cemetery of Père la Chaise, an epitaph on a tomb, which sets forth that the departed was called to a life of merit through the study of Montaigne's Essays.

There is, indeed, in the work of Montaigne strength enough to make any thinking man honest and virtuous; though, probably, never before or since have ideas so peculiar and original been put on paper. Written with the simplicity of a child, beneath each sentence lies the sagacity of a sage. He set little value on the glory and grandeur of the world, nor did he desire to live long; existence to him was only the means of performing good and noble actions. A short life, nobly conducted, he considered far more

desirable than a long one spent in frivolity and emptiness. His rule of life was built on the noblest Christian and philosophic maxims: he culled the best from all dogmas, he was tolerant to all opinions. United to the Catholic Church, he was yet full of sympathy for the persecuted Huguenot, and advocated gentleness, kindness and mercy towards him. His love for pagan writers arose solely from his desire to sip honey from every source; though, with other thinkers, he frankly admits that many pagans have been better Christians in practice, have advocated higher Christian principles than the common run of Christians themselves.

One failing one cannot, however, but notice in Montaigne's character: he had too much *laisser aller*. His nature was indolent; he took the world with too great ease; was too ready to find excuses for his neighbour's faults, for his own. He had no real anxiety to mend the errors of his ways: "Men's careers must inevitably be full of faults; therefore," he cries, "why lament over inevitable falls?" The while he probes his conscience to the quick; he analyses its

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movements at each hour of the day, yet not so that he may trace for himself another line of conduct, but rather that he may know himself. In this he differs from his favourite Marcus Aurelius, who each day proposed to himself some advance on the road to perfection, and despised him who merely let his mind dwell on vain meditation. If Montaigne had not been obliged to come into public life as Mayor of Bordeaux; if he had not been forced out of himself *nolens volens* into activity, there would have been great danger of his becoming a slave to his own love of repose, and turning into a selfish epicurean. But these public duties, as also perhaps the journeys undertaken for his health, saved him from deterioration. Another great preservative of his moral character was the natural benignity and rectitude of his mind. He loved all things great and small, animate and inanimate; he was never fanatical or tyrannical. He desired that all mankind should live in peace and tranquillity; his heart was humane and full of sympathy. Towards women he was in theory rather severe, having little patience with their weaknesses, and an

admitted contempt for their intellect and capacity for management. In practice, however, we have seen how completely he recognised his wife's qualities—confiding to her guiding hand the conduct of his estate and the education of their surviving daughter.

Thus Montaigne's existence passed in the practice of a tranquil philosophic virtue, contented with what could be attained by natural inclination; though, at the same time, he taught that virtue, to be worthy of the name, must be sought after; that if a man have no temptation and virtue come unbidden to him, he does not merit any great praise. He advocated with some humour, however, the practice of the virtue nearest at hand, not the search after a distant one. Like St. Paul, he exhorted his readers to be "Wise with sobriety." He would, if possible, circumscribe duties in order that those undertaken should be honestly carried out. His teaching would tend to produce a great calmness of the mind, the doctrine of the necessity for strife and struggle in the moral life is no doubt conspicuous by its absence.

Montaigne was, we may conclude, a philo-

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sophic Christian, not a dogmatic one, nor had he much sympathy with forms and ceremonies ; he soared above and dwelt on the idea more than on the expression of it. It is only wonderful, seeing the cruelty and havoc then perpetrated in his country under the name of religion, that he should have kept his faith at all ; still more so when we think of his heterogeneous reading. Books of every kind were perpetually passing through his hands ; and, as it is impossible for a thinking and analysing mind not to be influenced by its studies, he cannot but have entertained the desire to test even religion itself by personal application, to endeavour to judge for himself which was the true and best belief. The diversity of opinion about him might well have inclined him to scepticism, though we see how the quarrels of the religious sects but made him the more tolerant and pitiful towards humanity. All he prayed and worked for was peace for his country, the repose of people's consciences, a real fraternity and equality. Some such ideal was also Henri IV.'s desire for France : we know how nobly he succeeded in realising it.

It is interesting to see which of the many writers that he studied Montaigne mostly favoured, he who so recognised the practical wisdom of Ecclesiastes and St. Paul. What did he learn from pagan thought? Far from indiscriminately concurring in all philosophies, he listened to them only when they assisted to the practical study of man; but, when their theories became lost in the clouds, he blamed their temerity and ceased to regard them. Not being well educated in Greek, he was unable to read Aristotle and Plato in the original, but Cæsar and Cicero he thoroughly studied.

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His thoughts on death are consolatory, lofty and beautiful. He bids us not to flee from it or to fear it, but enjoins on us all so to live our daily life that we may never be afraid of dying. With persuasion and fervour he implores us not to fill ourselves with vain fears of "the most solemn day, the judge of all other days," but to trust in the mercy and love of our Creator, who made death as He made life.

Humanity, justice, moderation and love are the mainstrings, in short, of Montaigne's life, of his religion and philosophy. His desire is

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to inculcate the love of virtue, to inspire us to base our actions only upon it. He can imagine no worse state of things than "for wickedness to become legitimate; that it should assume, after the departure of the magistrate, the garb of virtue."

Montaigne is, perhaps, the essayist who has most vividly brought into ridicule the weaknesses and fallacies of society; he has no scruple in reproving vice under any circumstances, and no false respect for those above him deters him. Thus we find him in Béarn going personally to "La Belle Corisande," one of Henri of Navarre's favourites, imploring her for the sake of the love the prince bore her, for the sake of virtue, not to continue the intercourse which could but do the King harm and cause a complete rupture between him and his wife. Needless to say his expostulations bore no fruit, but the incident shows the philosopher's regard for order, his fearlessness in rebuking scandal.

Another marked trait in his character was his contempt for human glory. He had no hesitation in refusing the favours which Henri of Navarre wished to bestow on him

on his accession to the throne ; the pressing invitations to Court, the promises of handsome remuneration, were alike gratefully but firmly declined. Montaigne said that he had enough riches to suffice him ; that he would never accept anything from the liberality of kings, nor ask for payment or honour ; that the services he had hitherto been able to render had always been voluntary ; that he would faithfully serve his new sovereign, but in the same way as he had done his predecessors.

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Perhaps the most singular virtue of the man was humility : he ever put himself last. No one would be more surprised than he, probably, could he behold himself through his Essays—which, as we know, he wrote with no desire for fame—ranked among the great philosophers of the world. In his desire to make others wise, and to lead them by easy roads to the goal of truth and goodness, he tried mainly to unite reason with religion, and in this way to bring its truth into the heart of man. He did not consider any means too small to assist to this end ; himself but the humblest instrument.

The name of God he held in reverence ;

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he endeavoured to prove how all good actions have their origin in Him. He fully believed in a future state, but all he believed had to be tested by his reason. He reverenced the mysteries of his faith, and all sacred religious truths; thus he had some severe words of blame for his Protestant contemporaries because of the ignorant and light way in which they treated religious and sacred objects, books, pictures, &c. But even when certain acts incurred his censure, his heart was full of tenderness towards the sinner; he looked on him merely as misled, and lamented his weakness. It was just possible that at one period of his life, if he had found its disciples more open and true that he might have joined the reformed creed; yet it was in the character of the man to remain in the faith in which he was born. Montaigne had a deal of natural religion, a religion that embraced all that was tender and good; he was largely tolerant, even approving, of every school of doctrine, down to the pagan one. "His God is living, he believes in Him, prays to Him, He is ever the good God, the one God." The good God of the pagans who has created fish and

melons (both weaknesses of his), pleasant food, and wines, and beautiful women, and the merciful God of Holy Scripture, who to save man from his sins sent His Son to die for them, he would unite them in a single worship.

Brought up by his father as a hater of falsehood, Montaigne set truth among the chief of virtues. He did not admit that any trifling with a man's word, the link which binds men together, was permissible; he desired faith to be kept, even with thieves. He lamented the absence of integrity in politics and among rulers. "And yet," he says, "should not truth and honour be more dear to a prince than his own food, even than the food of his people?" He relates with astonishment that a man confessed to him one day that he followed a religion he did not believe in, simply to avoid losing a place in Court. Nothing does the philosopher more honour than his profound surprise at such a weakness. He enjoins care for the truth upon youth, urging parents not to allow any trickery to be practised in their children's games, "for," he argues, "our greatest vices are engendered in our

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tenderest infancy, our future character is framed by the hands of our nurses."

Another quality, which it is almost needless to say Montaigne was never tired of advocating, is humanity; kindness and love not only towards men but towards beasts, even plants. He deprecated the cruelties practised under the name of civilisation upon the unfortunate natives of the "New World" by the conquering Spaniard. He hated the legalised torture of the day; torture, he says, "which so tears and overwhelms unhappy souls that we risk sending them 'not in good condition' to their eternal Judge." These ideas so foreign to his age, this advocacy of clemency toward heretics, was naturally fiercely condemned by his barbarous contemporaries; but he pursued the even tenor of his way, and kept firmly to his own opinions.

He was far too honest a moralist to clothe himself with virtues he did not possess, and in the licentious age in which he lived it is not to be wondered at that he should sometimes have wandered from the paths of chastity. But he fully admitted his frailty, and implored others to refrain from

following his example. "Falling on the ground of the earth, I do not cease to admire, right up in the clouds, the high elevation of heroic souls." Reflections on the Essays

His Essays show that, though an upholder of order, he thought "popular opinion generally the most just and equitable, often keeping people more virtuous than the laws of recognised rules." As a citizen he had a profound respect for the laws of France; as a philosopher he despised them, being convinced that not one was founded upon reason, and that their own existence was their sole authority.

These are but a few of the points which must strike the student of Montaigne. It is impossible not to admit that his religion forms the most remarkable phase of his life, and at the same time the most difficult to unravel. A true upholder of God's truth he certainly was, but whether strictly a Catholic it is open to doubt. An atheist he certainly was not. It is chiefly such of his Essays as bear impressions produced by pagan writers that have given rise to the charge of atheism against him; but the fact of his bringing all

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the power of this bygone philosophy to bear on his examination of religion does not certainly make him an unbeliever. In all he wrote he united the love of virtue with genius. In his own life he was wise without affectation; he passed through a narrow-minded and fanatic generation with high ideals untarnished and a generous heart uncorrupted. Having striven all his days for the elevation of humanity, he awaited death tranquilly, and his last act on earth was to render honour to the religion of his forefathers.

EXTRACTS.—BOOK I

I AM one of those who are entirely exempt from this passion, neither loving nor esteeming it, although the world has undertaken and likes to grace it by its particular favour, adorning therewith wisdom, virtue and conscience. Silly and mean guise![*] The Italians have more suitably baptized it by the name of "malignity," and as it is a quality always hurtful, idle and foolish, besides being cowardly, mean and baneful, it is expressly forbidden to the Sages by the Stoics.

Essay II Of Sadness

We are never with ourselves. We are always somewhere beyond. Fear, Desire and Hope push us on toward the future and take from us, in the meantime, the sense and the consideration of what is; troubling us with the thought of what shall be, even when we shall be no more. One great principle is often repeated in Plato: "Do thine own work and know thyself." He who does as he ought, sees that the first lesson is to know himself and what is suit-

Essay III That our Affections Carry Themselves Beyond Us

[*] Florio, 1613, p. 3.

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able to him, and he who really knows himself will never mistake another man's work for his own, but will love and cultivate himself above everything; will refuse superfluous occupations and reject useless thoughts and propositions. In the same way folly, though it had all its desire, would never be satisfied. Wisdom, however, being pleased with the present, is never discontented with itself.* Epicurus dispenses the wise from looking forward and troubling about the future. Aristotle, who sifts everything, comments on Solon's words: "No one before death can be called happy," and wonders whether he who has lived and has died according to his wish can be called happy if he has left a bad name behind him and unhappiness to his posterity. As long as we are alive, we can convey ourselves by fancy and imagination whither we wish, but once we cease to exist we have no communication with anything, and it would have been better said by Solon, man can never be happy, as he cannot be so till he ceases to exist.

* Cicero, "Tusc.," xxxvii., v. 18.

Essay VIII On Sluggishness

In the same way that we see some grounds that have long lain idle and untilled, rendered rich and fertile by rest, bring forth innumerable sorts of wild and useless herbs, and know if we wish to make these lands of any use we must cultivate them and sow them with certain seeds, useful to us . . .

So there are minds which, if we do not occupy them with some subject which guides and restrains them, run into a thousand disorders, roving here and there in the vague field of imagination . . . and there is no folly or silly fancy they do not seize hold of amidst this agitation. . . .*

The soul that has not an established aim in view loses itself, for, as it is said, "It is being in no place to be everywhere." †

Essay IX On Liars

"Truth to say, falsehood is a cursed vice." We are not men, nor have other tie upon one another, but by our word. If we only recognise the horror and seriousness of it, we should fight it with fire and sword and

* Horace, "De Arte Poetica," vii.

† Martial, vii. 72.

Essay IX On Liars

with more justice than any other crime. It always seems to me that one amuses one's self with punishing children for innocent errors, quite without reason, and that we blame them for small faults which lead to nothing. Falsehood alone, and a little beneath it, obstinacy, seem to me faults of which we should at once check the birth and the progress. They grow so rapidly, and once the tongue goes into this false road it is impossible to check it, and thus it happens that we see honest men, in other ways, become its slaves and subjects. I know a good tailor's boy whom I have never heard speak the truth, not even when it might serve him usefully. If, like Truth, Falsehood had only one face, we should be on better terms, for then we should look upon the opposite of what the liar said as Truth, but the reverse side of Truth has a hundred thousand different faces and an indefinite field. The Pythagorians look upon "goodness" as certain and finite, and on "evil" as uncertain and infinite. A thousand roads branch off from it, while only one leads to it. Indeed, for myself, I could not guarantee to save myself from

most imminent danger if I had to tell a lie to do so.

Essay IX On Liars

An ancient father said: "It is better to be in the company of a dog we know than that of a man whose language is unknown to us," and "How much less sociable is a false tongue than Silence?"

Essay XI On Prognostication

As to oracles, it is certain that some time before the coming of Jesus Christ they had begun to lose their credit, for we see that Cicero gives himself the trouble to try and trace the cause of their decay. These were his words: "What is the reason that the oracles of Delphi are no longer consulted; that not merely in our days, but for a long time past* nothing is more held in contempt? . . . And although there may still remain among us some practices of divination from the spirits, from the stars, from the shapes and complexions of men, dreams and otherwise—(a notable example of the wild curiosity of our nature which amuses itself with the preoccupation of future things, as if we

* Cicero, "De Divini," ii. 57.

Essay XI On Prognostication

had not enough to do with the present), ye are they of much less authority than heretofore.

"A wise God covers with thick night the path of the Future, and laughs at the man who alarms himself without reason." *

Pacuvius says more wisely, "As to those who understand the language of birds and who would rather consult the liver of animals than their own, I had rather hear them than attend to them.† . . .

I do not esteem them any the more for making some accidental hits. There would be more certainty if there were rule and truth in always lying; besides, nobody keeps any account of their mistakes, which are most ordinary and infinite; yet people praise the prophecies which come true as being astonishing and rare. Thus answered Diogenes, who was surnamed "the Atheist," to one in Samothrace who, on showing him the Temple covered with inscriptions and votive pictures offered by those who had escaped from shipwreck, said: "Well, you who say the Gods treat human things with

* Horace, Odes, iii. 37.

† Cicero, "De Divini," i. 57.

indifference, what do you say now when you see how many people have been saved from death by their protection?" "I should say," he replied, "that the pictures of those who have been drowned are not here, and they are by far the greater number."*

Essay XI On Prognostication

The law of resolution and of constancy does not say that we are not to guard ourselves as much as lies in our power from the inconveniences and evils which menace us, or consequently not to be afraid that they will take us by surprise. On the contrary, all honest means of securing ourselves from evil are not only allowable, but praiseworthy; and the virtue of firmness shows itself principally in bearing, with a brave heart, inconveniences for which there is no remedy. In this way there is no bending of the body or play of weapons, which we find blamable if they serve to save us from the blow which threatens us.

Essay XII On Constancy

* Cicero, "De Natura," i. 37.

"I was amazed, my hair stood on end, my voice stuck in my throat." *

I am not a good naturalist, as they call it, and I do not know by what springs fear agitates us, but all the same it is a strange passion, and the doctors say there is none which sooner draws away our reason from its proper place. Indeed, I have seen many people go mad from fear, and even in the most reasonable it engenders most fearful paroxysms and confusion while its fever lasts.† . . .

Those who have been much hurt in a fight, and are still bleeding and wounded, are easily led back the next day to join again in the charge ; but you will never find those ready to face their enemies who have conceived great fear of them. Those who are in great terror of losing their goods, of being exiled and in subjection, live in perpetual agony, losing all appetite and repose ; while at the same time the really poor, the banished and the serfs are living just as happily as others. Many people, through impatience of perpetual alarms of fear, have hanged,

* Virgil, "Æneid," ii. 774.

† Florio, 1613, p. 27.

drowned and thrown themselves over precipices, and have well taught us that fear is more dreaded and more insupportable than death.

Essay XVII On Fear

. . . Solon said that, "Men, however much fortune has favoured them, cannot call themselves happy till they have been seen to pass over the last day of their life." . . . It seems sometimes that fortune lies in wait to surprise us to the last hour of our lives, showing us the power she has of overthrowing in a moment what she was so many years in building; making us cry out with Laberius, "I have lived longer by this one day than I should have done."*

Essay XVIII That Men are not to Judge us till after our Death

I think it likely that Solon, being a philosopher, looked far ahead, and wished to say that the very felicity of life itself, which depends on the tranquillity and contentment of a well-trained mind, and on the resolution and assurance of a regulated soul, ought never to be attributed to a man till you have seen how he acts that last scene of the play,

* Macrobius, ii. 7.

Essay XVIII That Men are not to Judge Us till after our Death

which is without doubt the most difficult one. During all the rest of the time he may have worn a mask. All the fine precepts of philosophy may have been repeated like a lesson. Accidents may not have come suddenly, there may have been time to prepare a tranquil face. But at the last moment of our being, the moment of death, no one can deceive any longer. We must all speak out, we must show what is good and honest at the bottom of the vase. . . . This is why this last act must be in touch with all the other actions of our life : it must be their crown. It is the supreme day. It is a day which judges all the other days. "It is a day," said an Ancient, "which must be judge of all our former years."* I must leave death to judge of the fruits of all my studies. Then will be seen whether my discourses came only from my mouth or my heart. I have seen several who through their death stamped the reputation for good or evil on their whole life. Scipio, the step-father of Pompeius, in dying well, wiped away the bad opinion which others had had of him till then. Epaminondas was asked

* Seneca.

which of the three he esteemed the most, Chabrias or Iphicrates or himself. "You must see us die," said he, "before it can be decided." . . .

Essay XVIII That Men are not to Judge Us till after our Death

God arranges things as He pleases. But in my time I have seen three of the most infamous people I have ever known die a regular death, composed and perfect in every way. There are brave and lucky deaths. I have seen Death cut the thread of a marvellous advancement and in the flower of the glory of a certain person,* with so glorious an end that, in my opinion, his ambitious and courageous designs had nothing in them so high as their interruption. He attained without completing his work, to greater glory than he could ever have hoped for. He anticipated by his death the power and the name to which he aspired.

* Doubtless referring to his friend, La Boétie, at whose death, in 1663, he was present.

Essay XIX
It is Philosophy to Learn how to Die

Cicero* says, "That to study philosophy is nothing but to prepare one's self for death. . . ."

One of the greatest benefits that virtue confers on us is the indifference to Death. By this means we live our life in peaceful tranquillity. It gives us that pure and pleasant taste for life without which all other pleasures would cease to exist, which is the reason why all the rules centre and concur in this one article. And although they all in like manner teach us not to mind pain, poverty or other accidents to which life is subject, it is not, nevertheless, with the same solicitude, because these accidents are not of absolute necessity. . . . But as to death, it is inevitable . . . and therefore, if it frightens us, it is a continual subject of torment, which cannot be relieved in any way. People are frightened even at the mention of death; and most avoid it as if it was the name of the Devil. "There is no place in which it may not reach us; even like Tantalus' stone, it hangs over us." † . . . In order that its name should not strike their

* "Tusc.," Quæst., i. 31.

† Cicero, "De Finibus," i. 18.

ears too roughly, and that the sound of it should not seem too unlucky, the Romans had learnt to soften it: instead of saying "He is dead," they would say, "He ceased to live—he has lived." . . .

Essay XIX It is Philosophy to Learn how to Die

Young and old leave life under the same conditions. There is no man so old and decrepit who, having heard of Methuselah, does not think he has yet twenty years of life in his body. Poor fool that you are! Who has assured to you any term of life? According to the concourse of things you have already lived by favour and outlived the ordinary term of life. And that it is so, reckon up among your acquaintances how many have attained to the age that you have, and of those who have ennobled their lives by their renown, I would take a bet that you would find many more had died before thirty-five years of age than after. It is full of reason and piety to take example of the life of Jesus Christ Himself which He ended at three-and-thirty. The greatest man who was simply a man—Alexander—died also at the same age. How many ways has death to surprise us? . . .

Our religion has not had a more sure

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human foundation than making us indifferent to life. . . . How foolish it is to distress ourselves at that turn of the road which leads us to exemption from pain! In the same way that our birth brought us to the beginning of everything, so does our death bring us to the end of everything. Therefore it would be as foolish to lament that we were not alive a hundred years ago as to lament that we shall not be alive a hundred years hence. Death is the entrance to another life. . . . Whether we live a long time or a short time it will be all rendered the same by Death, for there is neither long nor short in things which no longer exist. . . .

But Nature compels us to it. "Leave this world," says she, "in the same way that you entered it. The same passage that you made from Death to Life—without passion and without fear—remake from Life to Death. . . . Your birth was the first step towards your death. . . . If you have used your life profitably you have done all you can. Leave it satisfied. . . . If you have not used it properly, if it has been useless to you, why repine at leaving it? Why should you wish to retain it? . . . Life in itself is

neither good nor evil. It is the scene of good or evil according to the way you use it . . . You must give place to others, as others have given place to you. . . . No one dies before his hour. The time that you leave behind you is no more yours than the time that preceded your birth, it has nothing to do with you. . . . Whenever your life ends, there it is in entirety. The usefulness of life is not in its length, but in the use you make of it. Man may have lived long and yet lived very little. . . . If the company of others is a solace to you, is not the whole world going the same way as you are? . . . A thousand men, a thousand animals, a thousand other creatures, die at the same time that you die. . . . Each day leads to death. At the last day you will reach it."* These are the good lessons our mother Nature teaches.

Essay XIX
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I have often wondered why the face of Death . . . seems so much less frightening in wars than in our own houses? . . . Why it is always met far more calmly by villagers and poor people than by others? I truly think that it is all the terrible ceremonies

* Seneca, Epist., 120.

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and preparations with which we surround it that makes us so fear it. . . . Happy the death that leaves us no time to prepare for such ceremonies.

Essay XXVII It is a Folly to Measure Truth and Falsehood by our own Reason

It is not, indeed, without reason that we attribute our facility in believing . . . to simplicity and ignorance. It seems to me that I once learnt that belief is an impression made on the soul. . . . The more empty and pliable the soul is, the easier it is to impress it. . . . This is why children and poor people, women and the sick, are more easily led by the ears. It is, however, presumption to condemn those things as false which do not appear to us probable. This is the usual vice of those who think that they have more brains than others. Formerly I did thus : if I heard people talking of ghosts, or prognosticating future events, or relating things which I could not understand . . . I used to feel great compassion for poor people who were so deceived. Now I think I was as much to be pitied as they, not that experience has made me believe a whit

more than I used to believe . . . but reason has taught me that to condemn anything as false and impossible, is arrogantly and impiously circumscribing the limits of the will of God and the power of our mother Nature. . . . If we set down as monstrous or miraculous all those things that our reason cannot comprehend, how many miracles are continually before our sight? Let us consider through what clouds, and how gropingly in the dark, our teachers taught us about the things around us; we shall find it is more habit than science which takes away their strangeness . . . and that if those things were newly presented to us we should find them quite as surprising as many others. . . . The novelty of things rather than their grandeur incites us to seek for their cause. We must judge of the infinite power of Nature with more reverence and greater acknowledgment of our own ignorance and infirmity. When we hear people worthy of faith testify to wonderful things, even if we cannot be persuaded to believe, let us at least leave them in suspense. To condemn them is impossible, it is to use too gross presumption, it is pre-

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tending to know the limits of possibility. . . .

We read in Bouchet of the miracles of St. Hilary's relics. . . . His credit is not great enough to prevent us having the licence of not believing it, but . . . to condemn a whole train of such stories seems to me a singular impudence. For does not the great St. Augustine testify having seen a blind child recover its sight from touching the relics of SS. Gervais and Protasius at Milan, and a woman at Carthage cured of a cancer by another woman, newly baptized, making the sign of the cross on her? Hesperius, one of his friends, chased away evil spirits from his house with a little earth brought from the Sepulchre of our Lord, and this earth, when it was afterwards taken to a church, cured a man suffering from paralysis. . . . Many other miracles he says he himself witnessed. Of what could we accuse either him or the two holy bishops Aurelius and Maximinus, whom he called as witnesses? Should it be of ignorance, simplicity or credulity, or of malice and imposture? Is there any man of our age so vain who can compare himself to them,

either in virtue or piety or knowledge or judgment or truthfulness? . . . It is great absurdity, it is dangerous temerity to despise what we cannot understand. According to your wise knowledge you have established the limits of truth and falsehood, then you find that you have of necessity to believe many things which are more strange than those you disbelieve. You find yourselves obliged to abandon those limits. . . . Glory and curiosity are the ruin of our souls. The latter makes us poke our nose everywhere, and the former bids us leave everything undecided.

Essay XXVII. It is a Folly to Measure Truth and Falsehood by our own Reason

. . . Friendship has a general and universal heat, ever temperate and equal . . . all sweetness and gentleness; where there is no sharpness or bitterness. . . .

Essay XXVIII. On Friendship

What we usually call "friends" and "friendship" are only acquaintances and familiarities brought together through some particular occasion or use, by means of which some little intercourse exists between our souls; but in the friendship of which I speak they

are so tightly joined together one to the other, in so universal a mixture, that it effaces all sign of the seam by which they were first joined. If a man pressed me to give a reason why I loved him, I feel that I could only express myself by answering, "Because it was he, because it was I." . . . We sought each other before we met . . . I believe we met by the will of Heaven.* . . . Do not let us place in this rank those other ordinary friendships. . . . You must walk amid such ordinary friendships with the reins in your hands, with prudence and precaution. . . . "Love him," so said Chilo, "as having one day to hate him ; hate him as having one day to love him." This precept, which is abominable in true and absolute friendship, is of great use to everyday friendship, in describing which we can well recall that familiar precept of Aristotle, "Oh my friends ! there is no friend."† . . .

If in the friendship of which I speak one could give to the other, the receiver of the benefit would be the man who obliged his friend. For, each seeking above everything

* This refers to his friendship with La Boétie.

† Diogenes Laertius, v. 21.

to do good to the other, he who administers the occasion is the one who is liberal; thus giving contentment to his friend in enabling him to do what he wishes most. . . .

Essay XXVIII On Friendship

The ancient Menander * used to say that "he was happy who had had the good fortune to meet with but the shadow of a friend." . . .

As if we had the evil touch, we corrupt things in themselves beautiful and good by the way we use them. We seize hold of virtue in such a way that it becomes vicious if we embrace it too stringently and with too sharp desire. . . . Holy writ warns us of this when it says, "Do not be wiser than ye need to be, but be soberly wise." I have seen such a one blast the reputation of his religion in trying to make himself appear more religious than any of the men of his kind. I love temperate and moderate natures. Immoderate zeal, even when it does not offend, astonishes me and makes me study what name to give it.

Essay XXIX On Moderation

* Plutarch, "On Brotherly Love," c. iii.

Essay XXXI That a Man is to Judge Soberly of the Divine Ordinances

. . . Among Indians there is this laudable observance, that when any misfortune happens to them in battle or encounter, they demand pardon publicly from the Sun, who is their god, as having committed an unjust action. Thus they place all in the hands of Divine Justice and submit to it their judgment and actions. It suffices for a Christian to believe that all things come from God, and to receive them with acknowledgment of his Divine and inscrutable wisdom, to accept all in good part under whatever form it is sent. But I think it is very wrong (as I see it is a practice) to seek to support our religion by the prosperity of our enterprises. Our belief has far deeper foundations than to be guided by events, for there is great danger that the faith of those people who are accustomed to arguments so plausible and so much to their taste should be shaken when events turn out to their disadvantage. . . . God, being pleased to show us that the good have something else to hope for, and the wicked something else to fear, than the fortunes or misfortunes of this world, manipulates and guides them according to His own wish and

pleasure, and He does not allow us to use them unwisely for our own profit. . . . We must content ourselves with the light which the Sun is pleased to communicate to us, by virtue of his rays, and he who raises his eyes to draw a greater quantity of light into his body must not be surprised if, in punishment of his imprudence, he loses his sight. . . .

Essay XXXI That a Man is to Judge Soberly of the Divine Ordinances

Let us leave on one side the long comparison between a solitary and an active life, and that saying under which ambition and avarice shelter themselves; that we are not born for ourselves, but for the public. Let us truthfully ask those who are in the world to ask their conscience if they are not really seeking for employment and glory and the worry of their own interests, more for their own use than for public utility. . . . Let us reply to ambition that it is she who gives us taste for solitude, for what does she fly from more than from society? . . .

Essay XXXVIII On Solitude

But one does not always seek the right way of retirement. One thinks to have got

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free from troubles, but one has only changed them. There is not less trouble in governing a family than a whole state, . . . and although domestic occupations may be less important, they are not the less troublesome, and, besides this, although we are free from the court and the market, we are not free from the principal torments of our life. . . . Ambition, avarice, irresolution, fear, . . . do not abandon us because we change our abode. . . . they follow us even into the cloisters or the cells of philosophy. Neither deserts, nor hollowed-out rocks, nor fastings, nor horsehair separate us from them. It was said to Socrates that some one had not been at all improved by his travels. "I quite believe it," he said, "because he took himself along with him." . . . You do more harm than good to a sick person and increase the pain in moving him from place to place. . . . Therefore it is not enough to go away from people or to change your abode. A man must flee from the secret conditions within him, he must sequester himself from himself. . . .*

We carry our chains with us.† It is not

* Horace, Odes, ii. 16, 18.

† Persius, Sat., v. 158.

an entire liberty. We still turn our eyes towards the view which we have left behind and our fancy is full of it. . . . Our evil lodges in the soul which cannot escape from itself . . . and therefore it is to be called home and confined within itself; this is the true solitude which can be enjoyed in cities and the courts of kings, though more easily apart. Therefore, if we undertake to live alone and to deprive ourselves of our companions, let us so act that our contentment depends wholly upon our souls, . . . let us gain the power of being able to live well alone, and to live at our ease . . . let us not then fear to languish from tiresome idleness in solitude. . . . Virtue is contented with herself without words, without effects. Among the thousand actions which we are accustomed to perform, there is not one that really concerns ourselves. . . .

Solitude seems to me to be more enjoyable and to be more necessary to those who have given to the world their most active and flourishing years. . . We have lived enough for others, let us now live for ourselves; at least at the end of our life. Let us

carry our thought and our intention quietly within ourselves, and to our own ease and repose. . . . As God has given us the leisure to prepare for our removal, let us make ready, let us pack up our things and take leave of our companions in good time. Let us remove from ourselves those violent occupations which so engage us and take us out of ourselves. . . .

It is the greatest thing in the world for a man to know that he is his own. It is time to separate from society when we can no longer be of any use to it. . . .

Socrates* said, "Young people should cause themselves to be instructed, men should exercise themselves in doing good, and the old should retire from all civil and military occupations, living at their ease without any office." There are some characters which appreciate these precepts of retreat more than others. . . .

The occupation that one ought to choose in such a life should be neither a tiresome nor a troublesome one, otherwise we should change our abode for no reason at all. This

* Stobæus, Serm. xli.

depends on the taste of each particular one. . . .

Let us hear the advice given by the younger Pliny to his friend Caninius Rufus with reference to solitude: "I advise you in this full and happy retreat where you are, to leave to your servants the loads and abject cares of the establishment, to give yourself up to the study of literature so as to draw from it something which may be entirely and absolutely your own. . . ."

The imagination of those who, by devotion, seek solitude and draw their courage from the divine promises of a second life, is built on wiser foundations. In thinking of God, infinite Object of Goodness and Power, the soul has enough to satisfy its desires in all freedom. Sorrows and afflictions are profitable to it, for through them it gains eternal health and happiness, and it looks forward to Death as being the passage to so perfect a state. . . . This sole end, of another everlasting happy life, merits that we should really abandon the pleasures and the sweetness of this life, and he who can fill his soul with the ardour of this faith and hope, in all truth and constancy, erects for

Essay XXXVIII On Solitude

himself in solitude a more delicious life than any other.

Essay XL The Taste of Good or Evil depends in great part on the opinion we have of them

An ancient Greek maxim says that men are tormented with the opinions they have of things, and not by the things themselves. It would be a great point gained in the solace of our miserable human condition if this proposition could be established as certain and true in everything. . . .

If what we call evil and misfortune is not so in itself, but only through our fancy, it depends on us to change it or turn it to good.

If the original being of those things which we so fear had power to lodge in us by its own authority, it would then lodge the same way in all ! . . . The diversity of the opinions which we have of these things clearly shows that they only affect us according to our feelings. One person perhaps admits them within himself under their true form, but a thousand others receive them under a new and contrary shape. We look upon Death, Poverty and Pain as our principal evils ;

well, know then that this Death, which some call "the most horrible of all horrible things," is called by others "the only secure harbour from the storms and tempests of this life, the sovereign good of Nature, the sole prop of our liberty," and "the common and swift remedy of all evils." While some await it trembling and frightened, others support it with greater ease than life. . . .

Essay XL The Taste of Good or Evil depends in great part on the opinion we have of them

We suffer pain impatiently because we do not draw our principal peace from the soul, because we do not rely enough upon her who is the sole and sovereign mistress of our condition. . . . It is easy to see that what gives the intensity to our pains and pleasures is the sharpness of our minds. . . .

We are more sensitive to a cut of the razor than to six sword-thrusts in the heat of battle. . . .

Ease and indigence only depend on the opinion of each, and neither riches nor health own any more beauty or pleasure than what each individual who possesses them lends to them. Every one is either well or ill off according as he believes himself so, not from what others think. Only this is a reality then, what we believe.

Essay XL The Taste of Good or Evil depends in great part on the opinion we have of them

Fortune makes us neither ill nor well. It only gives us the material and the seed, which our soul, more powerful than fortune, turns and applies as it pleases, being the sole cause and mistress of her happy or unhappy condition. The external accessories take their flavour and colour from the internal constitution. Thus clothes warm us, not with their heat, but with our heat, which they serve to protect and nourish, performing the same service in the case of cold and a cold body, for in this way is preserved snow and ice. . . . Events are not painful or difficult in themselves. It is our weakness or cowardice that makes them so. . . .

Finally, a man does not transgress philosophy by allowing the existence of pains and human weakness to afflict him beyond measure; for they constrain her to go back to her unanswerable teaching: "If it be ill to live in want, at least there is no 'need' for a man to live in want. Nobody suffers for long except by his own fault. He who has not the courage to die nor yet to live, he who will neither resist nor fly, what can be done to him?"

Essay XLI Not to Communicate a Man's Honour

Of all the follies of the world, the most received and the most universal is the desire for reputation and glory. This we seek for, even to the extent of giving up riches, peace and health, those effectual and substantial goods, to follow this vain image, this empty word which has neither body nor form. . . . Even the philosophers give up this most unreasonable of man's humours less easily and more reluctantly than any other. . . . As Cicero says, "even those who fight against it would wish the books they write against it should come to light with their own names written on the title-pages. They wish to derive glory from seeming to despise it. Everything else is communicable and negotiable ; we lend our goods and our lives to our necessitous friends ; but to communicate a man's honour, and to robe another with a man's own glory, is very rarely seen.

Essay XLII On the Inequality between us

Plutarch says in some place that he does not find so great a difference between one beast and another as between man and man. He speaks of the qualities and perfections of

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the soul. . . . I would enlarge upon what Plutarch says, and say that there is more difference between such and such a man than there is between such a man and such a beast; . . . that there are as many and innumerable degrees of minds as there are cubits between this and Heaven. But, with regard to the estimation of men, it is wonderful that, ourselves excepted, no other creature is praised beyond its own qualities. We praise a horse for being strong and vigorous . . . not for its rich harness; a greyhound for his speed and not for his collar; a hawk for her swiftness, not for her hood and bells. Why, in the same way, do we not esteem a man for what he is himself? He has a great retinue with a beautiful palace, so much credit, so large a rental. All that is around him, but it is not him. You do not buy a cat blindly; if you bargain for a horse you take off its clothing and see it uncovered. . . . Why, in esteeming a man, do you prize him all wrapped and muffled up? He only shows us those parts which are none of his, hiding from us those by which alone we can judge of his real value. . . . You must judge him by himself and

not by what he wears. As one of the Ancients very pleasantly said, "Do you know why you thought him tall? You were counting him from the height of his shoes!" The pedestal is no part of the statue; measure him without his stilts. Let him put on one side his riches and honours and present himself in his shirt. Is his body capable of its functions, sound and vigorous? What soul has he? Is she beautiful and capable, and happily provided in all her faculties? Is she rich of what is her own? Or has she borrowed it? Has Fortune no hand in the affair? . . . Is she satisfied, equable and contented? That we must see, and in this way judge the many differences there are between man and man. . . . Is he "the wise man who has command over himself; whom neither poverty nor death nor change affright, who has the strength and courage to restrain his appetites and contemn honours; who has all within himself, a mind well turned and even balanced, like a smooth and perfect ball, which nothing external can stop in its course; whom fortune assails in vain?"* Such a man, then, is five

* Horace, Sat., ii. 7, 83.

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hundred cubits above kingdoms and duchies, he is an empire in himself. . . . What more is left him to desire ? . . . Compare him to the generality of men : stupid, base, servile, unstable ; continually at the mercy of divers passions which toss and tumble them to and fro, ever depending on others. You will find a greater distance than between Heaven and earth. Yet so blind is our custom that we take little or no notice of this. If we were considering a peasant and a king, a noble and a vassal, a magistrate and a private man, a rich man and a poor, great disparities would suddenly reveal themselves to our eyes, though in reality there are none, as one may say, except in their breeches. . . .

The flatterers of Alexander the Great wanted to make him believe he was the son of Jupiter.* One day, being wounded, and looking at the blood stream from his wound, he said : " Well, now what do you say ? Is not this red and purely human blood ? It is not blood like this that Homer would cause to flow from the wounds of the gods." . . .

* Plutarch, " Apothegms," art. Alexander.

The goods of fortune, whatever they are, require a mind fit to relish them. It is enjoying them, not possessing them, that makes us happy. . . .

Do we think that the choir-boys take great pleasure in music? Satiety rather makes it troublesome to them. Feasts, dances, masquerades, tournaments, please those who do not often see them, and who desire to see them. But to those who have been frequently present at them they become insipid and tiresome. . . .

There is nothing so revolting and troublesome as abundance. . . . What pleasure or happiness in shooting could he of our ancestors enjoy, who never went hawking without 7000 falcons? . . .

Hiero relates how inconvenient he found his royalty in not being able to go about and travel in the world at liberty, being, as it were, a prisoner in the limits of his country, and that in all he was doing he found himself surrounded by a tiresome crowd. Truly to see our kings sitting alone at table, surrounded by numbers of courtiers talking about them, and so many strangers staring at them, I have often felt more pity for them

Essay XLII On the Inequality between us

than envy. King Alphonso used to say: "In this way asses are happier than kings, being permitted to feed at their will and pleasure, a favour which kings cannot obtain from their servants." . . .

But, above all, Hiero laments that he finds himself deprived of all friendship and mutual society, in which consists the most perfect and sweet fruit of human life. For what proofs of affection and goodwill can I draw from him who owes me, whether he wishes it or not, all that he is able to do? . . . The honour which we receive from those who fear us is not honour, those respects are paid to royalty and not to me. . . . Do we not see that the wicked and the good king—the one who is hated and he who is beloved—have each as much reverence paid him one as the other? . . .

The courtiers praised the Emperor Julian one day for having judged rightly.* "I should be proud," he said, "of those praises if they came from people who dared to accuse or disapprove of my contrary actions, whatever they were." All the true advantages which princes have, they have in

* Ammianus Marcellinus, xxii. 10.

common with men of small fortune. . . . They have no different sleep or appetite than us. Their armour is of no better design than that which we don. Their crowns do not shelter them from the sun or the rain. . . .

Essay XLII On the Inequality between us

When the King Pyrrhus was undertaking to conquer Italy, Cyneas, his wise counsellor wishing to make him feel the vanity of his ambition, asked him: "Well, sire, what is your aim in undertaking this enterprise?" "To make myself master of Italy," the king answered. "And then, sire," said Cyneas, "and after that is accomplished?" "I shall pass on," said the other, "to Gaul and Spain." "And afterwards?" "I shall then subjugate Africa; and at last, when I have got the whole world under my control, I shall sit down and live quietly at my ease." "In God's name, sire," re-answered Cyneas, "tell me why you cannot place yourself at once, if you wish it, in the condition you speak of? Why do you not at once settle yourself in the state to which you aspire, and spare yourself all the work and hazard which you are undertaking?" . . .

I will end with an old saying which I

Essay XLII On the Inequality between us

think very apt to the purpose: "Every man frames his own fortune."

Essay LI On the Vanity of Words

A rhetorician of ancient times said that it was his profession to make little things appear great. This was a shoemaker who could make a great shoe for a little foot. . . . Aristotle wisely defined rhetoric as being a "Science to persuade the people"; Socrates and Plato, "An art to flatter and deceive." . . .

Eloquence flourished most in Rome when the public affairs were in the worst condition and agitated by the storm of civil wars. . . . There was never any famous orator known to come out of Persia or Macedonia.

I have entered upon this subject on the occasion of an Italian whom I lately received into my service. . . . I put him upon an account of his office, when he gave me such a discourse on this palate-science, with such ministerial gravity as if he were speaking on some great point in theology. He gave me a learned description of the

several kinds of appetite which a man has before he begins to eat, and after the first and second courses: the way to satisfy the first and to make up the others; the making of sauces and the qualities of their ingredients and effects; the differences of salads in their season, those which should be served hot or cold; the way of ornamenting them so as to make them pleasant to the eye; . . . and all this spoken with such rich and eloquent words, as if he were discoursing on the government of an empire, which learned discourse of my man brought these words of Terence to my recollection: "This is too salt, that's burnt, that's not washed enough, that's well—remember to do so another time. Thus do I ever advise them to have things done properly according to my capacity. And lastly, Damia, I commend my cooks to look into every dish as if it were a mirror, and tell them what they should do." . . . I do not know if others think like me, but when I hear our architects thunder out great words of pilasters, architraves, cornices, Corinthian and Doric works, and such-like jargon, my imagination flies to the palace of Apolli-

Essay LI On the Vanity of Words

don,* where, after all, I find them but paltry pieces of my own kitchen door. To hear men talk of metonomies, metaphors, allegories, and other grammar words, would not one think they meant some rare and exotic form of language? And yet their words are no better than the chatter of my housemaid.

And this, further, is a stupidity of the same stamp — to call the offices of our kingdom by the lofty titles of the Romans, though they have no similitude of function, still less of authority and power . . . and we think nothing of calling princes great who have nothing but what is ordinary in them.

Essay LVI On Prayers

I am putting forward some informal and undetermined fantasies, as those who do publish doubtful questions to be thought out in schools; not to establish truth but to seek it, and I submit them to the judgment of those who have the right to regulate not only my actions and opinions, but also my thoughts. Condemnation would be as useful

* A necromancer.

and acceptable to me as applause, for I should look upon myself as absurd and impious if I had written anything contrary to the Holy Resolutions and restrictions of the Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church, in which I was born, and in which I will die. . . .

I do not know if I am making a mistake, but as by a particular favour of the Divine goodness a certain form of prayer has been prescribed and dictated to us word by word from the mouth of God Himself, it always seems to me we should have it in more ordinary use than we have, and, if it rested with me, at the beginning and end of our meals, at our getting up and going to bed, and in every particular action where prayer is used. I should wish it to be the Pater Noster that Christians should employ not only now and then, but always. The Church can extend and diversify the prayer according to the needs of our instruction, for I know very well that it is always the same in substance and the same thing ; but yet, such a privilege ought to be given to this one, that people should have it continually in their mouth, for it is certain it

contains all that is needful, and that it is applicable to all occasions. It is the only prayer that I use everywhere, and which I repeat instead of changing. Thus it arises that I know no other so well by heart.

The thought has just come into my mind, how does the error arise that we always appeal to God in all our designs and enterprises, calling Him to help us in every difficulty and in every situation where our weakness needs help, without considering whether the occasion be just or unjust, and to call on His name and power in whatever state we are, or action we are engaged in, however vicious it may be? He, is indeed, our one and only protector, and can do all things for us. But though He deigns to honour us with His sweet paternal alliance, He is, notwithstanding, as just as He is good and powerful, and more often uses His justice and His power, and favours us according to that, and not according to our petitions. . . .

God's justice and power are inseparable. It is in vain to implore his help for us in a bad cause. We ought to have our souls pure and clean from all vicious passions, at

least at the moment that we are praying to Him ; otherwise, we ourselves present Him the rod with which to chastise us. Instead of repairing our faults, we only redouble them, presenting to Him, of whom we have to demand pardon, an affection full of irreverence and hatred. Therefore, I do not readily praise those whom I observe to be frequently praying, if the actions which follow the prayer do not show any amendment or reformation. . . . And the practice of a man who mixes devotion with a bad life, seems to me more to be condemned than that of a man living up to his passions and bad throughout. It is not without good reason that the Church forbids admittance to, and communion with, men obstinate and incorrigible in any open wickedness. We pray by custom and by fashion ; or rather, we read and pray aloud, which is no better than a hypocritical show of devotion ; and I am shocked to see a man cross himself three times at Benedicite, and as often at grace, . . . and then dedicate all other hours of the day to acts of malice, avarice and injustice, one hour to God and one to the devil, as if by composition and compensation.

Essay LVI On Prayers

A man whose whole thoughts are meditating nothing but impurity, which he knows to be so hateful to Almighty God, what can he say when he comes to speak to Him? He draws back, but immediately falls again. If the object of Divine Justice and the presence of his God did as he pretends, affect his soul, however short the repentance—the very fear of offending his Maker would so act upon his imagination that he would make himself master of those vices which envelop him.

The Church also seems to be very wise in forbidding a promiscuous, indiscreet and common use of the Holy and Divine Psalms that the Holy Spirit inspired to David. We must only mix God in our actions with reverence and caution. This language is too Divine to be put to any such use as that of exercising the lungs and pleasing our ears. It ought to come from the conscience and not from the tongue. . . . It is not rapidly and just passing by, that one must carry on a study so serious and venerable. The reading of the Holy Scriptures should be a temperate and premeditated act, to which men should always add this preface of our

office, "Sursum corda," preparing even the body to so humble a condition as shall show particular attention and reverence. . . .

There is, as I remember, a passage of Xenophon where he shows that we should pray to God the more rarely, as it is hard to compose our soul to that degree of calmness, patience and devotion in which it should be; otherwise our prayers are not only vain and useless, but vicious. "Forgive us our trespasses," we say, "as we forgive those that trespass against us." What do we mean by this, except that we offer Him our soul exempt from all vengeance and malice? How often do we invoke God and His help for the success of our faults and call for His aid in unjust designs? . . .* The avaricious man prays to Him for the preservation of his vain and superfluous riches; the ambitious, for victory and the road to fortune; the thief implores his aid to overcome the difficulties which oppose him in the execution of his wicked enterprises, or thanks Him for the ease with which he has cut a man's throat. On the steps of the house into

* Persius, ii. 4.

which they will climb or break in, men make their prayers. . . .

The true prayer and the reconciliation of ourselves to God cannot enter into an impure soul, subject at that very time to the domination of Satan. He who calls God to his assistance whilst he is on the road of vice, acts as a thief who should call a magistrate to help him, or as those who call upon the name of God to attest a falsehood . . .* There are very few men who would dare make public their secret requests to God. . . .

It seems to me truly we make use of our prayers like jargon and like those who employ holy and divine words for the use of sorcery and magic. For, having our soul full of concupiscence, . . . and not touched by any repentance or any new reconciliation towards God, we go and present Him with the words which memory lends to our tongue and hope to obtain for ourselves, expiation for our faults. There is nothing so easy, so sweet, so favourable as the Divine Law. She calls and invites us to Him however faulty and detestable we may be. She opens her arms to us and receives us in her

* Persius, ii. 20.

embrace however guilty or wicked we may be in the present, or will be in the future. But in return for this we must look upon her with a respectful eye, and we must receive this pardon with all gratitude and submission and intention to repent; or at least, at the moment when we are addressing ourselves to Him, have our soul sensible of the faults we have committed, and be at enmity with the passions which seduce us to offend Him. "Neither gods, nor honest men," says Plato, "accept gifts from the wicked."

Essay LVI On Prayers

I cannot reconcile the way in which we establish for ourselves the length of our life. I see that the Ancients shortened it very much at the price of public opinion. "How?" said the younger Cato to those who wished to prevent him killing himself; "am I now of an age to be reproached for abandoning life too soon?" And yet he was only forty-eight years old. He considered such an age as very ripe and very advanced, seeing how few people arrive at it. And those who, counting upon what they call the course of

Essay LVII On Age

nature, promise themselves years beyond it, might do so if they had the privilege of being exempt from the great number of accidents, to which we are all subject in the order of things, which may interrupt the length of time which they promise themselves. What a dream it is to expect to die from the failure of strength which extreme old age brings, and to make that the end of our existence, seeing that it is the kind of death the rarest of all, and the least common! We call it alone the "natural" one, as if it was against nature to see a man break his neck by falling, to be drowned in a shipwreck or to die of pestilence or pleurisy, and as if our ordinary condition did not expose us to these inconveniences. . . .!

To die of old age is a rare, singular and extraordinary death, much less natural than the others. It is the last and extremest way of dying. The further off it is from us, so much the less can it be hoped for. . . .

I esteem that our souls show at twenty years of age what they mean to be. No soul that has not by that time given evidence of its strength will give proof of it afterwards. The qualities and natural virtues produce in

that time or never what they have of vigour and beauty. . . .

It is possible that, with those who employ their time well, science and experience may increase with life, but vivacity, promptitude and firmness, and other more important essential faculties will fade and deteriorate. . . . Therefore I complain of the laws; not that they leave us too long to our work, but that they do not employ us earlier; for, considering the frailty of our life, and the many ordinary accidents to which it is exposed, I complain that so large a portion should be given up to childhood, to idleness and to apprenticeship.

EXTRACTS—BOOK II

THOSE who try to control human actions find that it is all they can do to piece them together and place them under the same light, for they commonly contradict each other in so strange a way that it seems impossible they should proceed from the same origin. The younger Marius sometimes called himself the son of Mars and sometimes the son of Venus ; . . . and who would have believed that it was Nero—that true image of cruelty—who, when first presented, according to custom, with the sentence of a condemned criminal to sign, cried, "Would to God I had never learnt to write!" * so much did it go to his heart to condemn a man to death! . . .

I believe there is nothing so uncommon among men as constancy, and nothing more common than inconstancy. . . . A word of Demosthenes says, "The commencement of every virtue is consultation and deliberation. The end and perfection is constancy. . . ."

Our ordinary practice is to follow the inclinations of our appetite, to the right or left, up hill or down hill, according as we are wafted by the wind of the moment. We

* Seneca, "De Clementia," ii. 1.

think as we wish at the moment, and change every moment as the animal who takes its colour from the place where it sleeps. What we have proposed one hour, we change at the next. "We are turned about as a top turns with a thong.*

We do not go, we are carried along like things that float, now softly, now with violence, according as the water is calm or tempestuous. . . . Every day 'tis a new fancy; and our tastes change with the movements of time. . . . We float between various inclinations, we wish for nothing freely, nothing absolutely, nothing constantly. . . .†

He whom you saw yesterday so brave, do not be surprised to find him a coward to-day. Anger, or necessity, or wine, or companionship, or the sound of a trumpet had put courage into his soul. This is no valour formed and established by reason, it is circumstance which has produced it, and therefore it is not marvellous that it should change under altered circumstances.

My soul sometimes appears with one face,

* Horace, Sat., ii. 7, 82.

† Seneca, Ep., 52.

sometimes with another, according to the side on which I rest it. If I speak variously of myself, it is that I work upon myself variously. All contradictions are there to be found in one corner or another of myself: shame, insolence; chastity, luxury; talkativeness, taciturnity; laboriousness, delicacy; ingeniousness, stupidity; sadness, cheerfulness; untruthfulness, truthfulness; wisdom, ignorance; liberality, avariciousness, wastefulness—all these I see in myself according to the way I am living; and whoever studies himself attentively and his way of living, will find in himself and in his judgment this volubility and discordance. . . .

"It is not wonderful," said an Ancient, "that chance affects us so much, since by chance we live." To him who plans his life for a certain end it may be possible to dispose of particular actions; but it is impossible for him to arrange the pieces who has not the whole form already designed in his head. Of what use are colours to him who does not know what he is going to paint? . . . An archer must first of all know what he is aiming at, and then he must guide his hand, the bow, the string, the arrow and his

Essay I On the Inconstancy of our Actions

movements. . . . No wind is of use to him who is not making for any certain port.

Essay VI On Custom and Experience

It is impossible that speeches and instruction, although our mind apply itself voluntarily to them, should be powerful enough to lead us to action if we do not, besides, exercise and form our mind by experience to the end to which we wish to attain; it will otherwise find itself at a loss when it comes to the hard part of its work. That is why those amongst the philosophers who aspire to the greatest perfection are not content to wait quietly in repose for the hardships of fortune, but, lest they should be surprised, inexperienced and new to the fight, went out to meet danger and subjected themselves on purpose to difficulties; abandoned riches to exercise a voluntary poverty; sought in labour and austerity of life to accustom themselves to want and work. . . .

It is in dying alone—the greatest work we have to do—that experience can give us no help. We can, by custom and experience, fortify ourselves against pain, shame, poverty

and such other accidents, but as to death we can only try it once ; we are but apprentices when we arrive at it. . . .

Essay VI On Custom and Experience

But, nevertheless, it seems to me that in one way and another we can prepare ourselves for it and make trial of what it is. . . . It is not without reason that we are taught to look on sleep as having a great resemblance to death. How easily we pass from wakefulness to sleep, with how little interest do we lose knowledge of the night and of ourselves. At first sight the faculty of sleep, which deprives us of all action and all sentiment, seems useless and against nature. But through this means nature teaches us that she has made us to die as well as to live ; shows us in life the eternal state she reserves for us, to accustom us to it and to take away all fear. Those who have by some violent accident fallen into a swoon and in it have lost all sense, have been very near seeing the true and natural face of death. As to the actual moment of passage, it need not be feared that it will bring any pain or suffering with it, since we cannot feel anything without leisure ; sufferings have need of time, which in death is so rapid that it must

Essay VI On Custom and Experience

necessarily render us insensible. It is the approaches of death we have to fear, and these may fall within the limits of our experience.

Essay XI On Cruelty

I take virtue to be quite a different thing and far more noble than good-nature. . . . Souls well-born and well-trained follow indeed much the same road, and represent in their actions the same face that virtue does. But the word "virtue" means something greater and more active than merely for a man to allow himself, by a happy disposition, to be led softly and placidly to the rule of reason. He who, through sweetness and natural kindness, despises injuries received would doubtless perform a praiseworthy action; but he who, vexed and stung to the quick through a wrong, fortifies himself with the arms of reason against the furious appetite of vengeance, and, after a great conflict, masters himself, would doubtless do a great deal more. The first one would do well, but the other virtuously; the one action might be called goodness and

the other virtue, for I look on the very name of virtue as presupposing difficulty and contention; virtue cannot be exercised without a battle. It is for this reason that we call God good, strong, liberal and just, but that we do not call Him virtuous, as all His operations are natural and without effort. . . .

For my part, even in the exercise of justice any penalty beyond that of a simple death seems to me pure cruelty, more especially with us who ought to have regard to dismiss souls in a good and calm state, which certainly cannot be the case if they have been agitated by insupportable torments. . . .

We live in a period which, through the licence of our civil wars, abounds in incredible examples of this vice. . . . As for me, I cannot see without displeasure an innocent beast, without power of defending itself, chased and killed; a creature that has never done us any harm. It frequently happens that the stag we hunt, finding itself weak and out of breath, having no other choice, surrenders itself, imploring mercy by its tears . . . from those who pursue it, and this has ever been to me a most unpleasant

Essay XI On Cruelty

sight. I hardly ever take any beast alive that I do not at once give it freedom. . . . The religion of the ancient Gauls taught that the soul, being external, it never ceased to change from one body to another. Mixed up with this fancy there must have been some conception of divine justice, for, according to the deportments of the soul whilst it inhabited Alexander, they said God assigned it another body to inhabit, more or less inferior and proper to its condition. . . . If it had been courageous, He lodged it in the body of a lion ; if malicious, in that of a fox, and so on, till, being purified by this punishment, it again entered the body of some other man.

Essay XII Apology for Raimond de Sebonde*

Learning is truly a very useful and a very good quality. Those who despise it only show their folly. Yet I do not value it to the extent that others do ; as Herillus the philosopher for one, who maintained that

* Raimond de Sebonde, a Spaniard by birth, was Professor of Medicine, Philosophy and Theology at Toulouse, about 1430.

learning contained all sovereign good, and that it sufficed to render us wise and contented. In this I do not concur, no more do I when others say that knowledge is the mother of all virtue, and that vice proceeds from ignorance. . . .

Essay XII Apology for Raimond de Sebonde

My father, a little before his death, having by accident found this book of Sebonde's beneath a lot of waste papers, begged me to translate it for him into French. . . . I found the imaginations of this author very beautiful, and his aims full of piety. . . . Ladies particularly delighting in reading it, I have often been called upon to clear the book of two principal objections made against it. His ideas are hardy and bold, for he undertakes, through human and natural reasons, to make good against the atheists all the articles of the Christian religion, and in this truly he is so strong and successful that I do not think it is possible to do better, and I am sure that no one has equalled him. . . .

The first reproach made against his work is, that Christians do wrong in resting their faith upon human reason, as religion is only conceived by faith, and faith but the particular

inspiration of Divine Grace. In this objection it seems to me there is an over-zealous piety, and therefore I would, with all mildness and respect, endeavour to satisfy those who bring it forward. This would be better done by a man more versed in theology than I am, who know nothing of it. Doubtless I apprehend that in a thing so divine and high, and so far surpassing the intelligence of man, as this truth with which it has pleased the goodness of God to enlighten us, it is very necessary that He shall lend us His help, by extraordinary favour and privilege, to conceive and lodge it in us: nor do I believe that purely human means are in any way capable of this; for, if they were, many rare and excellent souls, fully furnished with natural power in former ages, would not have failed, by means of their learning, to arrive at this knowledge. It is faith alone which embraces vividly and earnestly the deep mysteries of our religion. Nevertheless, I do not say that it is not a beautiful and laudable enterprise also to make use in the service of our faith of the natural and human tools which God has given us; we cannot doubt but that it is the most honourable

use to which we can put them, and there is, indeed, no occupation or design more worthy of a Christian man than to make it his aim through all his thoughts and studies, to embellish, extend and amplify the truths of his belief. We must not satisfy ourselves with serving God with our soul and mind only. We also owe and render Him corporal reverence ; we must employ our members, our movements and all external things to His honour. . . . If we believed in God with a lively faith ; if we held to our faith by Him, and not by reliance on ourselves ; if we had a wholly divine footing and foundation, human accidents would not have the power to shake us. . . . We should not allow it to be weakened by every new argument, or give way to the persuasion of all the rhetoric of the world ; we should withstand the fury of the waves, inflexible and unmoved in firmness. . . .

If this ray of divinity in any way touched us, it would show itself everywhere : not only our words, but also our works would carry its brightness and lustre. Everything which proceeded from us would bear the impress of this noble light.

Essay XII Apology for Raimond de Sebonde

Compare our manners with those of a Mohammedan, with those of a pagan, you will find that we always fall short; whereas, having regard to the beauty of our religion, we ought to excel therein in excellence, by an extreme and incomparable distance, so that others should say, "Are they so just, so charitable, so good, then they are Christians." . . .

Our religion is made to extirpate vices; but it would seem to screen, nourish, and incite them. We must not mock God. If we did believe in Him, I do not say by faith, but by simple belief (and I speak thus to our great shame); if we did believe in Him, or knew Him as we know our studies, as we know one of our companions, we should love Him above all other things, for the infinite goodness and beauty which shine in Him. At least He would hold the same rank in our affections as riches, pleasures, glory, and our friends. The best of us does not fear offending Him as much as he fears offending his neighbour, his relations, or his master. . . .

When the philosopher Antisthenes was being initiated into the mysteries of Orpheus,

the priest told him that those who professed that religion were certain to receive perfect and eternal happiness after death. "If you believe this," answered Antisthenes, "why do you not die yourself?" . . . If we believed the great promises of eternal blessing, and if we received them even with the same respect as we should a philosophical discourse, we should not look upon death with such horror as we do. . . . "I am willing to be dissolved, and to be with Jesus Christ." . . .

All this is a most evident sign that we receive our religion in our own way by our own hands, and no otherwise than other religions are received. We are Christians in the same way that we are Perigordins or Germans. . . .

God in His stupendous works has left us the character of His divinity, and it is only our stupidity which prevents us from discovering it. . . . Sebonde applied himself to this laudable study and laboured to show that there is no part of the world which disclaims its Maker. It would be doing wrong to Divine Goodness if the whole universe did not bear witness to our belief.

Essay XII Apology for Raimond de Sebonde

Heaven, and the elements, our bodies, our souls, all concur to this, if we can but find out the way to see it. They instruct us if we are capable of understanding. For this world is a very holy temple into which man is introduced to contemplate statues, not the works of mortal man, but such as the Divine purpose has made the objects of sense : the sun, the stars, the waters and the earth—to represent those that are intelligible to us. "The invisible things of God," says St. Paul, "from the creation of the world, His eternal power and Godhead," are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. . . .

Faith, coming to tint and illustrate the arguments of Sebonde, renders them firm and solid. They are capable of serving as first guide to the student, putting him into the way of knowledge ; of moulding him and preparing him for the grace of God, so that he can perfect himself in the truth of belief. I know a man of authority, brought up to letters, who confessed to me that he had been brought back from the errors of misbelief by the arguments of Sebonde. . . .

What does Truth preach when she im-

plores us to fly from worldly philosophy, when she inculcates in us so strongly that "our wisdom is but folly in the sight of God," that "of all vanities the most vain is man"? The man who presumes upon his wisdom does not know what wisdom is, and the man who is "nothing," yet thinks himself something, only "seduces and deceives himself." These sentences of the Holy Spirit explain so clearly and vividly what I wish to maintain, that I should need no other proof against those who, without humility or obedience, defy its authority. Those will be punished at their own expense, and will not suffer a man to oppose their reason but by itself. . . .

Presumption is our natural and original disease. Most wretched and weak of all creatures is man; and at the same time the proudest! . . .

The first law that God ever gave to man was one of pure obedience. It was a pure and simple commandment in which man had nothing to inquire into or dispute. For to obey is the proper office of the reasonable soul, grateful to his superior and heavenly Benefactor. From obedience and

submission proceed all other virtues, as all sin does from self-opinion. On the other hand, the first temptation that came to human nature from the devil, the first poison he insinuated into us, was by the promises he made to us of knowledge and wisdom: "And ye shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil." . . . The plague of man is the opinion of wisdom. This is why ignorance is so much recommended by our religion, as suitable to faith and obedience. St. Paul says: "Take heed lest any deceive you by philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men and the rudiments of the world." There is a general consent amongst the philosophers of every sect that the sovereign good consists in the tranquillity of the soul and body; but where shall we find it?

It is true, according to the old Greek verse, "That there is a great deal of contentment in not being over wise," * . . . and as Ecclesiastes † tells us, "In much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

* Sophocles, Ajax, b. 552.

† Chap. i. 18.

As life is rendered more pleasant by simplicity, so also is it rendered better and more innocent, as I was saying before. The simple and ignorant, says St. Paul, raise themselves up to heaven and take possession of it, and we, with all our knowledge, plunge ourselves into the infernal abyss. . . . Christians have a special knowledge how natural and original an evil curiosity is in man. . . . It was the first ruin of the human race. It is the road by which it precipitated itself into eternal death. Pride is our ruin and corruption: it is pride which diverts man from the right way, which makes him embrace novelties and prefer to be the head of a wandering and lost troop, in the path of evil and error, than to be a disciple in the school of truth, allowing himself to be held and guided by the hand of another in the right and trodden path. . . .

It is beyond our strength to comprehend the divine height of the works of our Creator; those which are the most worthy of Him and are the best are those which we least understand. To meet with an incredible thing gives an occasion to the

Christian to believe. It is all the more reason if it is against human reason. If it was according to reason it would no longer be a miracle. If it had an example, it would no longer be singular. "God is better known by not knowing," says St. Augustine; while Tacitus tells us: "It is more holy and reverent to believe the works of God than to know them." . . . We speak, indeed, of power truth, and justice, which are words which signify something very great. Yet these things we neither see nor conceive. We say that God fears, that God is angry, that God loves . . . yet these are all agitations and emotions which cannot lodge in God according to our form, which we cannot imagine according to His. God alone knows Himself, interprets His own works; and He does it in our language, to stoop and descend to us who grovel upon the earth. . . .

The participation which we have in the knowledge of truth is not acquired by our own strength. God has sufficiently taught us this by the witnesses He has chosen to instruct us in His admirable secrets: our

faith is not of our acquiring, but purely the gift of the liberality of another. It is not by speeches or by understanding that we have gained our religion, but by foreign authority and command. The weakness of our judgment assists us more than strength, and blindness more than sight. It is by means of our ignorance more than by science that we know anything of the Divine wisdom. No wonder that our natural and terrestrial means cannot conceive the supernatural and heavenly knowledge ; . . . is it not written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise ? Where is the scribe ? Where is the disputer of this world ? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world ? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." * . . .

Of all human and ancient opinions with regard to religion that seems to me the most true and excusable, which recognised God as an incomprehensible power, the origin and

* 1 Cor. i. 19, 20, 21.

preserver of all things, all goodness, all perfection ; receiving and taking in good part the honour and reverence mankind paid to Him, under whatever method, name or service. . . . This zeal has been universally looked upon by heaven with a gracious eye. . . . Pagan histories recognise to their profit and instruction dignity, order, justice, prodigies and oracles in their fabulous religions. God in His mercy, deigning by these temporal benefits to cherish the tender principles of a kind of brutish knowledge of Himself which natural reason gave them, through the false image of their dreams. Not only false but impious also, and injurious are those doctrines which man has forged from his own invention, and of all the religions which St. Paul found at Athens that which was dedicated to "The unknown God" seemed to him the most excusable. . . .

It has always seemed to me that the way Christian man often speaks of God is very indiscreet and irreverent. "God cannot die ; God cannot contradict Himself, God cannot do this or that." I do not like to have the divine power so limited to the

laws of men ; the ideas which present themselves to us under these propositions should be mentioned more reverently and more religiously.

When we say that the infinity of ages, as well past as to come, is as one instant with God—that His goodness, wisdom and power are part of His essence, our mouths speak it, but our intelligence does not take it in. . . . This arrogance of wishing to discover God by our own eyes has caused an eminent person of our nation to attribute to the divinity a human form ;* it is the cause that every day we attribute to God important events by a special appointment ; because they affect us we also think that they affect Him, that He looks on them with more care and attention than on events which seem to us of less weight and importance . . . as if to that King of kings it were more or less to upset an empire or the leaf of a tree, or as if His providence acted differently in guiding the event of a battle or the leap of a flea. "Men," says St. Paul,† "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools and changed the glory of an

* Tertullian. † Romans v. 22, 23.

incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man." . . . .

They who have compared our life to a dream were perhaps more in the right than they were aware of: . . . we wake sleeping and sleep waking . . . yesterday dies in to-day and to-day will die in to-morrow. There is nothing that remains in the same state or that is always the same thing.

It were a sinful saying to say of God, who is He, who only *is*, that *He was* or that *He shall be:* for those are terms of declension, passages and vicissitudes of what cannot continue nor remain in being: therefore we are to conclude that God only is, not according to any measure of time, but according to an immutable and motionless eternity, not measured by time, nor subject to any declension; before whom nothing was, and after whom nothing shall be, either more new or more recent; but a real *Being*, that with one sole *Now* fills the *For Ever*, and there is nothing that truly Is but *He* alone; without our being able to say *He has been* or *shall be*, without beginning and without end."*. . .

* Plutarch.

Man will rise if God will lend him His hand. He will rise if he will abandon himself and renounce his own methods and let himself be raised by purely celestial means. It is to our Christian faith, and not to his stoical virtue, that he must look for that divine and miraculous metamorphosis.

Essay XII Apology for Raimond de Sebonde

When we judge of another's assurance in death, which without doubt is the most remarkable event of human life, we must take heed of one thing, that very few believe that they have arrived at their last hour, and there is no period when hope does more delude us. It never ceases to whisper to us: Many others have been more ill and have not died, your condition is not so serious as is thought, and, at the worst, God has often performed other miracles. All this happens from our thinking too much of ourselves. It seems as if the whole universe must suffer from our dissolution and be full of compassion for us. . . .

Essay XIII On Judging of the Death of another

We wish to make everything go along with us; thence it follows that we look on our

death as a great event. . . . "What! shall so much science be lost, with so much damage to the world, without any notice being taken of it? Does it not cost more to kill so rare and exemplary a soul than a common and useless one? This life, which protects so many others, and on whom so many lives depend, which occupies all the world with its doings and fills up so many places, shall it drop off like one that is held by a single cord?" . . .

Therefore to judge of the resolution and constancy of one who does not consider himself in danger, though he really is, is not reasonable. And it is not enough that he die in this posture, unless he purposely placed himself in it for this effect. It often happens that men set a good face upon the matter, and so fix their countenances and speak with unconcern, so as to gain the reputation which they hope afterwards, living, to enjoy.

There is the name and the thing. The name is the voice which denotes and signifies the thing; the name is not a part of the thing, nor of its substance: it is a foreign piece joined to the thing, and outside it. God, who in Himself is all fulness and the height of all perfection, cannot augment or add anything to Himself within, but his name can be raised and increased by the blessings and the praise which we attribute to His external works; which praise, as we cannot incorporate it in Him, because He can have no increase in goodness, we attribute to His name, which is the part out of Him nearest to us. Thus it is that to God alone belongs all glory and honour, and there is nothing so out of reason as for us to try to seek for it for ourselves; for, being indigent and full of necessities within, and our nature being imperfect and ever in need of improvement, 'tis to that we should employ all our strength. We are all void and hollow: we are not to fill ourselves with wind and voice: we require more solid substance with which to repair ourselves. A hungry man would be very silly to seek to procure a fine garment rather than

a good meal. We must work for what is most pressing for us. As we say in our ordinary prayer, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill towards men." We are in want of beauty, virtue, wisdom, and such essential things; the exterior ornaments are to be sought only after we have seen to the necessary things. . . .

Chrysippus and Diogenes were the first and the most earnest to advocate contempt for glory and maintain that amid pleasures there were none so dangerous, and more to be avoided, than those which spring from the approbation of others. And truly experience shows us many hurtful treasons in them. Nothing so poisons princes as flattery, and there is no way by which the wicked more easily gain credit with them. There is nothing so baneful to the virtue of women than to entertain and flatter them with praise of their beauty. . . . Those philosophers said that all the glory of the world was not worth that a reasonable man would lift his finger to gain it. . . . That is, as I take it, for itself alone, for it often brings in its train several commodities which may make

it desirable ; it gains us goodwill, renders us less exposed to injury and offence from others, and so forth. Contempt of glory was one of the principal dogmas of Epicurus, for this precept of his sect, "Hide thy life," which forbids men to seek after public charges and appointments, necessarily presupposes that they should despise glory, which is nothing but the world's approbation of those actions we place in evidence. He who wishes us to hide ourselves, only to look after ourselves, and not to make ourselves known to others, how much less does he desire us to be praised or glorified by them! Thus was Idomenius counselled not to regulate his actions on public reputation and opinion except in such a manner as to avoid the accidental inconvenience that the contempt of other men might bring on him. Such discourses are, to my mind, very true and reasonable, but we are, I know not how, double in ourselves, which is the cause that what we believe we do not believe, and that we cannot separate ourselves from what we condemn. . . .

Carneades was the head of an opposite opinion, and maintained that glory was

desirable for itself. . . . This opinion has not failed to be more universally followed, as opinions which accord more with our desires most generally are. Aristotle gives it the first place amongst external benefits, and avoids, as too vicious extremes, exaggeration in seeking it or in flying from it. I think, if we had the books which Cicero wrote on this subject, he would relate fine things to us ; for this man was so devoured by the passion in question that, had he dared, he would have fallen into its excess, like so many others. To say that virtue is only to be desired for the sake of the honour which follows in its train . . . is so false an opinion, that I am vexed that it should ever have entered into the mind of a man who had the honour of being a philosopher. If it were true, then we should only need to be virtuous in public, and should have to keep the operations of the soul, which is the real seat of virtue, in rule and order, only so long as they fall under the observation of others. . . . "If thou knowest," said Carneades, "of a serpent lurking in a place where, without suspicion, a person is going to sit down, by whose

death thou expectest an advantage, thou dost ill if thou dost not give him caution of his danger ; and so much the more that the action is to be known but to thyself." If we do not take the law for doing right into our own hands, if impunity should pass among us for justice, to how many sorts of wickednesses should we not abandon ourselves each day ? . . .

Virtue is a very vain and frivolous thing if it derive its recommendation from Fame. . . . So to order it that actions should be seen and known is purely the work of Fortune ; it is Fate that brings us glory according to its temerity. I have often seen glory go before merit, and outstrip it to a great extent. What do they gain who teach nobles only to seek bravery for the sake of honour, . . . except to teach them not to place themselves in danger unless they are seen, and to take notice if there be witnesses who can give an account of their valour, although there are thousands of opportunities of being brave without any one remarking it ? How many unseen acts of bravery are there not performed during the raging of a battle ? . . .

Essay XVI On Glory

All the glory that I have looked for in my life is to have lived it tranquilly—tranquil, not according to Metrodorus or Arcesilaus or Aristippus, but according to myself. . . .

There is,* I know, a natural delight in hearing ourselves praised, but we think far too much about it. . . . I do not so much care what others think of me, I care far more what I am in myself. I wish to be rich through myself and not by borrowing.

Strangers only judge of events by outward appearances; every one can counterfeit a good appearance and yet be full within of terror and fear. They do not see my heart, they only see my countenance. . . .

This is why those judgments which are based on external appearances are wonderfully uncertain and doubtful, and why there is no more certain testimony than every one is to himself, . . . he who stands firm in an uncovered trench, what does he do more than the fifty poor pioneers in front, clearing the road for him and covering it with their bodies for five sous a day?

* Livy, xliv. 22

There is another kind of glory which consists in having a too good opinion of our own value. It is an inconsiderate affection we cherish within ourselves, which makes us seem to ourselves different to what we are ; in the same way as in love, passion sees nothing but beauty and grace in the object of its affection ; and those who are under the sway of this passion judge with a twisted and perverted judgment, and look upon those they love as being more perfect than they are.

I do not wish, however, that a man, for fear of falling into this error, should misjudge himself, nor value himself at less than he is. Judgment in all things should always maintain its balance. It is reasonable that he should discern in himself as well as in others the truth as presented to him. If it be Cæsar, let him boldly think himself to be the greatest captain in the world. We are nothing but ceremony. Ceremony carries us away, and we leave the substance of things behind. We cling to the branches and quit the trunk and the body. We have taught ladies to blush at the mention of actions they have no scruple in committing.

Essay XIX On Liberty of Conscience

One often sees good intentions, if not guided with moderation, push men on to very vicious actions. In this dispute, when France is a prey to civil war, there is no doubt that the best and soundest party is the one that is upholding religion and the ancient laws. But there are many among the good men of that party . . . who are pushed by passion beyond the limits of reason, and are therefore guided often by unjust, violent and rash councils.

It is quite certain that in the beginning, when our religion began to gain authority through the laws, zeal armed many unduly against all pagan books, and that in this way men of letters lost much of value. I maintain that this disorder has been more injurious to the welfare of learning than all the flames of the barbarian.

Essay XX That We do not Enjoy Anything without Alloy

The weakness of our condition is such that we make no use of things in their pureness and simplicity. The very elements we enjoy are changed, and so in the same way it is with metals. We have to debase gold

with some other substance to fit it to our service. That pure and simple virtue which constituted "The Aim of Life" to Ariston and Pyrrho, and other stoics . . . could not have been useful without some alloy. None among the pleasures and goods we enjoy are free from some admixture of evil and inconvenience. . . . Our greatest joy has more severity in it than gaiety; extreme and complete enjoyment brings more satiety than delight; extreme ease wearies one.* An ancient Greek wrote thus: "The gods sell us all the goods they give us." That is to say, they give us nothing which is completely pure and perfect, and which we do not have to buy at the expense of some evil.

Essay XX That We do not Enjoy Anything without Alloy

Work and pleasure, so unlike by nature, are associated, I know not how, by some natural bond. . . . Metrodorus said that there is a tinge of pleasure in melancholy. I do not know whether he intended anything else by that saying, but for myself I am of opinion that there is some design, some consent and complaisance in nourish-

* Epicharmus in Xenophon—"Mem. de Socrates," ii. 1, 30.

Essay XX That We do not Enjoy Anything without Alloy

ing melancholy. Besides ambition, which can be mixed up in it, there is a certain shade of delight and delicacy which smiles upon us and flatters us even in the very grip of melancholy. Are there not some characters which nourish themselves on it? . . .

Nature points us out this confusion; painters assert that the lines of our face which serve for tears also serve for laughter. . . .

When I examine myself religiously, I find that my best virtue has some vicious tendency. . . . Man everywhere and in everything is nothing but patched and pieced together. Even the laws of justice cannot subsist without a mixture of injustice; "and," says Plato,* "they who wish to free laws from all incommodity and inconvenience, might as well try to cut off the head of the Hydra."

* Plato, iv. 2.

Essay XXV That One should not counterfeit Sickness

There is a good epigram by Martial . . . where he pleasantly relates the story of Cœlius, who pretended to have the gout in order to avoid paying court to the great men of Rome, awaiting their rising, or attending them in the street, and to make his excuse more plausible he had his legs doctored and bandaged ; and counterfeited in every way the appearance of a man with gout. In the end Fortune gave him the pleasure of becoming gouty in reality. . . . I have read somewhere in Appian a similar story of one who, desiring to escape from the proscriptions of the Triumvirs of Rome, the better to disguise himself from those who were following him, not content with hiding and disguising himself, added yet more to the deception by pretending to have but one eye. But afterwards, when he had regained a little liberty and wished to take off the plaster which he had put over his eye for so long, he found that beneath this mask he had effectually lost the sight of it.

Mothers are quite right to punish their children when they imitate the blind, the lame and the hunchback or any other personal defect, for besides that their bodies,

Essay XXV That One should not counterfeit Sickness

being then so tender, easily lend themselves to a false bend, I believe, though I do not know how, that Fortune plays with us by taking us at our word, and I have heard of several persons who, having pretended to be ill, became so in reality.

Essay XXVIII That all Things have their Season

. . . All things have their season, the good as well as the bad. A man may say, "Our Father" out of season; as T. Quintus Flaminius, being general of an army, was blamed because he was seen praying apart during a battle that he won.

Eudemonidas seeing Xenocrates, when very old, taking part in the lessons of his school said, "When will this man be wise, if he is still learning?" * . . . The young are to prepare, say the sages, and the old to enjoy; and the greatest vice that they see in us is that our desires are always growing young again; that we are always re-beginning to live.

Our studies and our pleasures should sometimes be sensible of age. We have

* Seneca, "Epic," xxxvi.

one foot in the grave, and yet our appetites and occupations are only beginning to be born. . . . The most distant of my plans only extends to a year ahead. I only think of ending, and I discharge myself of all new hopes and enterprises, and take farewell of every place I depart from, and dispossess myself each day of all that I have. . . . This is, indeed, all the solace I find in my old age, that it destroys within me those desires and cares with which life is laden. The cares of the world, the cares of riches, of grandeur, of success, of health, of myself. There are men who learn to speak when they should be learning to be silent for ever. . . . If we are to study, let us choose a study suitable to our condition, so that we may be able to answer like him, who, when asked why he pursued his studies in his decrepitude, replied, "So that I may depart wiser, and more at my ease."

Essay XXVIII That all Things have their Season

. . . There is no passion which so shakes the uprightness of our judgment as anger. No one would have any scruple in punish-

Essay XXXI On Anger

ing with death a judge who had condemned a criminal in a rage. Why should it be any the more permitted to fathers and teachers to whip their children and chastise them when in anger? It is no longer correction, it is revenge. . .

We ourselves . . . should never lift up our hands against our servants when in anger. While our pulse beats and we feel emotions within us, let us put the case on one side; things will indeed appear different when we are collected and have cooled down. It is passion that then commands us; it is not we who speak, it is passion. Through it faults appear to us greater than they really are; like objects seen through a fog. . . . Again, those punishments which are inflicted calmly and with discretion are accepted far better and bear more fruit in him who suffers them. He does not consider himself justly condemned by a man agitated with ire and fury. For his justification he alleges the extraordinary passion of his master, his inflamed countenance, his unwonted oaths, his want of control, his precipitate rashness. . . . Saying is one thing and doing is another. The sermon

must be considered apart from the preacher. . . . A man whose morals are good may hold a false opinion. A wicked man may preach truth even though he does not believe it himself. It is doubtless a beautiful harmony when the saying and the doing lie together, and I do not deny that sayings, when followed by actions, have not all the greater authority and efficacy. . . .

Essay XXXI On Anger

Anger is a passion which pleases and flatters itself. How often, when we have been upset through a false cause, if the offending person makes a good excuse in defence, we fight against even truth and innocence !

EXTRACTS—BOOK III

No one is exempt from speaking foolishly; the evil thing is to do so on purpose. . . . Our structure within and without is full of imperfections. Yet there is nothing useless in nature, not even inutility itself. There is nothing grafted into our being that does not hold some opportune place in it. We are cemented with bad qualities; ambition, jealousy, envy, vengeance, superstition and despair lodge in us so naturally that their image is recognised even in the beasts, . . . he who would divest man of the seeds of these qualities would destroy the fundamental conditions of our life.

Essay I
Of Profit and Honesty

. . . For my part, I may wish in general to be different from what I am. I may condemn and dislike my whole life and beg of Almighty God to reform me entirely, and that He will graciously pardon my natural failings. But this does not prove my repentance, no more than would my dissatisfaction at not being an angel or Cato. . . .

Essay II
On Repentance

As for the rest, I hate the accidental repentance which old age brings with it. He

Essay II On Repentance

who in former times saw that he owed gratitude to the years as they had weaned him from vices, held a different opinion to mine. I should never be grateful for want of power, no matter what good it may do me. . . . Our desires are rare in old age, a profound satiety seizes us. I see in this nothing of conscience. Grief and weakness imprint in us a cowardly and stumbling virtue. . . .

To my mind* it is "the happy living," not (as Antisthenes said) "the happy dying," in which human felicity consists. . . . I repudiate these casual and sad reforms. God must give us courage; our conscience must cure itself by the aid of our reason, not by the decay of our appetites. . . .

One should love temperance for itself and through respect for God, who has commanded it to us. . . .

Essay III Of Three Employments

We must not rivet ourselves so tightly to our humours and fancies. Our principal object should be to know how to apply our-

* Diogenes Laertius, vii. 5.

selves to different employments. To tie one's self by choice to one employment is to exist but not to live. The most beautiful souls are those that have the most variety and pliancy. . . . If it was in my power to live my life according to my fancy, there is no good employment in which I should be so fixed as not to be able to free myself from it. Life is an unequal, irregular and diversified movement. . . . Most men's minds have need of outside influences with which to distract and occupy themselves. Mine,* on the contrary, has more need to recollect itself and to be quiet . . . for its greatest and most laborious study is to study itself. . . .

Meditation is a wholesome and powerful study for him who knows how to taste and pursue it vigorously. I prefer to fashion my soul than to furnish it. There is no occupation so weak or so strong as that of entertaining one's thoughts according to the individuality of the soul. . . . "It is the business of gods," said Aristotle,† " out of which proceeds their happiness and ours." . . .

* " The vices of sloth are to be shaken off by business."—Seneca, Ep. 56.

† " Moral. ad. Nicom," x. 8.

Essay III Of Three Employments

Conversation with good and beautiful women is also a sweet occupation to me. . . . But it is one in which you must be much on your guard. . . .

It is a folly to attach all your thoughts on it and to engage yourself in a foolish and indiscreet affection. . . .

These two occupations are uncertain and depend upon others. The one is troublesome by its rarity; the other fades with age. . . . the third occupation, that of books, is by far the more sure and more our own. It yields all other advantages to the two first, but for its own part it has the constancy and facility of its service. This occupation can follow one everywhere and assist one in all things. It comforts me in my old age and solitude. . . . To distract myself from an inopportune imagination I have only to have recourse to my books. They easily distract me and take me out of myself, and they are not offended when they see that I have recourse to them in default of other more real and material distractions. They always receive me with the same kindness. . . .

Books have many charming qualities to

those who know how to choose them, but there is no good without trouble. These are my three favourite and particular occupations.

Essay III Of Three Employments

I was once employed in consoling a lady truly in grief. Most mournings are merely artificial and ceremonious. "A woman has ever a fountain of tears ready to gush up when she requires to make use of them." A man proceeds badly when he opposes this passion, he only makes her more inclined to grieve: the evil is exasperated by being contended with. . . . On the contrary, then, you must at first favour women's grief and seem to approve of their sorrow and excuse it. In this way you are able to go on further, and by an easy and insensible intuition you glide gently into firmer discourses more suitable for their cure. . . .

Essay IV On Diversion

He who dies in a battle, with arms in his hand, does not there study death nor consider it. The ardour of the fight diverts his thought.

We always think of something else. The

Essay IV On Diversion

hope of a better life stays and encourages us, or hope in the valour of our children, or the future glory of our name, or our flight from the evils of this life, or the vengeance that threatens those who cause our death.

A very small thing diverts and distracts us, for a small thing holds us. We seldom look at things largely and by themselves. It is the small and superficial circumstances that touch us and the various questions that arise from the subjects.*

Essay VII On the Inconvenience of Greatness

The incommodity of grandeur, that I have made choice of to consider in this place . . . is this: there is perhaps nothing so pleasant in the dealings of men as the trials that we make against one another from jealousy of honour and valour, either in the exercises of the body or those of the mind, although in these, true greatness has no real part. It has, indeed, appeared to me that we treat princes disdainfully and injuriously by that very respect which we pay them; for it so

* Lucretius, v. 801.

displeased me in my childhood that they who played with me never did so honestly, looking upon me as unworthy of their talents. This we see happen daily, each person pretending to be unworthy to contend with them. If, however, it is seen that the great have the slightest desire for victory, there is no one who does not work to secure it to them, and who would not rather betray his own glory than oppose theirs? They will therein employ such means only as are necessary to save their honour. What part have they in the fight, when every one is for them? . . . Carneades* said "That the children of princes do not learn anything right, except to ride, for in all other exercises all bend and yield to them, but a horse, which is neither a flatterer nor a courtier, will throw a king's son to the ground as he would the son of a porter. . . ."

He who does not participate in any hazard and difficulty cannot pretend to take any interest in the honour and pleasure that follow hazardous enterprises.

* Plutarch, "How a man may distinguish a flatterer from a friend," c. 15.

Essay VII On the Inconvenience of Greatness

It is a pity for man to have such power, that through it all things give way to him. Fortune therein keeps you too far away from society and culture, and places you too much in solitude. Such easy and cowardly facility of making all bend is an enemy to every kind of pleasure. This is sliding, not walking; it is sleeping, but it is not living. Conceive a man gifted with omnipotence, you overwhelm him. He must beg humbly from you those difficulties and resistances, which his being and welfare demand.

Essay VIII On the Art of Conversation

. . . The most fruitful and natural exercise of the mind, in my opinion, is conversation. I find it the sweetest action of life. This is why, if I had to choose, I would more willingly consent to lose my sight than my speech and hearing. The Athenians and the Romans held this exercise in great honour in their academies. In our time the Italians still retain traces of the same to their great profit, as is shown in the comparison of their intelligence with ours. The study of

books is a languishing and feeble movement which does not excite; whereas talking teaches and exercises at once. If I dispute with a strong man and a rough combatant, he presses my thighs and pricks me left and right—his imaginations raise up mine. . . . Jealousy, glory and contention push and rouse me out of myself; to agree is a most tiresome quality in conversation. Thus the mind is fortified by communication with well-trained and vigorous intellects. No one can say how it is lost and degenerated by the continued commerce and frequentation which we have with base and sickly souls. There is no contagion that spreads more rapidly than this. I know by sufficient experience how much one and the other are worth. I like to discuss and contest, but it is with very few men and to please myself; for to serve as a spectacle to the great, to make competitive parade designedly of one's mind and soul, I look upon as a very bad trade for a man of honour. . . .

The contradictions of judgments do not offend or affect my mind, they only rouse and exercise me. . . . I can suffer myself to be roughly handled by my friends. "You

Essay VIII On the Art of Conversation

are a fool, you are dreaming." I like that among gallant men. They should express themselves courageously; thoughts should find vent in words. We must strengthen our hearing and fortify it against the tenderness of ceremonious words. . . . When I am contradicted, my attention, not my anger, is worked upon. I advance towards him who contradicts me, who instructs me. The cause of truth ought to be the common cause of both converser and listener. . . .

However it is certainly very difficult to bring men of my time to this. They have not the courage to correct, because they have not the courage to be corrected, and they always speak with dissimulation in the presence of each other. . . .

Essay IX On Vanity

There is perhaps no greater vanity than to write of it so vainly. What Divinity has so divinely expressed to us* should be carefully and continually meditated upon by men of understanding. . . . Who does not

* "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."—Eccles. i. 2.

see that I have taken a road which I shall continue to follow, constantly and without labour, so long as there is paper and ink in the world ? I can give no account of my life by its actions ; fortune has placed them too low. I can only do so by my fantasies. . . .

Among human conditions this is a very common one ; that we are more pleased with things foreign to us than with our own, . . . and in this love of change and movement I take my share. Those who go to the other extreme and are quite satisfied with and in themselves, esteeming what they possess higher than aught else, not recognising any beauty more beautiful than what they see, even though they are not wiser than we are, are of a truth happier ; I do not envy their wisdom but their good fortune.

This longing desire for unknown and new things contributes much to nourish in me the desire to travel, but many other considerations also conduce to it. I very willingly dispossess myself of the government of my home. There is some solace, I confess, in commanding, even if only in a barn, and in being obeyed by one's own people. But it is too monotonous and languid a pleasure ;

besides, it is of necessity marred by several unhappy defects. You are afflicted now by the poverty and indigence of your tenants, now by quarrels among your neighbours, and by the offences they commit against you; . . . by the fact that God scarce ever in six months sends the weather which contents your bailiff; if it is good for the vines, it is bad for the meadows; . . . to this may be added the new and well-formed shoe of the man of past times which hurts your foot; and that a stranger cannot understand how much it costs you and how much you endure to maintain the appearance of order which he sees in your family, and which you indeed pay for too dearly. . . .*

It is a sad extremity for a man to be always worried and bothered in his own household and domestic life. The place where one lives is always the first and the last in the battle of our troubles, where peace never shows its face entirely . . .

I sometimes find myself looking forward to mortal dangers and desiring them. I plunge myself with bent head into death, without considering or recognising it, as into

* Ovid, "Trist.," iv. 1, 69.

a deep and dark abyss, which sends me in a moment into a sound sleep without any sense of pain. In these quick and violent deaths the consequences I foresee give me more consolation than the effect does fear. It is said that life is not better for being long; so then death is better for not being long. . . .

I often find that we have plans of life proposed to us which neither the proposer nor the listener have any intention or desire to follow. . . . In my youth I have seen a man of high rank, who presented the most excellent but wicked verses to the people with one hand, and with the other hand at the same moment the most ripe and quarrelsome theological reformation that the world had seen for a long time. Men proceed thus: we let laws and precepts follow their bent and we go another way, not only from depraved morals but often by contrary opinion and judgment. Listen to a lecture on philosophy; the eloquence, pertinacity and invention at once strike your mind and move you, but there is nothing that touches or pricks your conscience, it is not to your conscience it is speaking. Is not this true? It made Aristo say, "That neither a bath nor a

Essay IX On Vanity

lesson could bear any fruit unless it cleansed and purified . . ."

One may regret better times, but one cannot fly from the present. We may desire better magistrates, but all the same we must obey those we have, and peradventure there is more praise in obeying the bad than the good.

Essay X On Managing the Will

Few things touch me, or, to say more truly, hold me in the way that they usually do other men ; for it is only reason that they should touch, so long as they do not possess, one. I am very anxious to enlarge, by study and discourse, this privilege of insensibility which is naturally very strong in me. I therefore do not trouble myself about many things. I have a clear sight, but I fix it on very few objects. I have a delicate and tender sense, but a hard and dense application. I undertake things with difficulty, and I usually employ myself on myself. , . . My opinion is that a man should lend himself to others, but only give himself to himself. . . . I have quite enough to do in disposing and

regulating the affairs in my domestic surroundings without meddling in other men's affairs, and have sufficient to do with my own concerns without troubling about outside matters. . . . "You have quite enough to do at home, do not go away from it." Men let themselves out to hire, their faculties are not for themselves but for those whom they serve; their tenants occupy them, not themselves. This condition of things does not please me. We must be careful of the liberty of our souls, and only give it out when occasion demands it, which occurs very seldom if we rightly judge. Look at those people who are ever ready to be at the beck and call of others; they do so indifferently to all, in small things or in great; in things in which they have no concern, as in those which do concern them. They push themselves in indiscriminately wherever there is work to do and quarrels to settle. They are without life if they are without tumultuous agitation. . . . It is not so much that they desire to go, but that they cannot keep still; like a rolling stone that may not stop till it can go no farther. Occupation seems to certain people to be a mark

of dignity and understanding, their minds seek repose in movement as children in a cradle ; they think themselves to be as serviceable to their friends as they are troublesome to themselves. No one distributes his money to others, but each one distributes his time and his life, there is nothing of which we are more generous than these two things, of which alone it would be praiseworthy and useful to be thrifty. . . .

Indeed, we really prevent the hold of the soul and hinder it by giving it so many things to seize upon. . . . The laws of Nature teach us exactly what we need. The sages have told us that according to Nature no one is indigent ; that each one is so only according to his opinion ; they distinguish with sufficient subtlety between the desires that emanate from Nature and those desires which arise from the unreasonableness of our own fancies. Those of which we can see the end are from Nature. Those which fly before us, and of which we cannot see the end, are our own. Poverty of goods is easy to cure ; poverty of the soul is irreparable. . . . Socrates,* seeing a great quan-

* Socrates, Ep., 16.

tity of riches, jewels and furniture being carried with much pomp through his town, said: "How many things there are which I do not require." . . .

The more we extend our desires and our possessions, the more we lay ourselves open to the blows of Adversity and Fortune. . . .*

We must not precipitate ourselves so headlong after our affections and interests. . . .

Our greatest agitations arise from ridiculous causes. . . .

Look and see why that man hazards his life and honour upon the fortune of his dagger and sword. If you ask him the reason of his quarrel, he cannot answer without blushing, so vain and frivolous is the reason. Most accommodations of our quarrels of to-day are shameful and untruthful. We only seek to save appearances, and we hide and deceive our real intentions. We plaster over the facts. We know very well how we said the thing and the sense in which we said it; those present know it, and our friends, to whom we wished to show our advantage, understand it well enough. It is with the loss of our honour

* Rousseau, Emile, liv. v.

Essay X On Managing the Will

and our courage that we disown our thoughts. We find excuse in falsehood, so as to place ourselves in the right. We are untrue to ourselves so as to excuse the lie that we have given to another. You must not look whether your word or action can have any other interpretation ; it is your own true and sincere interpretation, your real meaning and intention you must ever maintain, whatever it may cost you. Men speak to your virtue and conscience, which are not objects to be masked. Let us leave these vile ways and expedients to the jugglery of the law. The excuses and reparations which are made every day, to repair indiscretion, seem to me more hideous than the indiscretion itself. . . .

The beginning of all things is feeble and tender. Therefore we must have our eyes well open at the beginning, for when the danger is slight one often does not discover it, but when it has grown great one cannot find any remedy. . . .

To refrain from doing is often more generous than doing, but it does not come so much to light .

. . . Many abuses arise in the world, or (to say more truthfully) all the abuses in the world are engendered by our being taught to be afraid of making profession of our ignorance. We are told to accept all that we cannot refute. We speak on all subjects by precept and rule. . . . It makes me hate things likely to be true when they are imposed upon me as infallible. I love those words that soften and moderate the temerity of our propositions. "It may be," "perhaps." If I had to bring up children, I should always place in their mouths that manner of answering, which questions but does not resolve. "It is said," "I do not understand it," or "It might be," "Is it true?" It were better for people to keep on learning up to sixty years than to pretend, as they do, to be masters at ten. Whoever wishes to be cured of ignorance must confess it.

Essay XI On Cripples

I cannot say enough how greatly I esteem the advantages and powerful quality of beauty. Socrates called it "A Short

Essay XII On Physiognomy

Tyranny," and Plato, "The Privileges of Nature." We have nothing that surpasses it in credit; it holds the first rank in the relationship of men. It places itself in the front, seduces and possesses our judgment with great authority and marvellous impression. Phryne would have lost her cause in the hands of an excellent advocate if, unveiling, she had not overpowered the judge by the splendour of her beauty. This same word in Greek embraces both the good and the beautiful. . . . Looks are, however, but a feeble guarantee, although they have much influence. If I had to punish them, I should rather correct the wicked who falsify and betray the promises that Nature places in their forehead. I would more readily punish malice hidden under a mild and gentle appearance. There appear to be some happy faces, others unhappy. I think there is some art in distinguishing the good-natured faces from the stupid ones, the severe from the rude, the witty from the pensive, the disdainful from the melancholy, and so on with other opposite qualities. There are beauties which are not only proud but sour; there are others sweet, but beyond that they

become insipid. To foresee their future is a matter that I must leave undecided.

Essay XII On Physiognomy

There is no more natural desire than that of knowledge. We try every way which can lead us to it. Where reason fails us, we employ experience, . . . which is indeed a much more feeble and cheap way, but truth is so great a thing that we should not disdain any way which leads us to it. Reason has so many forms, that we know not which to choose. Experience has no fewer. The conclusions we would draw from the comparison of events is unsure, because they are always dissimilar. . . .

Essay XIII On Experience

I would rather understand myself well, through myself, than through Cicero. In the experience I have gained of myself, I should find enough to make me wise, if I were but a good scholar. He who remembers his past anger, and to what lengths the fever led him, sees the ugliness of this passion better than through Aristotle, and conceives for it a more just hatred. He who remembers the dangers he has run, those

Essay XIII On Experience

which have menaced him, the slight reasons which have led him from one side to another, will by this prepare himself for future changes and gain the knowledge of his condition. . . .

The advice to every one, "to know themselves," should be of important effect, since the God of wisdom and light caused it to be engraved on the frontal of his temple as comprehending all he had to advise us. . . . The difficulties and obscurities of every science can only be discovered by those who enter into them, for, indeed, it needs some degree of intelligence to be able to know one's ignorance; one has to push against a door to know that it is shut. From thence arises this Platonic subtlety: "Neither they who know are to inquire, forasmuch as they know; nor they who do not know, forasmuch as to inquire they must know what they inquire of." So in this, "of knowing a man's self," that every one is seen so resolved and satisfied with himself, that every one thinks himself sufficiently instructed, signifies that no one understands the matter in the least, as Socrates instructed Euthydemus.* I who profess nothing else,

* Xenophon's "Mem. of Soc.," iv. 2, 24.

find therein so much depth and variety, that my apprenticeship has no other fruit than to make me feel how much more is left for me to learn. . . . Aristarchus said that in ancient times it was hardly possible to find seven wise men in the world ; that in his time one could hardly find seven ignorant ones. Have we not still more reason to say so in our times than in his ? . . .

Experience has also taught me this, that we lose ourselves by impatience ; evils have their life and limits, their illness and their health. . . .

I am of the opinion of Crantor, " that we must not obstinately oppose ourselves to evils nor stifle them, nor succumb to them through weakness, but we must give way to them naturally according to their condition and our own." . . . It is unjust to complain that something has happened to one person which might happen to any one. . . .

* See an old man praying God that He will maintain him in entire and vigorous health ; that is to say, that He will restore him to youth. . . . My good man, it is finished ! No one can prop you up again.

* Ovid, " Trist.," iii. 8, 11

Essay XIII On Experience

You might be revived for a short time, and your misery would be prolonged for an hour or two by that means. . . . We must learn to suffer what cannot be avoided. Our life is composed, like the harmony of the world, of contrary things, of divers tones sweet and bitter, sharp and flat, merry and sad. The musician who should only touch one of these, what could he do? He must know how to use them in common and to mix them. It is the same with the evil and the good which are mixed in our life, without which mixture we cannot live. One part is as necessary to us as the other. . . .

There is nothing which should be so much recommended to youth as activity and vigilance. Our life is all movement. . . . Let us be careful of our time. Even then there is much left to us which will be useless and badly employed. . . . It is an absolute and almost divine perfection for a man to know how to enjoy his being loyally. We seek for other conditions because we do not understand the use of our own. We would go out of ourselves, because we know not how there to reside. It is all very well for us to walk on stilts, we must still walk

on our legs. If we are seated on the highest throne of the world, we are but seated on ourselves. The most beautiful lives, to my mind, are those which shape themselves on an ordinary model, without extravagance and without a miracle. Old age has need to be treated more tenderly. Let us recommend it to that protecting God of health and wisdom, but let it be bright and sociable.

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