

Essays, Book I

Michel de Montaigne

1580

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

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

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

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

The tags are omitted where they seem unimportant. The ones that are retained are kept very small to make them neglectable by readers who aren't interested in those details. Sometimes, as on pages 34 and 54, they are crucial. —The footnotes are all editorial. —Contemporary spellings of French words are used in the glossary and in references in the text to the glossary. —In the original, all the quotations from Latin writers are given in Latin.

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Glossary

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

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

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

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

pédant: Montaigne uses this to mean ‘schoolmaster’ much more than to mean what ‘pedant’ does to us, ‘person who parades excessively academic learning [or] insists on strict adherence to formal rules’ (OED). His title for Essay 25 is *Du pédantisme* = ‘On pedantry’, which is seriously misleading because the essay extends beyond •schoolmasters and •pedants to •learned men generally.

prince: Like the English ‘prince’, this in early modern times could refer to any rank up to that of king (or monarch; Queen Elizabeth I referred to herself as a ‘prince’), though the phrase *un Prince ou un Roi* on page 57 seems to belie that. Anyway, *prince* is translated by ‘prince’ throughout.

rêverie: This can be a day-dream, or a fancy, or a straggling thought (page 63) or (perhaps on page 38) a mental set.

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

24. Same design, differing outcomes

·CLEMENCY·

[^{1A}] [This essay starts with a story about a French prince—François, duke of Guise—who had been warned that a certain (named) gentleman in his household was planning to kill him. The story continues:] He summoned the man to appear before him. When the man was in his presence the prince saw him pale and trembling from the alarms of his conscience, and said: ‘Monsieur So-and-so, you know well enough what I want you for; your face shows it. There is nothing you can hide from me, because I am so thoroughly informed about your business that you would only make your plight worse by trying to conceal it. You know quite well such-and-such matters;’—referring to the ins and outs of the most secret parts of this undertaking—‘if you value your life you had better tell me the whole truth about this scheme.’ When the wretched man realised he had been caught and convicted (for one of his accomplices had revealed everything to the Queen Mother), he could only clasp his hands and plead with the prince for pardon and mercy. He began to throw himself at his feet but the prince stopped him, and continued with what he had been saying: ‘Come now! Have I ever done anything against you? Have I harmed any of your family out of private hatred? I haven’t known you for three weeks; what reason can have induced you to plot my death?’ The man replied in a trembling voice that he had no private cause but only the general interest of his party, since some had persuaded him that it would be an act of piety to eradicate somehow such a powerful enemy of their ·protestant· religion. ‘Well,’ continued the prince, ‘I want to show you how much gentler the religion I hold is than the

one you profess. Yours has advised you to kill me without a hearing, though I have done you no wrong; mine commands me to forgive you, convicted though you are of having wanted to murder me without reason. Go away, get out, don’t let me see you here again; and if you are wise you will from now on take more decent men to counsel you in your enterprises.’

The Emperor Augustus while in Gaul received conclusive evidence of a conspiracy that Lucius Cinna was brewing against him.¹ He thought about revenge, and for that purpose called a council of his friends for the next day. But he spent the night in great agitation, reflecting that he was to put to death a young man of good family and nephew to the great Pompey, groaning out several conflicting arguments:

‘What! Shall it be said that I live in fear and alarm, leaving my murderer to go about at his ease? Shall he go scot-free after attacking my head, which I have brought back safe from so many civil wars, so many battles on land and sea? After I have brought peace to the whole world, shall he be absolved after having planned not merely to murder me but to *sacrifice* me?’

(The conspiracy was to kill him while he was performing a sacrifice.) He remained silent for a while, and then berated himself in a firmer voice:

‘Why go on living if it matters to so many people that you should die? Will there be no end to your vengeance and cruelties? Is your life worth all the harm done to preserve it?’

His wife Livia, sensing his anguish, asked ‘Are women’s counsels to be accepted? Do what the doctors do when the usual prescriptions fail; they try the opposite. Up to now severity has done nothing for you: after Salvidienus there was Lepidus; after Lepidus, Murena; after Murena, Caepio;

¹ Actually, it was his son, Gnaeus Cornelius Cinna.

after Caepio, Egnatius. Start now to explore how mildness and clemency succeed. Cinna is convicted; pardon him. He can harm you no more, but he can contribute to your glory.’

Augustus was well pleased to have found an advocate after his own heart; having thanked his wife and rescinded the order for his friends to come to Council, he ordered that Cinna be brought before him quite alone. After sending everyone from the room and giving Cinna a chair, he addressed him thus: ‘In the first place, Cinna, I ask you to hear me peaceably. Do not interrupt me. I shall give you time and opportunity to respond to what I shall say. You know, Cinna, that after I took you in the camp of my enemies—not as having *become* my enemy but as having been *born* so—I spared you and restored all your property, making you so comfortable and prosperous that the victors envy the condition of the vanquished. I granted you the priestly office that you asked for, having refused it to others whose fathers had always fought at my side. Under such strong obligations to me, you have planned to kill me.’

At this, Cinna exclaimed that he was far from any such wicked thought. Augustus continued: ‘You are not keeping your promise: you assured me that I would not be interrupted.

Yes, you have planned to kill me. . . .’ and he gave details of the intended place, time and manner of the assassination, and of the other conspirators.

Seeing Cinna paralysed by this news, and silent—not now so as to keep his undertaking to be so, but from the pressure of his conscience—Augustus added: ‘Why are you doing this? Is it to become Emperor? Truly the commonwealth is in a bad way if I am the only obstacle to your gaining the imperial office! You cannot even look after your own

household, and recently lost a lawsuit through the influence of a mere freedman. What, do you really have no means or power to do anything except take on Caesar? If I am the only one frustrating your hopes, I give up! Do you think you will be endured by Paulus, Fabius, the Cossii and the Servilii, or the great band of noblemen who are not merely noble in name but who honour nobility itself by their deeds?’ After many more remarks (for he spoke to him for more than two hours) he said: ‘Now go, Cinna. I give you now as a traitor and a parricide the life I once gave you as an enemy. Let friendship between us begin today; let us compete for which of us will act in better faith—I in granting you your life or you in accepting it.’ And with that he left him. Some time later he granted the consulship to Cinna, reproaching him for not daring to ask for it. From then on Cinna was a firm friend to Augustus, and made him the sole heir to all his property.

After this incident, which occurred when Augustus was in his fortieth year, there was no further conspiracy or attempt against him, and he received a just reward for his clemency. But the same did not apply to our French prince, for his mildness could not save him from falling into the snare of another similar act of treachery.¹ So vain and worthless is human prudence; in defiance of all our projects, counsels and precautions, the outcome remains in the possession of fortune.

·THE ROLE OF FORTUNE·

We call doctors ‘lucky’ when they get a good result, as though their art alone could not stand on its own feet, its foundations being too fragile for it to support itself by its own strength, and as though no other art needed a helping hand from fortune in its operations. Regarding medicine I believe all the

¹ The duke of Guise—the hero of the first story in this essay—was assassinated a few months later.

bad or good you like, for we have, thank God, no dealings with each other. I am at the opposite pole from others: I despise it always, but when I am ill instead of coming to terms with it I begin also to hate it and to fear it. I tell those who urge me to take medicine that they should at least wait until I am restored to my health and strength so as to have more resources for resisting the impact and the danger of their potion. I let nature run its course; I take it for granted that it is armed with teeth and claws to protect itself from attacks launched against it and to maintain this structure, my body, whose dissolution it shuns. Instead of going to nature's aid when it is wrestling at close grips with the illness, I fear we are loading extra tasks on it and helping its adversary instead.

I say that not only in medicine but in many more certain arts fortune plays a large part. Poetic sallies that transport their author and carry him outside himself in rapture—why do we not attribute them to his good luck? He himself confesses that they surpass his own abilities and strength, and acknowledges that they come from outside him and are in no way within his own power; any more than orators say they have in theirs those extraordinary impulses and agitations that drive them beyond what they had planned to say. The same applies to painting, where sometimes there escape from the painter's hand touches that surpass his own conception and knowledge and bring even him to wonder and astonishment. But even more clearly than in what the artists say fortune's part in all these works is revealed in the works themselves—in graces and beauties that are found there, not only without the artist's intention but even without his knowledge. A competent reader often find in other men's writings perfections other than those the author put in or perceived, and endows them with richer meanings and aspects.

As for military exploits, everyone sees how fortune plays a large part in them. Even in our reflections and deliberations there is certainly some chance and good luck mixed in; all that our wisdom can do is not much; the sharper and more lively it is, the more frailty our wisdom finds within itself and the more it distrusts itself. I share Sylla's opinion: when I look *closely* at the most glorious exploits of war, it seems to me that I see that the leaders engage in deliberation and reflection only as a formality; they abandon the best part of the enterprise to fortune and, relying on its aid, go beyond the limits of all reason at every turn. There occur amid their deliberations fortuitous rejoicings and extraneous frenzies which usually impel them towards the least likely course and swell their courage beyond reason. That explains why many great ancient captains, in order to give credit to these rash plans, told their men that they had been led to them by some inspiration, by some sign and prognostication.

That is why, when the various circumstances and details of a matter create difficulties that leave us undecided and perplexed, unable to see and choose the best course of action, I think that the surest way (even if no other consideration invited us to it) is to throw ourselves into the course in which there is most decency and justice and, since we are in doubt about the shortest road, to keep always on the straight one. Thus, in the two examples I have just presented, it was for the man who had received the offence clearly finer and more generous to forgive than not to. If the first of them came to grief, that is no reason to condemn his good plan; and if he had taken the opposite decision we do not know that he would have escaped the end his destiny called him to; and thus he would have lost the glory of such exceptional kindness.

·RESPONSES TO HOSTILE CONSPIRACIES·

History tells of many people who, faced with such fears, have chosen the way of rushing to meet conspiracies against them with vengeance and punishment; yet I see very few who were well served by this remedy; witness so many Roman emperors. Someone who finds himself in this peril should not expect much from his strength or his vigilance. For how hard it is to protect ourselves from an enemy who is concealed behind the face of the most dutiful friend we have, and to know the inner thoughts and intentions of those around us! It is no use employing foreigners as a guard and being always surrounded by a hedge of armed men; anyone who holds his own life cheap will always be master of the life of others.

Also, the continual suspicion that leads a prince to distrust everyone must be an extraordinary torment to him. ^[B] Which is why Dion, when told that Callipus was on the lookout for ways to have him killed, had no heart to look into the matter, saying that he would rather die than live in the misery of having to be on guard not only against his enemies but also against his friends.

Alexander acted this out even more vividly and more daringly: having been warned in a letter from Parmenion that his beloved doctor Philip had been bribed by Darius to poison him, he gave the letter to Philip to read and at the same time swallowed the drink Philip had brought him. Was he not showing his resolve that if his friends wanted to kill him he consented to their doing so? Alexander is the supreme model of daring deeds, but I doubt whether any episode in his life showed more courage than this one or a beauty shining in so many aspects.

Those who preach to princes [see Glossary] such a watchful distrust, in the guise of preaching them security, preach them their ruin and their shame. Nothing noble is done

without risk. I know a man, ^[C] of a very martial courage by nature, and enterprising, ^[B] whose fine career is being daily corrupted by such persuasions:

- to keep himself surrounded by his own men;
- not to hear of any reconciliation with his former enemies;
- to keep apart and not entrust himself to stronger hands, no matter what promises are made or what advantage he sees in doing so.

^[C] I know another who has improved his fortune beyond all expectations by following a wholly opposite plan.

When the need arises, the bravery whose glory men seek so avidly can be shown as magnificently in a doublet as in armour, in a room as in a camp, with arm down as with arm raised.

[Carrying on from ‘. . . in doing so’:] ^[B] Such tender and circumspect prudence is a mortal enemy of great undertakings.

^[C] To gain the support of Syphax, Scipio left his army, abandoned Spain while its recent conquest was still doubtful, crossed to Africa with two small ships, and in enemy territory entrusted himself to the power of a barbarian king whose faith was unknown—without obligation, without hostage, under the sole security of the greatness of his own courage, his good fortune, and the promise of his high hopes: ‘Our own trust generally wins the trust of others’ [Livy].

[Carrying on from ‘. . . enemy of great undertakings’:] ^[B] For a life ambitious for fame, a man must on the contrary yield little to suspicions and keep them on a tight rein: fear and distrust attract and invite attack. The most mistrustful of our kings made himself secure mainly by. . . committing his life and his liberty into the hands of his enemies, showing complete trust in them so that they might pick up this trust from him. To his legions, mutinous and in arms against him, Caesar opposed only the authority of his countenance and

the pride of his words; he trusted so much in himself and in his good fortune that he did not fear to commit his fate to a rebellious and seditious army. 'Intrepid and erect, he stood on a grassy mound, deserving to be feared since he feared nothing' [Lucan].

[B] But it is quite true that this strong confidence can be displayed, entire and natural, only by those who do not take fright at the thought of death or of the worst that can eventually happen to them. Nothing worthwhile is achieved if one seeks an important reconciliation through a trembling, doubtful, uncertain display of 'confidence'. An excellent way to win the heart and will of someone else is to trust him, put oneself in his power—provided that it is done freely and without the constraint of any necessity, and that the trust one brings is clear and pure and one's face free of any misgivings.

When a boy I saw a gentleman, the military governor of a great city, in difficulties from the violence of an enraged populace. To stop this disturbance from the outset he decided to leave a safe place he was in and to put himself in the power of that mutinous mob; things went badly for him and he was wretchedly killed. But it seems to me that his error lay not in going out to them—the blame usually attached to his memory—but in adopting a course of submission and softness, trying to quieten that frenzy by following rather than by guiding, by asking rather than by remonstrating. I believe that a gracious severity, along with a military bearing full of assurance and confidence suitable to his rank and the dignity of his office would have succeeded better for him, or at least more honourably and fittingly. Humanity and gentleness are the last things to be expected from that monster, the mob, when it is thus aroused; it is much more accessible to awe and fear. I would also reproach him for something else. Having made a decision—in my opinion a

brave decision rather than a rash one—to cast himself into that stormy sea of furious men, weak and without armour, he should have drunk the whole cup and abandoned the role he was playing. Whereas when he saw the danger at close quarters his nose started to bleed, and the deflated and fawning look he had assumed changed into a frightened one, his voice and his eyes full of alarm and contrition. By trying to creep away and hide he inflamed them and called them down on himself.

Once it was planned to have a general review of various troops under arms—such being just the place for secret plans of revenge: nowhere can they be carried out with greater security. There were public and widely known signs that things would go badly for some of those who had the principal and necessary responsibility for the reviewing. [This was in Bordeaux when Montaigne was its mayor.] Various plans were proposed, this being a difficult matter with much weight and consequence. Mine was that they should above all give no sign of this fear, and show up and mingle with the ranks with heads high and faces open; and that instead of cutting anything out of the reviewing ceremony (as the other opinions mostly aimed to do) they should on the contrary urge the captains to tell their men to make their welcoming volleys fine and hearty in honour of the spectators, not sparing their powder. This pleased the suspect troops, and engendered from then on a useful mutual confidence.

[A] The course adopted by Julius Caesar seems to me the finest possible. First he tried by mildness and clemency to make himself loved even by his enemies; when conspiracies were uncovered, he let it be known that he had been told about them. Then he made the very noble resolve to await the outcome without fear and without anxiety, surrendering himself to the protection of the gods and of fortune. For that is the state he was in when he was killed.

[B] A foreigner told all and sundry that in return for a good sum of money he could teach Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse, an infallible way of sniffing out and revealing any machinations of his subjects against him. Dionysius, hearing of this, had him sent for to enlighten him about an art so necessary for his survival. The foreigner told him that his art was this: Dionysius should pay him one talent, and then boast of having learned from him a singular secret. Dionysius found this device good, and had six hundred crowns paid over to him. It was not likely that he would give so much money to an unknown man except as a reward for teaching him something very useful; and this belief served to keep his enemies in fear.

Princes are wise to *publish* information they receive warning them of plots against their life, so as to make people believe that they are well informed and that nothing can be undertaken that they do not get wind of. [C] The duke of Athens did many stupid things when consolidating his recent tyranny over Florence, but the most noteworthy was this: when he first received warning of the conspiracies that people were forming against him, getting this from Matteo di Morozo, one of the accomplices, he had him killed so as to suppress this information and not let it be known that anyone in the city was discontented with his rule.

[A] I remember reading an account of a Roman of high rank who was fleeing from the tyranny of the Triumvirate; he had already escaped his pursuers a thousand times by subtle tricks he had invented. One day a troop of horsemen responsible for arresting him passed close by some bushes behind which he was crouching; they failed to spot him. But at this point, considering

the toil and hardships he had already endured for so long to save himself from the continual careful searches they were making for him everywhere, the

little pleasure he could hope for from such a life, how much better it was for him to take the step once and for all than to remain forever in such dread,

he called them back and revealed his hiding place, voluntarily abandoning himself to their cruelty to relieve both them and himself of further trouble. Calling out for enemy hands is a rather extreme measure, but I believe it would be better to take it than to remain in a continual sweat over an outcome that cannot be remedied. Since any precautions we can take are full of uneasiness and uncertainty, it is better to prepare with fair assurance for whatever *can* happen, getting some consolation from not being sure that it *will*.

25. Being a schoolmaster, being learned, being wise

[Re the title of this essay, see Glossary on *pedant*.]

[A] In my childhood I was often annoyed to see that

- in Italian comedies that there was always a schoolmaster treated as a joke, and that
- the ·Latin· title ‘Magister’ [= ‘schoolmaster’] was not accorded much more respect among us ·Frenchmen·.

Placed as I was under their control, the least I could do was to defend their reputation. I tried to make excuses for them in terms of the natural incompatibility between the common herd and people of rare and excellent judgement and learning, the two going in totally opposite directions. But in ·writing· this I was wasting my Latin; it was the most civilised men who held them in the greatest contempt, witness our good Du Bellay: ‘But most of all I loathe pedantic learning.’ [B] And this attitude is ancient, for Plutarch says that *Greek* and *scholar* were terms of reproach and contempt among the Romans.

^[A] As I grew older I found that they were absolutely right and that ‘the most biggest clerks aren’t the most wisest’ [quoting the bad Latin of an ignorant monk in a story by Rabelais]. Yet how it can happen that a soul enriched by knowledge of so many things should not be made by that keener and more alert, and that a crude and commonplace mind can harbour within itself, without being improved, the reasonings and judgements of the best minds the world has produced—that still has me puzzled.

^[B] A young woman, the foremost of our princesses, said to me concerning a particular man: ‘For him to absorb so many other brains, and such great and powerful ones, his own brain has to squeeze up close, crouch down, and shrink to make room for them all!’ ^[A] in that spirit I would have thought that

- just as plants are swamped by too much water and lamps by too much oil, so the action of the mind is stifled by too much study and by too much matter; that
- being caught and entangled in a great variety of things, the mind loses the ability to sort itself out, and that
- it is bent and huddled down under the load.

But that is not what happens, for the more our souls are filled the more they *expand*. Examples from far-off times show that men who were able in the handling of public affairs—great captains and great statesmen—have also been very learned.

• ANCIENT PHILOSOPHERS •

As for philosophers, remote from all public occupations, they have indeed sometimes been mocked by the comic licence of their times, ^[C] their opinions and conduct making them ridiculous.

Do you want to make *them* judges of rights in a lawsuit, of a man’s deeds? They are indeed well prepared for that! They are still trying to find out whether there is life, whether there is motion, whether man differs from ox, what it is to act and be acted on, what kind of animals law and justice are! When they talk about—or talk *to*—the magistrate [see Glossary], they do it with an uncouth and disrespectful freedom. When they hear praise for a prince or a king, to them he is a mere shepherd, an idle shepherd who milks and shears his animals; but much more harshly than a real shepherd does. If you consider someone grander because he owns two thousand acres of land, they laugh at that because they customarily regard the whole world as their own. If you pride yourself on your nobility because you have seven rich forebears, they think little of you as having no conception of the universality of nature or of how many predecessors each of us has—rich, poor, kings, servants, Greeks, barbarians. If you were fiftieth in line from Hercules, they would think you empty-headed to value such a gift of fortune.¹

Thus the common herd despised them as ignorant of the elementary common things, as presumptuous and insolent.

But that portrait drawn by Plato is far removed from what applies to our folk. ^[A] The ones portrayed by Plato were envied as being *above* common ways, as being *contemptuous* of public duties, as having set up a particular inimitable way of life governed by lofty and unusual principles; the men I am talking about are despised as being *below* common ways, as being *incapable* of public duties, as having base lives and *moeurs* dragging along behind the common herd. ^[C] ‘I hate

¹ The point of ‘fiftieth’ is not the remoteness of the connection but the supposedly valuable length of the family’s known history.

men whose words are philosophical but whose deeds are base' [Pacuvius].

[A] As for those ·ancient· philosophers, I say, they were great in learning and even greater in every kind of action. And just as it is reported concerning that geometrician of Syracuse [Archimedes] that

having been turned aside from his contemplation in order to put some of it to practical use in the defence of his country, he immediately set about producing frightful machines and incredible effects, all the while disdaining this handiwork of his in which he thought he spoiled the dignity of his art, of which his works were mere apprentice work and toys,

so too with them: whenever they were put to the test of action they were seen to fly on such a soaring wing that it was clear that their heart and soul had been wondrously enriched by their understanding of things.

But [C] some, seeing the citadel of political power taken over by incompetents, withdrew from it. The man who asked Crates how long one had to go on philosophising, was told 'Until our armies are no longer led by mule-drivers.' Heraclitus made over the monarchy to his brother; and to the citizens of Ephesus who reproached him for spending his time playing with the children in front of the temple he retorted: 'Isn't it better to be doing this ·with them· than to be sharing the control of affairs with you?' [A] Others, whose imagination was set above fortune and above the world, found the seats of justice and even the thrones of kings to be low and vile. [C] Empedocles rejected the offer of kingship made by the men of Agrigentum. [A] When Thales condemned the preoccupation with thrift and money-making, he was accused of being like the fox ·in Aesop's fable about 'sour grapes'·, being unable to achieve these things. He decided to amuse himself by trying this out: making his knowledge,

just this once, stoop to the service of profit and gain, he set up a trade which in one year brought in such riches that the most experienced in that business could hardly have made as much in a lifetime.

·CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHERS·

[C] Aristotle reports that some people described Thales, Anaxagoras and their like as 'wise but not prudent', because they did not care enough about the more useful things. I am suspicious of that verbal distinction, but anyway the ·contemporary· people I am talking about cannot be excused in that way; judging from the base and needy fortune they settle for, we would be justified in saying both things—they are not wise and not prudent.

[A] But leaving aside this first explanation ·of the bad repute of learning, namely that 'the common herd' is stupid·, I think it is better to say that the trouble comes from their going about their knowledge in a wrong way, and that given how we are taught, it is no wonder that neither students nor their teachers become more capable though they make themselves more erudite. In truth the care and expense of our fathers aim only at furnishing our heads with knowledge; nobody talks about judgement or virtue. [C] When someone passes by, try exclaiming 'Oh, what a learned man!' and of another 'Oh, what a good man!' Our people will not fail to turn their gaze respectfully towards the first. There ought to be a third exclamation 'Oh, what blockheads!'

[A] We are eager to inquire: 'Does he know Greek or Latin?' 'Does he write in verse or in prose?' But what matters most is what we put last: 'Has he become better and wiser?' We ought to have asked who is *better* learned, not *more* learned.

·BORROWED KNOWLEDGE·

We work merely to fill the memory, leaving the understanding [C] and the conscience [A] empty. Just as birds sometimes go

in search of grain, carrying it in their beak without tasting it to give a beakful to their young, so our pedants go foraging for knowledge in books and lodge it on the edge of their lips, only to spit it out and scatter it to the winds.

[C] It is wonderful how snugly this folly fits my own case. Is it not doing the same thing, what I do in most of this composition of my essays? I go about rummaging in this book and that for sayings that please me—not to store them (for I have no storehouse) but to carry them into this book, where—if the truth be told—they are not *mine* any more than they were in their original place.

What makes us learned, I believe, is what we know now—not what we once knew any more than what we shall know some day.

[A] [Picking up from ‘... to the winds.’] But what is worse, their students and *their* little charges are not nourished and fed by it either. It is passed from hand to hand for the sole purpose of showing it off, entertaining others with it, and adding up amounts of it in this or that head, like coinage that is useful only for adding up and throwing away. . . .

We know how to say ‘This is what Cicero said’, ‘Such are the *moeurs* of Plato’, ‘These are Aristotle’s exact words.’ But what do we ourselves say? What do we do? What do we judge? A parrot could say as much.

This behaviour reminds me of the rich Roman who went to much trouble and great expense to round up experts in all branches of learning, keeping them always within reach so that when in conversation with friends he needed to speak of one thing or another they would take his place and all be ready to provide him one with an argument, another with a verse of Homer, each according to his assignment. He thought that this knowledge was his because it was in the heads of his people. It is the same with those whose ability is stored in their sumptuous libraries. . . .

We take the opinions and knowledge of others into our keeping, and that is all; we should make them our own. It is as though someone needed a fire, went next door to get a light, found a big blaze there and stayed to warm himself, forgetting to take any back home. What good do we get from having a belly full of meat if it is not digested, if it is not transformed into *us*, if it does not make us bigger and stronger? Lucullus was made and fashioned into such a great captain by books, not by experience—do we think that he treated books in our way?

[B] We let ourselves lean so heavily on other men’s arms that we annihilate our own powers. Do I want to arm myself against the fear of death? I do it at Seneca’s expense. Do I want consolation for myself or for someone else? I borrow it from Cicero; I would have found it in myself if I had been trained to do so. I do not like this ‘ability’ that is dependent on others and borrowed.

[A] Even if we could be learned with other men’s learning, we absolutely cannot be wise with any wisdom but our own. [Montaigne follows this with four short classical quotations and an anecdote about Diogenes. Then:] If our learning does not make our soul move with a better motion, if it does not give us healthier judgement, then I would just as soon my student spent his time playing tennis: that would at least make his body more agile. But after his fifteen or sixteen years of study just look at him! There is nothing so unfit for use; the only ‘improvement’ you can see in him is that his Latin and Greek have made him more conceited and more arrogant than when he left home. [C] He ought to have brought back a full soul; he brings back a swollen one; he has merely inflated it instead of enlarging it.

Protagoras told his pupils that they should either •pay him on his terms, or •swear in the temple how much they valued the profit they had received from his teaching, and

compensate him accordingly. If this were done today, these pedagogues of mine would be in for a disappointment if they had to rely on the sworn testimony of my experience.

My Perigordian patois very comically calls these youthful savants *lettre-ferits* ('word-struck'), men whom reading has whacked with a hammer, as the saying goes. In truth, they usually seem to have sunk even below common sense. You see a peasant and a shoemaker go about their business simply and naturally, talking about what they know; whereas these fellows—through wanting to exalt themselves and swagger around with this knowledge that floats on the surface of their brain—are for ever getting confused and tripping themselves up. Fine words break loose from them, but let someone else apply them! They know Galen well, but the patient not at all. They have already filled your head with laws before understanding what the case is really about. They know the theory of everything; *you* find someone who will put it into practice.

Whoever will look closely at persons of this sort (and they are spread about everywhere) will find as I do that most of the time they understand neither themselves nor anyone else, and that they have a full enough memory but an entirely hollow judgement; unless their own **nature** has designed it differently. I saw this in the case of Adrian Turnebus; he had no other profession but letters (in which he was, in my opinion, the greatest man for a millennium), but he had nothing schoolmasterish [*pedantesque*] about him except the way he wore his gown and some superficial mannerisms that might not be civilised by a courtier's standard but amount to nothing. ^[B] And I hate our people who find it harder to tolerate a gown askew than a soul askew, and who judge a man by how he bows, by his dignity, and by his boots. ^[A] For inside Turnebus was the most polished soul in the world. I often intentionally launched him on topics remote from his

profession; and he saw into them so clearly, with so quick a grasp, with so sound a judgement, that it seemed as if that he had never had any other profession but war and affairs of state. It is fair and strong **natures**—^[B] 'the ones whose hearts are made by Titan with gracious art and from a better clay' [Persius]—^[A] that keep their integrity through a bad education.

Now, it is not enough that our education does not spoil us; it should change us for the better. Some of our appellate courts, when they are to admit new members, examine only their knowledge; others add a test of their judgment, by giving them a case to judge. The latter seem to me to have a much better procedure. And although both parts are necessary and must occur together, the fact is that knowledge is less valuable than judgment. The latter can do without the former, but not vice versa. As the Greek verse says 'What use is knowledge if there is no understanding?' [Stobaeus]. Would to God that, for the good of our justice, those bodies were as well provided with understanding and conscience as they are with knowledge! ^[C] 'We are taught for the schoolroom, not for life' [Seneca].

^[A] Now, knowledge should be not merely attached to the soul but incorporated into it; we should not sprinkle but dye. And if knowledge does not change the soul, making its imperfect state better, then it would be much better to leave it alone. Knowledge is a dangerous sword that gets in its master's way and wounds him if it is in a weak hand that does not know how to wield it. . . .

Perhaps that is why neither we ·French· nor theology require much learning in women; and why ·a certain nobleman· . . . , when told that his intended bride. . . had been brought up simply and never taught to read, replied that he liked her the better for that and that a woman knew enough if she knew the difference between her husband's undershirt and his doublet.

So it is not as great a wonder as they proclaim it to be that our ancestors thought little of book-learning and that even now it is found only by chance in the chief councils of our kings; for even today if book-learning were not kept in credit by the only goal that is set before us these days by such branches of it as jurisprudence, medicine, *pedantisme* [see Glossary], and even theology, namely to get rich by them, you would see it in as wretched a condition as it ever was. And what loss would that be, given that it teaches us neither to think well nor to act well? [C] ‘Now that so many are learned, it is good men that we lack’ [Seneca]. To a man who has no knowledge of what is good, all other knowledge is harmful.

But perhaps the reason I was looking for just now—i.e. the explanation for the bad repute of learning [see page 58]—comes also from this: since studies in France have almost no other goal than the making of money, few of those whom nature brought into the world for noble rather than lucrative duties devote themselves to learning; or else they do so quite briefly, withdrawing (before getting a taste for it) to a profession that has nothing in common with books; so that ordinarily few are left to devote themselves entirely to study except people of humble means trying to make a living from it. And the souls of those people, being—by nature, by their home upbringing, and by example—of the basest alloy, bring forth false fruits of learning. For learning is not there to give light to a soul that has none, or to make a blind man see. Its task is not to provide him with sight but to direct the sight he has, to put it through its paces, provided that it already has sound and capable feet and legs.

Knowledge is a good medicine, but no medicine is strong enough to preserve itself from taint and corruption by defects in the jar that contains it. Here is a man who sees clearly but does not see straight; so he sees what is good and does not follow it; he sees knowledge and does not use it. Plato’s main

statute in his *Republic* is to give its citizens employments according to their natures. Nature can do all, and does do all. Cripples are ill-suited to physical exercises, and crippled souls to mental ones. Bastard and vulgar souls are unworthy of philosophy.

When we see a man ill-shod, we say it is no wonder, if he is a shoemaker! Likewise it seems that experience often presents us with a doctor worse doctored, a theologian less reformed, a scholar less competent, than anyone else.

Aristo of Chios had reason to say long ago that philosophers harm their hearers, inasmuch as most souls are not fit to profit from such teaching, which when it does not work for good works for evil: ‘Debauchees come from Aristippus’s school, boors from Zeno’s’ [Cicero].

·EDUCATING FOR VIRTUE·

[A] In that fine education that Xenophon ascribed to the Persians, we find that they taught their children virtue just as other nations teach letters. [C] Plato says that the eldest son in their royal succession was brought up as follows. At birth he was entrusted not to women but to eunuchs holding highest authority in the king’s entourage on account of their virtue. They took charge of making his body fair and healthy. After seven years they taught him horse-riding and hunting. When he reached fourteen they put him in the hands of four men: the wisest, the most just, the most temperate, and the most valiant man in the nation. The first taught him religion; the second, to be always truthful; the third to make himself master of his appetites; the fourth to fear nothing.

[A] It is a thing worthy of great consideration that in Lycurgus’s excellent form of government, one truly prodigious in its perfection, despite the emphasis on the education of children as the state’s principal responsibility, little mention is made of learning. . . .; as if those high-souled youths,

disdaining any yoke except that of virtue, had to be provided not with our masters of knowledge but only with masters of valour, prudence and justice—^[C]an example followed by Plato in his *Laws*. ^[A]Their teaching consisted in posing questions about their judgements of men and their actions; if the pupils condemned or praised this or that person or action they had to reason out what they said; by this means they sharpened their understanding while also learning what is right.

In Xenophon, Astyages asks Cyrus for an account of his last lesson. He replies: 'In our school a big boy had a small coat that he gave to a smaller classmate and took his coat, which was larger. Having been told by our teacher to judge this quarrel, I judged that things should be left as they were and that each boy seemed to be better off. He showed me that I had done badly by considering only what seemed *better*, whereas I should first have taken care of *justice*, which required that no-one should be forced in regard to something that belonged to him.' And he says he was whipped for this, just as we are in our village schools for forgetting how to conjugate *τιπτω* [the Greek word for 'thrash'].

My schoolmaster would treat me to a fine harangue in the demonstrative mode before he would persuade me that his school was worth that one! They wanted to shorten the journey, and since it is true that learning, even when done properly, can only teach us wisdom, integrity and resolution, they wanted to put their children from the outset in contact with actual cases, teaching them not by hearsay but by the test of action, forming and moulding them in a living way, not only by word and precept but chiefly by examples and works; in order to create not merely their soul's knowledge but its very essence and temperament, not an acquisition but a natural possession. . . .

It is said that people used to go to other Greek cities to find rhetoricians, painters and musicians, but to Sparta for

legislators, magistrates, and military generals.

- In Athens one learned to talk well; •here [= in Sparta] to act well;
- there to disentangle oneself from bad arguments and confront the imposture of trickily intertwined words;
- here to disentangle oneself from the snares of sensual pleasure and to boldly confront the menaces of fortune and of death;
- those were busy with words; •these with things;
- there it was a continuous exercise of the tongue; •here a continuous exercise of the soul.

So it is not strange that when Antipater demanded from them [i.e. the Spartans] fifty children as hostages they replied—quite the opposite to what we would do—that they preferred to give twice that many adults, so important did they consider the loss ·to the hostage children· of their country's education. When Agesilaus invites Xenophon to send his sons to be brought up in Sparta, it is not to learn rhetoric or dialectic there but, he says, to learn the finest science there is, namely the science of obeying and commanding. [Then ^[C]an anecdote in which Socrates pokes fun at Hippias, eventually getting him to admit that his learned arts are useless.]

Both in that martial government and in all others like it, examples show that learned study makes hearts soft and effeminate more than it makes them strong and warlike. The strongest state that we see in the world at present is that of the Turks, a people equally trained to respect arms and to despise letters. I consider Rome more valiant before it became learned. In our time the most warlike nations are the most crude and ignorant: the Scythians, the Parthians, Tamerlane give us evidence of that. When the Goths sacked Greece, what saved all the libraries from being burned down was the idea spread by one of the invaders that this item should be left intact for the enemy, to deflect them from

military exercises and make them spend time on sedentary and idle occupations.

When our own King Charles VIII saw himself master of the kingdom of Naples and a large part of Tuscany, almost without drawing his sword from its scabbard, the noblemen in his suite attributed this unhoped-for ease of conquest to the fact that the Italian princes and nobility spent more time in becoming clever and learned than in becoming vigorous and soldierly.

26. Educating children

TO MADAME DIANE DE FOIX, COMTESSE DE GURSON

^[A] I have never known a father fail to acknowledge his son as his own, no matter how hunchbacked or mangy he was. It is not that he does not see his infirmities (unless he is quite besotted by his affection), but the boy is his! Myself too; I see better than anyone else that these ·writings of mine· are only the *rêveries* [see Glossary] of a man who has only tasted the outer crust of the sciences [see Glossary] during his childhood and has retained only a vague undetailed picture of them: a little of everything and nothing thoroughly, French style. For, to sum up, I do know that there is such a thing as medicine, jurisprudence, four parts in mathematics, and roughly what they aim at. ^[C] And perhaps I also know the sciences' general claim to be of service to our life. ^[A] But as for digging deeper into them, biting my nails over the study of Aristotle, ^[C] the monarch of modern doctrine, or stubbornly persevering in any branch of learning, I have never done it; ^[C] nor could I sketch even the bare outlines of any art. There is not a child half-way through school who cannot claim to know more than I do; I am not equipped even to test him on his first lesson. If I am forced to do so, I am constrained—being

ignorant of all the details—to draw from it (rather ineptly) something of universal scope, and test his natural judgement on that—a lesson as unknown to the boys as theirs is to me.

·USES OF PAST WRITERS·

I have not had regular dealings with any solid book except Plutarch and Seneca, where I draw like the Danaïds, constantly filling and then pouring out. I get some of it to stick to this paper; to myself, next to nothing.

^[A] When it comes to books, my quarry is history, or poetry, which I love with a special affection; for (as Cleanthes said) just as the trumpet's voice rings out clearer and stronger from being forced through a narrow tube, so it seems to me that when a thought is compressed into the constraints of poetic rhythm it springs out much more vigorously and gives me a stiffer jolt. As for my own natural faculties, of which *this* is the *essai* [see Glossary], I feel them bending under the load. My conceptions and my judgement move only by groping, staggering, stumbling and blundering; and when I have gone as far as I can, I am far from satisfied; I still see country further on, but with a confused vision, in a cloud that I cannot sort out. When I undertake to speak indiscriminately of everything that comes to my fancy, using only my own natural resources, then if I happen (as I often do) to come across in good authors the same topics I have tried to treat—as in Plutarch I have just this very moment come across his discourse on the power of the imagination—I see myself to be, compared with those men, so weak and paltry, so heavy and sluggish, that I feel pity or scorn for myself.

Still I am pleased •that my opinions have the honour of often coinciding with theirs ^[C] and that at least I **follow** them a long way behind, saying 'Yes indeed!'; and ^[A] •that I know (as many do not) the vast difference there is between them and me, yet still allow my weak and lowly thoughts to run

on without plastering or patching the faults this comparison has shown me. [C] You would need good muscles to undertake to march **abreast** of those folk!

[A] Those rash authors of our own century who scatter whole passages from ancient writers throughout their own nugatory works, to do themselves honour, do the opposite. The infinite difference in brilliance gives such a pale, sallow, ugly face to their own contributions that they lose much more than they gain.

[C] There were two contrasting approaches. Chrysippus the philosopher mixed into his writings not merely passages but entire books from other authors—in one the whole of the *Medea* of Euripides—and Apollodorus said that if you removed the borrowings the page would be left blank. Epicurus, on the contrary, in the three hundred volumes that he left included not a single borrowed quotation.

[A] [Picking up from ‘. . . than they gain.’] The other day I chanced upon such a passage. I had dragged along languidly behind some French words—words so bloodless, so fleshless and so empty of matter and sense that indeed that’s all they were, *French words*—when at the end of a long and boring road I came upon a passage that was high, rich, soaring to the clouds. If the slope had been gentle and the climb slower,

next clause: *cela eust esté excusable;*

literally meaning: that would have been excusable;

what Montaigne presumably had in mind: that would have made it sensible for the author to include the quoted passage in his own work;

but it was a precipice so straight and so steep that when I was six words into it I knew I was flying off into another world. From there I saw the bog I had come out of, so low and so deep that I never again had the stomach to go back into it. If I stuffed one of my chapters with such rich spoils,

that would reveal all too clearly the stupidity of the others.

[C] Criticising others for having my faults seems to me no more inconsistent than (as I often do) criticising myself for having other people’s. Faults should be condemned everywhere and not allowed any place to hide. Yet I know how audaciously I strive to measure up to my stolen wares, to keep in step with them, not without some rash hope of deceiving the eyes of judges who might identify them. But I have two partial defences against this conduct. •I do this is as much by virtue of how I apply my borrowings as by virtue of matching them through my inventiveness or my power. •And I do not wrestle with those old champions wholesale, but come at them one at a time; and I do not fight body against body, but proceed by snatches, little light attacks. I do not grapple with them; I merely try them out; and never engage with them as far as I make a show of doing. If I could stand up to them I would really be something! because I take them on only where they are toughest.

As for what I have caught some people doing—

covering themselves with other men’s armour, not even their fingertips showing; and carrying out their plan (as it is easy for the learned to do on common subjects) with ancient inventions patched together here and there

—for those who want to pass their borrowings off as their own, **(i)** this is unjust and cowardly; having nothing worthwhile of their own to show off, they try to present themselves in false colours; and **(ii)** it is very stupid to be content with getting through deceit the ignorant approval of the common herd, while losing all credit among men of understanding—the only ones whose praise has any weight—who turn up their noses at this borrowed marquetry. For my part there is nothing that I would want to do less. I do not speak the minds of others except to speak my own mind better. . . .

^[A] [Picking up from ‘. . . the stupidity of the others.’] . . . Whatever these futilities of mine may be, I have not planned to hide them, any more than I would a bald and graying portrait of myself in which the artist had painted not a perfect face but my own. These are *my* humours and opinions; I offer them as what I believe, not as to be believed. My only aim here is to reveal myself, and I may be different tomorrow if I learn something new that changes me. I have no authority to be believed, nor do I want it, feeling myself too ill-instructed to instruct others.

·EDUCATING CHILDREN·

Well, someone who had seen the preceding chapter ·on schoolmasters etc.· was telling me at my home the other day that I should have enlarged a little on the subject of children’s education. If I did have any competence in this matter, Madame, I could not put it to better use than to make a present of it to that little man who is giving signs that he will soon come bravely out of you (you are too great-souled to begin otherwise than with a male). Having played so large a part in bringing about your marriage, I have a certain rightful interest in the greatness and prosperity of whatever comes out of it; in addition to which your former claim on my service obliges me to desire honour, wealth and success to everything that concerns you. But in truth I know nothing about it except this: that the biggest and most important difficulty in the branch of learning whose topic is humanity seems to lie in the area that deals with the upbringing and education of children.

^[C] Just as in farming: the operations that precede the planting are certain and easy, as is the planting itself; but as soon as what is planted springs to life, raising it involves many methods and much difficulty. So too with men: it is not much work to plant them; but as soon as they are born,

there is a variety of cares—full of bustle and worry—in their training and upbringing.

^[A] At that early age the signs of their inclinations are so slight and obscure, the promise they show is so uncertain and misleading, that it is hard to base any solid judgement upon them. ^[B] Look at Cimon, look at Themistocles and a thousand others, how unlike themselves they became! Bear-cubs and puppies show their natural inclinations, but men, plunging headlong into habits, into opinions, into laws, easily change or disguise themselves.

^[A] Still, it is difficult to force natural propensities. That is why people, having failed to choose their children’s road well, often waste their time spending years in training children for things in which they cannot get a foothold. At all events my opinion is that in this difficulty they should be put on the path towards the best and most rewarding goals, and that little heed should be paid to those trivial conjectures and prognostications that we base on their childish actions. ^[C] Even Plato in the *Republic* seems to me to give them too much authority.

^[A] Madame, learning is a great ornament and a wonderfully useful tool, especially for people raised to such a degree of fortune as you are. In truth it is not used properly in mean and lowborn hands. It is prouder to lend its resources to

- conducting a war,
 - governing a people, or
 - gaining the friendship of a prince or of a foreign nation
- than to
- drawing up dialectical arguments,
 - pleading an appeal, or
 - prescribing a mass of pills.

Thus, Madame, because I believe you will not forget this element in the education of your children, you who have tasted its sweetness and who belong to a literary race—

for we still have the writings of those early counts de Foix from whom his lordship the count your husband and yourself are descended, while your uncle François de Candale daily produces writings that will extend the knowledge of this family trait through centuries

—I want to tell you of just one fancy of mine that is contrary to normal practice; it is all I can contribute to your service in this matter.

The task of the tutor that you will give your son—and your choice of *him* will determine the whole outcome of your son's education—will have many other important parts on which I say nothing because on them I have nothing worthwhile to say; as for this matter on which I take it on myself to give him advice, he will accept it only as far as he finds it convincing. For a child of noble family who

seeks learning not •to make money (for such an abject goal is unworthy of the grace and favour of the Muses, and besides it looks to others and depends on them), or •for external advantages, but rather •for advantages that are truly his own, that inwardly enrich and adorn him, wanting to become an able man rather than a learned one,

I would urge that •care be taken to choose a tutor with a well-made rather than a well-filled head, that •both be required of him but with more emphasis on *moeurs* [see Glossary] and intelligence than on any branch of learning, and that •the tutor go about his job in a new way.

•HOW THE TUTOR SHOULD PROCEED•

Teachers are for ever bawling into our ears as though pouring liquid down a funnel, our task being merely to repeat what we have been told. I would want him—your son's tutor—to correct this practice. Right from the start, according to the capacity of the soul he has in hand, he should begin to put

it through its paces, making it taste things, choose them, discern them by itself; sometimes clearing the way for the boy, sometimes letting him clear it for himself.

I do not want the tutor to do all the thinking and talking; I want him also to *listen* when the pupil's turn comes to speak. [C] Socrates and later Archesilaus used to make their pupils speak first; they spoke afterwards. 'The authority of those who teach is often an obstacle to those who want to learn' [Cicero].

It is good to make him trot in front of his tutor, letting the latter judge the child's pace and judge how far he has to hold back to adapt himself to the child's ability. If that proportion is wrong we spoil everything. And finding it and going along in it evenly is one of the hardest tasks I know. It is the work of a lofty and powerful soul to slow down to the child's pace and to guide his footsteps. I walk more firmly and surely uphill than down.

Those who follow our ·French· practice of trying to regulate many minds with such different capacities and forms by a single lesson and a similar degree of guidance—it is no surprise if in a whole race of children they can find barely two or three who reap any proper fruit from their education.

[A] [Picking up from '...comes to speak.'] Let him ask the pupil for an account not merely of the lesson's words but of its sense and substance; in judging how the child profits, let him go by the testimony not of his memory but of his life. Let him be made to show what he has just learned in a hundred aspects and apply it to that many different subjects, to see whether he has really grasped it and made it his own,

the rest of the sentence: [C] *prenant l'instruction à son progresz, des pædagogismes de Platon.*

translated by Florio: taking his instruction from the institution given by Plato.

by Cotton/Hazlitt: taking instruction of his progress by the pedagogic institutions of Plato.

by Frame: planning his progress according to the pedagogical method of Plato.

by Screech: judging the boy's progress by what Plato taught about education.

^[A] Disgorging food exactly as you have swallowed it is a sign of rawness and indigestion; the stomach has not done its work if it has not changed the substance and the form of what it is given to cook.

^[B] Our soul moves only on faith, being shackled and constrained to the whims of other people's fancies—a slave and captive under the authority of their teaching. We have been so subjected to leading strings that we no longer have a free stride; our vigour and liberty have been quenched. . . .

^[B] I had a private meeting in Pisa with a decent man who is so Aristotelian that the most sweeping of his dogmas is that

- the touchstone and measure of all solid speculation and all truth is conformity with Aristotle's teaching;
- outside of that there are only chimeras and emptiness;
- he saw everything, said everything.

When that position was taken too broadly, and unfairly, it once put him in great danger from the Roman Inquisition, and kept him there for a long time.

^[A] Let him make his pupil pass everything through a filter and never lodge anything in his head simply by authority and on trust. Let not Aristotle's principles be *principles* for him, any more than the Stoics' or the Epicureans'. Set all these judgements before him; he will choose if he can; if not, he will remain in doubt. ^[C] Only fools are certain and assured. ^[A] 'Doubting pleases me as much as knowing' [Dante].

For if he embraces the opinions of Xenophon and Plato through his own reasoning, they will no longer be theirs;

they will be his. ^[C] He who follows another follows nothing. He finds nothing; indeed he seeks nothing. . . . Let him at least know that he knows. ^[A] He should imbibe their ways of thinking, not learn their precepts. And let him boldly forget where he got them from if he wants to, but let him know how to make them his own. Truth and reason are common to all; they no more belong to the man who first expressed them than to anyone who did so later. ^[C] It is no more 'according to Plato' than 'according to me', since he and I understand and see it the same way. ^[A] Bees plunder these flowers and those, but then of them they make honey that is entirely theirs; it is no longer thyme or marjoram. Even so with the pieces borrowed from others, he—the pupil—will transform and blend them so as to make of them a work that is entirely his—namely, *his judgement*. The forming of this is the only aim of his education, his work and study.

^[C] Let him hide all the help he has had, and show only what he has made of it. Pillagers, borrowers, parade their buildings and purchases, not what they get from others. You do not see the sweeteners given to an appeal-court judge; you see the alliances he has gained and the honours for his children. No-one makes public his receipts; everyone makes public his acquisitions. The profit we get from study is to have become better and wiser by it.

^[A] As Epicharmus used to say, it is the understanding that sees and hears; it is the understanding that makes profit of everything, that arranges everything, that acts, dominates, and reigns; everything else is blind, deaf, and soulless. Certainly we make it servile and cowardly by not leaving it free to do anything by itself. Who ever asked his pupil what *he* thinks about ^[B] rhetoric or grammar, or ^[A] this or that saying of Cicero? They are shoved into our memory. . . .as though they were oracles, in which letters and syllables are the substance of the matter.

[C] To know by heart is not to *know*; it is to store in our memory something that we have been given. What we really *know* we can avail ourselves of without looking at the model, without turning our eyes towards our book. Sad competence, a purely bookish competence! I look to it to provide decoration, not foundation, following Plato's view that true philosophy consists in steadfastness, faith and sincerity, the other branches of learning—with other aims—being merely cosmetic.

[Half a page on the need for the pupil to be active, and the desirability that young people be introduced to foreign lands and languages at an early age. Then:]

·KEEP IT TOUGH·

[A] Everyone agrees that it is not right to bring up a child in the lap of his parents. Natural affection makes them too tender and lax, even the wisest of them. They are not capable of punishing his faults or of seeing him brought up roughly, as he ought to be, and dangerously. They could not bear to see him riding back sweating and dusty from his training, . . . or see him on a skittish horse, or up against a tough fencer foil in hand, or with his first arquebus [a portable firearm]. But there is no way around it; if you want to make a real man of him you must certainly not spare him in his youth, and must often flout the laws of medicine. 'Let him live beneath the open sky, and dangerously' [Horace].

[C] It is not enough just to toughen his soul; his muscles must also be toughened. The soul is too hard-pressed if it is not seconded, and has too great a task doing two jobs unaided. I know how much mine labours in company with a body so tender and so sensitive, which leans so heavily on it. I often notice in my reading that in their writings my masters present, as fine examples of great spirit and the power of courage, acts that usually owe more to thickness of skin and

hardness of bones. I have seen men, women and children who are naturally so constituted that a beating is less to them than a flick of the finger is to me; who move neither tongue nor eyebrow at the blows they receive. When athletes imitate philosophers in endurance, it is strength of sinews rather than of heart.

Now, getting used to enduring work is getting used to enduring pain: 'Work hardens one against pain' [Cicero]. The boy must be broken into the pain and harshness of training, to ready him for the pain and harshness of dislocation, of colic, of cauterizings; and also of the dungeon and of torture. For he may be a prey to the last two, which at certain times threaten the good man as well as the bad. We are finding this now: whoever fights the laws threatens righteous men with the scourge and the noose.

[A] [Picking up from the paragraph about parents.] And then the authority of the tutor, which should be sovereign for the pupil, is interrupted and hampered by the presence of the parents. Add the fact that the respect the whole household pays the boy, and his awareness of the resources and status of his family, are in my opinion disadvantages at that particular age, and not trivial ones.

·CONDUCT IN CONVERSATION·

In this school of conversation among men I have often noticed a flaw: instead of learning about others we labour only to teach them about ourselves, and take more pains to peddle our wares than to acquire new ones. Silence and modesty are very good qualities in social intercourse. This boy will be trained to be sparing and thrifty about his ability when he has acquired it, and not to take exception to stupid things and wild tales that will be told in his presence—for it is unmannerly and impolite to hit at everything that is not to our taste. [C] Let him settle for correcting *himself*, and not

seem to reproach others for ·doing· things that he refuses to do, or speak against common *moeurs*: ‘A man may be wise without ostentation, without arousing envy’ [Seneca].

Let him shun these domineering and uncivil airs, and the childish ambition to try to •seem more clever by being different and—as though criticisms and novelties were the finest merchandise—to •gain a reputation by producing them. Just as it is appropriate only for great poets to use poetic licence, so also it is tolerable only for great and illustrious souls to take unusual liberties. ‘If Socrates and Aristippus have acted contrary to the rules of behaviour and custom, do not think it is all right for you to do the same: they gained that privilege by great and sublime merits’ [Cicero].

^[A] He will be taught not to enter into discussion or argument except when he sees an opponent worth wrestling with—and even then not to make all the moves that can help him but only those that can help him most. Let him be made fastidious in sorting out and selecting his arguments, and fond of relevance and thus of brevity.

Above all let him be taught to throw down his arms and surrender to truth as soon as he perceives it, whether it is in his opponent’s hands or within himself through reconsideration. For he will not be placed at a lectern to read out a prescribed text; the only thing that pledges him to a cause is his approval of it. He is not going to take up the profession in which men sell for ready cash the freedom to retract and think again. . . .

^[C] If the tutor is of my disposition, he will form the boy’s will to be a very loyal, very affectionate, very brave subject of his prince; but will cool in him any desire to attach himself to him otherwise than as a public duty. Apart from several other drawbacks, . . . when a man’s judgement has been hired and bought it is either •partial and less free or •tainted with imprudence and ingratitude. A full-time courtier cannot

have the right or the will to speak and think other than favourably of a master who has chosen him, out of so many thousands of subjects, to train and raise up with his own hand. This favour and advantage corrupt his freedom, not without some reason, and dazzle him. So we generally find that what those folk say is at variance with what anyone else says in the state, and is little to be trusted in such matters.

^[A] Let his conscience and his virtue shine forth in his speech, and be guided only by reason. Make him understand that •confessing the flaw he finds in his own argument—even if no-one else has noticed it—is an act of judgement and sincerity, which are the main qualities he pursues, and ^[C] that •obstinacy and quarrelsomeness are vulgar qualities, most often seen in the lowest souls. And that to think again and change his mind, to give up a bad case at the height of his ardour, are rare, strong and philosophical qualities.

·THE WORLD AS THE PUPIL’S BOOK·

^[A] He will be warned that when he is in company he should have his eyes everywhere; for I find that the chief places are commonly seized by the least able men, and that greatness of fortune is hardly ever combined with ability. While talk at the top end of the table was about the beauty of a tapestry or the flavour of the malmsey, I have seen many witty remarks at the other end pass unnoticed.

He will sound out the capacity of each person: a herdsman, a mason, a passer-by; he should put everything to use, and borrow from each according to his wares; for there is a use for everything; even the stupidity and weakness of others will teach him something. By noting each man’s graces and manners he will create in himself a desire for the good ones and contempt for the bad.

Put into his mind an honest spirit of inquiry about everything: he will see whatever is unusual around him:

a building, a fountain, a man, the field of an ancient battle, the place where Caesar or Charlemagne passed. . . . He will inquire into the *moeurs*, the resources, and the alliances of this prince and that. These are very enjoyable to learn about and very useful to know.

In this association with men I mean to include—and foremost—those who now live only in the memory of books. By means of histories he will associate with those great souls of the best ages. It is a waste of time, if you will: but also, if you will, it is a study of inestimable value. . . . In this field what profit he will get out of reading the *Lives* of our Plutarch! But let my guide remember the goal of his task, and let him impress on his pupil not so much the date of the fall of Carthage as the *moeurs* of Hannibal and Scipio; not so much the name of the place where Marcellus died as why his death there showed him unworthy of his duty. Let him be taught not so much •the histories as •how to make judgments relating to them.

[Now a page or more containing •remarks about the richness and commendable brevity of Plutarch's works, and •a jumble of remarks about human foolishness. Then:] This great world. . . .is the mirror we should look into, so as to know ourselves from the proper angle. In short, I want it to be the book my young scholar reads. So many humours, sects, judgments, opinions, laws and customs teach us to judge sanely of our own, and teach our judgement to acknowledge its imperfection and natural weakness, which is not an easy learning experience. So many state disturbances and changes of public fortune teach us not to regard our own as any great miracle. So many names, so many victories and conquests buried in oblivion, make it ridiculous to hope to perpetuate our name by capturing ten armed brigands and a chicken-coop known only by its fall. The pride and arrogance of so many foreign displays of pomp, the inflated

majesty of so many courts and dignities, strengthens and steadies our sight so that it can sustain the brilliance of our own without blinking. So many millions of men buried before us encourage us not to be afraid of going to join such good company in the other world. And so on.

[C] Our life, Pythagoras used to say, is like the vast throng assembled for the Olympic games. Some use their bodies to win fame from the contests; others bring merchandise to sell for profit. Some—and they are not the worst—seek no other gain than to see how and why everything is done, and to be spectators of other men's lives so that they can judge and regulate their own.

[A] The examples •he will draw from his study of human history• will illustrate all the most profitable lessons of philosophy, which ought to be the rule and measure of men's actions. He will be told. . . .

- what it is to know and not to know (which ought to be the goal of study);
- what valour, temperance, and justice are;
- what the difference is between
 - ambition and greed,
 - slavery and submission,
 - licence and liberty;
- by what signs we can recognise true and solid contentment;
- how far we should fear death, pain and shame;
- 'how we can flee from hardships and how we can endure them' [Virgil];
- what springs move us, and the causes of so many different impulses in us.

For it seems to me that the first lessons in which we steep his mind should be those that regulate his *moeurs* and his sense, that teach him to know himself and to know how to die well and to live well.

[C] Among the liberal arts, let us start with the art that liberates us. They are indeed all in some way serviceable in the regulation and practice of our lives, just as everything else is, in some way; but let us choose the one that leads there directly and professes to do so.

If we could confine our life's furnishings to their right and natural limits, we would discover that the greater part of the sciences[see Glossary] now in use are not useful to us; and that even in those that *are*, there are very useless stretches and depths that we would do better to leave alone; following what Socrates taught, we should limit our study of subjects that lack utility. [A] 'Dare to be wise. Start now. To hesitate about this is to act like the bumpkin who wants to cross but waits for the stream to dry up; time flows and will flow for ever, as an ever-rolling stream' [Horace]. . . .

After he has been taught what serves to make him wiser and better, he will be taught the elements of logic, physics, geometry, rhetoric; and he will soon get to the bottom of any branch of learning he chooses, because his judgement will already have been formed. He will be taught sometimes through discussions, sometimes through books; the tutor will sometimes provide him with verbatim passages from authors suited to his purposes; sometimes he will give him the marrow and the substance, predigested. If the tutor does not know enough books to provide him with all the fine things that would serve his purposes, he can be associated with a scholar to provide him, as the need arises, with material for him to sort out and dispense to the growing boy. . . .

·PHILOSOPHY AND ITS GOAL, VIRTUE·

It is a significant fact that in our century things have reached a state where even among men of understanding *philosophy* is an empty and fantastical name, without use or value—in common opinion and in fact. I believe that the cause of this

lies in the chop-logic sophistries that block the approaches to it. It is very wrong to portray philosophy as inaccessible to the young and as having a surly, frowning and terrifying face. Who has masked it with this false face, pale and hideous? There is nothing more cheerful, more lusty, more sprightly—I almost said more frolicsome. What it preaches is all feast and fun. A sad and gloomy expression shows that you have come to the wrong place.

The soul in which philosophy dwells should by its health make the body healthy too. It should make its tranquility and ease shine out; should use its own mould to shape the ·person's· outward bearing, thus arming it with graceful pride, with an active and joyous demeanour, and with a contented and good-natured face. . . . [C] Its goal is virtue, which is not (as the schoolmen say it is) perched at the top of a steep, rugged, inaccessible mountain. Those who have come close to it hold that on the contrary virtue lives on a beautiful plateau, fertile and flowering, from which it clearly sees all things beneath it; but you can get there, if you know the way, by paths that are shaded, grassy, sweetly flowering, smooth and gently rising like tracks in the vaults of heaven.

It is because they have not spent much time with this virtue—

this supreme, beautiful, triumphant, loving virtue, as delightful as it is courageous, a professed and implacable foe to sourness, displeasure, fear and constraint, having nature as its guide, fortune and pleasure as its companions

—that there are men who in their weakness have •fashioned this absurd portrait of it, sad, quarrelsome, sullen, threatening and scowling, and •placed it on a rock, in a solitary place, among brambles, a spectre to terrify people.

This tutor of mine, who knows that he should fill his pupil's mind with at least as much love for virtue as reverence

for it, will be able to tell him that the poets' attitudes follow those of the mob, and to get him to learn from experience that the gods make men sweat harder on the approaches to the chambers of Venus [goddess of love] than to those of Pallas [goddess of wisdom]. And when he begins to feel for himself, and is faced with a choice, as a mistress to be enjoyed, between two characters in Ariosto's poem *Orlando furioso*, namely:

- Bradamante, with her **natural** beauty, active, noble, virile though not mannish; dressed as a boy, wearing a shining helmet, and
- Angelica, her beauty soft, dainty, delicate, **artificial**; robed as a maiden with pearls in her headdress,

the tutor will think his pupil to be manly even in love if his choice is flat contrary to that of the effeminate Phrygian shepherd [Paris, who in a beauty-contest awarded the prize to Aphrodite, which amounts to choosing Angelica].

He will teach him this new lesson, that the value and height of true virtue lies in the ease, usefulness and pleasure of being virtuous, which is so far from being difficult that children master it as well as adults, and simple folk as well as clever ones. Virtue's tool is self-control, not effort. Socrates, its prime favourite, deliberately gives up effort so as to slip into the naturalness and ease of its progress. Virtue is the nursing mother of human pleasures. By making them just, it makes them sure and pure. By moderating them, it keeps them in breath and appetite. By withdrawing the pleasures that it denies to us it sharpens our appreciation of those it leaves us, and it leaves us an abundance of all those that nature consents to. . . . If virtue lacks the ordinary kind of good fortune, it rises above it, or does without it and creates a different fortune that is all its own, no longer fluctuating and unsteady. It knows how to be rich, powerful and learned, and lie on perfumed pillows. It loves life; it loves beauty, glory and health. But its own particular task is to know

how to enjoy those blessings temperately and to lose them with fortitude; a task much more noble than harsh, without which the whole course of our life is denatured, turbulent, and deformed—and then you can indeed tie *it* to those rocky paths, those brambles and those spectres.

If this pupil's disposition is so weird that

- he would rather listen to a fable than hear an account of a fine voyage or a wise conversation,
- when the drum sounds calling the youthful ardour of his comrades to arms he turns aside for the drum of a troupe of jugglers, and
- he finds it no more pleasant and sweet to return dusty and victorious from a combat than from tennis or a dance with the prize from that exercise,

then I see no remedy except for his tutor to strangle him early when no-one is looking, or apprentice him to a pastry cook somewhere—even if he is the son of a Duke—following Plato's precept that children should be placed not according to the *facultés* [here = occupations] of their father but according to the *facultés* [here = abilities] of their soul.

^[A] Since it is philosophy that teaches us to live, and since there is a lesson in it for childhood as well as for other ages, why is it not imparted to children? ^[B] 'At this moment you are moist soft clay. You ought to be taken now, *now*, and fashioned without end by the rapid wheel' [Persius]. ^[A] We are taught how to live when life is over. A hundred students have caught the pox before reaching Aristotle's lesson on temperance. ^[C] Cicero used to say that if he lived the life of two men he would not spend time studying the lyric poets. I find these chop-logic merchants even more pathetically useless. Our boy is in much more of a hurry; he owes only the first fifteen or sixteen years of his life to school-learning; the rest is owed to action. Let us use so short a time for the *necessary* teachings. ^[A] Get rid of those thorny subtleties, of

dialectics, abuses by which our lives cannot be amended. Take the simple arguments of philosophy; learn to choose and apply them at the right time; they are easier to grasp than a tale by Boccaccio. A child is capable of it as soon as he leaves his wet-nurse, much more than of learning to read and write. Philosophy has lessons for men's birth as well as for their decrepitude. . . .

·TEACHING SHOULD NOT BE GRIM·

For all this, I do not want the boy to be imprisoned. I do not want him to be given up to the anger and surly temperament of a furious schoolmaster. I do not want to spoil his mind by keeping him in torture and hard labour, as others do, for fourteen or fifteen hours a day—like a porter. ^[C] And if because of some solitary or melancholy streak he were seen to be indiscriminately addicted to the study of books, I do not think it would be good to encourage him in this. It unfits them for social intercourse and distracts them from better occupations. And how many men I have known in my time made stupid by rash greed for knowledge! Carneades was so mad about it that he no longer had time to tend to his hair or his nails.

^[A] Nor do I want to ruin his noble *moeurs* [see Glossary] by the incivility and barbarism of others. French wisdom used to be proverbially a wisdom that took hold early but had little staying power. Indeed we still see that there is nothing as fine as the little children in France; but usually they disappoint the hopes placed in them, and as grown men they have no distinction. I have heard intelligent men maintain that it is these schools they are sent to—and there are plenty of them—that make them so brutish.

For our boy a room, a garden, his table, his bed, alone, in company, morning and evening—all hours will be the same, all places will be his study; because philosophy, which (as

the shaper of judgment and *moeurs*) will be his principal study, has the privilege of being at home everywhere. When during a feast the orator Isocrates was asked to talk about his art he replied: 'What I can do, this is not the time for; what it is the time for, I cannot do.' Everyone thinks he was right about this, for presenting harangues and rhetorical debates to a company gathered for laughter and good cheer would produce too discordant a mixture. And as much could be said of all the other sciences [see Glossary]; but as for philosophy, in the part that treats of man, his duties and his tasks, it has been the common judgment of all the sages that because of the sweetness of its society it should not be excluded from feasts or from games. . . .

In this way he will certainly be less idle than others. But just as the steps we take strolling in a gallery tire us less than a third as many steps on a set journey, so too our lessons—occurring as if by chance, not bound to any time or place, and mixed in with all our activities—will slip by without being felt. Even games and exercises will be a good part of his studies; running, wrestling, ^[C] music, ^[A] dancing, hunting, handling horses and weapons. His outward grace, social ease and physical dexterity should be fashioned along with his soul. What is being trained is not a soul or a body, but a man, who must not be split into two. . . .

This education should be conducted, moreover, with severe gentleness, not as it usually is. Instead of being invited to letters, children are actually shown nothing but horror and cruelty. Away with violence and compulsion! In my view nothing so strongly depraves and stupefies a wellborn nature. If you want him to fear disgrace and punishment do not harden him to them ·by subjecting him to them·. Harden him to sweat and to cold, to wind and to sun, and to dangers that he ought to scorn. Rid him of all softness and delicacy about dress and about sleeping, eating

and drinking. Get him used to *everything*. Let him not be an effeminate pretty boy, but a boy who is fresh and vigorous.

[C] Boy, man, old man, I have always believed and judged in the same way. But among other things I have always disliked the discipline of most of our schools. If they had leaned towards ·undue· indulgence, that might have been a less harmful failure. They are a real prison for captive youth. By punishing boys for depravity before they are depraved, you make them so. Go there at lesson time: you hear nothing but screams—from tortured children and from masters drunk with rage. . . .

It is wonderful how concerned Plato is in his *Laws* with the gaiety and pastimes of the youths of his city, and how much he dwells on their races, games, singing, jumping and dancing, the control and patronage of which was entrusted in antiquity, he said, to the gods themselves: Apollo, the Muses and Minerva. He extends himself to a thousand precepts for his gymnasia. He spends little time on book-learning; and seems to recommend poetry in particular only for the ·sake of the· music.

[A] Anything idiosyncratic or strange in our *moeurs* and conduct is to be avoided as inimical to social intercourse. . . . I have seen men fly from the smell of apples more than from gunfire; others who are terrified of a mouse, or who vomit at the sight of cream. . . . Some occult property may be involved in this, but in my opinion anyone who got onto this young enough could stamp it out.

One victory my education has achieved over me (admittedly not without some trouble) is that except for beer my appetite adapts itself indiscriminately to everything that people consume. While the body is still supple, it should for that reason be made pliant to all manners and customs. Provided his appetites and his will can be kept in check, a young man should be suited to all nations and compa-

nies, even to dissoluteness and excess if the need arises. [Montaigne devotes a page to •expanding this last point, emphasising (with a quotation from Seneca) the difference between wanting to act badly and knowing how to do so, and •presenting a rapid-fire series of quotations all addressed to the idea that philosophising is a manner of living rather than of learning or talking. Then:]

[C] My pupil will not so much *say* his lesson as *do* it. He will repeat it in his actions. [A] We will see if there is prudence in his enterprises, if there is goodness and justice in his conduct, [C] if there is judgment and grace in his speaking, fortitude in his illnesses, modesty in his games, temperance in his pleasures, order in his economy, [A] unconcern in his tastes, whether of flesh or fish, wine or water. ‘Who regards his learning as the law of his life, not a means of showing off; who obeys himself and submits to his own injunctions’ [Cicero]. The true mirror of our thinking is the course of our lives. . . .

·DETHRONING RHETORIC·

The ·social· world is nothing but chatter; I never see a man who does not say more than he should rather than less. Yet half our life is wasted on that. They keep us for

- four or five years learning the meanings of words and stringing them into sentences,
- as many more in learning how to arrange them into a long composition, divided into four or five parts, then
- another five years, at least, learning how to mix and weave them concisely into verbal subtleties.

Let us leave that to those who make a living doing it. . . .

Provided our pupil is well equipped with substance, words will follow only too easily; if they will not come, he will drag them out. I hear people who excuse themselves for not being able to express themselves, pretending that their heads are

full of many fine things that they cannot deliver for lack of eloquence. That is rubbish. Do you know what in my opinion that ·stuff in their heads· is? It consists of shadows that come to them from some shapeless conceptions that they cannot deliver outwardly because they cannot untangle and clarify them within themselves. They don't themselves yet know what it¹—·the stuff in their heads·—means. Just watch them stammer on the point of giving birth to it; you will judge that they are labouring not for delivery [C] but for conception, and [A] that they are only licking this imperfect matter into shape. For my part I maintain—[C] and Socrates makes it a rule—[A] that whoever has a vivid and clear thought in his mind will express it, even ·if necessary· in the Bergamask dialect; or, if he is dumb, by signs. 'Once you have mastered the things, the words will come freely' [Horace]. And as another said just as poetically in his prose: 'When things have taken hold of the mind, words come thick and fast' [Seneca]; [C] and another: 'The things themselves carry the words along' [Cicero].

[A] He knows nothing of ablatives, conjunctives, substantives, or grammar; nor does his footman or a Petit-Pont fishwife, yet they will talk your ear off, if you like, and will probably stumble as little over the rules of their language as the best master of arts in France. He does not know rhetoric, or how in a preface to capture the benevolence of the gentle reader; nor does he care to know it. The fact is that all that fine painting is easily eclipsed by the light of a simple natural truth. . . . [There follow three ancient anecdotes in which rhetoric is laughed at. Then:]

Whether introducing or summing up, a useful saying or a pithy remark is always in season. [C] If it does not suit what comes after it or what comes before, it is good in itself.

[A] I am not one of those who think that good rhythm makes a good poem. Let him lengthen a short syllable if he wants to; it does not matter. If the inventions are happy and wit and judgement have done their work well, I shall say: 'There is a good poet, but a bad versifier.' 'He has the flair, though his verses are harsh' [Horace]. Let his work, says Horace, lose all its seams and measures—

[B] 'Take away rhythm and measure; change the order of the words putting the first last and the last first; you will still find the poet in those scattered remains.'

—[A] he will still not belie himself for all that; the very fragments will be beautiful. That is what Menander replied when the day was near for his promised comedy and he was chided for not having yet set his hand to it: 'It is composed and ready; it remains only to add the verses.' Having thought the things through and arranged them in his mind, he took little account of the rest. Since Ronsard and Du Bellay have brought renown to our French poetry, I don't see any apprentice—however minor—who does not swell his words and arrange his rhythms almost as they do. [C] 'More sound than sense' [Seneca]. [A] Common people think there were never so many poets. But just as it has been easy for them to copy their rhymes, so they fall far short of imitating the rich descriptions of the one and the delicate inventions of the other.

[Now more than a page of further denigration of showy rhetoric. Then:] [C] Just as in dress it is pettiness to seek attention by some peculiar or unusual fashion, so too in speech the search for novel phrases and little-known words comes from a schoolmasterish ambition that is just puerile. If only I could limit myself to words used in the markets of Paris! The grammarian Aristophanes did not know what

¹ Taking *s'entendent* to be a slip for *l'entendent*.

he was talking about when he criticized Epicurus for his simple words and for the aim of his oratorical art, which was nothing but clarity of language.

Imitating speech is easy: it can be quickly picked up by an entire people; imitating judgement and invention does not come so fast. Most readers when they find a similar robe very wrongly think they have hold of a similar body. Strength or sinews are not borrowed; the attire and the cloak are borrowed.

Most of the people whose company I keep talk like these Essays; I do not know whether they think like them.

^[A] Athenians (says Plato) give their attention to fullness and elegance in speech, Spartans to brevity, Cretans to fertility of thought rather than of language—and they are the best. Zeno said he had two sorts of followers: •those he called *philologous*, who cared for real learning and were his favourites, and •those he called *logophilous*, who cared only for language. [This is a pun involving the two senses of *logos* in Greek—‘reason’ and ‘word’.] This is not to deny that speaking well is a beautiful and fine thing; but it is not as fine as it is made out to be, and it makes me angry that our whole life is taken up by it. I would want first to know my own language and that of the neighbours I have regular dealings with.

·LATIN AS A FIRST LANGUAGE·

There is no doubt that Greek and Latin are handsome and great arrangements; but they are bought too dear. I will tell you here about a way of getting them that is cheaper than the usual one; it was tried out on me. Anyone who wants to can use it.

My late father, having made all the inquiries a man can make among men of learning and understanding about a superlative form of education, became aware of the drawbacks of the current system; he was told that the sole reason why

we cannot attain the greatness of soul and knowledge of the ancient Greeks and Romans was the length of time we spend learning languages, ^[C] which cost *them* nothing. ^[A] I do not believe that to be the only reason. Anyway, the expedient my father hit upon was to place me, while still at the breast and before the first loosening of my tongue, in the care of a German, who has since died a famous doctor in France, wholly ignorant of our language and very well versed in Latin. This man, who had been sent for expressly and was very highly paid, had me continuously on his hands. There were also two others with him, less learned, to attend me and relieve him. They spoke to me only in Latin. As for the rest of my father’s household, it was an inviolable rule that neither he nor my mother nor a manservant nor a housemaid ever uttered in my presence anything except such words of Latin as each had learned in order to chat with me.

It is wonderful how each of them profited from this. My father and my mother in this way learned enough Latin to understand it and became fluent enough to speak it when they had to, as did the servants who were most attached to my service. Altogether, we became so Latinised that it spilled over into the neighbouring villages, where many tools and artisans still have Latin names that have taken root through usage. As for me, I was more than six years old before I knew any more French or Perigordian than I knew Arabic. And so without art, without books, without grammar or rules, without whips and without tears I had learned a Latin quite as pure as what my schoolmaster knew—for I could not have corrupted it or contaminated it. A test that other boys do in the colleges by translating from *French* into Latin they had to give me by requiring me to turn some *bad Latin* into good. ·At the Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux, where I was sent after studying at home·, I had as private tutors Nicholas Grouchy (who wrote *De comitiis Romanorum*), Guillaume Guerente

(who wrote a commentary on Aristotle), George Buchanan, that great Scottish poet, and Marc-Antoine Muret, whom France and Italy recognise as the best orator of his time; they have often told me that as a child I had that language so fluent and so ready that they were afraid to approach me. Buchanan, whom I subsequently met in the retinue of the late Marshal de Brissac, told me that he was writing a book on educating children and was taking my education as his model, for he was then tutoring the Count de Brissac whom we have since seen so valiant and brave.

As for Greek, of which I have scarcely any knowledge, my father planned to have it taught to me artificially, but in a new way, as a sort of debate or sport. We volleyed our declensions back and forth, like those who learn arithmetic and geometry through certain board-games. For among other things he had been advised to enable me to love knowledge and duty by my own choice, and to educate my soul in all gentleness and freedom, without forcing my will. He did this so religiously that—

because some people hold that it disturbs the tender brains of children to wake them in the morning with a jolt, snatching them suddenly and violently out of their sleep, in which they are much more deeply submerged than we are

—he had me woken up by the sound of some musical instrument; and I always had a man to do this for me.

This example will suffice to judge all the rest by, and also to commend the prudence and affection of so good a father, who is not to be blamed if his wonderful cultivation did not produce a harvest worthy of it. There were two causes for that, the first being the sterile and unfit soil. My health was sound and solid, and my nature gentle and tractable, but I was also so sluggish, lax and drowsy that they could not drag me out of my idleness even to make me play. Whatever I saw

I saw well, and beneath this inert appearance I nourished bold ideas and opinions in advance of my age. I had a slow mind that would go only as far as it was led, a slow understanding, a weak imagination, and an incredible lack of memory. No wonder he could get nothing worthwhile from all this!

Secondly, just as people impelled by frantic desire to be cured will try any sort of advice, so that good man—terrified of failing in something so close to his heart—at last let himself be carried away by the common opinion. . . ., fell in line with standard practice, and sent me when I was about six to the Collège de Guyenne, then very flourishing and the best in France. (He no longer had about him the men who had given him those first educational ideas, which he had brought back from Italy.) It is impossible to add anything to the care he took there over choosing competent personal tutors for me and over all the other details of my education, in which he held out for certain particular practices contrary to school usage. But for all that, it was still school. My Latin promptly degenerated, and since then I have lost all use of it from lack of practice. And the only thing this novel education of mine did for me was to have me skipped immediately into the upper classes. When I left College at thirteen I had ‘completed the course’ (as they put it), in truth without any benefit that I can put in evidence now.

·READING FOR PLEASURE·

My first taste for books arose from my pleasure in the fables of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*; when I was about seven or eight I would sneak away from any other pleasure to read them, Latin being my mother-tongue and this being the easiest book I knew and the one best suited by its content to my tender age.

(As for the likes of *Lancelot du lac*, *Amadis*, *Huon de Bordeaux* and such trashy books that children spend time on, I did not even know their titles—and still do not know their substance—so exact was the way I was taught.)

This love for Ovid made me more casual about studying my set books. I was particularly lucky at this stage to have an understanding tutor who adroitly went along with this passion and others like it; for I read in succession Virgil's *Aeneid*, then Terence, then Plautus and the Italian comedies, always lured on by the charm of the subject. (If he had been so foolish as to stop this way of doing things, I think I would have acquired from school nothing but a hatred for books, as do most of our nobility.) He went about it cleverly, pretending not to see what was going on. He whetted my appetite, letting me devour such books only in secret, while gently keeping me at work on my prescribed lessons. For the chief qualities my father sought in those he put in charge of me were good nature and an easy-going disposition. And my own disposition had no vices except inertia and laziness. The danger was not that I should do wrong but that I should do nothing. Nobody forecast that I would become bad, only useless; they foresaw loafing, not knavery.

^[C] I am aware that that is how it has turned out. The complaints that ring in my ears are like this:

- Lazy!
- Cool in the duties of friendship and kinship, and in public duties!
- Too fond of his own opinions!
- Too apt to look down on others!

Even the most insulting accusers do not say

- Why did he take that? or
- Why hasn't he paid what he owes?

but rather

- Why doesn't he cancel the debt that is owed to him?
- Why doesn't he give more?

I would be glad if people found me to be wanting only in such works of supererogation [i.e. actions that go beyond—are in a sense better than—what is morally required]. But it is wrong for them to *demand* what I do not owe—much more rigorously than they demand of themselves what they *do* owe! By blaming me for not performing it, they turn the deed into one which, if I had performed it, would not have gratified them and would not have brought me the gratitude I deserved. Also, any active generosity on my part should have greater weight because I have never been the passive recipient of any. I may dispose of my fortune the more freely the more it is mine; and of *myself* the more *I* am mine. Still, if I were a great polisher of my actions I might well beat off such reproaches, informing some of these people that their annoyance comes not so much from my not doing enough for them as from my inability to do enough *more*.

[Picking up from '... loafing, not knavery'.] ^[A] Nevertheless, my soul had strong stirrings of its own, and confident and open judgements on topics that it knew, quietly digesting them without telling anyone else. Among other things, I believe that it was incapable of surrendering to force and violence.

[Then a ^[B]-tagged passage about young Montaigne's precocious talents as an actor, followed by:] ^[B] I have always held that those who condemn such entertainments are unreasonable, and that those who refuse to let deserving troupes of actors into our self-governing towns—begrudging the people these public pleasures—are unjust. Good governments take care to assemble the citizens, bring them together for sports and games just as they do for solemn worship: sociability and friendliness are increased by this. . . .

[A] Returning now to my subject: there is nothing like arousing appetite and affection; otherwise you simply produce asses loaded with books. They are whipped into retaining a pocketful of learning; but if learning is to do us any good it must not merely lodge within us; we must marry it.

27. It is folly to judge the true and the false from our own capacities

[A] It is not perhaps without reason that we attribute to simple-mindedness and ignorance a readiness to believe and be convinced. For it seems to me that I once learned that belief was a kind of impression stamped on our soul; and the softer and less resistant the soul was, the easier it was to print anything on it: [C] 'Just as a weight placed on a balance must weigh it down, so the mind must yield to evident things' [Cicero]. The more empty and free of counterweights a soul is, the more easily it gives beneath the weight of the first persuasive argument. [A] That is why children, common people, women and the sick are more apt to be led by the ears.

But then, on the other hand, it is stupid presumption to despise and condemn as false everything that seems to us improbable, a vice that is widespread among those who think they have some uncommon ability.

I used to do that once: whenever I heard tell of ghosts walking, or of prophecies, enchantments, sorcery, or some other tale that I could not get my teeth into. . . . I felt compassion for the wretched folk who were taken in by these follies. Now I find that I was at least as pitiable. Not that experience has since shown me anything surpassing my first beliefs (and not for lack of curiosity on my part),

but reason has taught me •that to condemn something thus dogmatically as false and impossible is to claim the privilege of knowing the bounds and limits of God's will and of the power of our mother nature; and •that there is no greater folly in the world than reducing these things to the measure of our own capacity and competence.

If we describe as 'prodigies' or 'miracles' anything that our reason cannot reach, how many of these are continually coming into view! Let us consider through what clouds, and how gropingly, we are led to our acquaintance with most of the things we hold in our hands; and we will certainly find that what stops them from being strange to us is not knowledge but familiarity, . . . and that if they were presented to us for the first time we would find them at least as incredible as any others [and a quotation from Lucretius saying the same thing].

He who had never seen a river thought that the first one he encountered was the ocean; and we think that the biggest things we have encountered are the utmost that nature produces in that category. [A quotation from Lucretius making the same point, and then:] [C] 'When we grow used to seeing anything it accustoms our minds to it and we cease to be astonished by it; we never seek the causes of things like that' [Cicero]. What makes us seek the causes of things is not so much their grandeur as their novelty.

[A] We should judge the infinite power of nature with more reverence and more awareness of our own ignorance and weakness. How many improbable things have been testified to by trustworthy people! If we cannot bring ourselves to believe them, we should leave them undecided; for condemning them as impossible is claiming—with rash presumption—that we know the limits of possibility. [C] If people rightly understood the difference between the impossible and the unusual, and between what is contrary to the orderly course

of nature and what is contrary to the common opinion of men, so that they neither rashly believed nor glibly disbelieved, they would be observing Chilo's rule: *Nothing in excess*.

[A] When we read in Froissart •that the count of Foix knew the following morning in Béarn of the defeat of King John of Castille at Juberother, and •*how* he is alleged to have known this, we can laugh at that; and also at the story our annals tell, that on the very day when King Philip-Augustus died at Mante, Pope Honorius celebrated a public requiem for him and ordered the same to be done throughout Italy; for the authority of such witnesses is perhaps not high enough to keep us in check.

But wait! When Plutarch. . . . says that he knows with certain knowledge that

in the time of Domitian, the news of the battle lost by Antonius in Germany was publicly announced in Rome, several days' journey away, and spread through all the world on the very day that it was lost;

and when Caesar maintains that

often the news of an event actually preceded the event itself,

shall we say that these simple folk let themselves be hoaxed like the common herd because they were not clear-sighted as we are?

Is there anything more delicate, clear-cut and alert than the judgement of Pliny when he sees fit to put it into play? anything further from triviality? Leaving aside the excellence of his knowledge, which I count for less, in which of those two qualities do we surpass him? Yet every little schoolboy convicts him of lying, and lectures him about the march of nature's handiwork.

When we read in Bouchet about the miracles done by the relics of Saint Hilary, let it go; his credit is not great enough to take away our right to challenge him; but to condemn

wholesale all similar stories seems to me to be impudent in the extreme. The great saint Augustine testifies that he saw

- a blind child recover its sight on the relics of Saint Gervais and Saint Protasius at Milan;
- a woman in Carthage cured of cancer by a sign of the cross that a newly baptised woman made over her;
- his friend Hesperius, whose house was infested by spirits, driving them off with a little soil taken from our Lord's sepulchre, and
- that same soil, later carried to church, promptly curing a paralytic;
- a long-blind woman recovering her sight when she rubbed her eyes with flowers that she had touched Saint Stephen's shrine with during a procession;

and many other miracles at which he says he was personally present. What shall we to accuse him of—him and the two holy bishops, Aurelius and Maximinus, whom he calls on as witnesses? Will it be •(i)• ignorance, simple-mindedness, credulity, or •(ii)• knavery and imposture? Is any man in our century so impudent as to think himself comparable with them for •(ii)• virtue and piety, or for •(i)• knowledge, judgement and ability? [C] 'Who, even if they gave no reasons, would crush me by their mere authority' [Cicero].

[A] It is a dangerous and fateful presumption—besides the absurd rashness it implies—to disdain what we do not understand. For after you have used that fine understanding of yours to establish •the limits of truth and error, and it then turns out you *must* believe some things even stranger than the ones you reject, you are obliged from then on to abandon •them.

Now, what seems to me to bring so much disorder into our consciences, in these religious troubles that we are in, is this •partial• surrender of their beliefs by Catholics. They see themselves as moderate and understanding when they

yield to their enemies some of the disputed articles of faith. They do not see what an advantage you give an adversary when you begin to yield ground, or how that encourages him to press his attack; but apart from that, the articles they select as being the least weighty are sometimes extremely important. We should either totally submit to the authority of our ecclesiastical government or totally release ourselves from it. It is not for us to decide what part of it to obey.

Moreover I can say this because I tried it and found that that was the upshot. Having previously exercised this freedom of personal choice and selection, neglecting certain details in the observances of our Church that seem more empty or more strange than the rest, and then coming to discuss them with learned men, I found that those things have a massive and very solid foundation, and that it is only stupidity and ignorance that make us receive them with less reverence than the rest.

Why do we not remember how much we sense contradiction even within our own judgement, and how many things were articles of faith for us yesterday that are fables for us today? Vainglory (leading us to stick our noses into everything) and curiosity (forbidding us to leave anything unresolved and undecided) are the scourges of our soul.

28. Friendship

[In the original, this essay concerns *l'amitié*, a word which in Montaigne's day covered a wide range of affectionate relationships.]

[A] As I was considering the way a painter I employ goes about his business, I felt a desire to copy him. He chooses

the best place, the middle of each wall, on which to put a picture executed with all his skill; and fills the empty space all around it with grotesques, which are fantastic paintings whose only charm is their variety and strangeness. And what in truth are these things of mine, these essays, if not grotesques, monstrous bodies pieced together from a variety of limbs, without any definite shape, having no order, sequence, or proportion except by accident? . . .

I match my painter in this second part, but I fall short of him in the first and better part; for my ability does not go so far as to venture to undertake a rich polished picture fashioned according to the rules of art. So I decided to borrow one from Etienne de La Boétie, which will bring honour to the rest of this work.¹ It is a **discourse** to which he gave the title 'Voluntary Servitude', but those who did not know this have very fitly rebaptised it as 'Against One Man'. He wrote it in his early youth as a kind of *essai* [see Glossary] in honour of freedom against tyrants. It has long circulated among men of understanding—not without great and well-merited commendation, for it is a fine thing, and as full as it could possibly be. Still, it is far from being the best he could do; if at the more mature age when I knew him he had adopted a plan like mine of writing down his thoughts, we would have seen many rare things bringing us very close to the glory of antiquity; for, particularly in the matter of natural gifts, I know no-one comparable with him. But nothing of his survives apart from this treatise (and that by chance; I think he never saw it after it left his hands) and some observations on that Edict of January,² made famous by our civil wars, which will perhaps find their place elsewhere. That is all I have been able to recover of his

¹ La Boétie's dates are 1530–63. Montaigne's: 1533–92.

² A decree of limited tolerance towards protestants, issued in January 1562 by Catherine de' Medici, regent of France.

literary remains—^[C] I, the heir to whom, with death on his lips, he so lovingly willed his books and his papers—^[A] apart from the slim volume of his works that I have had published.

I am especially indebted to **this discourse**, because it led to our meeting for the first time. For it was shown to me long before I met him, and gave me my first knowledge of his name; thus putting us on the path towards the friendship that we fostered, as long as God willed, so entire and so perfect that you will find few parallels in the whole of literature and no trace of it among men of today. So much coming-together is needed to build up such a friendship that it is a big thing if fortune can do it once in three centuries.

Nature seems to have put us on the path to society more than to anything else. ^[C] And Aristotle says that good legislators have had more care for friendship than for justice. ^[A] Now, the ultimate point in society's perfection is this [i.e. friendship]. ^[C] For in general all associations that are forged and fostered by pleasure or profit, by public or private needs, are less beautiful and noble—and less *friendships*—to the extent that they throw into the mix some cause and object and reward other than friendship itself. Nor do those four ancient species of love—natural, social, hospitable and erotic—come up to real friendship, either separately or together.

·BETWEEN MEMBERS OF THE SAME FAMILY·

^[A] From children towards fathers it is rather *respect*. Friendship is fostered by free and open communication, which cannot exist between them because of they are too unequal, and might interfere with the duties of nature, because

•fathers' secret thoughts cannot all be shared with

their children for fear of begetting an unbecoming intimacy; and

•the counsels and corrections that are one of the chief duties of friendship cannot be offered by children to their fathers. . . .

Truly *brother* is a beautiful name and full of affection, which is why he and I made our alliance a brotherhood. But the solder of brotherhood is enormously melted and weakened by the complexities of ownership, the division of property, one brother's wealth being the other's poverty. Since brothers have to advance their careers along the same path and at the same speed, it is inevitable that they often jostle and bump into each other. Moreover, why should there be found between them the harmony and kinship that engender these true and perfect friendships? Father and son can have totally different characters; so can brothers. 'He is my son, he is my kinsman, but he is wild' or '. . . but he is wicked' or '. . . but he is a fool!' And to the extent that they are loving relationships commanded by the law and the bonds of nature, there is less of our own choice and *liberté volontaire*.¹ Our *liberté volontaire* produces nothing more properly its own than affection and friendship. It is not that I haven't experienced all the friendship that can exist in that situation, having had the best most indulgent father who ever was, even into extreme old age, and coming from a family famous and exemplary from father to son in the matter of brotherly harmony: ^[B] 'And myself known for my fatherly concern for my brothers' [Horace].

·BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN·

^[A] You cannot compare it—i.e. the true friendship I am talking about—with affection for women, even though it is born

¹ Conservatively translated this = 'voluntary freedom'; whatever Montaigne means by that, it is presumably a counterpart to La Boétie's *Servitude volontaire* = 'voluntary servitude'.

of our own choice, or •put them in the same category. I admit that the fire of passion—‘I am not unknown to the goddess who concocts the bitter-sweet anguish of love’ [Catullus]—is more active, more scorching and more intense. But it is an impetuous and fickle fire, fluctuating and variable, a feverish fire, subject to attacks and relapses, which gets hold of only a corner of us. In friendship it is a general universal warmth, also moderate and even, a constant and settled warmth, all gentleness and smoothness with nothing bitter and biting about it. What is more, •sexual• love is nothing but a frantic desire for something that escapes us: ‘Like the hunter who chases the hare through heat and cold, over hill and dale, yet thinks nothing of it once he has bagged it; only while it flees does he pound after it’ [Ariosto]. As soon as it enters the territory of friendship (i.e. in the agreement of wills) it languishes and grows faint. Because it has a **fleshly** end, it is subject to satiety, so that enjoyment of it destroys it. Friendship on the other hand is enjoyed in proportion to the desire for it; it is bred, nourished and increased only when enjoyed, because it is **spiritual**, and the soul becomes better at it through practice. Under this perfect friendship those fleeting passions also once found a place in me (not to mention *him*, who in his verses admits to all too many of them). So those two emotions came into me, each aware of the other; but never to be compared, the first keeping its course in a proud and lofty flight, disdainfully watching the other exhausting itself far below.

As for marriage, for one thing it is a bargain where only the entrance is free, its continuance being constrained and forced, depending on things outside our will; and a bargain ordinarily made for other purposes. For another, a thousand tangled threads come into it from outside, enough to break the continuity and trouble the course of a lively affection; whereas in a friendship there are no dealings or business

with anything outside the friendship. Besides, to tell the truth, the ordinary capacity of women is inadequate for the communion and fellowship that sustain this sacred bond, nor does their soul seem firm enough to endure the strain of such a tight and durable knot. And indeed if it were not for that—

if it were possible to fashion such a willing and free relationship, where not only the souls had this full enjoyment but the bodies would also share in the union, ^[C] i.e. where the whole man [here = ‘human being’] was involved

—^[A] it is certain that the resulting friendship would be fuller and more complete. But there has never yet been an example of the •female• sex achieving this, ^[C] and by the common agreement of the ancient schools it is excluded from it.

•BETWEEN OLD MEN AND YOUTHS•

^[A] And that other licence of the Greeks is rightly abhorred by our *mœurs*. ^[C] Moreover, since it involved, according to their practice, such a necessary difference of age and divergence of roles between the lovers, it did not correspond closely enough to the perfect union and harmony that I am asking for here. ‘What is this friendship-love? Why does no-one ever love an ugly youth or a handsome old man?’ [Cicero]. For even the picture the Academy paints of it will not contradict me, I think, when I say the following about it.

•The first frenzy inspired by Venus’s son •Cupid• in the lover’s heart at the sight of the flower of tender youth—in which they allow all the excessive and passionate acts that an immoderate ardour can produce—was simply based on **physical beauty**, a false image of **bodily generation** [here = ‘sexual activity’]. For it could not have been based on *l’esprit* [here =? ‘the intellect’], which had yet to show itself—which was still being born, before the age of budding.

•If this frenzy seized a base heart, the means of his courtship were riches, presents, favours in advancement to high office, and other such base merchandise, which were generally condemned.

•If it fell on a nobler heart, the means were likewise nobler: •instruction in philosophy, •lessons teaching reverence for religion, obedience to the law and dying for the good of one's country, •examples of valour, wisdom, justice. The lover worked to make himself acceptable by the grace and beauty of his soul, that of his body having long since faded, and hoping by this mental fellowship to establish a firmer and more durable pact.

When this courtship achieved its effect—

eventually; for while they do not require the lover to devote time and discretion to his enterprise they strictly require it of the loved one, because he had to reach a judgement about an internal beauty that is hard to recognize and hidden from discovery

—there was then born in the loved one the desire for **spiritual conception** through the medium of **spiritual beauty**. This was the main thing here; corporeal beauty secondary and contingent—quite the opposite of the lover. For this reason they prefer the loved one and show that the gods also prefer him; and they severely rebuke the poet Aeschylus for having given, in the love of Achilles and Patroclus, the role of the lover to Achilles, who was in the first beardless bloom of his youth, and the handsomest of all the Greeks.

Once this general communion was established, with the stronger and worthier part of it exercising its functions and predominating, they say that it produced fruits very useful for private and public life; that it was the strength of the countries where it was an accepted practice, and the main defence of equity and liberty. Witness the salutary loves of Hermodius and Aristogeiton. So they call it sacred and

divine, and reckon that the hostility to it comes only from the violence of tyrants and the cowardice of the common people. In short, all that can be conceded to the Academy is that it was a love ending in friendship—which pretty well fits the Stoic definition of love: 'Love is the attempt to form a friendship inspired by beauty' [Cicero].

·BETWEEN MONTAIGNE AND LA BOÉTIE·

the next sentence: *Je revien à ma description, de façon plus equitable et plus equable.*

apparently meaning: I return to my description in a more balanced and calm manner.

what Montaigne may have meant: I return to my description of a more balanced and calm kind of friendship.

'Only what has been strengthened and matured by judgment and the passage of time should be judged to be a friendship' [Cicero].

[A] Moreover what we normally call friends and friendships are only acquaintances and familiar relationships created by some chance or convenience, by means of which our souls enter into conversation. In the friendship I am talking about, souls mingle and blend with each other so completely that they erase the seam joining them and cannot find it again. If you press me to say why I loved him, I cannot reply [C] except by saying: 'Because it was he, because it was I.'

[A] Beyond all my reasoning, beyond anything I can say specifically about it, there was I know not what inexplicable and fateful force mediating this union.

[C] We were seeking each other before we met, because of the reports we heard of each other, which had more effect on our affection than was reasonable from what the reports said; I think it was by some ordinance of heaven. We embraced each other by our names. And at our first meeting, which chanced to be at a great crowded town-festival, we found

ourselves so taken with each other, so known to each other and so bound together, that from then on nothing was as close to us as we were to each other. He wrote an excellent Latin satire, which has been published, in which he excuses and explains the suddenness of our mutual understanding, which so quickly reached perfection. Having so short a period to last, having begun so late—for we were both grown men, he a few years older than I—it had no time to waste.¹ It did not have to follow the pattern of mild and regular friendships that need so many precautions in the form of long preliminary association. This friendship has no model but itself, no comparison with anything but itself.

[Picking up from ‘...mediating this union.’] ^[A] There is no one special consideration—nor two nor three nor four nor a thousand of them—but rather I know not what quintessence of this whole mixture that seized my will and brought it to plunge into his and lose itself, ^[C] and that seized his will and brought it to plunge into mine and lose itself, with equal hunger and rivalry. ^[A] I say ‘lose’, in truth; for we kept nothing back; nothing was his or mine.

·THE FUSION, ESPECIALLY OF WILLS·

After the condemnation of Tiberius Gracchus, the Roman consuls were prosecuting those who had been in his confidence; and Laelius asked Caius Blossius, Gracchus’s closest friend, how much he would have done for him. He replied:

‘Anything.’

‘What, anything? What if **he ordered you** to set fire to our temples?’

‘He would never have ordered me to do that.’

‘But what if he had?’

‘I would have obeyed.’

If he was such a perfect friend of Gracchus as the histories say, he had no need to provoke the consuls with that last rash assertion, and ought not to have abandoned the certainty he had of Gracchus’s will. Still, those who condemn his reply as seditious do not fully understand this mystery ·of friendship· and do not grasp that he had Gracchus’s intentions up his sleeve,

end of the sentence: *et par puissance et par cognoissance.*

literally meaning: both by power and by knowledge.

Montaigne’s point: ??

^[C] They were more friends than citizens; friends ·of one another· more than friends or foes of their country, or than friends of ambition and civil strife. Having perfectly committed themselves to one other, each had a perfect hold on the reins of the other’s inclination; assume that this team was guided by virtue and led by reason (without which it could not be harnessed together), and Blossius’ reply is what it should have been. If their actions flew off in different directions they were by my measure neither friends of each other nor friends to themselves.

Moreover ^[A] that reply sounds no better than mine would if I were asked ‘If **your will ordered you** to kill your daughter would you kill her?’ and I said Yes. For that is no witness that I would consent to do so, because I do not doubt what my will is, any more than I doubt the will of such a friend. All the arguments in the world have no power to dislodge me from my certainty about my friend’s intentions and decisions. Not one of his actions could be set before me, no matter what it looked like, without my immediately finding its motive. Our souls pulled together in such unity, and regarded each other with such ardent affection—with a like affection revealing

¹ La Boétie died about four years after he and Montaigne first met.

themselves to each other right down to the very core—that not only did I know his soul as well as I knew my own but I would certainly have trusted myself to him more readily than to myself.

Do not let those other common friendships be placed in this rank. I have as much acquaintance with them as the next man, including ones that are the most perfect of that kind. ^[B] But I advise you not to confuse the rules of the two; you would be making a mistake. In those other friendships one must walk, bridle in hand, with prudence and caution; the bond is not tied in such a way that there is no question of doubting it. ‘Love him’ Chilo used to say ‘as if you are to hate him some day; hate him as if you are to love him.’ That precept, which is so detestable in this sovereign and ruling friendship ‘I have been talking about’, is healthy in the conduct of ordinary ^[C] and customary friendships, in regard to which we must employ the remark that Aristotle often repeated: ‘O my friends, there is no friend.’

^[A] In this noble relationship the services and benefits that other friendships feed on do not even merit being taken into account. That is because of the total fusion of our wills. For just as my friendship toward myself is not increased—no matter what the Stoics say—by the help I give myself in time of need; and just as I feel no gratitude for the service do myself; so too the union of such friends, being truly perfect, makes them lose the sense of such duties, to hate and banish from between them these words of separation and distinctness: ‘benefit’, ‘obligation’, ‘gratitude’, ‘request’, ‘thanks’, and the like. Everything actually being in common between them—wills, thoughts, judgments, goods, wives, children, honour and life—^[C] and their relationship being that of one soul in two bodies, according to Aristotle’s very apt definition, ^[A] there can be neither lending nor giving between them. That is why lawmakers, so as to honour marriage with

some imagined resemblance to this divine union, forbid gifts between husband and wife, wanting to imply by this that everything should belong to each of them and that they have nothing to divide and split between them.

In a friendship of the kind of am talking about, if one could give to the other it would be the one who received the benefit who obliged his companion. Because each of them seeks above all to benefit the other, the one who furnishes the means and the occasion for this is in fact the liberal one, giving his friend the satisfaction of doing for him what he most wants to do. [Montaigne illustrates this with an obscure quotation from Diogenes and an anecdote from ancient Greece, and then turns to a different aspect of the ideal kind of friendship he is writing about.]

Common friendships can be divided up: one may love in this one his beauty, in that one his easy-going *moeurs*, in another generosity, in another his role as a father, in another his role as a brother, and so on. But this friendship that takes possession of the soul and reigns there supreme cannot possibly be double. ^[C] If two asked for help at the same time, which would you run to? If they asked for conflicting favours, how would you decide on priority? If one entrusted to your silence something it would be useful for the other to know, how would you extricate yourself? A single dominant friendship dissolves all other obligations. The secret that I have sworn to reveal to no other, I can without perjury reveal to him who is not another; he is myself. It is a great enough miracle to be doubled; those who talk about tripling themselves do not realise the loftiness of the thing. Nothing that can be matched is extreme. And anyone who supposes that of two men I love each as much as the other, and that they love each other and me as much as I love them, is multiplying into a group the most singular and unified of all things, of which even one is the rarest thing in the world. . . .

In alliances that get hold of us only by one end we need to watch only for imperfections that specifically concern that end. It cannot matter to me what the religion of my doctor or my lawyer is: that consideration has nothing in common with the friendly services they owe to me. And in domestic relations with my servants I have the same attitude. I scarcely inquire in the chastity of my footman; I try to find out if he is diligent. I am less afraid of a gambling mule-driver than of a weak one, or of a profane cook than an incompetent one. I do not make it my business to tell the world how to behave—enough others do that—but how I behave in it: ‘This is what I do: do what serves you’ [Terence]. For the intimate company of my table I choose the agreeable not the wise; in my bed, beauty before virtue; in social conversation, ability—even without integrity. And so on.

•HOW I MISS HIM!•

[A] . . . I would like to address this to people who have experienced what I am talking about; but knowing how far removed from common practice such a friendship is—and how rare it is—I do not expect to find any good judge of it. For even the writings that antiquity has left us on this subject seem to me weak compared to what I feel. This is a matter in which the actuality surpasses even the precepts of philosophy: ‘While I am in my right mind, there is nothing I will compare with a delightful friend’ [Horace].

If I compare •all the rest of my life—

although by the grace of God I have lived it sweetly and easily, exempt (save for the death of such a friend) from grievous affliction, in full tranquility of mind, settling for the natural endowments I was born with and not looking for others

—to •the four years that were granted me to enjoy the sweet company and fellowship of that man, it is nothing but smoke,

nothing but a dark and dreary night. Since the day when I lost him—‘which I shall ever recall with pain, ever with honour (since the gods ordained it so)’ [Virgil]—I merely drag wearily on. Even the pleasures that come my way—rather than consoling me they redouble my grief for his loss. We went halves in everything; it seems to me that I am robbing him of his share: ‘Nor is it right for me to enjoy pleasures, I decided, while he who shared life with me is gone’ [Terence]. I was already so formed and accustomed to everywhere being

the next word: *deuxiesme*

translated by Florio: two

by Cotton: his double

by Frame: a second self

by Screech: one of two

that I now seem to be no more than a half. [B] ‘If a superior force has taken that part of my soul, why do I, the remaining one, linger behind? What is left is not so dear, nor an entire thing. That day was the downfall of us both’ [Horace].

[A] There is no action or thought in which I do not miss him—as he would have missed me; for just as he infinitely surpassed me in every other ability and virtue, so he did in the duty of friendship. [Montaigne now quotes two lines from Horace and ten from Catullus expressing the kind of grief that he feels over La Boétie; continues ‘But let us listen a while to this eighteen-year-old boy’, which had been intended as a lead-in to republishing his friend’s *Voluntary Servitude*; and then explains that he won’t do that because this work has been exploited for evil ends. He continues: ‘So instead of that serious work I will substitute another one, more gallant and more playful, written in the same season of his life.’ This was to introduce something which in every non-posthumous edition of the *Essays* constituted no. 29. Its content was a set of twenty-nine sonnets by La Boétie,

dedicated by Montaigne to the comtesse de Guiche. There is clear evidence that Montaigne had intended in the next edition to omit these poems, but not that he had worked out any repair for this mention of them in essay 28.]

30. Moderation

[A] By our handling of things that are in themselves beautiful and good we corrupt them, as if our touch were infectious. We can grasp virtue in a way that will make it vicious if we embrace it with too sharp and violent a desire. Those who say that there is never any excess in virtue because it is no longer virtue if there is excess in it are playing with words. ‘The wise man counts as mad, and the just man as unjust, if in their strivings after virtue they go beyond what is sufficient’ [Horace]. That is a subtle observation on the part of philosophy: one can both love virtue too much and behave with excess in an action that itself is just. The voice of God goes along with this: ‘Be not wiser than you should, but be soberly wise’ [Romans xii.3].

[C] I have seen a man of high rank harm the reputation of his religion by showing himself religious beyond any example of men of his sort.

I like temperate and moderate natures. Immoderateness even towards the good, if it does not offend me it astonishes me and leaves me unsure what to call it. Pausanias’s mother (who gave the first information and brought the first stone for her son’s death) and the dictator Posthumius (who had his own son put to death because his youthful ardour had driven him successfully against the enemy a little in advance of his squadron) seem to me not so much *just* as *strange*. And I like neither to advise nor to follow a virtue so savage and so costly.

The archer who overshoots the target *misses*, just as does the one who falls short. And my eyes trouble me when I suddenly come up into a strong light, just as they do when I plunge into darkness.

Callicles says in Plato that philosophy at its extremes is harmful, and advises us not to push into it beyond what is profitable. He says that taken in moderation philosophy is pleasant and useful, but that it can eventually make a man

- wild and vicious,
- contemptuous of religions and common laws,
- an enemy of social intercourse,
- an enemy of human pleasures,
- incapable of any political administration, of helping others, or of helping himself, and
- fit to be slapped with impunity.

What he says is true, for in its excess philosophy enslaves our natural freedom and by logical trickery leads us astray from the fine level road that nature has traced for us.

[A] Our affection for our wives is entirely legitimate; yet theology nevertheless bridles it and restrains it. It seems to me that I once read in Saint Thomas, in a passage where he is condemning marriages between relatives within the forbidden degrees, several reasons including this one: There is a risk that the love felt for such a wife might be immoderate; for if the conjugal love between them is full and perfect (as it ought to be), and added to that is the further affection proper among kinsfolk, there is no doubt that this extra will carry such a husband beyond the limits of reason.

The branches of knowledge that regulate men’s *moeurs* [see Glossary], like theology and philosophy, involve themselves with everything. No activity is so private or so secret as to escape their attention and jurisdiction. . . . So on their behalf I want to teach husbands—if there are still any who are too eager—that even the pleasures they enjoy when lying with

their wives are condemned if not kept within moderation; and that in this relationship as in unlawful ones one can err through licentiousness and debauchery. [C] Those shameless caresses that our first heat suggests to us in this sport are not only indecently but harmfully practised on our wives. At least let them learn shamelessness from some other hand! They are always aroused enough for our need. In that context I have merely followed nature's simple instruction.

[A] Marriage is a religious and holy bond; which is why the pleasure we get from it should be restrained and serious, with some austerity mixed in; its sensuousness should be somewhat prudent and conscientious. And because its chief end is procreation, some people question whether it is permissible to seek intercourse when there is no hope of conception, as when the woman is beyond child-bearing age or already pregnant. . . . [B] Certain nations [C] including the Mahometans [B] abominate intercourse with pregnant women; many also with those who are menstruating. [Montaigne now offers a page of anecdotes from ancient times, mostly illustrating different views about what is permissible in sexual relations within marriage. His 'summing up' of all this—'there is no pleasure, however proper, that does not become a matter of reproach when excessive and intemperate'—has only a loose fit with the anecdotes. He continues:]

[A] But to speak in good earnest, is not man a miserable animal? His natural condition makes him hardly able to taste one single pleasure pure and entire; yet he uses reasoning to curtail even that; he is not wretched enough until he has used skill and hard work to increase his misery: [B] 'The wretched paths of fortune we make worse by art' [Propertius]. [C] Human wisdom is behaving stupidly when it

works to diminish the number and sweetness of our sensual pleasures, as it is behaving favourably and industriously when it works to trick out and disguise our ills and make us feel them less. If the decision had been up to me, I would have taken another route;¹ it would have been more natural—i.e. true, practicable and holy—and perhaps I would have made *myself* strong enough to set limits to it.

[A] Consider the fact that the physicians of our minds and bodies, as though plotting together, find no way to a cure—no remedy for the illnesses of body and soul—except through torment, pain and tribulation. Vigils, fasting, hair-shirts and banishments to distant solitary places, endless imprisonments, scourges and other sufferings have been introduced for that purpose; but on condition that the suffering is real and the pain bitter. . . . For if a man's health and liveliness were sharpened by fasting, if he found fish more tasty than meat, fasting would cease to be a salutary prescription; just as in the other sort of medicine drugs have no effect on anyone who takes them with appetite and pleasure. The bitter taste and the difficulty are attributes that help them to work. A constitution that accepted rhubarb as ordinary food would spoil its efficacy; to cure our stomach it must be something that hurts it; and here the common rule that things are cured by their opposites breaks down; for in this case one ill cures another ill.

[B] This notion is somewhat like that other very ancient one, universally embraced by all religions, of thinking that we can please heaven and nature by our massacres and murders. [The essay concludes with a page of truly gruesome illustrations of this.]

¹ He means: other than the one dictated by theology and philosophy, the one recommended by human wisdom when it is 'behaving stupidly'.