

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Book 2 · Chapter 28

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All Things Have Their Season

Such as compare Cato the Censor with the younger Cato, who killed himself, compare two beautiful natures, much resembling one another. The first acquired his reputation several ways, and excels in military exploits and the utility of his public employments; but the virtue of the younger, besides that it were blasphemy to compare any to it in vigor, was much more pure and unblemished. For who could absolve that of the Censor from envy and ambition, having dared to attack the honor of Scipio, a man in goodness and all other excellent qualities infinitely beyond him or any other of his time?

That which they report of him, among other things, that in his extreme old age he put himself upon learning the Greek tongue with so greedy an appetite, as if to quench a long thirst, does not seem to me to make much for his honor; it being properly what we call falling into second childhood. All things have their seasons, even good ones, and I may say my Paternoster out of time; as they accused T. Quintus Flaminius, that being general of an army, he was seen praying apart in the time of a battle that he won.

Imponit finem sapiens et rebus honestis.

The wise man limits even honest things. • JUV., 6.444

Eudemonidas, seeing Xenocrates when very old, still very intent upon his school lectures: "When will this man be wise," said he, "if he is yet learning?"

And Philopoemen, to those who extolled King Ptolemy for every day inuring his person to the exercise of arms: "It is not," said he, "commendable in a king of his age to exercise himself in these things; he ought now really to employ them."

The young are to make their preparations, the old to enjoy them, say the sages: and the greatest vice they observe in us is that our desires incessantly grow young again; we are always re-beginning to live. Our studies and desires should sometime be sensible of age; yet we have one foot in the grave and still our appetites and pursuits spring every day anew within us:

*Tu secunda marmora
Locas sub ipsum funus, et, sepulcri
Immemor, struis domos.*

The longest of my designs is not of above a year's extent; I think of nothing now but ending; rid myself of all new hopes and enterprises; take my last leave of every place I depart from, and every day dispossess myself of what I have. *Olim iam nec perit quicquam mihi, nec acquiritur. Plus superest viatici quam viæ.*

Vixi, et, quem dederat cursum fortuna, peregi.

'Tis indeed the only comfort I find in my old age, that it mortifies in me several cares and desires wherewith my life has been disturbed; the care how the world goes, the care of riches, of grandeur, of knowledge, of health, of myself. There are men who are learning to speak at a time when they should learn to be silent for ever.

A man may always study, but he must not always go to school what a contemptible thing is an old Abecedarian!

*Diversos diversa iuvant; non omnibus annis
Omnia conveniunt.*

If we must study, let us study what is suitable to our present condition, that we may answer as he did, who being asked to what end he studied in his decrepit age, "that I may go out better," said he, "and at greater ease." Such a study was that of the younger Cato, feeling his end approach, and which he met with in Plato's *Discourse of the Eternity of the Soul*: not, as we are to believe, that he was not long before furnished with all sorts of provision for such a departure; for of assurance, an established will and instruction, he had more than Plato had in all his writings; his knowledge and courage were in this respect above philosophy; he applied himself to this study, not for the service of his death; but, as a man whose sleeps were never disturbed in the importance of such a deliberation, he also, without choice or change, continued his studies with the other accustomed actions of his life.

The night that he was denied the praetorship he spent in play; that wherein he was to die he spent in reading. The loss either of life or of office was all one to him.

You against the time of death have marble cut for use, and, forgetful of the tomb, build houses. • HOR., CARM., 2.18.17

Henceforward I will neither lose, nor expect to get: I have more wherewith to defray my journey, than I have way to go. • SEN., EP., 77

I have lived and finished the career Fortune placed before me. • VERG., AEN., 4.653

Various things delight various men; all things are not for all ages. • MAX., EL., 1.104

MONTAIGNE'S SOURCES

Hor., Carm.	Horace, <i>Odes</i>
Juv.	Juvenal, <i>Satires</i>

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Max., El.	Maximianus, <i>Elegies</i>
Sen., Ep.	Seneca, <i>Epistles</i>
Verg., Aen.	Virgil, <i>Æneid</i>