

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Front Matter

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To the Reader

a READER, here is an honest book. It warns you straight away that I only meant for it to be private, for my family, and never once considered either your service or my reputation. I do not have the strength for such a design. I wrote it for my relatives and my friends so that once I am gone (which may be soon) they may find in it again remnants of my personality and thoughts, and remember me in a more complete and lifelike way. Had I been seeking public attention, I would have c made myself look better and presented myself more carefully. a But I want you to see me as I am, in a plain, natural, and ordinary way, free of c pretense a and artifice. I am the one depicted here. My faults and my very self are exposed for all to see, at least as much as public conventions will let me. Had I lived among those nations, which (they say) still live under the sweet liberty of nature's primitive laws, I assure you I would easily have painted myself quite fully and quite naked. So, reader, here I am, the subject of my book, and I see no reason why you should spend your free time on so unimportant and pointless a topic. Farewell, then! From Montaigne,¹ c March first, 1580.²

c *This preface, corrected by the author himself, was lost in the first printing after his death. It has since been found.*³

NOTES

- 1 Michel de Montaigne's estate, near Bergerac, France.
- 2 This is the date of the first publication of the *Essays* by Simon Millanges, in Bordeaux. Abel L'Angelier changed the date in his edition, the first to comprise all three books, to June 12, 1588. In his notes for a revised edition, Montaigne restored the original date.
- 3 This note appears in Marie de Gournay's 1598 edition.