

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Book 1 · Chapter 41

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On Not Sharing One's Fame

Of all the follies of the world, that which is most universally received is the solicitude of reputation and glory; which we are fond of to that degree as to abandon riches, peace, life, and health, which are effectual and substantial goods, to pursue this vain phantom and empty word, that has neither body nor hold to be taken of it:

*La fama, ch'invaghisce a un dolce suono
Gli superbi mortali, et par si bella,
E un echo, un sogno, anzi d'un sogno un ombra,
Ch'ad ogni vento si dilegua a sgombra.*

And of all the irrational humors of men, it should seem that the philosophers themselves are among the last and the most reluctant to disengage themselves from this: 'tis the most restive and obstinate of all: *Quia etiam bene proficientes animos tentare non cessat*. There is not any one of which reason so clearly accuses the vanity; but it is so deeply rooted in us that I dare not determine whether any one ever clearly discharged himself from it or no. After you have said all and believed all has been said to its prejudice, it produces so intestine an inclination in opposition to your best arguments that you have little power to resist it.

For, as Cicerosays, even those who most controvert it, would yet that the books they write about it should visit the light under their own names, and seek to derive glory from seeming to despise it. All other things are communicable and fall into commerce: we lend our goods and stake our lives for the necessity and service of our friends; but to communicate a man's honor, and to robe another with a man's own glory, is very rarely seen. And yet we have some examples of that kind. Catulus Lutatius in the Cimbrian war, having done all that in him lay to make his flying soldiers face about upon the enemy, ran himself at last away with the rest, and counterfeited the coward, to the end his men might rather seem to follow their captain than to fly from the enemy; which was to abandon his own reputation in order to cover the shame of others. When Charles Vcame into Provence in the year 1537, 'tis said that Antonio de Leva, seeing the emperor positively resolved upon this expedition, and believing it would redound very much to his honor, did, nevertheless,

Fame, which with alluring sound charms proud mortals, and appears so fair, is but an echo, a dream, nay, the shadow of a dream, which at every breath vanishes and dissolves. • TASSO, GERUS., 14.63

Because it ceases not to assail even well-directed minds. • AUG., DE CIV. D., 5.14

very stiffly oppose it in the council, to the end that the entire glory of that resolution should be attributed to his master, and that it might be said his own wisdom and foresight had been such as that, contrary to the opinion of all, he had brought about so great an enterprise; which was to do him honor at his own expense. The Thracian ambassadors coming to comfort Archileonida, the mother of Brasidas, upon the death of her son, and commending him to that height as to say he had not left his like behind him, she rejected this private and particular commendation to attribute it to the public: "Tell me not that," said she; "I know the city of Sparta has many citizens both greater and of greater worth than he." In the battle of Crecy, the Prince of Wales, being then very young, had the vanguard committed to him: the main stress of the battle happened to be in that place, which made the lords who were with him, finding themselves overmatched, send to King Edward to advance to their relief. He inquired of the condition his son was in, and being answered that he was alive and on horseback: "I should, then, do him wrong," said the king, "now to go and deprive him of the honor of winning this battle he has so long and so bravely sustained; what hazard soever he runs, that shall be entirely his own"; and, accordingly, would neither go nor send, knowing that if he went, it would be said all had been lost without his succor, and that the honor of the victory would be wholly attributed to him. *Semper enim quod postremum adjectum est, id rem totam videtur traxisse.*

Many at Rome thought, and would usually say, that the greatest of Scipio's acts were in part due to Laelius, whose constant practice it was still to advance and support Scipio's grandeur and renown, without any care of his own. And Theopompus, king of Sparta, to him who told him the republic could not miscarry since he knew so well how to command, "Tis rather," answered he, "because the people know so well how to obey."

As women succeeding to peerages had, notwithstanding their sex, the privilege to attend and give their votes in the trials that appertained to the jurisdiction of peers; so the ecclesiastical peers, notwithstanding their profession, were obliged to attend our kings in their wars, not only with their friends and servants, but in their own persons. As the Bishop of Beauvais did, who being with Philip Augustus at the battle of Bouvines, had a notable share in that action; but he did not think it fit for him to participate in the fruit and glory of that violent and bloody trade. He with his own hand reduced several of the enemy that day to his mercy, whom he delivered to the first gentleman he met either to kill or receive them to quarter, referring the whole execution to this other hand; and he did this with regard to William, Earl of Salisbury, whom he gave up to Messire Jehan de Nesle. With a like subtlety of conscience to that I have just named, he would kill but not wound, and for that reason ever fought with a mace. And a certain person of my time, being reproached by the king that he had laid hands on a priest, stiffly and positively denied he had done any such thing: the meaning of which was, he had cudgelled and kicked him.

For always that which is last added, seems to have accomplished the whole affair. • LIVY, 27.45

MONTAIGNE'S SOURCES

Aug., De civ. D.	Augustine, <i>City of God</i>
Livy	Livy, <i>History of Rome</i>
Tasso, Gerus.	Tasso, Torquato, <i>Jerusalem Delivered</i>