

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Book 1 · Chapter 3

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Our affections are transported beyond our selves

THOSE WHICH STILL ACCUSE MEN for ever gasing after future things, and go about to teach us, to take hold of present fortunes, and settle our selves upon them, as having no hold of that which is to come; yea much lesse than we have of that which is already past, touch and are ever harping upon the commonest humane error, if they dare call that an error, to which Nature hir selfe, for the service of the continuation of hir worke, doth address us, imprinting (as it doth many others) this false imagination in us, as more jealous of our actions, then of our knowledge. We are never in our selves, but beyond. Feare, desire, and hope, draw us ever towards that which is to come, and remove our sense and consideration from that which is, to amuse us on that which shal be, yea when we shal be no more. *Calamitosus est animus futuri anxius. A minde in suspense, what is to come, is in a pittifull case.*

This notable example of precept is often alleadged in *Plato*, *Follow thy businesse and knowe thy selfe*; Each of these two members, doth generally imply all our duty; and likewise enfolds his companion. He that should do his businesse, might perceive that his first lesson is, to knowe what he is, and what is convenient for him. And he that knoweth himselfe, takes no more anothers matters for his owne, but above all other things, loveth and correcteth himselfe, rejecteth superfluous occupations, idle imaginations, and unprofitable propositions. As if you grant follie what it desireth, it will no-whit be satisfied; so is wisdom content with that which is present, and never displeased with it selfe. *Epicurus* doth dispense with his age from the foresight and care of what shall insue. Amongst the lawes that regard the deceased, that which ties the actions of Princes to be examined when they are dead, seemes to me verie solide. They are companions, if not maisters of the lawes: That which justice could not work on their heads, it is reason it effect upon their reputation, and goods of their successors: things wee many times preferre before our lives. It is a custome brings many singular commodities unto nations that observe it, and to be desired of all good Princes: who have cause to complaine that the memorie of the wicked is used as theirs. Wee owe a like obedience and subjection to all Kings; for it respects their office: but estimation and affection, we owe it onely to their vertue. If they be unworthie, we are to endure them patiently, to conceale their vices, and to aid their indifferent

actions with our commendations, as long as their authoritie hath need of our assistance, and that ought to be ascribed unto politike order. But our comerce with them being ended, there is no reason we should refuse the unfolding of our felt wrongs unto justice and our libertie. And specially to refuse good subjects, the glory to have reverently and faithfullly served a maister, whose imperfections were so well knowne unto them: exempting posteritie from so profitable an example. And such as for the respect of some private benefite or interest, do wickedly imbrace the memorie of an unwoorthie Prince, doe particular justice at the charge of publike justice. *Titus Livius* speaketh truely, where he saieth, that the speech of men brought up under a royaltie is ever full of vaine ostentations, and false witness: every man indifferently extolling the king, to the furthest straine of valour and Sovereigne greatnes. The magnanimitie of those two Souldiers, may bee reproved, one of which being demaunded of *Nero*, why he hated him, answered him to his teeth; I loved thee whilst thou wast worthie of love, but since thou becamest a parricide, a fire-brand, a jugler, a player, and a Coach-man, I hate thee, as thou deservest. The other being asked, wherefore he sought to kill him; answered, Because I find no other course to hinder thy uncessant outrages and impious deedes. But can any man, that hath his senses about him, justlie reprove the publike and generall testimonies, that since his death, have bin given, and so shal be for ever, both against him and all such like reprobates, of his tyrannicall and wicked demeanours? I am sorie that in so sacred a pollicie as the Lacedemonian was, so fained and fond a ceremonie at the death of their kings was ever devised and brought in use. All their confederates and neighbours, all the slave-Ilotes, men and women pell-mell, for a testimonie of their grieve and sorrow did mangle and gash their foreheades; and in their out-cries, and lamentations, exclaimed, that their deceased king, howsoever he had lived, was and had bin the best Prince that ever they had, ascribing in order the commendations due unto desert, and to the last and latter rancke, what belongs unto the first merite. *Aristotle* that hath an oare in every water, and medleth with all things, makes a question, about *Solons* speech, who saith, that no man can truely be counted happy before his death, Whether he that lived and died according to his wish may be named happy, Whether his renowne be good or ill, and whether his posteritie bee miserable or no. Whilst we stirre and remove, we transport our selves by preoccupation whersoever we list: But no sooner are wee out of being, but wee have no communication at all with that which is. And it were better to tell *Solon*, that never man is happy then, since he never is so, but when he is no more.

Quisquam

*Vix radicitus è vita se tollit, & eijcit:
Se facit esse qui quiddam super inscius ipse,
Nec remonet satis à proiecto corpora sese, &
Vindicat*

*Scarce any rids himselfe of life so cleare,
But leaves unwitting some part of him heere:
Nor frees or quits himselfe sufficiently
From that his body which forlorne doth lie.*

Bertrand of *Glesquin* died at the siege of the castle of *Rancon*, neere unto *Puy* in *Avergne*: the besieged yeelding afterwards, were forced to carrie the

keies of the Castle, upon the decease of the Captaine. *Bartholomew of Alviano*, Generall of the Venetian forces dying in their service and wars about *Brescia*, and his body being to be transported to *Venice*, through the territorie of *Verona*, which was then enemy unto them, the greatest part of the armie thought it expedient to demaund a safeconduct for their passage of those of *Verona*, to which *Theodoro Trivulcio* stoutly opposed himselfe, and chose rather to passe it by maine force, and to hazard the day, saying it was not convenient, that he who in his life-time had never apprehended feare of his enemies should now being dead, seeme to feare them. Verily in like matters, by the lawes of *Greece*, hee that required a dead bodie of his enemies, with intent to burie the same, renounced the victory, and might no more erect any trophie of it: and he who was so required, purchased the title of honour and gaine. So did *Nicias* loose the advantage he had clearely gained of the Corinthians; and contrariewise, *Agésilas* assured that, he doubtfully had gotten of the Boetians. These actions might bee deemed strange, if in all ages it were not a common-received opinion, not only to extend the care of our selves, beyond this life, but also to believe, that heavenly favours do often accompanie us unto our grave, and continue in our posterity. Whereof there are so many examples (leaving our moderne a part) that I neede not wade farre into it.

Edward the first, king of *England*, in the long warres he had with *Robert* King of *Scotland*, having by triall found how greatly his presence advantaged the successe of his affaires, and how he was ever victorious in any enterprise he undertooke in his owne person; when he died, bound his sonne by solemne oath, that being dead he should cause his body to be boiled, untill the flesh fel from the bones, which he should cause to be enterred, and carefully keeping the bones, ever carie them about him, whensoever he should happen to have wars with the Scots: As if destinie had fataly annexed the victory unto his limmes. *John Zisca*, who for the defence of *Wickliffs* opinions so much troubled the state of *Bohemia*, commanded that after his death his body should be flead, and a drum made of his skin, to be carried and sounded in all the wars against his enemies: deeming the sound of it would be a meanes to continue the advantages, which in his former warres hee had obtained of them. Certaine Indians did likewise carry the bones of one of their Captaines in the skirmishes they had with the Spaniards, in regarde of the good successe (whilst he lived) hee had against them: And other nations of that new-found world, do likewise carrie the bodies of such woorthie and fortunate men with them, as have died in their battels, to serve them in steade of good fortune and encouragement. The first examples reserve nothing else in their tombes, but the reputation acquired by their former atchievements: but these will also adjoyne unto it the power of working. The act of Captaine *Bayard* is of better composition, who perceiving himselfe deadly wounded by a shot received in his body, being by his men perswaded to come off and retire himselfe from out the throng, answered, hee would not now so neere his end beginne to turne his face from his enemy: and having stowtly foughten so long as he could stand, feeling himselfe to faint and stagger from his horse, commanded his steward to lay him against a tree, but in such sort, that he might die with his face toward the enemy; as indeed he did. I may not omit this other example, as remarkable for this consideration, as any of the precedent. The Emperour *Maximilian*, great grand-father to *Philip*, now King of *Spaine*, was a Prince highly endowed with many noble qualities, and

amongst others with a wel-nigh matchlesse beautie and comelines of body; but with other customes of his, hee had this one much contrarie to other Princes, who to dispatch their waightiest affaires make often their close stoole, their regale Throne or Councel-chamber, which was, that he would not permit any groome of his chamber (were he never so neere about him) to see him in his inner-chamber, who if he had occasion but to make water, wold as nicely and as religiously withdraw himselfe as any maiden, and never suffer so much as a Phisition, much lesse any other whatsoever, to see those privie partes that all in modestie seeke to keepe secret and unseene. My selfe, that am so broade-mouthed and lavish in speaches, am notwithstanding naturally touched with that bashfulnesse. And unlesse it be by the motion of necessitie or of voluptuousnesse, I never willingly emparked those actions and partes (which custome willeth to be concealed) to the view of anie creature. I endure more compulsion, then I deeme befitting a man, especially of my profession. But he grew to such superstition, that by expresse wordes in his last will and testament, he commaunded, that being dead, he should have linnen-flops put about them. He should by *Codicile* have annexed unto it, that he who should put them on, might have his eies hood-winckt. The instruction which *Cyrus* giveth his children, that neither they nor any other should either see or touch his body, after the breath were once out of it; I ascribe it unto some motive of devotion in him. For both his historian and himselfe, amongst many other notable qualities they are endued with, have throughout all the course of their life, seemed to have a singular respect and awefull reverence unto religion. That storie displeased me very much, which a noble man told me of a kinsman of mine (a man very famous and well knowne both in peace and warre) which is, that dying verie aged in his court, being much tormented with extreame pangs of the stone, hee with an earnest and unwearied care, employed all his last houres, to dispose the honor and ceremonie of his funeralls, and summoned all the nobilitie that came to visit him to give him assured promise to be as assistants, and to convey him to his last resting place. To the very same Prince, who was with him at his last gaspe, he made verie earnest sute, he would command all his houshold to wait upon him at his interment, enforcing many reasons, and alleaging divers examples, to proove that it was a thing verie convenient, and fitting a man of his qualitie: which assured promise when he had obtained, and had at his pleasure marshalled the order how they should march, he seemed quietly and contentedly to yeeld up the ghost. I have seldome seene a vanitie continue so long. This other curiositie meere opposite unto it (which to prove I need not labor for home-examples) seemeth in my opinion cosin-german to this: that is, when one is ever readie to breathe his last, carefully and passionately to endeavor, how to reduce the convoy of his obsequies unto some particular and unwonted parcimonie, to one servant and to one lanterne: I heare the humor and appointment of *Marcus Æmilius Lepidus* commended, who expressely forbade his heires to use those ceremonies about his interment, which in such cases were formerly accustomed: Is it temperance and frugalitie, to avoide the charge and voluptuousnes, the use and knowledge of which is imperceptible unto us? Lo here an easie reformation and of smal cost. Were it requisite to appoint any, I would be of opinion, that as well in that, as in all other actions of mans life, every man should referre the rule of it to the qualitie of his fortune. And the Philosopher *Lycon* did wisely appoint his friends to place his body, where they should thinke it fittest

and for the best: and for his obsequies, they should neither be superfluous and over-costly, nor base and sparing. For my parte, I woulde wholly relie on custome, which should dispose this ceremonie, and would yeeld my selfe to the discretion of the first or next, into whose hands I might chance to fall. *Totus hic locus est contemnendus in nobis, non negligendus in nostris.* All this matter should be despised of us, but not neglected of ours. And religiously said a holy man; *Curatio funeris, conditio sepulturæ, pompa exequiarum, magis sunt uiuorum solatia, quam subsidia mortuorum.* The procuration of funerall, the manner of buriall, the pompe of obsequies, are rather comfortes to the living, than helpe to the dead. Therefore Socrates answered Criton, who at the houre of his death, asked him, how he would be buried: *Even as you please*, saide he: were I to meddle further with this subject, I would deeme it more gallant, to imitate those who yet living and breathing, undertake to enjoy the order and honour of their sepulchres, and that please themselves to beholde their dead countenance in Marble. Happy they that can rejoyce and gratifie their sense with insensibilitie, and live by their death! A little thing would make me conceive an inexpressible hatred against all popular domination; although it seeme most naturall and just unto me: when I call to minde that inhumane injustice of the Athenians, who without further triall or remission, yea without suffering them so much as to reply or answere for themselves, condemned those noble and worthy captaines, that returned victoriously from the sea-battaile, which they (neere the Iles *Arginenses*) had gained of the Lacedemonians; the most contested, bloodie and greatest fight the Græcians ever obtained by sea with their owne forces: forsomuch as after the victorie, they had rather followed those occasions, which the lawe of warre presented unto them, for their availe, than to their prejudice staide to gather and burie their dead men. And the succours of *Diomedon* makes their ruthlesse execution more hatefull, who beeing a man of notable and exemplar vertue, both militarie and politike, and of them so cruelly condemned; after he had heard the bloodie sentence, aduancing himselfe forward to speake, having fit opportunitie and plausible audience; he, I say, insteede of excusing himselfe, or endeavouring to justifie his cause, or to exasperate the evident iniquitie of so cruell a doome, expressed but a care of the Judges preservation, earnestly beseeching the Gods to turne that judgement to their good, praying that for want of not satisfying the voves, which he and his companions had vowed in acknowledgement and thanksgiving for so famous a victorie, and honourable fortune, they might not drawe the wrath and revenge of the Gods upon them, declaring what their voves were. And without more words, or urging further reasons, courageously addressed himselfe to his execution. ¹ For *Chabrias*, Captaine Generall of their sea-fleete, having afterward obtained a famous victorie of *Pollis*, Admirall of *Sparta*, in the Ile of *Naxa*, lost absolutely the benefit of it, and onely contented with the day (a matter of great consequence for their affaires) fearing to incurre the mischief of this example, and to save a few dead carcasses of his friends, that floated up and downe the sea, gave leasure to an infinite number of his living enemies, whom he might easily have surprized to saile away in safetie, who afterward made them to purchase their importunate superstition, at a deere-deere rate.

Quæris, quo iaceas, post obitum, loco?
Quo non nata iacent.

*Where shall you lie when you are dead?
Where they lie that were never bred.*

This other restores the sense of rest unto a body without a soule.

*Neque sepulchrum, quo recipiat, habeat portum corporis:
Ubi remissa humana uita, corpus requiescat à malis.*

*To turne in, as a hav'n, have he no grave,
Where life left, from all griefe he rest may have.*

Even as Nature makes us to see, that many dead things have yet certaine secret relations unto life. Wine dooth alter and change in sellers, according to the changes and alterations of the seasons of it's vineyard. And the flesh of wilde beasts and venison doeth change qualitie and taste in the powdering-tubbes, according to the nature of living flesh, as some say that have observed it.

NOTES

- 1 *But fortune some yeares after punished him alike, and made him taste of the verie same sauce.* is missing.