

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Book 2 · Chapter 10

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Of Bookes

I MAKE no doubt but it shall often befall me to speake of things, which are better, and with more truth handled by such as are their crafts-maisters. Here is simply an Essay of my naturall faculties, and no whit of those I have acquired. And hee that shall taxe mee with ignorance, shall have no great victorie at my handes; for hardly could I give others reason for my discourses, that give none unto my selfe, and am not well satisfied with them. He that shal make serch after knowledge, let him seek-it where it is: there is nothing I professe lesse. These are but my fantasies, by which I endeavour not to make things knowen, but my selfe. They may haply one day be knowen unto me, or have bin at other times, according as fortune hath brought me where they were declared or manifested. But I remember them no more. And if I be a man of some reading, yet I am a man of no remembring, I conceive no certainty, except it bee to give notice, how farre the knowledge I have of it, dooth now reach. Let no man busie himselfe about the matters, but on the fashion I give them. Let that which I borrow be survaid, and then tell me whether I have made good choice of ornaments, to beautifie and set foorth the invention, which ever comes from mee. For, I make others to relate (not after mine owne fantasie, but as it best falleth out) what I can not so well expresse, either through unskill of language, or want of judgement. I number not my borrowings, but I weigh them. And if I would have made their number to prevaile, I would have had twice as many. They are all, or almost all of so famous and ancient names, that me thinkes they sufficiently name themselves without me. If in reasons, comparisons and arguments, I transplant any into my soile, or confound them with mine owne, I purposely conceale the Authour, thereby to bridle the rashnesse of these hastie censures, that are so headlong cast upon all manner of compositions, namely yoong writings, of men yet living; and in vulgare, that admitte all the worlde to talke of them, and which seemeth to convince the conception and publike designe alike. I will have them to give *Plutarch* a bobbe upon mine owne lippes, and vex themselves in wronging *Seneca* in mee. My weakenesse must be hidden under such great credites. I will love him that shall trace, or unfeather me; I meane through clearenesse of judgement, and by the onely distinction of the force and beautie of my Discourses. For my selfe,

who for want of memorie, am ever to seeke, how to trie and refine them, by the knowledge of their countrie, knowe perfectly, by measuring mine owne strength, that my soyle is no way capable, of some over-pretious flowers, that therin I find set, and that all the fruites of my encrease could not make it amendes. This am I bound to answer-for, if I hinder my selfe, if there be either vanitie, or fault in my Discourses, that I perceive not, or am not able to discerne, if they be shewed me. For, many faults doe often escape our eyes; but the infirmitie of judgement consisteth in not being able to perceive them, when another discovereth them unto us. Knowledge and truth may be in us without judgement, and we may have judgement without them: Yea, the acknowledgement of ignorance, is one of the best and surest testimonies of judgement that I can finde. I have no other Sergeant of band to marshall my rapsodies, than fortune. And looke how my humours or conceites present them-selves, so I shuffle them up. Sometimes they prease out thicke and three-folde, and other times they come out languishing one by one. I will have my naturall and ordinarie pace seene as loose, and as shuffling as it is. As I am, so I goe on plodding. And besides, these are matters, that a man may not be ignorant of, and rashly and casually to speake of them. I would wish to have a more perfect understanding of things, but I will not purchase it so deare, as it cost. My intention is to passe the remainder of my life quietly, and not laboriously, in rest, and not in care. There is nothing I will trouble or vex my selfe about, no not for Science it selfe, what esteeme soever it be-of. I doe not search and tosse over Bookes, but for an honest recreation to please, and pastime to delight my selfe: or if I studie, I only endeavour to find out the knowledge that teacheth or handleth the know-ledge of my selfe, and which may instruct me how to die well, and how to live well.

Has meus ad metas sudet oportet equus.

*My horse must sweating runne,
That this goale may be wonne.*

If in reading I fortune to meete with any difficult points, I fret not my selfe about them, but after I have given them a charge or two, I leave them as I found them. Should I earnestly plod upon them I should loose both time and my selfe; for I have a skipping wit. What I see not at the first view, I shal lesse see it, if I opionate my selfe upon it. I do nothing without blithnes; and an over-obstinate continuation, and plodding contention, doth dazle, dull, and wearie the same: My sight is thereby confounded, and diminished. I must therefore withdraw-it, and at fittes goe to it againe. Even as to judge well of the lustre of scarlet, we are taught to cast our eyes over-it, in running it over by divers glances, sodaine glimpses, and reiterated reprisings. If one booke seeme tedious unto me, I take another, which I follow not with any earnestnes, except it be at such houres as I am idle, or that I am wearie with doing nothing. I am not greatly affected to new bookes, because ancient Authors are in my judgment more full and pithie: nor am I much adicted to Greeke bookes, forasmuch as my understanding cannot well rid his worke with a childish and apprentice intelligence. Amongst moderne bookes meerely pleasant. I esteeme *Bocace* his *Decameron*, *Rabelais*, and the kisses of *John* the second (if they may be placed under this title) worth the paines-taking to reade them. As for

Amadis and such like trash of writings, they had never the credit so much as to allure my youth to delight in them. This I will say more, either boldly or rashly, that this old and heave-pased minde of mine, will no more be pleased with *Aristotle*, or tickled with good *Ovid*: his facilitie, and quaint inventions, which heretofore have so ravished me, they can now adaies scarcely entertaine me. I speake my minde freely of all things, yea of such as peradventure exceede my sufficiencie, and that no-way I hold to be of my jurisdiction. What my conceit is of them, is also to manifest the proportion of my insight, and not the measure of things. If at any time I find my selfe distasted of *Platoes Axiochus*, as of a forceles worke, due regarde had to such an Author, my judgement doth nothing beleieve it selfe: It is not so fond-hardy, or selfe-conceited, as it durst dare to oppose it selfe against the authority of so many other famous ancient judgements, which he reputeth his regents and maisters, and with whome hee had rather erre. He chafeth with, and condemneth himselfe, either to rely on the superficiall sense, being unable to pierce into the centre, or to view the thing by some falce lustre. He is pleased onely to warrant himselfe from trouble and unrulines: As for weaknes he acknowledgeth and ingeniously avoweth the same. He thinkes to give a just interpetation to the apparances which his conception presents unto him, but they are shallow and imperfect. Most of *Æsopes* fables have divers senses, and severall interpretations: Those which *Mithologize* them, chuse some kind of colour well-suting with the fable; but for the most part, it is no other then the first and superficiall glosse: There are others more quicke, more sinnowie, more essential and more internall, into which they could never penetrate; and thus thinke I with them. But to follow my course; I have ever deemed that in Poesie, *Virgil*, *Lucretius*, *Catullus*, and *Horace*, doe doubtles by farre hold the first ranke: and especially *Virgil* in his *Georgikes*, which I esteeme to be the most accomplished piece of worke of Poesie: In comparison of which one may easily discerne, that there are some passages in the *Æneidos*, to which the Author (had he lived) would no doubt have given some review or correction: The fift booke whereof is (in my mind) the most absolutely perfect. I also love *Lucane*, and willingly reade him, not so much for his stile, as for his owne worth, and truth of his opinion and judgement. As for good *Terence*, I allow the quaintnes and grace of his Latin tongue, and judge him wonderfull conceited and apt, lively to represent the motions and passions of the minde, and the condition of our manners: our actions make me often remember him. I can never reade him so often, but still I discover some new grace and beautie in him. Those that lived about *Virgils* time, complained that some would compare *Lucretius* unto him. I am of opinion, that verely it is an unequall comparison; yet can I hardly assure my selfe in this opinion, whensoever I find my selfe entangled in some notable passage of *Lucretius*. If they were moved at this comparison, what would they say now of the fond-hardie and barbarous stupiditie of those which now adaies compare *Ariosto* unto him? Nay what would *Ariosto* say of it himselfe?

O sœclum insipiens & infacetum!

*O age that hath no wit,
And small conceit in it.*

I thinke our ancestors had also more reason to cry out against those that blushed not to equall *Plautus* unto *Terence* (who makes more shew to be a gentleman) then *Lucretius* unto *Virgil*. This one thing doth greatly advantage the estimation and preferring of *Terence*, that the father of the Romane eloquence, of men of his qualitie doth so often make mention of him; and the censure, which the chiefe judge of the Romane Poets giveth of his companion. It hath often come unto my minde, how such as in our daies give themselves to composing of comedies (as the Italians who are very happie in them) employ three or foure arguments of *Terence* and *Plautus* to make up one of theirs. In one onely comedie they will huddle up five or sixe of *Bocaces* tales. That which makes them so to charge themselves with matter, is the distrust they have of their owne sufficiencie, and that they are not able to undergoe so heavie a burthen with their owne strength. They are forced to finde a body on which they may rely and leane themselves: and wanting matter of their owne wherewith to please-us, they will have the storie or tale to busie and amuse us: where as in my Author it is cleane contrarie: The elegancies, the perfections and ornaments of his manner of speech, make us neglect and loose the longing for his subject. His quaintnes and grace doe still retaine us to him. He is every-where pleasantly conceited,

Liquidus puroque simillimus amni,

*So clearely-neate, so neatly-cleare,
As he a fine-pure river were.*

and doth so replenish our minde with his graces, that we forget those of the fable. The same consideration drawes me somewhat further. I perceive that good and ancient Poets have shunned the affectation and enquest, not onely of fantastically, new-fangled, Spagniolized, and Petrarchisticall elevations, but also of more sweete and sparing inventions, which are the ornament of all the poetically workes of succeeding ages. Yet is there no competent judge, that findeth them wanting in those ancient ones, and that doth not much more admire that smoothly-equall neatnes, continued sweetnes, and flourishing comelines of *Catullus* his Epigrams, then all the sharpe quippes, and wittie girds, wherewith *Martiall* doth whet and embellish the conclusions of his. It is the same reason I spake-of erewhile, as *Martiall* of himselfe. *Minus illi ingenio laborandum fuit, in cuius locum materia successerat.* Hee needed the lesse woorke with his witte, in place whereof matter came in supplie; The former without beeing moved or pricked cause themselves to bee heard lowd enough: they have matter to laugh-at every where, and neede not tickle themselves; where as these must have foraine helpe: according as they have lesse spirit, they must have more body. They leape on horsebacke: because they are not sufficiently strong in their legges to march on foote. Even as in our dances, those base conditioned men that keepe dancing-schools, because they are unfit to represent the porte and decencie of our nobilitie, endeavor to get commendation by dangerous loftie trickes, and other strange tumbler-like frisks and motions. And some Ladies make a better shew of their countenances in those dances, wherein are divers changes, cuttings, turnings, and agitations of the body, then in some dances of state and gravitie, where they neede but simply to tread a naturall measure, represent an unaffected

carriage, and their ordinarie grace; And as I have also seene some excellent Lourdans, or Clownes attired in their ordinarie workie-day clothes, and with a common homely countenance, afford us all the pleasure that may be had from their art: Prentises and learners that are not of so high a forme, to besmeare their faces, to disguise themselves, and in motions to counterfet strange visages and antickes, to enduce us to laughter. This my conception is no where better discerned, then in the comparison betweene *Virgils Æneidos*, and *Orlando Furioso*. The first is seene to soare aloft with full-spread wings, and with so high and strong a pitch, ever following his point; the other faintly to hover and flutter from tale to tale, and as it were skipping from bough to bough, alwaies distrusting his owne wings, except it be for some short flight, and for feare his strength and breath should faile him, to sit downe at every fields-end.

Excursusque breues tentat

*Out-lobes sometimes he doth assay,
But very short, and as hee may.*

Loe-here then, concerning this kinde of subjects, what Authors please me best: As for my other lesson, which somewhat more mixeth profite with pleasure, whereby I learne to range my opinions, and addresse my conditions; the Bookes that serve mee thereunto, are *Plutarke* (since he spake French,) and *Seneca*; Both have this excellent commoditie for my humour, that the knowledge I seeke in them, is there so scatteringly and loosely handled, that whosoever readeth them is not tied to plod long upon them, whereof I am uncapable. And so are *Plutarke's* little workes, and *Seneca's* Epistles, which are the best and most profitable partes of their writings. It is no great matter to drawe mee to them, and I leave them where I list. For, they succede not, and depend not one of another. Both jumpe and sute together, in most true and profitable opinions: And fortune brought them both into the worlde in one age. Both were tutors unto two Romane Emperours: Both were strangers, and came from farre countries; both rich and mightie in the common-wealth, and in credite with their maisters. Their instruction is the prime and creame of Philosophie, and presented with a plaine, unaffected, and pertinent fashion. *Plutarke* is more uniforme and constant; *Seneca* more waving and diverse. This doth labour, force, and extend himselfe, to arme and strengthen vertue against weaknes, feare, and vitious desires; the other seemeth nothing so much to feare their force or attempt, and in a maner scorneth to hasten or change his pace about them, and to put himselfe upon his garde. *Plutarke's* opinions are Platonicall, gentle and accommodable unto civill societie: *Seneca's* Stoicall and Epicuriane, further from common use, but in my conceit, more proper particular, and more solide. It appeareth in *Seneca*, that he somewhat inclineth and yeeldeth to the tyranny of the Emperors which were in his dayes; for, I verely beleieve, it is with a forced judgement, he condemneth the cause of those nobly-minded murtherers of *Cæsar*. *Plutarke* is every where free and open-hearted; *Seneca*, ful-fraught with points and sallies, *Plutarke* stuf with matters. The former doth moove and enflame you more; the latter, content, please, and pay you better: This doth guide you, the other drive you on. As for *Cicero*, of all his works, those that treat of Philosophie

(namely morall) are they which best serve my turne, and square with my intent. But boldly to confesse the trueth, (For, *Since the barres of impudencie were broken downe, all curbing is taken away*) his maner of writing seemeth very tedious unto me, as doth all such-like stuffe. For, his prefaces, definitions, divisions, and etymologies, consume the greatest part of his Workes; whatsoever quicke, wittie and pithie conceit is in him is surcharged, and confounded by those his long and farre-fetcht preambles. If I bestow but one houre in reading him, which is much for me; and let me call to minde what substance, or juice I have drawne from him, for the most parte, I finde nothing but winde and ostentation in him: for he is not yet come to the arguments, which make for his purpose, and reasons that properly concerne the knot or pith I seeke-after. These Logically and Aristotelian ordinances are not availefull for me, who onely endeavour to become more wise and sufficient, and not more wittie or eloquent. I would have one beginne with the last point: I understand sufficiently what death and voluptuousnes are: let not a man busie himselfe to anatomize them. At the first reading of a Booke, I seeke for good and solide reasons, that may instruct me how to sustaine their assaults. It is neither gramaticall subtilties, nor logical quiddities, nor the wittie contexture of choise wordes, or arguments, and syllogismes, that will serve my turne. I like those discourses that give the first charge to the strongest parte of the doubt; his are but flourishes, and languish every where. They are good for Schooles, at the barre, or for Orators and Preachers, where wee may slumber: and though wee wake a quarter of an houre after, wee may finde and trace him soone enough. Such a manner of speach is fitte for those Judges, that a man woulde corrupt by hooke or crooke, by right or wrong, or for children and the common people, unto whom a man must tell all, and see what the event will be. I would not have a man goe about, and labour by circumloquutions, to induce and winne me to attention, and that (as our Herolds or Criers do) they shall ring out their wordes. Now heare mee, now listen, or ho-yes. The Romanes in their Religion were wont to say, *Hoc age*; which in ours we say, *Sursum corda*. There are so many lost words for me. I come ready prepared from my house. I neede no allurement nor sawce; my stomacke is good enough to digest rawe meate: And whereas with these preparatives and flourishes, or preambles, they thinke to sharpen my taste, or stirre my stomacke, they cloy and make it wallowish. Shall the priviledge of times excuse me from this sacrilegious boldnes, to deeme *Platoes* Dialogismes to be as languishing, by over-filling and stuffing his matter? And to bewaile the time that a man, who had so many thousands of things to utter, spends about so many, so long, so vaine, and idle interloquutions, and preparatives? My ignorance shall better excuse me, in that I see nothing in the beautie of his language. I generally enquire after Bookes, that use sciences, and not after such as institute them. The two first, and *Plinie*, with others of their rancke, have no *Hoc age* in them, they will have to do with men, that have forewarned themselves; or if they have, it is a materiall and substantiall *Hoc age*, and that hath his bodie apart. I likewise love to read the Epistles and *Atticum*, not onely because they containe a most ample instruction of the Historie, and affaires of his times, but much more because in them I descry his private humours. For (as I have saide else-where) I am wonderfull curious, to discover and know, the minde, the soule, the genuine disposition, and naturall judgement of my Authors. A man ought

to judge their sufficiencie, and not their customes, nor them by the shew of their writings. Which they sette forth on this worlds Theatre. I have sorrowed a thousand times, that ever we lost the booke, that *Brutus* writ of Virtue. *Oh it is a goodly thing to learne the Theorike of such as understand the practise well.* But forsomuch as the Sermon is one thing, and the Preacher an other: I love as much to see *Brutus* in *Plutarke*, as in himselfe. I would rather make choise to know certainly, what talke he had in his tent with some of his familiar friends, the night fore-going the battel, then the speach he made the morrow after to his army: and what he did in his chamber or closet, then what in the Senate or market place. As for *Cicero*, I am of the common judgement, that besides learning, there was no exquisite excellencie in him: He was a good Citizen, of an honest-gentle nature, as are commonly fat and burly men; for so was he: But to speake truely of him, full of ambitious vanitie and remisse nicenesse. And I knowe not well howe to excuse him, in that he deemed his Poesie worthy to be published. It is no great imperfection, to make bad verses, but it is an imperfection in him, that he never perceived how unworthy they were of the glorie of his name. Concerning his eloquence, it is beyond all comparison, and I verely beleeeve, that none shall ever equall it. *Cicero* the yoonger, who resembled his father in nothing, but in name, commaunded in *Asia*, chaunced one day to have many strangers at his boorde, and amongst others, one *Cæstius* sitting at the lower end, as the maner is to thrust-in at great mens tables: *Cicero* enquired of one of his men what he was, who tolde him his name, but he dreaming on other matters, and having forgotten what answer his man made him, asked him his name twice or thrice more: the servant, because hee would not be troubled to tell him one thing so often, and by some circumstance make him to knowe him better. It is, saide he, the same *Cæstius*, of whome some have tolde you, that in respect of his owne, maketh no accompt of your fathers eloquence: *Cicero* being sodainely mooved, commaunded the saide poore *Cæstius*, to be presently taken from the table, and well whipt in his presence: Lo-heere an uncivill and barbarous host. Even amongst those, which (all things considered) have deemed his eloquence matchlesse and incomparable others there have beene, who have not spared to note some faultes in it: As great *Brutus* said, that it was an eloquence, broken, halting, and disjoynted, *fractam & elumbem: Incoherent and sinnowlesse.* Those Orators that lived about his age, reprooved also in him the curious care he had of a certaine long cadence, at the end of his clauses, and noted these wordes, *esse uideatur*, which he so often useth. As for me, I rather like a cadence that falleth shorter, cut like Iambikes: yet doth he sometimes confound his numbers; but it is seldome: I have especially observed this one place. *Ego uerò me minus diu senem esse mallet, quàm esse senem, ante quam essem.* But I had rather, not be an olde man so long as I might be, than to be olde before I should be. Historians are my right hand; for they are pleasant and easie: and therewithall, the man with whome I desire generally to be acquainted, may more lively and perfectly be discovered in them, than in any other composition: the varietie and truth of his inward conditions, in grose and by retale: the diversitie of the meanes of his collection and composing, and of the accidents that threaten him. Now, those that write of mens lives, forasmuch as they amuse and busie themselves more about counsell than events, more about that which commeth from within, than that which appeereth outward; they are fittest for mee: And

that's the reason why *Plutarke* above all in that kinde, doth best please mee. Indeede I am not alittle grieved that we have not a dozen of *Laertii*, or that hee is not more knowne, or better understoode: for, I am no lesse curious to know the fortunes and lives of these great maisters of the world, than to understand the diversitie of their decrees and conceits. In this kinde of studie of Historie, a man must, without distinction, tosse and turne over all sorts of Authors, both olde and new, both French and others, if hee will learne the things they so diversly treat-of. But me thinkes that *Cæsar* above all doth singularly deserve to be studied, not onely for the understanding of the Historie, as of himselfe; so much perfection and excellencie is there in him more than in others, although *Salust* be reckoned one of the number. Verily I reade that Author with a little more reverence and respect, than commonly men reade profane and humane Workes: sometimes considering him by his actions, and wonders of his greatnesse, and other times waighing the puritie and inimitable polishing and elegancie of his tongue, which (as *Cicero* saith) hath not onely exceeded all Historians, but happly *Cicero* himselfe: with such sinceritie in his judgement. Speaking of his enemies, that except the false colours, wherewith he goeth about to cloake his bad cause, and the corruption and filthinesse of his pestilent ambition. I am perswaded there is nothing in him to be found fault-with: and that he hath bin over-sparing to speake of himselfe: for, so many notable and great things could never be executed by him, unlesse hee had putte more of his owne unto them, than he setteth downe. I love those Historians that are either very simple, or most excellent. The simple who have nothing of their owne to adde unto the storie, and have but the care and diligence to collect whatsoever comes unto their knowledge, and sincerely and faithfully to register al things, without choice or culling, by the naked truth leave our judgement more entire, and better satisfied.

Such amongst others (for example sake) plaine and well-meaning Froisard, who in his enterprize, hath marched with so free and genuine a puritie, that having committed some oversight, he is neither ashamed to acknowledge, nor afraide to correct the same, wheresoever hee hath either notice or warning of it: and who representeth unto us the diversitie of the newes then currant, and the different reports, that were made unto him. The subject of an history should bee naked, bare, and formelesse; each man according to his capacitie or understanding may reape commoditie out of it. The curious and most excellent have the sufficiencie to cull and chuse that, which is worthie to bee knowne, and may select of two relations, that which is most likely: of the condition of Princes, and of their humors, therby they conclude their counsels, and attribute convenient words unto them: they have reason to assume auctoritie unto them, to direct and shapen our beliefe unto theirs. But truely that belongs not to manie. Such as are between both (which is the most common fashion) it is they that spoile all; they will needs chew our meate for us, and take upon them a law to judge, and by consequence to square and encline the story according to their fantasie; for, where the judgement bendeth one way, a man cannot chuse but wrest and turne his narration that way. They undertake to chuse things worthy to be knowne, and now and then conceale either a word, or a secret action from us, which would much better instruct us: omitting such things as they understand not, as

incredible: and happily such matters, as they know not how to declare, eyther in good Latin, or tolerable French. Let them boldly enstale their eloquence, and discourse: Let them censure at their pleasure, but let them also give us leave to judge after them: And let them neither alter nor dispence by their abridgements and choise, any thing belonging to the substance of the matter; but let them rather send it pure and entire with all hir dimensions unto us. Most commonly (as chiefly in our age) this charge of writing histories is committed unto base, ignorant, and mechanically kinde of people, only for this consideration that they can speake wel; as if we sought to learne the Grammer of them; and they have some reason, being only hyred to that end, and publishing nothing but their tittle-tattle to aime at nothing else so much. Thus with store of choise and quaint words, and wyre-drawne phrases they huddle up, and make a hodge-pot of a laboured contexture of the reports, which they gather in the market-places or such other assemblies. *The only good histories are those that are written by such as commanded or were imploid themselves in weighty affairs, or that were partners in the conduct of them, or that at least have had the fortune to manage others of like qualitie.* Such in a maner are all the Græcians and Romans. For, many eie-witnesses having written of one same subject (as it hapned in those times, when Greatnesse and Knowledge did commonly meet) if any fault or over-sight have passt them, it must be deemed exceeding light, and upon some doubtfull accident. *What may a man expect at a Phisitions hand, that discourseth of war, or of a bare Scholler, treating of Princes secret designes?* If we shall but note the religion, which the Romans had in that, we neede no other example: *Asinius Polio* found some mistaking or oversight in *Cæsars* Commentaries, whereinto he was false, only because he could not possibly oversee all things with his owne eyes, that happened in his army, but was faine to relie on the reports of particular men, who often related untruths unto him; or else because he had not beene curiously advertised, and distinctly enformed by his Lieutenants and Captaines, of such matters as they in his absence had managed or effected. Whereby may be seene, that *nothing is so hard, or so uncertaine to be found-out, as the certainty of a truth,* sithence no man can put any assured confidence concerning the truth of a battell, neither in the knowledge of him, that was General or commanded over it, nor in the soldiers that fought, of any thing, that hath hapned amongst them; except after the maner of a strict point of law, the severall witnesses are brought and examined face to face, and that all matters bee nicely and thorowly sifted by the objects and trialls of the successe of every accident. Verily the knowledge wee have of our owne affaires is much more barren and feeble. But this hath sufficiently beene handled by *Bodine*, and agreeing with my conception. Somewhat to ayde the weaknesse of my memory, and to assist hir great defects; for it hath often beene my chance to light upon bookes, which I supposed to be new, and never to have read, which I had notwithstanding diligently read and runne-over many yeares before, and all bescribed with my notes: I have a while since accustomed my selfe, to note at the end of my booke (I meane such as I purpose to read but once) the time I made an end to read it, and to set downe what censure or judgement I gave of it; that so, it may at least, at another time represent unto my mind, the aire and generall Idea, I had conceived of the Author in reading him. I will here set downe the Coppy of some of mine anotations, and especially what I noted upon my *Guicciardine* about tenne yeares since:

(For what language so ever my bookes speake unto me, I speake unto them in mine owne) He is a diligent Historiographer, and from whom in my concept, a man may as exactly learne the truth of such affaires as passed in his time, as of any other writer whatsoever: and the rather because himselfe hath bin an Actor of most parte of them, and in very honourable place. There is no signe or apparance, that ever he disguised or coloured any matter, either through hatred, malice, favour, or vanitie; whereof the free and imparciall judgements he giveth of great men, and namely of those by whom he had bin advanced or employed in his important charges, as of Pope *Clement* the seaventh, beareth undoubted testimonie. Concerning the partes wherewith he most goeth about to prevaile, which are his digressions and discourses, manie of them are verie excellent, and enriched with faire ornaments, but he hath too much pleased himself in them: for, endeavoring to omit nothing that might be spoken, having so full and large a subject, and almost infinit, he proveth somewhat languishing, and giveth a taste of a kinde of scholasticall tedious babling. Moreover, I have noted this, that of so several and divers armes, successes, and effects he judgeth-of; of so many and variable motives, alterations, and counsells, that he relateth, he never referreth any one unto vertue, religion or conscience: as if they were all extinguished and banished the world: and of all actions, how glorious so ever in apparance they be of themselves, he doeth ever impute the cause of them, to some vicious and blame-worthie occasion, or to some commoditie and profit. It is impossible to imagine, that amongst so infinite a number of actions whereof he judgeth, some one have not beene produced and compassed by way of reason. No corruption could ever possesse men so universally, but that some one must of necessitie escape the contagion; which makes me to feare, he hath had some distast or blame in his passion, and it hath haply fortun'd, that he hath judged or esteemed of others according to himselfe. In my *Philip de Comines*, there is this: In him you shall finde a pleasing-sweete, and gently-gliding speach, fraught with a purely-sincere simplicitie, his narration pure and unaffected, and wherein the Authours unspotted-good meaning doth evidently appeare, void of all manner of vanitie or ostentation speaking of himselfe, and free from all affection or envy speaking of others: his discourses and perswasions, accompanied more with a well-meaning zeale, and meere verity, then with any labored and exquisit sufficiency, and all-through, with gravitie and aucthority, representing a man well-borne, and brought up in high negotiations. Upon the memories and historie of Monsieur du *Bellay*: It is ever a well-pleasing thing, to see matters written by those, that have assaide how, and in what maner they ought to be directed and managed: yet can it not be denyed, but that in both these Lordes, there will manifestly appeare a great declination from a free liberty of writing, which clearely shineth in ancient writers of their kinde: as in the Lord of *Jonville*, familiar unto Saint *Lewis*, *Eginard*, Chancellor unto *Charlemaine*; and of more fresh memory in *Philip de Comines*. This is rather a declamation or pleading for King *Francis* against the Emperour *Charles* the fifth, then an History. I will not believe, they have altered or changed any thing concerning the generalitie of matters, but rather to wrest and turne the judgement of the events, many times against reason, to our advantage, and to omitte whatsoever they supposed, to be doubtfull or ticklish in their maisters life: they have made profession of it: witnesse the recoylings of the Lordes of *Momorancy* and

Byron, which therein are forgotten; and which is more, you shall not so much as finde the name of the Lady of Estampes mentioned at all. A man may sometimes colour, and happily hide secret actions, but absolutely to conceale that, which all the world knoweth, and especially such things as have drawne-on publike effects, and of such consequence, it is an inexcusable defect, or as I may say unpardonable oversight. To conclude, whosoever desireth to have perfect information and knowledge of King *Francis* the first, and of the things happened in his time, let him addresse himselfe elsewhere, if hee will give any credite unto mee. The profite he may reape here, is by the particular deduction of the battels and exploits of warre, wherein these Gentlemen were present; some privie conferences, speaches or secret actions of some Princes, that then lived, and the practises managed, or negotiations directed by the Lord of *Langeay*, in whom doubtlesse are very many things, well-worthie to be knowne, and divers discourses not vulgare.