

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Book 2 · Chapter 23

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Of bad meanes employed to a good end

THERE IS a woonderfull relation and correspondencie found in this universall pollicie of Natures workes, which manifestly sheweth, it is neither casuall, nor directed by diverse maisters. The infirmities and conditions of our bodies, are likewise seene in states and governements: *Kingdomes and Commonwealths as well as we, are borne, flourish, and fade through age.* We are subject unto a repleatnesse of humours, hurtfull and unprofitable, yea be it of good humours (for even Phisitians feare that, and because there is nothing constant in us, they say, that perfection of health over joyfull and strong, must by arte be abated and diminished, lest our nature unable to settle it selfe in any certaine place, and for hir amendment to ascend higher, should over-violently recoile backe into disorder; and therefore they prescribe unto Wrestlers purging and phlebotomie, to substract that superabundance of health from them) or of bad, which is the ordinarie cause of sicknesse. Of such like repletion are States often seene to be sicke, and diverse purgations are wont to be used to purge them. As wee have seene some to dismisse a great number of families (chiefly to disburthen the Countrey) which elsewhere goe to seeke where they may at others charge seate themselves. In this sorte our ancient *French* leaving the high Countries of *Germanie*, came to possesse *Gaule*, whence they displaced the first Inhabitants. Thus grew that infinite confluence of people, which afterward under *Brennus* and others, over-ranne *Italie*. Thus the *Gothes* and *Vandalles*, as also the Nations which possesse *Greece*, left their naturall Countries, to go where they might have more elbow-roome: And hardly shall we see two or three corners in the worlde, that have not felt the effect of such a remooving alteration. The Romanes, by such meanes, erected their Collonies; for perceiving their Cittie to growe over-populous, they were wont to discharge it of unnecessarie people, which they sent to inhabite and manure the Countries they had subdued. They have also sometimes maintained warre with some of their ennemies, not onely thereby to keepe their men in breath, lest Idlenesse, the mother of Corruption, should cause them some worse inconvenience.

*Et patimur longæ pacis mala, sæuior armis
Luxuria incumbit.*

*We suffer of long peace the soking harmes,
On us lies luxury more fierce then armes.*

But also to let the common wealth blood, and somewhat to allay the over vehement heate of their youth, to lop the sprigs, and thinne the branches of this over-spreading tree, too much abounding in ranknesse and gaillardise. To this purpose they maintained a good while warre with the Carthaginians. In the treatie of *Bretignie*, *Edward* the third, King of *England*, would by no meanes comprehend in that generall peace the controversie of the Dutchie of *Britanny*, to the end he might have some way to disburthen himselfe of his men of warre, and that the multitude of English men, which he had employde about the warres of *France*, should not returne into *England*. It was one of the reasons, induced *Philip* our King to consent, that his sonne *John* should be sent to warre beyond the seas, that so he might carry with him a great number of yong hot-bloods, which were amongst his trained militarie men. There are divers now adayes, which will speake thus, wishing this violent and burning emotion we see and feelee amongst us, might be derived to some neighbour warre, fearing lest those offending humours, which at this instant are predominant in our bodies, if they be not diverted elsewhere, will still maintaine our fever in force, and in the end cause our utter destruction: And in truth *a forraine warre is nothing so dangerous a disease as a civill*: But I will not beleeeve that God would favour so unjust an enterprise, to offend and quarrell with others for our commoditie.

*Nil mihi tam ualdè placeat Rhammusia uirgo,
Quòd temerè inuitis suscipiatur heris.*

*That fortune likes me not, which is constrained.
By Lords unwilling rashly entertained.*

Notwithstanding the weaknesse of our condition, doth often urge us to this necessitie, to use bad meanes to a good end. *Lycurgus* the most vertuous and perfect Law-giver that ever was, devised this most unjust fashion, to instruct his people unto temperance, by force to make the Helotes, which were their servants, to be drunke, that seeing them so lost and buried in wine, the Spartanes might abhorre the excesse of that vice. Those were also more to be blamed, who anciently allowed that criminall offenders, what death soever they were condemned unto, should by Phisitians all alive be torne in pieces, that so they might naturally see our inward parts, and thereby establish a more assured certaintie in their arte: For, if a man must needes erre or debauch himselfe, it is more excusable, if hee doe it for his soules health, then for his bodies good. As the Romanes trained up, and instructed their people to valour, and contempt of dangers and death, by the outrageous spectacles of Gladiators, and deadly-fighting fencers, who in presence of them all combated, mangled, sliced and killed one another.

*Quid uesani aliud sibi uult ars impia ludi,
Quid mortes iuuenum, quid sanguine pasta uoluptas?*

*What else meanes that mad arte of impious fense,
Those yong-mens deaths, that blood-fed pleasing sense?*

which custome continued even untill the time of *Theodosius* the Emperour.

*Arripe delatam tua dux in tempora famam,
Quódque patris superest successor laudis habeto:
Nullus in urbe cadat, cuius sit pœna uoluptas,
Iam solis contenta feris infamis arena,
Nulla cruentatis homicidia ludat in armis.*

*The fame defer'd to your times entertaine,
Enherite praise which doth from Sire remaine,
Let none die to give pleasure by his paine:
Be shamefull Theaters with beastes content,
Not in goar'd armes mans slaughter represent.*

Surely it was a wonderfull example, and of exceeding benefite for the peoples institution, to see dayly one or two hundred, yea sometimes a thousand brace of men armed one against another, in their presence to cut and hacke one another in pieces, with so great constancie of courage, that they were never seene to utter one word of faintnesse or commiseration, never to turne their backe, nor so much as to shew a motion of demissenesse, to avoide their adversaries blowes: but rather to extend their necks to their swordes, and present themselves unto their strokes. It hath hapned to diverse of them, who through many hurts being wounded to death, have sent to aske the people, whether they were satisfied with their dutie, before they would lie downe in the place. They must, not onely fight and die constantly, but jocondly: in such sort as they were cursed and bitterly scolded at, if in receiving their death they were any way seene to strive, yea maidens encited them to it.

*consurgit ad ictus,
Et quoties uictor ferrum iugulo inserit, illa
Delicias ait esse suas, pectúsque iacentis
Virgo modesta iubet converso pollice rumpi.*

*The modest maide, when wounds are giv'n, upriseth;
When victors sword the vanquisht throate surpriseth,
She saith, it is her sporte, and doth command,
T'embrue the conquer'd breast, by signe of hand.*

The first Romans disposed thus of their criminalls: But afterward they did so with their innocent servants; yea of their free-men, which were sold to that purpose: yea of Senators, and Romane Knights, and women also.

*Nunc caput in mortem uendunt, & funus arenæ,
Atque hostem sibi quisque parat cùm bella quiescunt.*

*They sell mens lives to death and stages sight,
When warres doe cease, they finde with whom to fight.*

*Hos inter fremitus nouósque lusus,
Stat sexus rudis insciúsque ferri,
Et pugnas capit improbus uiriles.*

*Amidst these tumults, these strange sporting sights,
That Sexe doth sit, which knowes not how sworde bites,
And entertaines unmov'd, those manly fights.*

Which I should deeme very strange and incredible; if we were not dayly accustomed to see in our warres many thousands of forraine nations, for a very small some of mony to engage both their blood and life in quarels wherein they are nothing interested.