The Essays of Montaigne, V8

Michel de Montaigne

Table of Contents

The Essays of Montaigne, V8 ..... **1**
Michel de Montaigne 1
CHAPTER XLVIII. OF WAR HORSES, OR DESTRIERS 1
CHAPTER XLIX. OF ANCIENT CUSTOMS 6
CHAPTER L. OF DEMOCRITUS AND HERACLITUS 9
CHAPTER LI. OF THE VANITY OF WORDS 11
CHAPTER LII. OF THE PARSIMONY OF THE ANCIENTS 13
CHAPTER LIII. OF A SAYING OF CAESAR 13
CHAPTER LIV. OF VAIN SUBTLETIES 14
CHAPTER LV. OF SMELLS 16
CHAPTER LVI. OF PRAYERS 17
CHAPTER LVII. OF AGE 22

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Michel de Montaigne

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CHAPTER XLVIII. OF WAR HORSES, OR DESTRIERS

I here have become a grammarian, I who never learned any language but by rote, and who do not yet know adjective, conjunction, or ablative. I think I have read that the Romans had a sort of horses by them called 'funales' or 'dextrarios', which were either led horses, or horses laid on at several stages to be taken fresh upon occasion, and thence it is that we call our horses of service 'destriers'; and our romances commonly use the phrase of 'adestrer' for 'accompagner', to accompany. They also called those that were trained in such sort, that running full speed, side by side, without bridle or saddle, the Roman gentlemen, armed at all pieces, would shift and throw themselves from one to the other, 'desultorios equos'. The Numidian men−at−arms had always a led horse in one hand, besides that they rode upon, to change in the heat of battle:

> "Quibus, desultorum in modum, binos trahentibus equos, inter
> acerrimam saepe pugnam, in recentem equum, ex fesso, armatis
> transultare mos erat: tanta velocitas ipsis, tamque docile
> equorum genus."
> ["To whom it was a custom, leading along two horses, often in the
> hottest fight, to leap armed from a tired horse to a fresh one; so
> active were the men, and the horses so docile."—Livy, xxiii. 29.]

There are many horses trained to help their riders so as to run upon any one, that appears with a drawn sword, to fall both with mouth and heels upon any that front or oppose them: but it often happens that they do more harm to their friends than to their enemies; and, moreover, you cannot loose them from their hold, to reduce them again into order, when they are once engaged and grappled, by which means you remain at the mercy of their quarrel. It happened very ill to Artybius, general of the Persian army, fighting, man to man, with Onesilus, king of Salamis, to be mounted upon a horse trained after this manner, it being the occasion of his death, the squire of Onesilus cleaving the horse down with a scythe betwixt the shoulders as it was reared up upon his master. And what the Italians report, that in the battle of Fornova, the horse of Charles VIII., with kicks and plunges, disengaged his

master from the enemy that pressed upon him, without which he had been slain, sounds like a very great chance, if it be true.

[In the narrative which Philip de Commines has given of this battle, in which he himself was present (lib. viii. ch. 6), he tells us of wonderful performances by the horse on which the king was mounted. The name of the horse was Savoy, and it was the most beautiful horse he had ever seen. During the battle the king was personally attacked, when he had nobody near him but a valet de chambre, a little fellow, and not well armed. "The king," says Commines, "had the best horse under him in the world, and therefore he stood his ground bravely, till a number of his men, not a great way from him, arrived at the critical minute."]

The Mamalukes make their boast that they have the most ready horses of any cavalry in the world; that by nature and custom they were taught to know and distinguish the enemy, and to fall foul upon them with mouth and heels, according to a word or sign given; as also to gather up with their teeth darts and lances scattered upon the field, and present them to their riders, on the word of command. 'T is said, both of Caesar and Pompey, that amongst their other excellent qualities they were both very good horsemen, and particularly of Caesar, that in his youth, being mounted on the bare back, without saddle or bridle, he could make the horse run, stop, and turn, and perform all its airs, with his hands behind him. As nature designed to make of this person, and of Alexander, two miracles of military art, so one would say she had done her utmost to arm them after an extraordinary manner for every one knows that Alexander's horse, Bucephalus, had a head inclining to the shape of a bull; that he would suffer himself to be mounted and governed by none but his master, and that he was so honoured after his death as to have a city erected to his name. Caesar had also one which had forefeet like those of a man, his hoofs being divided in the form of fingers, which likewise was not to be ridden, by any but Caesar himself, who, after his death, dedicated his statue to the goddess Venus.

I do not willingly alight when I am once on horseback, for it is the place where, whether well or sick, I find myself most at ease. Plato recommends it for health, as also Pliny says it is good for the stomach and the joints. Let us go further into this matter since here we are.

We read in Xenophon a law forbidding any one who was master of a horse to travel on foot. Trogus Pompeius and Justin say that the Parthians were wont to perform all offices and ceremonies, not only in war but also all affairs whether public or private, make bargains, confer, entertain, take the air, and all on horseback; and that the greatest distinction betwixt freemen and slaves amongst them was that the one rode on horseback and the other went on foot, an institution of which King Cyrus was the founder.

There are several examples in the Roman history (and Suetonius more particularly observes it of Caesar) of captains who, on pressing occasions, commanded their cavalry to alight, both by that means to take from them all hopes of flight, as also for the advantage they hoped in this sort of fight.

"Quo baud dubie superat Romanus,"

["Wherein the Roman does questionless excel."—Livy, ix. 22.]

says Livy. And so the first thing they did to prevent the mutinies and insurrections of nations of late conquest was to take from them their arms and horses, and therefore it is that we so often meet in Caesar:

"Arma proferri, jumenta produci, obsides dari jubet."

["He commanded the arms to be produced, the horses brought out, hostages to be given."—De Bello Gall., vii. II.]

The Grand Signior to this day suffers not a Christian or a Jew to keep a horse of his own throughout his empire.

Our ancestors, and especially at the time they had war with the English, in all their greatest engagements and pitched battles fought for the most part on foot, that they might have nothing but their own force, courage, and constancy to trust to in a quarrel of so great concern as life and honour. You stake (whatever Chrysanthes in Xenophon says to the contrary) your valour and your fortune upon that of your horse; his wounds or death bring your person into the same danger; his fear or fury shall make you reputed rash or cowardly; if he have an ill mouth or will not answer to the spur, your honour must answer for it. And, therefore, I do not think it strange that those battles were more firm and furious than those that are fought on horseback:

"Caedebant pariter, pariterque ruebant
Victores victique; neque his fuga nota, neque illis."

["They fought and fell pell−mell, victors and vanquished; nor was flight thought of by either."—AEneid, x. 756.]

Their battles were much better disputed. Nowadays there are nothing but routs:

"Primus clamor atque impetus rem decernit."

["The first shout and charge decides the business."—Livy, xxv. 41.]

And the means we choose to make use of in so great a hazard should be as much as possible at our own command: wherefore I should advise to choose weapons of the shortest sort, and such of which we are able to give the best account. A man may repose more confidence in a sword he holds in his hand than in a bullet he discharges out of a pistol, wherein there must be a concurrence of several circumstances to make it perform its office, the powder, the stone, and the wheel: if any of which fail it endangers your fortune. A man himself strikes much surer than the air can direct his blow:

"Et, quo ferre velint, permittere vulnera ventis
Ensis habet vires; et gens quaecumque virorum est,
Bella gerit gladiis."

["And so where they choose to carry [the arrows], the winds allow the wounds; the sword has strength of arm: and whatever nation of men there is, they wage war with swords."—Lucan, viii. 384.]

But of that weapon I shall speak more fully when I come to compare the arms of the ancients with those of modern use; only, by the way, the astonishment of the ear abated, which every one grows familiar with in a short time, I look upon it as a weapon of very little execution, and hope we shall one day lay it aside. That missile weapon which the Italians formerly made use of both with fire and by sling was much more terrible: they called a certain kind of javelin, armed at the point with an iron three feet long, that it might pierce through and through an armed man, Phalarica, which they sometimes in the field darted by hand, sometimes from several sorts of engines for the defence of beleaguered places; the shaft being rolled round with flax, wax, rosin, oil, and other combustible matter, took fire in its flight, and lighting upon the body of a man or his target, took away all the use of arms and limbs. And yet, coming to close fight, I should think they would also damage the assailant, and that the camp being as it were planted with these flaming truncheons, would produce a common inconvenience to the whole crowd:

"Magnum stridens contorta Phalarica venit,
Fulminis acta modo."

["The Phalarica, launched like lightning, flies through the air with a loud rushing sound."—AEneid, ix. 705.]

They had, moreover, other devices which custom made them perfect in (which seem incredible to us who have not seen them), by which they supplied the effects of our powder and shot. They darted their spears with so great force, as ofttimes to transfix two targets and two armed men at once, and pin them together. Neither was the effect of their slings less certain of execution or of shorter carriage:

["Culling round stones from the beach for their slings; and with these practising over the waves, so as from a great distance to

throw within a very small circuit, they became able not only to
wound an enemy in the head, but hit any other part at pleasure."
—Livy, xxxviii. 29.]

Their pieces of battery had not only the execution but the thunder of our cannon also:

"Ad ictus moenium cum terribili sonitu editos,
pavor et trepidatio cepit."

["At the battery of the walls, performed with a terrible noise,
the defenders began to fear and tremble."—Idem, ibid., 5.]

The Gauls, our kinsmen in Asia, abominated these treacherous missile arms, it being their use to fight, with greater bravery, hand to hand:

["They are not so much concerned about large gashes−the bigger and
deeper the wound, the more glorious do they esteem the combat but
when they find themselves tormented by some arrow−head or bullet
lodged within, but presenting little outward show of wound,
transported with shame and anger to perish by so imperceptible a
destroyer, they fall to the ground."—−Livy, xxxviii. 21.]

A pretty description of something very like an arquebuse−shot. The ten thousand Greeks in their long and famous retreat met with a nation who very much galled them with great and strong bows, carrying arrows so long that, taking them up, one might return them back like a dart, and with them pierce a buckler and an armed man through and through. The engines, that Dionysius invented at Syracuse to shoot vast massy darts and stones of a prodigious greatness with so great impetuosity and at so great a distance, came very near to our modern inventions.

But in this discourse of horses and horsemanship, we are not to forget the pleasant posture of one Maistre Pierre Pol, a doctor of divinity, upon his mule, whom Monstrelet reports always to have ridden sideways through the streets of Paris like a woman. He says also, elsewhere, that the Gascons had terrible horses, that would wheel in their full speed, which the French, Picards, Flemings, and Brabanters looked upon as a miracle, "having never seen the like before," which are his very words.

Caesar, speaking of the Suabians: " in the charges they make on horseback," says he, "they often throw themselves off to fight on foot, having taught their horses not to stir in the meantime from the place, to which they presently run again upon occasion; and according to their custom, nothing is so unmanly and so base as to use saddles or pads, and they despise such as make use of those conveniences: insomuch that, being but a very few in number, they fear not to attack a great many." That which I have formerly wondered at, to see a horse made to perform all his airs with a switch only and the reins upon his neck, was common with the Massilians, who rid their horses without saddle or bridle:

"Et gens, quae nudo residens Massylia dorso,
Ora levi flectit, fraenorum nescia, virga."

["The Massylians, mounted on the bare backs of their horses,
bridleless, guide them by a mere switch."—Lucan, iv. 682.]

"Et Numidae infraeni cingunt."

["The Numidians guiding their horses without bridles."
—AEneid, iv. 41.]

"Equi sine fraenis, deformis ipse cursus,
rigida cervice et extento capite currentium."

["The career of a horse without a bridle is ungraceful; the neck
extended stiff, and the nose thrust out."—Livy, xxxv. II.]

King Alfonso, —[Alfonso XI., king of Leon and Castile, died 1350.]— he who first instituted the Order of the Band or Scarf in Spain, amongst other rules of the order, gave them this, that they should never ride mule or mulet, upon penalty of a mark of silver; this I had lately out of Guevara's Letters. Whoever gave these the title of Golden Epistles had another kind of opinion of them than I have. The Courtier says, that till his time it was a disgrace to a gentleman to ride on one of these creatures: but the Abyssinians, on the contrary, the nearer they are to the person of Prester John, love to be mounted upon large mules, for the greatest dignity and grandeur.

Xenophon tells us, that the Assyrians were fain to keep their horses fettered in the stable, they were so fierce and vicious; and that it required so much time to loose and harness them, that to avoid any disorder this tedious preparation might bring upon them in case of surprise, they never sat down in their camp till it was first well fortified with ditches and ramparts. His Cyrus, who was so great a master in all manner of horse service, kept his horses to their due work, and never suffered them to have anything to eat till first they had earned it by the sweat of some kind of exercise. The Scythians when in the field and in scarcity of provisions used to let their horses blood, which they drank, and sustained themselves by that diet:

> "Venit et epoto Sarmata pastus equo."
>
> ["The Scythian comes, who feeds on horse−flesh"
> —Martial, De Spectaculis Libey, Epigr. iii. 4.]

Those of Crete, being besieged by Metellus, were in so great necessity for drink that they were fain to quench their thirst with their horses urine.—[Val. Max., vii. 6, ext. 1.]

To shew how much cheaper the Turkish armies support themselves than our European forces, 'tis said that besides the soldiers drink nothing but water and eat nothing but rice and salt flesh pulverised (of which every one may easily carry about with him a month's provision), they know how to feed upon the blood of their horses as well as the Muscovite and Tartar, and salt it for their use.

These new−discovered people of the Indies [Mexico and Yucatan D.W.], when the Spaniards first landed amongst them, had so great an opinion both of the men and horses, that they looked upon the first as gods and the other as animals ennobled above their nature; insomuch that after they were subdued, coming to the men to sue for peace and pardon, and to bring them gold and provisions, they failed not to offer of the same to the horses, with the same kind of harangue to them they had made to the others: interpreting their neighing for a language of truce and friendship.

In the other Indies, to ride upon an elephant was the first and royal place of honour; the second to ride in a coach with four horses; the third to ride upon a camel; and the last and least honour to be carried or drawn by one horse only. Some one of our late writers tells us that he has been in countries in those parts where they ride upon oxen with pads, stirrups, and bridles, and very much at their ease.

Quintus Fabius Maximus Rullianus, in a battle with the Samnites, seeing his horse, after three or four charges, had failed of breaking into the enemy's battalion, took this course, to make them unbridle all their horses and spur their hardest, so that having nothing to check their career, they might through weapons and men open the way to his foot, who by that means gave them a bloody defeat. The same command was given by Quintus Fulvius Flaccus against the Celtiberians:

> ["You will do your business with greater advantage of your horses'
> strength, if you send them unbridled upon the enemy, as it is
> recorded the Roman horse to their great glory have often done; their
> bits being taken off, they charged through and again back through
> the enemy's ranks with great slaughter, breaking down all their
> spears."—Idem, xl. 40.]

The Duke of Muscovy was anciently obliged to pay this reverence to the Tartars, that when they sent an embassy to him he went out to meet them on foot, and presented them with a goblet of mares' milk (a beverage of greatest esteem amongst them), and if, in drinking, a drop fell by chance upon their horse's mane, he was bound to lick it off with his tongue. The army that Bajazet had sent into Russia was overwhelmed with so dreadful a tempest of snow, that to shelter and preserve themselves from the cold, many killed and embowelled their horses, to creep into their bellies and enjoy the benefit of that vital heat. Bajazet, after that furious battle wherein he was overthrown by Tamerlane, was in a hopeful way of securing his own person by the fleetness of an Arabian mare he had under him, had he not been constrained to let her drink her fill at the ford of a river in his way, which rendered her so heavy and indisposed, that he was afterwards easily overtaken by those that pursued him. They say, indeed, that to let a horse stale takes him off his mettle, but as to drinking, I should rather have thought it would refresh him.

Croesus, marching his army through certain waste lands near Sardis, met with an infinite number of serpents, which the horses devoured with great appetite, and which Herodotus says was a prodigy of ominous portent to his affairs.

We call a horse entire, that has his mane and ears so, and no other will pass muster. The Lacedaemonians, having defeated the Athenians in Sicily, returning triumphant from the victory into the city of Syracuse, amongst other insolences, caused all the horses they had taken to be shorn and led in triumph. Alexander fought with a nation called Dahas, whose discipline it was to march two and two together armed on one horse, to the war; and being in fight, one of them alighted, and so they fought on horseback and on foot, one after another by turns.

I do not think that for graceful riding any nation in the world excels the French. A good horseman, according to our way of speaking, seems rather to have respect to the courage of the man than address in riding. Of all that ever I saw, the most knowing in that art, who had the best seat and the best method in breaking horses, was Monsieur de Carnavalet, who served our King Henry II.

I have seen a man ride with both his feet upon the saddle, take off his saddle, and at his return take it up again and replace it, riding all the while full speed; having galloped over a cap, make at it very good shots backwards with his bow; take up anything from the ground, setting one foot on the ground and the other in the stirrup: with twenty other ape's tricks, which he got his living by.

There has been seen in my time at Constantinople two men upon one horse, who, in the height of its speed, would throw themselves off and into the saddle again by turn; and one who bridled and saddled his horse with nothing but his teeth; an other who betwixt two horses, one foot upon one saddle and the other upon another, carrying the other man upon his shoulders, would ride full career, the other standing bolt upright upon and making very good shots with his bow; several who would ride full speed with their heels upward, and their heads upon the saddle betwixt several scimitars, with the points upwards, fixed in the harness. When I was a boy, the prince of Sulmona, riding an unbroken horse at Naples, prone to all sorts of action, held reals —[A small coin of Spain, the Two Sicilies, under his knees and toes, as if they had been nailed there, to shew the firmness of his seat.

CHAPTER XLIX. OF ANCIENT CUSTOMS

I should willingly pardon our people for admitting no other pattern or rule of perfection than their own peculiar manners and customs; for 'tis a common vice, not of the vulgar only, but almost of all men, to walk in the beaten road their ancestors have trod before them. I am content, when they see Fabricius or Laelius, that they look upon their countenance and behaviour as barbarous, seeing they are neither clothed nor fashioned according to our mode. But I find fault with their singular indiscretion in suffering themselves to be so blinded and imposed upon by the authority of the present usage as every month to alter their opinion, if custom so require, and that they should so vary their judgment in their own particular concern. When they wore the busk of their doublets up as

high as their breasts, they stiffly maintained that they were in their proper place; some years after it was slipped down betwixt their thighs, and then they could laugh at the former fashion as uneasy and intolerable. The fashion now in use makes them absolutely condemn the other two with so great resolution and so universal consent, that a man would think there was a certain kind of madness crept in amongst them, that infatuates their understandings to this strange degree. Now, seeing that our change of fashions is so prompt and sudden, that the inventions of all the tailors in the world cannot furnish out new whim−whams enow to feed our vanity withal, there will often be a necessity that the despised forms must again come in vogue, these immediately after fall into the same contempt; and that the same judgment must, in the space of fifteen or twenty years, take up half−a−dozen not only divers but contrary opinions, with an incredible lightness and inconstancy; there is not any of us so discreet, who suffers not himself to be gulled with this contradiction, and both in external and internal sight to be insensibly blinded.

I wish to muster up here some old customs that I have in memory, some of them the same with ours, the others different, to the end that, bearing in mind this continual variation of human things, we may have our judgment more clearly and firmly settled.

The thing in use amongst us of fighting with rapier and cloak was in practice amongst the Romans also:

> "Sinistras sagis involvunt, gladiosque distringunt,"
> ["They wrapt their cloaks upon the left arm, and drew their swords."—De Bello Civili, i. 75.]

says Caesar; and he observes a vicious custom of our nation, that continues yet amongst us, which is to stop passengers we meet upon the road, to compel them to give an account who they are, and to take it for an affront and just cause of quarrel if they refuse to do it.

At the Baths, which the ancients made use of every day before they went to dinner, and as frequently as we wash our hands, they at first only bathed their arms and legs; but afterwards, and by a custom that has continued for many ages in most nations of the world, they bathed stark naked in mixed and perfumed water, looking upon it as a great simplicity to bathe in mere water. The most delicate and affected perfumed themselves all over three or four times a day. They often caused their hair to be pinched off, as the women of France have some time since taken up a custom to do their foreheads,

> "Quod pectus, quod crura tibi, quod brachia veilis,"
> ["You pluck the hairs out of your breast, your arms, and thighs."
> —Martial, ii. 62, i.]

though they had ointments proper for that purpose:

> "Psilotro nitet, aut acids latet oblita creta."
> ["She shines with unguents, or with chalk dissolved in vinegar."
> —Idem, vi. 93, 9.]

They delighted to lie soft, and alleged it as a great testimony of hardiness to lie upon a mattress. They ate lying upon beds, much after the manner of the Turks in this age:

> "Inde thoro pater AEneas sic orsus ab alto."
> ["Thus Father AEneas, from his high bed of state, spoke."
> —AEneid, ii. 2.]

And 'tis said of the younger Cato, that after the battle of Pharsalia, being entered into a melancholy disposition at the ill posture of the public affairs, he took his repasts always sitting, assuming a strict and austere course of life. It was also their custom to kiss the hands of great persons; the more to honour and caress them. And meeting with friends, they always kissed in salutation, as do the Venetians:

> "Gratatusque darem cum dulcibus oscula verbis."
> ["And kindest words I would mingle with kisses."

—Ovid, De Pont., iv. 9, 13]

In petitioning or saluting any great man, they used to lay their hands upon his knees. Pasicles the philosopher, brother of Crates, instead of laying his hand upon the knee laid it upon the private parts, and being roughly repulsed by him to whom he made that indecent compliment: "What," said he, "is not that part your own as well as the other?" — [Diogenes Laertius, vi. 89.]— They used to eat fruit, as we do, after dinner. They wiped their fundaments (let the ladies, if they please, mince it smaller) with a sponge, which is the reason that 'spongia' is a smutty word in Latin; which sponge was fastened to the end of a stick, as appears by the story of him who, as he was led along to be thrown to the wild beasts in the sight of the people, asking leave to do his business, and having no other way to despatch himself, forced the sponge and stick down his throat and choked himself.—[Seneca, Ep., 70.] They used to wipe, after coition, with perfumed wool:

"At tibi nil faciam; sed Iota mentula lana."

They had in the streets of Rome vessels and little tubs for passengers to urine in:

"Pusi saepe lacum propter se, ac dolia curta."
Somno devincti, credunt extollere vestem."

["The little boys in their sleep often think they are near the public urinal, and raise their coats to make use of it."
—Lucretius, iv.]

They had collation betwixt meals, and had in summer cellars of snow to cool their wine; and some there were who made use of snow in winter, not thinking their wine cool enough, even at that cold season of the year. The men of quality had their cupbearers and carvers, and their buffoons to make them sport. They had their meat served up in winter upon chafing dishes, which were set upon the table, and had portable kitchens (of which I myself have seen some) wherein all their service was carried about with them:

"Has vobis epulas habete, lauti
Nos offendimur ambulante caena."

["Do you, if you please, esteem these feasts: we do not like the ambulatory suppers."—Martial, vii. 48, 4.]

In summer they had a contrivance to bring fresh and clear rills through their lower rooms, wherein were great store of living fish, which the guests took out with their own hands to be dressed every man according to his own liking. Fish has ever had this pre−eminence, and keeps it still, that the grandees, as to them, all pretend to be cooks; and indeed the taste is more delicate than that of flesh, at least to my fancy. But in all sorts of magnificence, debauchery, and voluptuous inventions of effeminacy and expense, we do, in truth, all we can to parallel them; for our wills are as corrupt as theirs: but we want ability to equal them. Our force is no more able to reach them in their vicious, than in their virtuous, qualities, for both the one and the other proceeded from a vigour of soul which was without comparison greater in them than in us; and souls, by how much the weaker they are, by so much have they less power to do either very well or very ill.

The highest place of honour amongst them was the middle. The name going before, or following after, either in writing or speaking, had no signification of grandeur, as is evident by their writings; they will as soon say Oppius and Caesar, as Caesar and Oppius; and me and thee, as thee and me. This is the reason that made me formerly take notice in the life of Flaminius, in our French Plutarch, of one passage, where it seems as if the author, speaking of the jealousy of honour betwixt the AEtolians and Romans, about the winning of a battle they had with their joined forces obtained, made it of some importance, that in the Greek songs they had put the AEtolians before the Romans: if there be no amphibology in the words of the French translation.

The ladies, in their baths, made no scruple of admitting men amongst them, and moreover made use of their serving−men to rub and anoint them:

"Inguina succinctus nigri tibi servus aluta

Stat, quoties calidis nuda foveris aquis."
["A slave—his middle girded with a black apron—stands before you,
when, naked, you take a hot bath."—Martial, vii. 35, i.]

They all powdered themselves with a certain powder, to moderate their sweats.

The ancient Gauls, says Sidonius Apollinaris, wore their hair long before and the hinder part of the head shaved, a fashion that begins to revive in this vicious and effeminate age.

The Romans used to pay the watermen their fare at their first stepping into the boat, which we never do till after landing:

"Dum aes exigitur, dum mula ligatur,
Tota abit hora."
["Whilst the fare's paying, and the mule is being harnessed, a whole
hour's time is past."—Horace, Sat. i. 5, 13.]

The women used to lie on the side of the bed next the wall: and for that reason they called Caesar,

"Spondam regis Nicomedis,"
["The bed of King Nicomedes."—Suetonius, Life of Caesar, 49.]

They took breath in their drinking, and watered their wine

"Quis puer ocius
Restinguet ardentis Falerni
Pocula praetereunte lympha?"
["What boy will quickly come and cool the heat of the Falernian
wine with clear water?"—Horace, Od., ii. z, 18.]

And the roguish looks and gestures of our lackeys were also in use amongst them:

O Jane, a tergo quern nulls ciconia pinsit,
Nec manus, auriculas imitari est mobilis albas,
Nec lingua, quantum sitiat canis Appula, tantum."
["O Janus, whom no crooked fingers, simulating a stork, peck at
behind your back, whom no quick hands deride behind you, by
imitating the motion of the white ears of the ass, against whom no
mocking tongue is thrust out, as the tongue of the thirsty Apulian
dog."—Persius, i. 58.]

The Argian and Roman ladies mourned in white, as ours did formerly and should do still, were I to govern in this point. But there are whole books on this subject.

CHAPTER L. OF DEMOCRITUS AND HERACLITUS

The judgment is an utensil proper for all subjects, and will have an oar in everything: which is the reason, that in these Essays I take hold of all occasions where, though it happen to be a subject I do not very well understand, I try, however, sounding it at a distance, and finding it too deep for my stature, I keep me on the shore; and this knowledge that a man can proceed no further, is one effect of its virtue, yes, one of those of which it is most proud. One while in an idle and frivolous subject, I try to find out matter whereof to compose a body, and then to prop and support it; another while, I employ it in a noble subject, one that has been tossed and tumbled by a thousand hands, wherein a man can scarce possibly introduce anything of his own, the way being so beaten on

every side that he must of necessity walk in the steps of another: in such a case, 'tis the work of the judgment to take the way that seems best, and of a thousand paths, to determine that this or that is the best. I leave the choice of my arguments to fortune, and take that she first presents to me; they are all alike to me, I never design to go through any of them; for I never see all of anything: neither do they who so largely promise to show it others. Of a hundred members and faces that everything has, I take one, onewhile to look it over only, another while to ripple up the skin, and sometimes to pinch it to the bones: I give a stab, not so wide but as deep as I can, and am for the most part tempted to take it in hand by some new light I discover in it. Did I know myself less, I might perhaps venture to handle something or other to the bottom, and to be deceived in my own inability; but sprinkling here one word and there another, patterns cut from several pieces and scattered without design and without engaging myself too far, I am not responsible for them, or obliged to keep close to my subject, without varying at my own liberty and pleasure, and giving up myself to doubt and uncertainty, and to my own governing method, ignorance.

All motion discovers us: the very same soul of Caesar, that made itself so conspicuous in marshalling and commanding the battle of Pharsalia, was also seen as solicitous and busy in the softer affairs of love and leisure. A man makes a judgment of a horse, not only by seeing him when he is showing off his paces, but by his very walk, nay, and by seeing him stand in the stable.

Amongst the functions of the soul, there are some of a lower and meaner form; he who does not see her in those inferior offices as well as in those of nobler note, never fully discovers her; and, peradventure, she is best shown where she moves her simpler pace. The winds of passions take most hold of her in her highest flights; and the rather by reason that she wholly applies herself to, and exercises her whole virtue upon, every particular subject, and never handles more than one thing at a time, and that not according to it, but according to herself. Things in respect to themselves have, peradventure, their weight, measures, and conditions; but when we once take them into us, the soul forms them as she pleases. Death is terrible to Cicero, coveted by Cato, indifferent to Socrates. Health, conscience, authority, knowledge, riches, beauty, and their contraries, all strip themselves at their entering into us, and receive a new robe, and of another fashion, from the soul; and of what colour, brown, bright, green, dark, and of what quality, sharp, sweet, deep, or superficial, as best pleases each of them, for they are not agreed upon any common standard of forms, rules, or proceedings; every one is a queen in her own dominions. Let us, therefore, no more excuse ourselves upon the external qualities of things; it belongs to us to give ourselves an account of them. Our good or ill has no other dependence but on ourselves. 'Tis there that our offerings and our vows are due, and not to fortune she has no power over our manners; on the contrary, they draw and make her follow in their train, and cast her in their own mould. Why should not I judge of Alexander at table, ranting and drinking at the prodigious rate he sometimes used to do?

Or, if he played at chess? what string of his soul was not touched by this idle and childish game? I hate and avoid it, because it is not play enough, that it is too grave and serious a diversion, and I am ashamed to lay out as much thought and study upon it as would serve to much better uses. He did not more pump his brains about his glorious expedition into the Indies, nor than another in unravelling a passage upon which depends the safety of mankind. To what a degree does this ridiculous diversion molest the soul, when all her faculties are summoned together upon this trivial account! and how fair an opportunity she herein gives every one to know and to make a right judgment of himself? I do not more thoroughly sift myself in any other posture than this: what passion are we exempted from in it? Anger, spite, malice, impatience, and a vehement desire of getting the better in a concern wherein it were more excusable to be ambitious of being overcome; for to be eminent, to excel above the common rate in frivolous things, nowise befits a man of honour. What I say in this example may be said in all others. Every particle, every employment of man manifests him equally with any other.

Democritus and Heraclitus were two philosophers, of whom the first, finding human condition ridiculous and vain, never appeared abroad but with a jeering and laughing countenance; whereas Heraclitus commiserating that same condition of ours, appeared always with a sorrowful look, and tears in his eyes:

> "Alter
> Ridebat, quoties a limine moverat unum

Protuleratque pedem; flebat contrarius alter."
["The one always, as often as he had stepped one pace from his threshold, laughed, the other always wept."—Juvenal, Sat., x. 28.]
[Or, as Voltaire: "Life is a comedy to those who think; a tragedy to those who feel." D.W.]

I am clearly for the first humour; not because it is more pleasant to laugh than to weep, but because it expresses more contempt and condemnation than the other, and I think we can never be despised according to our full desert. Compassion and bewailing seem to imply some esteem of and value for the thing bemoaned; whereas the things we laugh at are by that expressed to be of no moment. I do not think that we are so unhappy as we are vain, or have in us so much malice as folly; we are not so full of mischief as inanity; nor so miserable as we are vile and mean. And therefore Diogenes, who passed away his time in rolling himself in his tub, and made nothing of the great Alexander, esteeming us no better than flies or bladders puffed up with wind, was a sharper and more penetrating, and, consequently in my opinion, a juster judge than Timon, surnamed the Man−hater; for what a man hates he lays to heart. This last was an enemy to all mankind, who passionately desired our ruin, and avoided our conversation as dangerous, proceeding from wicked and depraved natures: the other valued us so little that we could neither trouble nor infect him by our example; and left us to herd one with another, not out of fear, but from contempt of our society: concluding us as incapable of doing good as evil.

Of the same strain was Statilius' answer, when Brutus courted him into the conspiracy against Caesar; he was satisfied that the enterprise was just, but he did not think mankind worthy of a wise man's concern'; according to the doctrine of Hegesias, who said, that a wise man ought to do nothing but for himself, forasmuch as he only was worthy of it: and to the saying of Theodorus, that it was not reasonable a wise man should hazard himself for his country, and endanger wisdom for a company of fools. Our condition is as ridiculous as risible.

CHAPTER LI. OF THE VANITY OF WORDS

A rhetorician of times past said, that to make little things appear great was his profession. This was a shoemaker, who can make a great shoe for a little foot. —[A saying of Agesilaus.]— They would in Sparta have sent such a fellow to be whipped for making profession of a tricky and deceitful act; and I fancy that Archidamus, who was king of that country, was a little surprised at the answer of Thucydides, when inquiring of him, which was the better wrestler, Pericles, or he, he replied, that it was hard to affirm; for when I have thrown him, said he, he always persuades the spectators that he had no fall and carries away the prize. —[Quintilian, ii. 15.— The women who paint, pounce, and plaster up their ruins, filling up their wrinkles and deformities, are less to blame, because it is no great matter whether we see them in their natural complexions; whereas these make it their business to deceive not our sight only but our judgments, and to adulterate and corrupt the very essence of things. The republics that have maintained themselves in a regular and well−modelled government, such as those of Lacedaemon and Crete, had orators in no very great esteem. Aristo wisely defined rhetoric to be "a science to persuade the people;" Socrates and Plato" an art to flatter and deceive." And those who deny it in the general description, verify it throughout in their precepts. The Mohammedans will not suffer their children to be instructed in it, as being useless, and the Athenians, perceiving of how pernicious consequence the practice of it was, it being in their city of universal esteem, ordered the principal part, which is to move the affections, with their exordiums and perorations, to be taken away. 'Tis an engine invented to manage and govern a disorderly and tumultuous rabble, and that never is made use of, but like physic to the sick, in a discomposed state. In those where the vulgar or the ignorant, or both together, have been all−powerful and able to give the law, as in those of Athens, Rhodes, and Rome, and where the public affairs have been in a continual tempest of commotion, to such places have the orators always repaired. And in truth, we shall find few persons in those republics who have pushed their fortunes to any great degree of eminence without the assistance of eloquence.

Pompey, Caesar, Crassus, Lucullus, Lentulus, Metellus, thence took their chiefest spring, to mount to that degree

of authority at which they at last arrived, making it of greater use to them than arms, contrary to the opinion of better times; for, L. Volumnius speaking publicly in favour of the election of (Q. Fabius and Pub. Decius, to the consular dignity: "These are men," said he, "born for war and great in execution; in the combat of the tongue altogether wanting; spirits truly consular. The subtle, eloquent, and learned are only good for the city, to make praetors of, to administer justice."—[Livy, x. 22.]

Eloquence most flourished at Rome when the public affairs were in the worst condition and most disquieted with intestine commotions; as a free and untilled soil bears the worst weeds. By which it should seem that a monarchical government has less need of it than any other: for the stupidity and facility natural to the common people, and that render them subject to be turned and twined and, led by the ears by this charming harmony of words, without weighing or considering the truth and reality of things by the force of reason: this facility, I say, is not easily found in a single person, and it is also more easy by good education and advice to secure him from the impression of this poison. There was never any famous orator known to come out of Persia or Macedon.

I have entered into this discourse upon the occasion of an Italian I lately received into my service, and who was clerk of the kitchen to the late Cardinal Caraffa till his death. I put this fellow upon an account of his office: when he fell to discourse of this palate−science, with such a settled countenance and magisterial gravity, as if he had been handling some profound point of divinity. He made a learned distinction of the several sorts of appetites; of that a man has before he begins to eat, and of those after the second and third service; the means simply to satisfy the first, and then to raise and actuate the other two; the ordering of the sauces, first in general, and then proceeded to the qualities of the ingredients and their effects; the differences of salads according to their seasons, those which ought to be served up hot, and which cold; the manner of their garnishment and decoration to render them acceptable to the eye. After which he entered upon the order of the whole service, full of weighty and important considerations:

> "Nec minimo sane discrimine refert,
> Quo gestu lepores, et quo gallina secetur;"
>
> ["Nor with less discrimination observes how we should carve a hare, and how a hen." or, ("Nor with the least discrimination relates how we should carve hares, and how cut up a hen.)"
> —Juvenal, Sat., v. 123.]

and all this set out with lofty and magnificent words, the very same we make use of when we discourse of the government of an empire. Which learned lecture of my man brought this of Terence into my memory:

> "Hoc salsum est, hoc adustum est, hoc lautum est, parum:
> Illud recte: iterum sic memento: sedulo
> Moneo, qux possum, pro mea sapientia.
> Postremo, tanquam in speculum, in patinas,
> Demea, Inspicere jubeo, et moneo, quid facto usus sit."
>
> ["This is too salt, that's burnt, that's not washed enough; that's well; remember to do so another time. Thus do I ever advise them to have things done properly, according to my capacity; and lastly, Demea, I command my cooks to look into every dish as if it were a mirror, and tell them what they should do."
> —Terence, Adelph., iii. 3, 71.]

And yet even the Greeks themselves very much admired and highly applauded the order and disposition that Paulus AEmilius observed in the feast he gave them at his return from Macedon. But I do not here speak of effects, I speak of words only.

I do not know whether it may have the same operation upon other men that it has upon me, but when I hear our architects thunder out their bombast words of pilasters, architraves, and cornices, of the Corinthian and Doric

orders, and suchlike jargon, my imagination is presently possessed with the palace of Apollidon; when, after all, I find them but the paltry pieces of my own kitchen door.

To hear men talk of metonomies, metaphors, and allegories, and other grammar words, would not one think they signified some rare and exotic form of speaking? And yet they are phrases that come near to the babble of my chambermaid.

And this other is a gullery of the same stamp, to call the offices of our kingdom by the lofty titles of the Romans, though they have no similitude of function, and still less of authority and power. And this also, which I doubt will one day turn to the reproach of this age of ours, unworthily and indifferently to confer upon any we think fit the most glorious surnames with which antiquity honoured but one or two persons in several ages. Plato carried away the surname of Divine, by so universal a consent that never any one repined at it, or attempted to take it from him; and yet the Italians, who pretend, and with good reason, to more sprightly wits and sounder sense than the other nations of their time, have lately bestowed the same title upon Aretin, in whose writings, save tumid phrases set out with smart periods, ingenious indeed but far− fetched and fantastic, and the eloquence, be it what it may, I see nothing in him above the ordinary writers of his time, so far is he from approaching the ancient divinity. And we make nothing of giving the surname of great to princes who have nothing more than ordinary in them.

CHAPTER LII. OF THE PARSIMONY OF THE ANCIENTS

Attilius Regulus, general of the Roman army in Africa, in the height of all his glory and victories over the Carthaginians, wrote to the Republic to acquaint them that a certain hind he had left in trust with his estate, which was in all but seven acres of land, had run away with all his instruments of husbandry, and entreating therefore, that they would please to call him home that he might take order in his own affairs, lest his wife and children should suffer by this disaster. Whereupon the Senate appointed another to manage his business, caused his losses to be made good, and ordered his family to be maintained at the public expense.

The elder Cato, returning consul from Spain, sold his warhorse to save the money it would have cost in bringing it back by sea into Italy; and being Governor of Sardinia, he made all his visits on foot, without other train than one officer of the Republic who carried his robe and a censer for sacrifices, and for the most part carried his trunk himself. He bragged that he had never worn a gown that cost above ten crowns, nor had ever sent above tenpence to the market for one day's provision; and that as to his country houses, he had not one that was rough−cast on the outside.

Scipio AEmilianus, after two triumphs and two consulships, went an embassy with no more than seven servants in his train. 'Tis said that Homer had never more than one, Plato three, and Zeno, founder of the sect of Stoics, none at all. Tiberius Gracchus was allowed but fivepence halfpenny a day when employed as public minister about the public affairs, and being at that time the greatest man of Rome.

CHAPTER LIII. OF A SAYING OF CAESAR

If we would sometimes bestow a little consideration upon ourselves, and employ the time we spend in prying into other men's actions, and discovering things without us, in examining our own abilities we should soon perceive of how infirm and decaying material this fabric of ours is composed. Is it not a singular testimony of imperfection that we cannot establish our satisfaction in any one thing, and that even our own fancy and desire should deprive us of the power to choose what is most proper and useful for us? A very good proof of this is the great dispute that has ever been amongst the philosophers, of finding out man's sovereign good, that continues yet, and will eternally continue, without solution or accord:

"Dum abest quod avemus, id exsuperare videtur
Caetera; post aliud, quum contigit illud, avemus,

Et sitis aequa tenet."

["While that which we desire is wanting, it seems to surpass all the rest; then, when we have got it, we want something else; 'tis ever the same thirst"—Lucretius, iii. 1095.

Whatever it is that falls into our knowledge and possession, we find that it satisfies not, and we still pant after things to come and unknown, inasmuch as those present do not suffice for us; not that, in my judgment, they have not in them wherewith to do it, but because we seize them with an unruly and immoderate haste:

"Nam quum vidit hic, ad victum qux flagitat usus,
Et per quae possent vitam consistere tutam,
Omnia jam ferme mortalibus esse parata;
Divitiis homines, et honore, et laude potentes
Aflluere, atque bona natorum excellere fama;
Nec minus esse domi cuiquam tamen anxia corda,
Atque animi ingratis vitam vexare querelis
Causam, quae infestis cogit saevire querelis,
Intellegit ibi; vitium vas efficere ipsum,
Omniaque, illius vitio, corrumpier intus,
Qux collata foris et commoda quomque venirent."

["For when he saw that almost all things necessarily required for subsistence, and which may render life comfortable, are already prepared to their hand, that men may abundantly attain wealth, honour, praise, may rejoice in the reputation of their children, yet that, notwithstanding, every one has none the less in his heart and home anxieties and a mind enslaved by wearing complaints, he saw that the vessel itself was in fault, and that all good things which were brought into it from without were spoilt by its own imperfections."—Lucretius, vi. 9.]

Our appetite is irresolute and fickle; it can neither keep nor enjoy anything with a good grace: and man concluding it to be the fault of the things he is possessed of, fills himself with and feeds upon the idea of things he neither knows nor understands, to which he devotes his hopes and his desires, paying them all reverence and honour, according to the saying of Caesar:

"Communi fit vitio naturae, ut invisis, latitantibus
atque incognitis rebus magis confidamas,
vehementiusque exterreamur."

["'Tis the common vice of nature, that we at once repose most confidence, and receive the greatest apprehensions, from things unseen, concealed, and unknown."—De Bello Civil, xi. 4.]

CHAPTER LIV. OF VAIN SUBTLETIES

There are a sort of little knacks and frivolous subtleties from which men sometimes expect to derive reputation and applause: as poets, who compose whole poems with every line beginning with the same letter; we see the shapes of eggs, globes, wings, and hatchets cut out by the ancient Greeks by the measure of their verses, making them longer or shorter, to represent such or such a figure. Of this nature was his employment who made it his business to compute into how many several orders the letters of the alphabet might be transposed, and found out that incredible number mentioned in Plutarch. I am mightily pleased with the humour of him,

["Alexander, as may be seen in Quintil., Institut. Orat., lib. ii., cap. 20, where he defines Maratarexvia 'to be a certain

> unnecessary imitation of art, which really does neither good nor harm, but is as unprofitable and ridiculous as was the labour of that man who had so perfectly learned to cast small peas through the eye of a needle at a good distance that he never missed one, and was justly rewarded for it, as is said, by Alexander, who saw the performance, with a bushel of peas."—Coste.

who having a man brought before him that had learned to throw a grain of millet with such dexterity and assurance as never to miss the eye of a needle; and being afterwards entreated to give something for the reward of so rare a performance, he pleasantly, and in my opinion justly, ordered a certain number of bushels of the same grain to be delivered to him, that he might not want wherewith to exercise so famous an art. 'Tis a strong evidence of a weak judgment when men approve of things for their being rare and new, or for their difficulty, where worth and usefulness are not conjoined to recommend them.

I come just now from playing with my own family at who could find out the most things that hold by their two extremities; as Sire, which is a title given to the greatest person in the nation, the king, and also to the vulgar, as merchants, but never to any degree of men between. The women of great quality are called Dames, inferior gentlewomen, Demoiselles, and the meanest sort of women, Dames, as the first. The cloth of state over our tables is not permitted but in the palaces of princes and in taverns. Democritus said, that gods and beasts had sharper sense than men, who are of a middle form. The Romans wore the same habit at funerals and feasts. It is most certain that an extreme fear and an extreme ardour of courage equally trouble and relax the belly. The nickname of Trembling with which they surnamed Sancho XII., king of Navarre, tells us that valour will cause a trembling in the limbs as well as fear. Those who were arming that king, or some other person, who upon the like occasion was wont to be in the same disorder, tried to compose him by representing the danger less he was going to engage himself in: "You understand me ill," said he, "for could my flesh know the danger my courage will presently carry it into, it would sink down to the ground." The faintness that surprises us from frigidity or dislike in the exercises of Venus are also occasioned by a too violent desire and an immoderate heat. Extreme coldness and extreme heat boil and roast. Aristotle says, that sows of lead will melt and run with cold and the rigour of winter just as with a vehement heat. Desire and satiety fill all the gradations above and below pleasure with pain. Stupidity and wisdom meet in the same centre of sentiment and resolution, in the suffering of human accidents. The wise control and triumph over ill, the others know it not: these last are, as a man may say, on this side of accidents, the others are beyond them, who after having well weighed and considered their qualities, measured and judged them what they are, by virtue of a vigorous soul leap out of their reach; they disdain and trample them underfoot, having a solid and well−fortified soul, against which the darts of fortune, coming to strike, must of necessity rebound and blunt themselves, meeting with a body upon which they can fix no impression; the ordinary and middle condition of men are lodged betwixt these two extremities, consisting of such as perceive evils, feel them, and are not able to support them. Infancy and decrepitude meet in the imbecility of the brain; avarice and profusion in the same thirst and desire of getting.

A man may say with some colour of truth that there is an Abecedarian ignorance that precedes knowledge, and a doctoral ignorance that comes after it: an ignorance that knowledge creates and begets, at the same time that it despatches and destroys the first. Of mean understandings, little inquisitive, and little instructed, are made good Christians, who by reverence and obedience simply believe and are constant in their belief. In the average understandings and the middle sort of capacities, the error of opinion is begotten; they follow the appearance of the first impression, and have some colour of reason on their side to impute our walking on in the old beaten path to simplicity and stupidity, meaning us who have not informed ourselves by study. The higher and nobler souls, more solid and clear−sighted, make up another sort of true believers, who by a long and religious investigation of truth, have obtained a clearer and more penetrating light into the Scriptures, and have discovered the mysterious and divine secret of our ecclesiastical polity; and yet we see some, who by the middle step, have arrived at that supreme degree with marvellous fruit and confirmation, as to the utmost limit of Christian intelligence, and enjoy their victory with great spiritual consolation, humble acknowledgment of the divine favour, reformation of

manners, and singular modesty. I do not intend with these to rank those others, who to clear themselves from all suspicion of their former errors and to satisfy us that they are sound and firm, render themselves extremely indiscreet and unjust, in the carrying on our cause, and blemish it with infinite reproaches of violence and oppression. The simple peasants are good people, and so are the philosophers, or whatever the present age calls them, men of strong and clear reason, and whose souls are enriched with an ample instruction of profitable sciences. The mongrels who have disdained the first form of the ignorance of letters, and have not been able to attain to the other (sitting betwixt two stools, as I and a great many more of us do), are dangerous, foolish, and importunate; these are they that trouble the world. And therefore it is that I, for my own part, retreat as much as I can towards the first and natural station, whence I so vainly attempted to advance.

Popular and purely natural poesy
["The term poesie populaire was employed, for the first time, in the French language on this occasion. Montaigne created the expression, and indicated its nature."—Ampere.]

has in it certain artless graces, by which she may come into comparison with the greatest beauty of poetry perfected by art: as we see in our Gascon villanels and the songs that are brought us from nations that have no knowledge of any manner of science, nor so much as the use of writing. The middle sort of poesy betwixt these two is despised, of no value, honour, or esteem.

But seeing that the path once laid open to the fancy, I have found, as it commonly falls out, that what we have taken for a difficult exercise and a rare subject, prove to be nothing so, and that after the invention is once warm, it finds out an infinite number of parallel examples. I shall only add this one—that, were these Essays of mine considerable enough to deserve a critical judgment, it might then, I think, fall out that they would not much take with common and vulgar capacities, nor be very acceptable to the singular and excellent sort of men; the first would not understand them enough, and the last too much; and so they may hover in the middle region.

CHAPTER LV. OF SMELLS

It has been reported of some, as of Alexander the Great, that their sweat exhaled an odoriferous smell, occasioned by some rare and extraordinary constitution, of which Plutarch and others have been inquisitive into the cause. But the ordinary constitution of human bodies is quite otherwise, and their best and chiefest excellency is to be exempt from smell. Nay, the sweetness even of the purest breath has nothing in it of greater perfection than to be without any offensive smell, like those of healthful children, which made Plautus say of a woman:

"Mulier tum bene olet, ubi nihil olet."
["She smells sweetest, who smells not at all.
—Plautus, Mostel, i. 3, 116.]

And such as make use of fine exotic perfumes are with good reason to be suspected of some natural imperfection which they endeavour by these odours to conceal. To smell, though well, is to stink:

"Rides nos, Coracine, nil olentes
Malo, quam bene olere, nil olere."
["You laugh at us, Coracinus, because we are not scented; I would, rather than smell well, not smell at all."—Martial, vi. 55, 4.]

And elsewhere:

"Posthume, non bene olet, qui bene semper olet."
["Posthumus, he who ever smells well does not smell well."
—Idem, ii. 12, 14.]

I am nevertheless a great lover of good smells, and as much abominate the ill ones, which also I scent at a greater distance, I think, than other men:

"Namque sagacius unus odoror,
Polypus, an gravis hirsutis cubet hircus in aliis
Quam canis acer, ubi latest sus."

["My nose is quicker to scent a fetid sore or a rank armpit, than a dog to smell out the hidden sow."—Horace, Epod., xii. 4.]

Of smells, the simple and natural seem to me the most pleasing. Let the ladies look to that, for 'tis chiefly their concern: amid the most profound barbarism, the Scythian women, after bathing, were wont to powder and crust their faces and all their bodies with a certain odoriferous drug growing in their country, which being cleansed off, when they came to have familiarity with men they were found perfumed and sleek. 'Tis not to be believed how strangely all sorts of odours cleave to me, and how apt my skin is to imbibe them. He that complains of nature that she has not furnished mankind with a vehicle to convey smells to the nose had no reason; for they will do it themselves, especially to me; my very mustachios, which are full, perform that office; for if I stroke them but with my gloves or handkerchief, the smell will not out a whole day; they manifest where I have been, and the close, luscious, devouring, viscid melting kisses of youthful ardour in my wanton age left a sweetness upon my lips for several hours after. And yet I have ever found myself little subject to epidemic diseases, that are caught, either by conversing with the sick or bred by the contagion of the air, and have escaped from those of my time, of which there have been several sorts in our cities and armies. We read of Socrates, that though he never departed from Athens during the frequent plagues that infested the city, he only was never infected.

Physicians might, I believe, extract greater utility from odours than they do, for I have often observed that they cause an alteration in me and work upon my spirits according to their several virtues; which makes me approve of what is said, that the use of incense and perfumes in churches, so ancient and so universally received in all nations and religions, was intended to cheer us, and to rouse and purify the senses, the better to fit us for contemplation.

I could have been glad, the better to judge of it, to have tasted the culinary art of those cooks who had so rare a way of seasoning exotic odours with the relish of meats; as it was particularly observed in the service of the king of Tunis, who in our days —[Muley−Hassam, in 1543.] —landed at Naples to have an interview with Charles the Emperor. His dishes were larded with odoriferous drugs, to that degree of expense that the cookery of one peacock and two pheasants amounted to a hundred ducats to dress them after their fashion; and when the carver came to cut them up, not only the dining−room, but all the apartments of his palace and the adjoining streets were filled with an aromatic vapour which did not presently vanish.

My chiefest care in choosing my lodgings is always to avoid a thick and stinking air; and those beautiful cities, Venice and Paris, very much lessen the kindness I have for them, the one by the offensive smell of her marshes, and the other of her dirt.

CHAPTER LVI. OF PRAYERS

I propose formless and undetermined fancies, like those who publish doubtful questions, to be after a disputed upon in the schools, not to establish truth but to seek it; and I submit them to the judgments of those whose office it is to regulate, not my writings and actions only, but moreover my very thoughts. Let what I here set down meet with correction or applause, it shall be of equal welcome and utility to me, myself beforehand condemning as absurd and impious, if anything shall be found, through ignorance or inadvertency, couched in this rhapsody, contrary to the holy resolutions and prescriptions of the Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church, into which I was born and in which I will die. And yet, always submitting to the authority of their censure, which has an absolute power over me, I thus rashly venture at everything, as in treating upon this present subject.

I know not if or no I am wrong, but since, by a particular favour of the divine bounty, a certain form of prayer has been prescribed and dictated to us, word by word, from the mouth of God Himself, I have ever been of opinion that we ought to have it in more frequent use than we yet have; and if I were worthy to advise, at the sitting down to and rising from our tables, at our rising from and going to bed, and in every particular action wherein prayer is used, I would that Christians always make use of the Lord's Prayer, if not alone, yet at least always. The Church may lengthen and diversify prayers, according to the necessity of our instruction, for I know very well that it is always the same in substance and the same thing: but yet such a privilege ought to be given to that prayer, that the people should have it continually in their mouths; for it is most certain that all necessary petitions are comprehended in it, and that it is infinitely proper for all occasions. 'Tis the only prayer I use in all places and conditions, and which I still repeat instead of changing; whence it also happens that I have no other so entirely by heart as that.

It just now came into my mind, whence it is we should derive that error of having recourse to God in all our designs and enterprises, to call Him to our assistance in all sorts of affairs, and in all places where our weakness stands in need of support, without considering whether the occasion be just or otherwise; and to invoke His name and power, in what state soever we are, or action we are engaged in, howsoever vicious. He is indeed, our sole and unique protector, and can do all things for us: but though He is pleased to honour us with this sweet paternal alliance, He is, notwithstanding, as just as He is good and mighty; and more often exercises His justice than His power, and favours us according to that, and not according to our petitions.

Plato in his Laws, makes three sorts of belief injurious to the gods; " that there are none; that they concern not themselves about our affairs; that they never refuse anything to our vows, offerings, and sacrifices." The first of these errors (according to his opinion, never continued rooted in any man from his infancy to his old age; the other two, he confesses, men might be obstinate in.

God's justice and His power are inseparable; 'tis in vain we invoke His power in an unjust cause. We are to have our souls pure and clean, at that moment at least wherein we pray to Him, and purified from all vicious passions; otherwise we ourselves present Him the rods wherewith to chastise us; instead of repairing anything we have done amiss, we double the wickedness and the offence when we offer to Him, to whom we are to sue for pardon, an affection full of irreverence and hatred. Which makes me not very apt to applaud those whom I observe to be so frequent on their knees, if the actions nearest to the prayer do not give me some evidence of amendment and reformation:

> "Si, nocturnus adulter,
> Tempora Santonico velas adoperta cucullo."
>
> ["If a night adulterer, thou coverest thy head with a Santonic cowl."—Juvenal, Sat., viii. 144.— The Santones were the people who inhabited Saintonge in France, from whom the Romans derived the use of hoods or cowls covering the head and face.]

And the practice of a man who mixes devotion with an execrable life seems in some sort more to be condemned than that of a man conformable to his own propension and dissolute throughout; and for that reason it is that our Church denies admittance to and communion with men obstinate and incorrigible in any notorious wickedness. We pray only by custom and for fashion's sake; or rather, we read or pronounce our prayers aloud, which is no better than an hypocritical show of devotion; and I am scandalised to see a man cross himself thrice at the Benedicite, and as often at Grace (and the more, because it is a sign I have in great veneration and continual use, even when I yawn), and to dedicate all the other hours of the day to acts of malice, avarice, and injustice. One hour to God, the rest to the devil, as if by composition and compensation. 'Tis a wonder to see actions so various in themselves succeed one another with such an uniformity of method as not to interfere nor suffer any alteration, even upon the very confines and passes from the one to the other. What a prodigious conscience must that be that can be at quiet within itself whilst it harbours under the same roof, with so agreeing and so calm a society, both the crime and the judge?

A man whose whole meditation is continually working upon nothing but impurity which he knows to be so odious to Almighty God, what can he say when he comes to speak to Him? He draws back, but immediately falls into a relapse. If the object of divine justice and the presence of his Maker did, as he pretends, strike and chastise his soul, how short soever the repentance might be, the very fear of offending the Infinite Majesty would so often present itself to his imagination that he would soon see himself master of those vices that are most natural and vehement in him. But what shall we say of those who settle their whole course of life upon the profit and emolument of sins, which they know to be mortal? How many trades and vocations have we admitted and countenanced amongst us, whose very essence is vicious? And he that, confessing himself to me, voluntarily told me that he had all his lifetime professed and practised a religion, in his opinion damnable and contrary to that he had in his heart, only to preserve his credit and the honour of his employments, how could his courage suffer so infamous a confession? What can men say to the divine justice upon this subject?

Their repentance consisting in a visible and manifest reparation, they lose the colour of alleging it both to God and man. Are they so impudent as to sue for remission without satisfaction and without penitence? I look upon these as in the same condition with the first: but the obstinacy is not there so easy to be overcome. This contrariety and volubility of opinion so sudden, so violent, that they feign, are a kind of miracle to me: they present us with the state of an indigestible agony of mind.

It seemed to me a fantastic imagination in those who, these late years past, were wont to reproach every man they knew to be of any extraordinary parts, and made profession of the Catholic religion, that it was but outwardly; maintaining, moreover, to do him honour forsooth, that whatever he might pretend to the contrary he could not but in his heart be of their reformed opinion. An untoward disease, that a man should be so riveted to his own belief as to fancy that others cannot believe otherwise than as he does; and yet worse, that they should entertain so vicious an opinion of such great parts as to think any man so qualified, should prefer any present advantage of fortune to the promises of eternal life and the menaces of eternal damnation. They may believe me: could anything have tempted my youth, the ambition of the danger and difficulties in the late commotions had not been the least motives.

It is not without very good reason, in my opinion, that the Church interdicts the promiscuous, indiscreet, and irreverent use of the holy and divine Psalms, with which the Holy Ghost inspired King David. We ought not to mix God in our actions, but with the highest reverence and caution; that poesy is too holy to be put to no other use than to exercise the lungs and to delight our ears; it ought to come from the conscience, and not from the tongue. It is not fit that a prentice in his shop, amongst his vain and frivolous thoughts, should be permitted to pass away his time and divert himself with such sacred things. Neither is it decent to see the Holy Book of the holy mysteries of our belief tumbled up and down a hall or a kitchen they were formerly mysteries, but are now become sports and recreations. 'Tis a book too serious and too venerable to be cursorily or slightly turned over: the reading of the scripture ought to be a temperate and premeditated act, and to which men should always add this devout preface, 'sursum corda', preparing even the body to so humble and composed a gesture and countenance as shall evidence a particular veneration and attention. Neither is it a book for everyone to fist, but the study of select men set apart for that purpose, and whom Almighty God has been pleased to call to that office and sacred function: the wicked and ignorant grow worse by it. 'Tis, not a story to tell, but a history to revere, fear, and adore. Are not they then pleasant men who think they have rendered this fit for the people's handling by translating it into the vulgar tongue? Does the understanding of all therein contained only stick at words? Shall I venture to say further, that by coming so near to understand a little, they are much wider of the whole scope than before. A pure and simple ignorance and wholly depending upon the exposition of qualified persons, was far more learned and salutary than this vain and verbal knowledge, which has only temerity and presumption.

And I do further believe that the liberty every one has taken to disperse the sacred writ into so many idioms carries with it a great deal more of danger than utility. The Jews, Mohammedans, and almost all other peoples, have reverentially espoused the language wherein their mysteries were first conceived, and have expressly, and not without colour of reason, forbidden the alteration of them into any other. Are we assured that in Biscay and in

Brittany there are enough competent judges of this affair to establish this translation into their own language? The universal Church has not a more difficult and solemn judgment to make. In preaching and speaking the interpretation is vague, free, mutable, and of a piece by itself; so 'tis not the same thing.

One of our Greek historians age justly censures the he lived in, because the secrets of the Christian religion were dispersed into the hands of every mechanic, to expound and argue upon, according to his own fancy, and that we ought to be much ashamed, we who by God's especial favour enjoy the pure mysteries of piety, to suffer them to be profaned by the ignorant rabble; considering that the Gentiles expressly forbad Socrates, Plato, and the other sages to inquire into or so much as mention the things committed to the priests of Delphi; and he says, moreover, that the factions of princes upon theological subjects are armed not with zeal but fury; that zeal springs from the divine wisdom and justice, and governs itself with prudence and moderation, but degenerates into hatred and envy, producing tares and nettles instead of corn and wine when conducted by human passions. And it was truly said by another, who, advising the Emperor Theodosius, told him that disputes did not so much rock the schisms of the Church asleep, as it roused and animated heresies; that, therefore, all contentions and dialectic disputations were to be avoided, and men absolutely to acquiesce in the prescriptions and formulas of faith established by the ancients. And the Emperor Andronicus having overheard some great men at high words in his palace with Lapodius about a point of ours of great importance, gave them so severe a check as to threaten to cause them to be thrown into the river if they did not desist. The very women and children nowadays take upon them to lecture the oldest and most experienced men about the ecclesiastical laws; whereas the first of those of Plato forbids them to inquire so much as into the civil laws, which were to stand instead of divine ordinances; and, allowing the old men to confer amongst themselves or with the magistrate about those things, he adds, provided it be not in the presence of young or profane persons.

A bishop has left in writing that at the other end of the world there is an isle, by the ancients called Dioscorides, abundantly fertile in all sorts of trees and fruits, and of an exceedingly healthful air; the inhabitants of which are Christians, having churches and altars, only adorned with crosses without any other images, great observers of fasts and feasts, exact payers of their tithes to the priests, and so chaste, that none of them is permitted to have to do with more than one woman in his life —[What Osorius says is that these people only had one wife at a time.]— as to the rest, so content with their condition, that environed with the sea they know nothing of navigation, and so simple that they understand not one syllable of the religion they profess and wherein they are so devout: a thing incredible to such as do not know that the Pagans, who are so zealous idolaters, know nothing more of their gods than their bare names and their statues. The ancient beginning of 'Menalippus', a tragedy of Euripides, ran thus:

> "O Jupiter! for that name alone
> Of what thou art to me is known."

I have also known in my time some men's writings found fault with for being purely human and philosophical, without any mixture of theology; and yet, with some show of reason, it might, on the contrary, be said that the divine doctrine, as queen and regent of the rest, better keeps her state apart, that she ought to be sovereign throughout, not subsidiary and suffragan, and that, peradventure, grammatical, rhetorical, logical examples may elsewhere be more suitably chosen, as also the material for the stage, games, and public entertainments, than from so sacred a matter; that divine reasons are considered with greater veneration and attention by themselves, and in their own proper style, than when mixed with and adapted to human discourse; that it is a fault much more often observed that the divines write too humanly, than that the humanists write not theologically enough. Philosophy, says St. Chrysostom, has long been banished the holy schools, as an handmaid altogether useless and thought unworthy to look, so much as in passing by the door, into the sanctuary of the holy treasures of the celestial doctrine; that the human way of speaking is of a much lower form and ought not to adopt for herself the dignity and majesty of divine eloquence. Let who will 'verbis indisciplinatis' talk of fortune, destiny, accident, good and evil hap, and other suchlike phrases, according to his own humour; I for my part propose fancies merely human and merely my own, and that simply as human fancies, and separately considered, not as determined by any decree from heaven, incapable of doubt or dispute; matter of opinion, not matter of faith; things which I discourse

of according to my own notions, not as I believe, according to God; after a laical, not clerical, and yet always after a very religious manner, as children prepare their exercises, not to instruct but to be instructed.

And might it not be said, that an edict enjoining all people but such as are public professors of divinity, to be very reserved in writing of religion, would carry with it a very good colour of utility and justice— and to me, amongst the rest peradventure, to hold my prating? I have been told that even those who are not of our Church nevertheless amongst themselves expressly forbid the name of God to be used in common discourse, nor so much even by way of interjection, exclamation, assertion of a truth, or comparison; and I think them in the right: upon what occasion soever we call upon God to accompany and assist us, it ought always to be done with the greatest reverence and devotion.

There is, as I remember, a passage in Xenophon where he tells us that we ought so much the more seldom to call upon God, by how much it is hard to compose our souls to such a degree of calmness, patience, and devotion as it ought to be in at such a time; otherwise our prayers are not only vain and fruitless, but vicious: "forgive us," we say, "our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us"; what do we mean by this petition but that we present to God a soul free from all rancour and revenge? And yet we make nothing of invoking God's assistance in our vices, and inviting Him into our unjust designs:

"Quae, nisi seductis, nequeas committere divis"

["Which you can only impart to the gods, when you have gained them over."—Persius, ii. 4.]

the covetous man prays for the conservation of his vain and superfluous riches; the ambitious for victory and the good conduct of his fortune; the thief calls Him to his assistance, to deliver him from the dangers and difficulties that obstruct his wicked designs, or returns Him thanks for the facility he has met with in cutting a man's throat; at the door of the house men are going to storm or break into by force of a petard, they fall to prayers for success, their intentions and hopes of cruelty, avarice, and lust.

"Hoc igitur, quo to Jovis aurem impellere tentas,
Dic agedum Staio: 'proh Jupiter! O bone, clamet,
Jupiter!' At sese non clamet Jupiter ipse."

["This therefore, with which you seek to draw the ear of Jupiter, say to Staius. 'O Jupiter! O good Jupiter!' let him cry. Think you Jupiter himself would not cry out upon it?"—Persius, ii. 21.]

Marguerite, Queen of Navarre,—[In the Heptameron.]— tells of a young prince, who, though she does not name him, is easily enough by his great qualities to be known, who going upon an amorous assignation to lie with an advocate's wife of Paris, his way thither being through a church, he never passed that holy place going to or returning from his pious exercise, but he always kneeled down to pray. Wherein he would employ the divine favour, his soul being full of such virtuous meditations, I leave others to judge, which, nevertheless, she instances for a testimony of singular devotion. But this is not the only proof we have that women are not very fit to treat of theological affairs.

A true prayer and religious reconciling of ourselves to Almighty God cannot enter into an impure soul, subject at the very time to the dominion of Satan. He who calls God to his assistance whilst in a course of vice, does as if a cut−purse should call a magistrate to help him, or like those who introduce the name of God to the attestation of a lie.

"Tacito mala vota susurro
Concipimus."

["We whisper our guilty prayers."—−Lucan, v. 104.]

There are few men who durst publish to the world the prayers they make to Almighty God:

"Haud cuivis promptum est, murmurque, humilesque susurros
Tollere de templis, et aperto vivere voto"

["'Tis not convenient for every one to bring the prayers he mutters out of the temple, and to give his wishes to the public ear. —"Persius, ii. 6.]

[See: "Letters To the Earth" by Mark Twain in the story of Abner Schofield, Coal Dealer, Buffalo, N.Y.: for a discussion of the contradictions between 'public' and 'private' prayers. D.W.]

and this is the reason why the Pythagoreans would have them always public and heard by every one, to the end they might not prefer indecent or unjust petitions as this man:

"Clare quum dixit, Apollo!
Labra movet, metuens audiri: Pulcra Laverna,
Da mihi fallere, da justum sanctumque videri;
Noctem peccatis, et fraudibus objice nubem."

["When he has clearly said Apollo! he moves his lips, fearful to be heard; he murmurs: O fair Laverna, grant me the talent to deceive; grant me to appear holy and just; shroud my sins with night, and cast a cloud over my frauds."—Horace, Ep., i. 16, 59.— (Laverna was the goddess of thieves.)

The gods severely punished the wicked prayers of OEdipus in granting them: he had prayed that his children might amongst themselves determine the succession to his throne by arms, and was so miserable as to see himself taken at his word. We are not to pray that all things may go as we would have them, but as most concurrent with prudence.

We seem, in truth, to make use of our prayers as of a kind of jargon, and as those do who employ holy words about sorceries and magical operations; and as if we reckoned the benefit we are to reap from them as depending upon the contexture, sound, and jingle of words, or upon the grave composing of the countenance. For having the soul contaminated with concupiscence, not touched with repentance, or comforted by any late reconciliation with God, we go to present Him such words as the memory suggests to the tongue, and hope from thence to obtain the remission of our sins. There is nothing so easy, so sweet, and so favourable, as the divine law: it calls and invites us to her, guilty and abominable as we are; extends her arms and receives us into her bosom, foul and polluted as we at present are, and are for the future to be. But then, in return, we are to look upon her with a respectful eye; we are to receive this pardon with all gratitude arid submission, and for that instant at least, wherein we address ourselves to her, to have the soul sensible of the ills we have committed, and at enmity with those passions that seduced us to offend her; neither the gods nor good men (says Plato) will accept the present of a wicked man:

"Immunis aram si terigit manus,
Non sumptuosa blandior hostia
Mollivit aversos Penates
Farre pio et saliente mica."

["If a pure hand has touched the altar, the pious offering of a small cake and a few grains of salt will appease the offended gods more effectually than costly sacrifices." —Horace, Od., iii. 23, 17.]

CHAPTER LVII. OF AGE

I cannot allow of the way in which we settle for ourselves the duration of our life. I see that the sages contract it

very much in comparison of the common opinion: "what," said the younger Cato to those who would stay his hand from killing himself, "am I now of an age to be reproached that I go out of the world too soon?" And yet he was but eight−and−forty years old. He thought that to be a mature and advanced age, considering how few arrive unto it. And such as, soothing their thoughts with I know not what course of nature, promise to themselves some years beyond it, could they be privileged from the infinite number of accidents to which we are by a natural subjection exposed, they might have some reason so to do. What am idle conceit is it to expect to die of a decay of strength, which is the effect of extremest age, and to propose to ourselves no shorter lease of life than that, considering it is a kind of death of all others the most rare and very seldom seen? We call that only a natural death; as if it were contrary to nature to see a man break his neck with a fall, be drowned in shipwreck, be snatched away with a pleurisy or the plague, and as if our ordinary condition did not expose us to these inconveniences. Let us no longer flatter ourselves with these fine words; we ought rather, peradventure, to call that natural which is general, common, and universal.

To die of old age is a death rare, extraordinary, and singular, and, therefore, so much less natural than the others; 'tis the last and extremest sort of dying: and the more remote, the less to be hoped for. It is, indeed, the bourn beyond which we are not to pass, and which the law of nature has set as a limit, not to be exceeded; but it is, withal, a privilege she is rarely seen to give us to last till then. 'Tis a lease she only signs by particular favour, and it may be to one only in the space of two or three ages, and then with a pass to boot, to carry him through all the traverses and difficulties she has strewed in the way of this long career. And therefore my opinion is, that when once forty years we should consider it as an age to which very few arrive. For seeing that men do not usually proceed so far, it is a sign that we are pretty well advanced; and since we have exceeded the ordinary bounds, which is the just measure of life, we ought not to expect to go much further; having escaped so many precipices of death, whereinto we have seen so many other men fall, we should acknowledge that so extraordinary a fortune as that which has hitherto rescued us from those eminent perils, and kept us alive beyond the ordinary term of living, is not like to continue long.

'Tis a fault in our very laws to maintain this error: these say that a man is not capable of managing his own estate till he be five−and−twenty years old, whereas he will have much ado to manage his life so long. Augustus cut off five years from the ancient Roman standard, and declared that thirty years old was sufficient for a judge. Servius Tullius superseded the knights of above seven−and−forty years of age from the fatigues of war; Augustus dismissed them at forty−five; though methinks it seems a little unreasonable that men should be sent to the fireside till five−and−fifty or sixty years of age. I should be of opinion that our vocation and employment should be as far as possible extended for the public good: I find the fault on the other side, that they do not employ us early enough. This emperor was arbiter of the whole world at nineteen, and yet would have a man to be thirty before he could be fit to determine a dispute about a gutter.

For my part, I believe our souls are adult at twenty as much as they are ever like to be, and as capable then as ever. A soul that has not by that time given evident earnest of its force and virtue will never after come to proof. The natural qualities and virtues produce what they have of vigorous and fine, within that term or never,

"Si l'espine rion picque quand nai,
A pene que picque jamai,"
["If the thorn does not prick at its birth,
'twill hardly ever prick at all."

as they say in Dauphin.

Of all the great human actions I ever heard or read of, of what sort soever, I have observed, both in former ages and our own, more were performed before the age of thirty than after; and this ofttimes in the very lives of the same men. May I not confidently instance in those of Hannibal and his great rival Scipio? The better half of their lives they lived upon the glory they had acquired in their youth; great men after, 'tis true, in comparison of others; but by no means in comparison of themselves. As to my own particular, I do certainly believe that since that age,

both my understanding and my constitution have rather decayed than improved, and retired rather than advanced. 'Tis possible, that with those who make the best use of their time, knowledge and experience may increase with their years; but vivacity, promptitude, steadiness, and other pieces of us, of much greater importance, and much more essentially our own, languish and decay:

> "Ubi jam validis quassatum est viribus aevi
> Corpus, et obtusis ceciderunt viribus artus,
> Claudicat ingenium, delirat linguaque, mensque."
>
> ["When once the body is shaken by the violence of time,
> blood and vigour ebbing away, the judgment halts,
> the tongue and the mind dote."—Lucretius, iii. 452.]

Sometimes the body first submits to age, sometimes the mind; and I have seen enough who have got a weakness in their brains before either in their legs or stomach; and by how much the more it is a disease of no great pain to the sufferer, and of obscure symptoms, so much greater is the danger. For this reason it is that I complain of our laws, not that they keep us too long to our work, but that they set us to work too late. For the frailty of life considered, and to how many ordinary and natural rocks it is exposed, one ought not to give up so large a portion of it to childhood, idleness, and apprenticeship.

> [Which Cotton thus renders: "Birth though noble, ought not to share
> so large a vacancy, and so tedious a course of education." Florio
> (1613) makes the passage read as−follows: "Methinks that,
> considering the weakness of our life, and seeing the infinite number
> of ordinary rocks and natural dangers it is subject unto, we should
> not, so soon as we come into the world, allot so large a share
> thereof unto unprofitable wantonness in youth, ill−breeding
> idleness, and slow−learning prentisage."