Others shape the man; I portray him, and offer to the view one in particular, who is ill-shaped enough, and whom, could I refashion him, I should certainly make very different from what he is. But there is no chance of that.

Now the lines of my portrait are never at fault, although they change and vary. The world is but a perpetual see-saw. Everything goes incessantly up and down – the earth, the rocks of Caucasus, the pyramids of Egypt – both with the universal motion and with their own. Constancy itself is nothing but a more sluggish movement. I cannot fix my subject. He is always restless, and reels with a natural intoxication. I catch him here, as he is at the moment when I turn my attention to him. I do not portray his being; I portray his passage; not a passage from one age to another or, as the common people say, from seven years to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute. I must suit my story to the hour, for soon I may change, not only by chance but also by intention. It is a record of various and variable occurrences, an account of thoughts that are unsettled and, as chance will have it, at times contradictory, either because I am then another self, or because I approach my subject under different circumstances and with other considerations. Hence it is that I may well contradict myself, but the truth, as Demades said, I do not contradict. Could my mind find a firm footing, I should not be making essays, but coming to conclusions; it is, however, always in its apprenticeship and on trial.

I present a humble life, without distinction; but that is no
matter. Moral philosophy, as a whole, can be just as well applied to a common and private existence as to one of richer stuff. Every man carries in himself the complete pattern of human nature.

Authors communicate with the world in some special and peculiar capacity; I am the first to do so with my whole being, as Michel de Montaigne, not as a grammarian, a poet, or a lawyer. If people complain that I speak too much of myself, I complain that they do not think of themselves at all.

But is it reasonable that, being so private in my way of life, I should set out to make myself known to the public? Is it reasonable either that I should present to the world, in which style and artifice receive so much credit and authority, the crude and simple products of nature, and of a weakish nature at that? Is it not like building a wall without stone or some similar material, to construct books without learning or art? Musical compositions are the product of skill, mine of chance.

To this extent, at least, I have conformed to the rules: that no man ever came to a project with better knowledge and understanding than I have of this matter, in regard to which I am the most learned man alive; and secondly that no man ever went more deeply into his subject, or more thoroughly examined its elements and effects, or more exactly and completely achieved the purpose he set out to work for. To perfect it I need only bring fidelity to my task; and that is here, the purest and sincerest that is to be found anywhere. I speak the truth, not to the full, but as much as I dare; and as I grow older I become a little more daring, for custom seems to allow age greater freedom to be garrulous and indiscreet in speaking of itself. It cannot happen here, as I often see it elsewhere, that the craftsman and his work are in contradiction. Can a man so sensible in his conversation, they ask, have written so foolish a book? Or can such learned writings proceed from one so poor in conversation?

If a man's talk is commonplace and his writing distinguished, it means that his talent lies in the place from which he borrows, and not in himself. A learned person is not learned in all things,
but a man of talent is accomplished in every respect, even in his ignorance.

Here my book and I proceed in agreement, and at the same pace. In other cases, the work may be praised or blamed apart from the workman; but here it cannot be. Who touches one, touches the other. The reader who passes judgement on the book without knowing the man will do himself more wrong than he does me. But anyone who comes to know the man will give me complete satisfaction. It will be more than I deserve if I win only so much public approbation as to make intelligent men realize that I could have profited by learning, had I possessed it, and that I deserved better assistance from my memory.

Let me here excuse myself for saying what I often repeat, that I rarely repent, and that my conscience is content with itself, not as the conscience of an angel or a horse, but as the conscience of a man; though always with the addition of this refrain – which is no formal refrain but a true and sincere confession – that I speak as one who questions and does not know, referring the decision purely and simply to common and authorized belief. I do not teach, I relate.

There is no vice that is absolutely a vice which does not offend, and which is not detected by a sound judgement. For its ugliness and impropriety are so apparent that those who say it arises chiefly from stupidity and ignorance are probably in the right; so hard is it to imagine that a man could recognize it without loathing. Malice sucks up the greater part of its venom, and so poisons itself. Vice leaves in the soul, like an ulcer in the flesh, a remorse which is always scratching itself and drawing blood. For reason obliterates other grief or sorrow, but it engenders that of remorse, which is harder to bear because it springs from within, as the cold and heat of fever are sharper than those in the outer air. I regard as vices – but each in its degree – not only those that reason and nature condemn, but those that are the creation of human opinion, false and erroneous though it may be, so long as they are confirmed as such by law and custom.

There is likewise no goodness in which a noble nature does
not delight. There is indeed a certain sense of gratification when we do a good deed that gives us inward satisfaction, and a generous pride that accompanies a good conscience. A resolutely wicked soul may perhaps arm itself with some assurance, but it cannot provide itself with this contentment and satisfaction. It is no slight pleasure to feel oneself preserved from the contagion of so corrupt an age, and to say to oneself: ‘A man might look into my very soul, and yet he would not find me guilty of anyone’s affliction or ruin, or of revenge or envy, or of offending against the public laws, or of innovation and disturbance, or of failing to keep my word. And whatever the licence of the age may permit or suggest to any man, I have never laid my hands on any Frenchman’s goods, or put my fingers into his purse. I have lived only on what is my own, in war as in peace, and have never used another man’s labour without paying him.’ These testimonies of a good conscience are pleasant; and such a natural pleasure is very beneficial to us; it is the only payment that can never fail.

To base the reward for virtuous actions on other men’s approval is to rely on too uncertain and shaky a foundation. Especially in so corrupt and ignorant an age as this, the good opinion of the crowd is injurious. Whom are you trusting to see what is praiseworthy? God preserve me from being an honest man according to the criterion that I daily see every man apply to himself, to his own advantage! ‘What were once vices have now become customs.’

Some of my friends have at times taken it upon themselves to school and lecture me most outspokenly, either of their own accord or at my invitation: a service which, to a healthy mind, surpasses, not only in utility but in kindness, every other office of friendship. I have always welcomed it with the most open arms both of courtesy and gratitude. But to speak of it now in all honesty, I have often found both in their blame and their praise so much false measure that I should not have been much amiss if I had done what according to their notions was wrong, instead of what they considered right. Those of us, especially,

* Seneca, Letters, xxxix.
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who live retired lives, exposed only to our own gaze, should have a fixed pattern within us by which to test our actions and, according to this, sometimes hug and sometimes correct ourselves. I have my own laws and my own court to judge me, and I refer to these rather than elsewhere. I certainly restrain my actions out of deference to others, but I understand them only by my own light. None but you know whether you are cruel and cowardly, or loyal and dutiful. Others have no vision of you, but judge of you by uncertain conjectures; they see not so much your nature as your artifices. Do not rely on their opinions, therefore; rely on your own. 'You must use your own judgement about yourself.'* 'The inner conscience of virtue and vice exercises a great influence; take that away, and all is in ruins.'†

But the saying that repentance follows close on sin does not seem to apply to sin in all its array, when it lodges in us as if in its own home. We may disown and reject vices which take us by surprise, and into which we are impelled by our passions; but those which by long habit are rooted and anchored in a strong and vigorous will are not prone to be gainsaid. Repentance is simply a recanting of our will and an opposition to our fancies; it may shift us in any direction. It makes one man disavow his past virtue and continence:

Quae mens est hodie, cur tadem non puerofuit?
vel cur his animis incolumes non redunt genae?‡

It is a rare life that remains orderly even in private. Everyone can play his part in the farce, and act an honest role on the stage. But to be disciplined within, in one's own breast, where all is permissible and all is concealed - that is the point! The next step, therefore, is to be orderly at home, in our common actions, for which we are accountable to no man, and in which there is no study or artifice. That is why Bias, describing an ideal household,§ says that it is one where the master is the

* Cicero, Tusculans, 1, xxiii.
† Cicero, De Natura Deorum, iii, xxxv.
‡ 'Why was my mind when a boy not the same as it is today? Or why, with my present mind, do my cheeks not become fresh as of old?' Horace, Odes, iv, x, 7.
§ See Plutarch, Banquet of the Seven Sages.
same alone in his house as abroad, where he is afraid of the law and of what men will say. And it was a worthy answer that Julius Drusus gave to the builders who offered for three thousand crowns so to alter his mansion that his neighbours could no longer overlook him, as they then did. 'I will give you six thousand,' he said, 'if you will make it possible for everyone to see into it from every side.' It is observed to the honour of Agesilus that, when travelling, he would take up his lodgings in temples, so that the people, and the gods themselves, might witness his private actions. Many a man has been a wonder to the world, whose wife and valet have seen nothing in him that was even remarkable. Few have been admired by their servants.

No man was ever a prophet, not merely in his own house, but in his own country, says the experience of history. It is the same in trivial matters. And in this humble example you may see a reflection of greater ones. In my region of Gascony, they think it funny to see me in print. But the further from my own haunts my reputation spreads, the higher I am rated. In Guienne I pay the printers; elsewhere they pay me. It is on this accident that men rely who conceal themselves whilst they are alive and present, to gain a name when they are dead and gone. I am less ambitious; I cast myself upon the world, solely for my present advantage. When I leave it - that is that!

See, after a public function, how the admiring crowd escorts a man to his door; with his robe he drops his part, and falls as low as his ascent was high. Within himself, all is baseness and confusion. Even if there were some order in him, it would take a keen and perspicacious mind to perceive it in his humble and private actions. Moreover, discipline is a dull and dismal virtue. To storm a breach, conduct an embassy, govern a people, those are brilliant actions. To scold, laugh, sell, pay, love, hate, and deal gently and justly with one's family and oneself, not to relax or contradict oneself: that is something rarer, more difficult and less noticed by the world. A life of retirement, therefore, whatever men may say, is subject to duties as harsh and exacting as any other, if not more so. And private persons, says
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Aristotle, do virtue a higher and more difficult service than men in authority. We prepare ourselves to meet outstanding occasions rather for glory than for conscience' sake. The shortest way to gain a great name, however, would be to do for conscience' sake what we now do for glory. And Alexander's virtue seems to me to show somewhat less strength on his great stage than that of Socrates in his humble and obscure activities. I can easily imagine Socrates in Alexander's place, but Alexander in that of Socrates, I cannot. If Alexander were asked what he could do, he would reply, 'Conquer the world'; but if the same question were put to Socrates, his answer would be, 'Lead a man's life according to its natural conditions': a much more general, more important, and more legitimate undertaking.

The worth of a soul does not consist in soaring to a height, but in a steady movement. Its greatness is not exercised in a mighty, but in an intermediate state. As those who judge and test our inner being attach no great importance to the brilliance of our public acts, and see that these are no more than jets and beads of clear water spurting from an otherwise thick and muddy bottom; so, under similar circumstances, those who judge us by our brave outward show come to a like conclusion about our inner character. They cannot reconcile common faculties, just like their own, with these other faculties, which astound them and are so far beyond their vision.

Therefore we endow demons with monstrous shapes. And who does not picture Tamburlaine with arched brows, open nostrils, a grim visage, and a prodigious stature, in accordance with the picture that the imagination has conceived of him from the report of his fame? If, years ago, I had been taken to see Erasmus, it would have been hard for me not to take as precepts and maxims every word that he said to his servant or his landlady. It suits our imagination better to think of a craftsman on the close-stool or on top of his wife, than of a Chief Justice, venerable for his bearing and his talents, in the same position. From such high thrones, it seems to us, men do not descend so low as to live.
As wicked souls are often driven by some external impulse to perform a good deed, so are virtuous souls to do wrong. They must be judged, therefore, by their settled state, when they are at home, supposing that they are sometimes there; or at least when they are nearest to repose and to their true situation. Natural inclinations are assisted and reinforced by education, but they are hardly ever altered or overcome. In my time, a bare thousand natures have escaped to virtue or to vice from a contrary education.

_Sic ubi desuetae silvis in carcere clausae
mansuerae ferae, et vultus posueru minaces,
ateque hominem didicere pali, si torrida parvus
venit in ora crwuor, redenni rabiesque furorque,
admonitaque sument gustato sanguine fauces;
ferret, et a trepido sive abstinet ira magistro._

These original qualities are not to be extirpated; they are covered up, they are concealed. Latin is to me, as it were, my natural language; I understand it better than French. But for the last forty years I have had no practice in speaking or writing it. And yet on the two or three occasions in my life when I have been overwhelmed by extreme and sudden emotion – once when I saw my father, though in perfect health, fall towards me in a faint – the first words that have risen from the depths of my heart have always been in Latin. Nature has surged up and forcibly expressed herself, in spite of long disuse. And the same is said to have happened to many others.

Those who, in my time, have attempted to correct the morals of the world by new ideas, have reformed the surface vices; but the essential ones they have left unaffected, if not increased; and here one must fear an increase. We are apt to refrain from all other good deeds on the strength of these arbitrary and external improvements, which are less costly and earn greater honour. And by this means we beg a cheap exemption for our other

*‘So wild beasts in captivity may forget their forests, grow tame, lose their fierce habits, and learn to endure the control of man. But if a little blood touches their hot lips, their rage and ferocity return. Roused by the taste of blood, their jaws distend, and they hardly refrain from springing on their frightened master.’ Lucan, iv, 237.*
vices, natural, consubstantial, and internal. Consider for a moment how our experience of the matter stands. There is no man who, if he listens to himself, does not discover within him an individual principle, a ruling principle, that struggles against his education, and against the tempestuous passions opposing it. For my part, I am seldom roused by sudden impulses; I find myself, like some heavy and cumbrous body, almost always in my place. If I am not at home, I am always very near. My excesses do not carry me far away. There is nothing extreme or odd about them. And I have strong and vigorous revulsions.

The true reproach, the one which applies to the common run of men, is that their very retraction is full of filth and corruption; their idea of reformation is blurred; their penitence is almost as faulty and diseased as their sin. Some are so wedded to vice by a natural bond, or from long habit, that they can no longer see its ugliness. Others, in whose ranks I belong, feel sin to be a burden, but counterbalance it with pleasure, or something else; they suffer it and give way to it for a certain price; but wickedly and basely, nevertheless. Yet it might perhaps be possible to imagine such a disproportion between the pleasure and the sin that the first might justly be said to excuse the second, as we say utility does; and this not only if the pleasure were accidental, and apart from it, as in theft, but also if it lay in the very commission of the sin, as in intercourse with women, where the provocation is violent and, so they say, sometimes irresistible.

The other day, when I was on the estate of a kinsman of mine in Armagnac, I saw a peasant whom everybody called The Thief. He told us his story, which was like this: Born a beggar, and realizing that if he were to earn his living by the work of his hands, he would never succeed in securing himself against want, he decided to become a thief; and thanks to his physical strength, he practised his trade quite safely throughout his youth. He gathered his harvest and his vintage from other men’s lands, but at such great distances and in such great stacks that no one could conceive how one man could carry away so much on his shoulders in a single night. And he took care, besides, to equal-
ize and distribute the damage that he caused, so as to minimize the loss to each individual. Now, in his old age, he is rich for a man of his condition, thanks to his trade, which he openly confesses. And to reconcile God to his winnings, he has made it, he said, his daily task to compensate the heirs of the men he robbed by voluntary gifts. If he does not complete his task — for to do it all at once is beyond him — he will, he says, leave it as a charge to his heirs, to repay them according to the wrong he did to each, which is known to him alone. From his account, whether true or false, it seems that this man regards theft as a dishonest action, and hates it, though less than he hates poverty. He repents of it quite simply, but in so far as it was thus counter-balanced and compensated, he does not repent of it. This is not a case in which habit makes us one with our sin, and even conforms our understanding to it; nor is it a case of an impetuous gale whose gusts confuse and blind our souls, flinging us for the moment, judgement and all, into the power of vice.

Habitually, I do what I do with all my being, and keep step with myself; I seldom do anything that hides from and escapes my reason, and that is not guided more or less by the concurrence of all my faculties, without division and without internal rebellion. My judgement takes all the blame or all the praise for my actions. And once it takes the blame, it keeps it for good; for it has been the same almost since birth, with the same character, the same inclinations, the same strength. And in the matter of general opinions, I established myself in my youth in the position where I was to stay.

Some sins are impulsive, hasty, and sudden: let us leave them aside. But as regards those other sins which are so often repeated, meditated, and considered, whether they are temperamental sins, or arise from our profession and vocation, I cannot imagine their being implanted for so long in one and the same heart, unless the reason and conscience of the man who harbours them constantly wills them and intends them to be there. And I find it somewhat hard to call up a picture of that repentance which, according to this thief’s boast, comes on him at a certain prescribed moment.
I do not agree with the Pythagorean sect, that men take on a new soul when they approach the images of the gods, to receive their oracles. Unless what he meant to say was that it must be a strange, new soul, borrowed for the occasion, since their own show so little sign of the purification and cleansing needed for this ceremony.

The actions of these habitual sinners are quite contrary to the precepts of the Stoics, which command us to correct the imperfections and vices that we recognize in ourselves, but forbid us to be troubled and disturbed by them. They give us to believe that they feel great inward grief and remorse; but of amendment and correction, or of ceasing to sin, they show us no sign. Yet if the disease is not thrown off there is no cure. If repentance were laid on one dish of the scales it would outweigh the sin. I know of no quality so easy to counterfeit as godliness, when the life and morals do not conform to it. Its essence is abstruse and secret; its externals are easy and ostentatious.

For myself, I may wish, on the whole, to be otherwise; I may condemn and dislike my general character, and implore God to reform me throughout, and to excuse my natural weakness. But I should not, I think, give the name of repentance to this, any more than I should to my dissatisfaction at not being an angel or a Cato. My actions are controlled and shaped to what I am, and to my condition of life. I can do no better. And repentance does not properly apply to things that are not in our power, though regret certainly does. I can imagine numberless loftier and better disciplined natures than mine; but this does not make me amend my character, any more than my arm or my mind grows stronger by my conceiving some other man's to be so. If to imagine and desire a nobler way of conduct than ours were to make us repent of our own, we should have to repent of our most innocent actions, in as much as we may rightly suppose that a more excellent nature would have performed them more perfectly and with more nobility; and we should wish to do likewise.

When I look back on the conduct of my youth, I find that I generally behaved in an orderly manner, according to my lights;
that is as much as my powers of control can manage; I do not flatter myself; in similar circumstances I should always be the same. It is not a single spot, but rather a general stain that dyes me. I know of no superficial, middling, or formal repentance. It must touch me in every part before I can call it so. It must Pierce my bowels and pain them as deeply and as completely as God sees into me.

As for business, many good chances have escaped me for lack of good management. Yet my plans have been well-chosen, according to the opportunities that I had, my habit being always to take the easiest and safest course. I find that in my past decisions I have, by my own rules, acted wisely, taking into account the state of the matter confronting me; and I should do the same a thousand years hence in the same situations. I am not thinking of conditions as they are at present, but as they were when I was considering them.

The importance of any decision depends on the hour; circumstances and things are always moving and changing. I have committed some serious and grievous errors in my life, not for lack of good judgement but for lack of good fortune. In what we have to deal with, there are hidden elements, at which we cannot guess, particularly in human nature: silent states that make no show and are sometimes unknown to their very possessors, but that are roused and brought out by circumstances as they arise. If my foresight has been unable to fathom and predict them, I have no complaint against it; its functions are limited. If the event goes against me; and if it favours the side I have rejected, there is no remedy. I do not reproach myself for this; I blame my fortune, not my performance; and this cannot be called repentance.

Phocion had given the Athenians some advice which was not followed. When, however, contrary to his expectation, the affair turned out happily, someone said to him: 'Tell me, Phocion, are you glad things are going so well?' 'Yes, I am very glad things have turned out like this,' he answered, 'but I am not sorry that I gave the advice I did.' When my friends come to me for an opinion, I give it freely and frankly, without being
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deterred, as most people are, by the fact that, the matter being risky, it may turn out contrary to my expectations, and I may then be blamed for my advice. That does not trouble me in the least. For though they will prove to be wrong, I should not have been right to refuse them the service.

I have generally only myself to blame for my errors or mishaps. For, as a matter of fact, I rarely ask others for advice, except out of formal courtesy, unless I have need of learned instruction or factual knowledge. In matters where I have only to exercise my judgement, others' opinions may serve me as confirmation, but do not often deter me. I listen to them all politely and gravely; but I do not remember ever, to this day, having trusted any but my own. In my view they are just flies and specks that distract my will. I do not much value my own opinions, but I value those of others no more. Fortune pays me as I deserve. If I take no advice, I give still less. I am very seldom consulted, and even more seldom heeded; and I know of no undertaking, public or private, that my advice has advanced and improved. Even those who, by chance, have come to depend on it, have in the end preferred to be guided by any other brain than mine. And as one who is quite as jealous of his right to leisure as of his right to authority, I would rather have it so. By leaving me alone, they follow my declared wish, which is to be wholly self-reliant and self-contained. It pleases me not to be interested in the affairs of others, and to be free from responsibility for them.

Once any business is over, I have few regrets, whatever the result. For my grief is soothed by the reflection that things were bound to happen as they did. I see them as part of the great stream of the universe, in the Stoics' chain of cause and effect. Your mind cannot, by wish or thought, alter the smallest part without upsetting the whole order of things, both past and future.

Moreover, I hate that repentance which is incidental to old age. I do not agree with that man of old* who said that he was grateful to the years for having rid him of sensuality; I can never

*A saying attributed to Sophocles in Plato's Republic.
give thanks to impotence for any good it may do me. 'Provid-
dence will never appear so hostile to its own work that weakness
will rank among the blessings.'* Our passions are rare in old
age; and a deep satiety overcomes us after the act. I can see no
sign of conscience in that. Vexation and weakness impose a
sluggish rheumatic virtue upon us. We must not let ourselves
be so wholly carried away by our natural changes as to let them
warp our judgement. Youth and pleasure did not prevent me,
of old, from recognizing in sensuality the face of vice; nor does
the distaste which the years have brought me make me fail to
see in vice the face of sensuality. Now that I am no longer in it,
I judge it as if I were. When I give my mind a jolt and observe it,
I find that it is the same as it was in my most licentious days,
except, perhaps, that it has weakened and deteriorated as it has
grown old. And I find that though it refuses to embroil me in
these pleasures out of regard for my physical health, it would
be no more likely than it was of old to do so for my spiritual
good. I do not regard it as more valiant for being out of the
battle. My temptations are so broken and mortified that they
are not worth a fight. By merely stretching out my hands, I
exorcize them. But should my reason be faced again with my
old lust, I am afraid it would have less strength of resistance
than it had of old. I do not see that of itself it judges otherwise
than it did then; nor that it has received any new light. There­
fore, if there is an improvement, it is a sickly one. It is a poor
kind of remedy, to owe one's health to a disease!

It is not the business of our misfortunes to work us a remedy;
a sound judgement must do that. Iills and afflictions cannot
make me do more than curse them; they are good enough for
people who can only be roused by the whip. My mind runs a
freer course in prosperity. It is much more distracted and occu­
pied when digesting pains than pleasures. I see much more
clearly in fine weather. Health gives me more cheerful and more
effective admonishment than sickness. I came as near as is pos­
sible for me to a reformed and disciplined life when I had the
health to enjoy it. I should be angry and ashamed if my sad and

* Quintilian, v, xii, 19.
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wretched decrepitude should seem preferable to my good healthy, active, and vigorous years. I should hate to be valued not for what I have been, but for what I have ceased to be.

In my opinion it is in a happy life, not, as Antisthenes said, in a happy death, that human felicity consists. I never looked forward to becoming that monstrosity, a philosopher's tail tied to the head and body of a libertine; nor to having this miserable remainder renounce and belie the fairest, fullest, and longest part of my life. I wish to present and exhibit myself uniformly, in every part. If I had my life to live again, I should live as I have lived; I neither deplore the past, nor fear the future. And if I am not mistaken, I have been much the same inwardly as on the surface. One of my principal debts to fortune is that the course of my physical life has brought each thing in its season. I have seen the leaves and the flowers and the fruit; and now I see the withering. And this is fortunate because it is natural. I bear the infirmities that I suffer much more patiently because they have come at the proper time, and also because they make me remember more kindly the long happiness of my past life. So also my wisdom may well be of the same proportions now as in former years. But it was more capable and attractive when it was fresh, gay, and natural than it is in its present worn, peevish, and heavy condition. I will have nothing to do, therefore, with these fortuitous and tearful reformations.

God must touch our hearts. Our conscience must amend itself by the strengthening of our reason, not by the weakening of our appetites. Sensual pleasures are neither pale nor colourless in themselves because they seem so to dull and bleary eyes. Temperance should be loved for its own sake, and out of reverence for God, who has enjoined both it and chastity upon us; what chills impose on us, and what I owe to the good offices of my colic, is neither chastity nor temperance. One cannot boast of despising and combating sensual desires if one does not see them, if one does not know them, their charms, their power, and their most alluring beauty. I know it all, and have the right to speak. But it seems to me that in old age our souls are subject to more troublesome ailments and weaknesses than
in youth. I said this when I was young, and they scoffed at me for my beardless chin. I repeat it now that my grey hairs give me authority. We call the queasiness of our tastes and our dislike of present-day things by the name of wisdom. But the truth is that we do not so much give up our vices as change them, and in my opinion for the worse. Besides a foolish and tottering pride, a tedious garrulity, prickly and unsociable moods, superstition, and an absurd preoccupation with money after we have lost the use for it, I find in old age an increase of envy, injustice, and malice. It stamps more wrinkles on our minds than on our faces; and seldom, or very rarely, does one find souls that do not acquire, as they age, a sour and musty smell. Man moves onward as a whole towards his growth and towards his decay.

When I consider the wisdom of Socrates, and several details of his condemnation, I venture to believe that he in some degree deliberately lent himself to it by prevarication, since, at the age of 70, he was so soon due to suffer the benumbing of his mind’s rich activities, and the dimming of its accustomed clarity.

What metamorphoses do I see old age working every day in many of my acquaintances! It is a powerful disease, which makes natural and imperceptible advances. It requires a great store of study and great precautions, if we are to avoid the infirmities that it lays upon us, or at least to retard their progress. Despite all my entrenchments, I feel it gaining on me foot by foot. I resist for as long as I can, but I do not myself know to what it will reduce me at last. But come what may, I am glad that the world will know the height from which I shall have fallen.