And Margaret, queen of Navarre, like a woman, prolongs the advantage of women very far, ordaining that at thirty it is time for them to change the title of "beautiful" to "good."

The sooner the possession we give Love over our life, the better we are. Look at his bearing: he is a heartless boy. Who does not know how in his school they proceed contrary to all order? Study, exercise, practice, are ways leading to incapacity; the novices there give the lesson: "Love knows no rule" [Saint Jerome]. *Certainly Love's conduct has much more style when it is mingled with heedlessness and confusion; mistakes and misadventures give it point and grace. Provided it is sharp and hungry, it matters little whether it is prudent. See how he goes reeling, tripping, and wantonly playing; you put him in the stocks when you guide him by art and wisdom, and you constrain his divine freedom when you subject him to those hairy and callous hands.

Moreover, I often hear women portray this relationship as wholly spiritual and disdain to place in consideration the interest that the sexes have in it. Everything contributes to it. But I may say that I have often seen us excuse the weakness of their minds in favor of their bodily beauties; but I have never yet seen that for the sake of our beauty of mind, however wise and mature that mind may be, they were willing to grant favors to a body that was slipping the least little bit into decline. Why is not one of them seized with desire for that noble *Socratic exchange of body for soul, buying a philosophical and spiritual intelligence and generation at the price of her thighs, the highest price to which she can raise them? Plato ordains in his *Laws that whoever has performed some signal and useful exploit in war, regardless of his ugliness or old age, may not for the war's duration be refused a kiss or other amorous favor from whomever he wants. What he finds so just in recommendation of military worth, may it not also be so in recommendation of some other kind of worth? And why is not one of them seized with desire "to gain before her sisters the glory of this chaste love? And I do mean chaste.

For if it comes to love's encounter,
Like fire in straw, mighty in size, with little power,
They spend their rags in vain.

The vises that are stifled in thought are not the worst.

To conclude this notable commentary, which has escaped from me in a flow of babble, a flow sometimes impetuous and harmful—

And as an apple, secret present from her love,
Falls out from the chaste bosom of the maid,
Where she has quite forgotten it, hid beneath her robe,
When at her mother's step she starts, afraid,
As she rises it falls, rolls off at a swift pace.
A guilty blush spreads o'er her downcast face.

I say that males and females are cast in the same mold; except for education and custom, the difference is not great. *Plato invites both without discrimination to the fellowship of all studies, exercises, functions, warlike and peaceful occupations, in his commonwealth. And the philosopher *Anaxarchus eliminated any distinction between their virtue and ours. *It is much easier to accuse one sex than to excuse the other. It is the old saying: 'The pot calls the kettle black.'

It is very easy to demonstrate that great authors, when they write about causes, adduce not only those they think are true but also those they do not believe in, provided they have some originality and beauty. They speak truly and usefully enough if they speak ingeniously. We cannot make sure of the master cause; we pile up several of them, to see if by chance it will be found among them.

For one cause will not do; We must state many, one of which is true.

Do you ask me whence comes this custom of blessing those who sneeze? We produce three sorts of wind. That which issues from below is too foul, that which issues from the mouth carries some reproach of gluttony; the third is sneezing. And because it comes from the head and is blameless, we give it this civil reception. Do not laugh at this piece of subtilty; it is, they say, from *Aristotle.

It seems to me I have read in *Plutarch (who, of all the authors I know, is the one who best combined art with nature and judgment with knowledge) that he gives the reason for the heaving of the stomach that afflicts those who travel by sea, as fear, having found some reason by which he proves that fear can produce such an effect. I, who am very subject to seasickness, know very well that this cause does not affect me, and I know it, not by reasoning, but by necessary experience. Not to mention what I have been told, that the same thing often happens to animals, and especially to pigs, without any apprehension of danger, and what an acquaintance of mine has told me about himself, that though he was very subject to it, the desire to vomit had left him two or three times when he found himself oppressed with fright in a big storm. And hear this ancient: *I was too sick to think about the danger [Seneca]. *"I was never afraid on the water, nor indeed anywhere else (and I have often enough had just occasions, if death is one), at least not to the point of being confused or bewildered. Fear sometimes arises from want of judgment as well as from want..."
of courage. All the dangers I have seen, I have seen with open eyes, with my sight free, sound, and entire; besides, it takes courage to be afraid. It once served me in good stead, compared with others, so to conduct my flight and keep it orderly, that it was carried out, "if not without fear, at all events without terror and without dismay; it was excited, but not dazed or distracted.

Great souls go much further yet and offer us examples of flights not merely composed and healthy, but proud. Let us tell of the one that Alcibiades reports of Socrates, his comrade in arms: "I found him," he says, "after the rout of our army, him and Laches, among the last of the fugitives; and I observed him at my leisure and in safety, for I was on a good horse and he on foot, and we had fought that way. I noticed first how much presence of mind and resolution he showed compared with Laches; and then the boldness of his walk, no different from his ordinary one, his firm and steady gait, considering and judging what was going on around him, looking now at one side, now the other, friends and enemies, in a way that encouraged the former and signified to the latter that he was a man to sell his blood and his life very dear to anyone who should try to take them away. And thus they made their escape; for people are not inclined to attack such men; they run after the frightened ones." That is the testimony of that great captain, which teaches us what we experience every day, that there is nothing that throws us so much into dangers as an unthinking eagerness to get clear of them.

Where there is less fear, there is generally less danger [Livy].

Our common people are wrong to say that such-and-such a man fears death, when they mean to say that he thinks about it and foresees it. Foresight is equally suitable in whatever concerns us, whether for good or ill. To consider and judge the danger is in a way the opposite of being shunned by it.

I do not feel myself strong enough to sustain the impact and impetuousness of this passion of fear, or of any other vehement passion. If I were once conquered and thrown by it, I would never get up again quite intact. If anything made my soul lose its footing, it would never set it back upright in its place; it probes and searches itself too keenly and deeply, and therefore would never let the wound that had pierced it close up and heal. It has been well for me that no illness has yet had it low. Each attack made on me I meet and fight off in my full armor: thus the first one that swept me off my feet would leave me without resources. I have no secondary defense; no matter where the torrent should break my dike, I would be helpless and be drowned for good.

Epicurus says that the wise man can never pass into a contrary state. I have an opinion about the converse of this saying: that anyone who has once been very foolish will never at any other time be very wise.

God tempers the cold according to the chalk, and gives me passions according to my means of withstanding them. Nature, having uncovered me on one side, has covered me up on the other; having disarmed me of strength, she has armed me with insensibility and a controlled, or dull, apprehensiveness.

III: 6

Of coaches

Now I cannot long endure (and I could endure them less easily in my youth) either coach, or litter, or boat; and I hate any other transportation than horseback, both in town and in the country. But I can endure a litter less than a coach, and for the same reason I can more easily bear a rough trotting on the water, whereby fear is produced, than the movement felt in calm weather. By that slight jolt given by the oars, stealing the vessel from under us, I somehow feel my head and stomach troubled, as I cannot bear a shaky seat under me. When the sail or the current carries us along evenly or when we are tossed, this uniform movement does not bother me at all. It is an interrupted motion that annoys me, and most of all when it is languid. I cannot otherwise describe its nature. The doctors have ordered me to bind and swathe my abdomen with a towel to remedy this trouble; which I have not tried, being accustomed to wrestle with the weaknesses that are in me and overcome them by myself.

If my memory were sufficiently stored with them, I should not be grudge my time to tell here the infinite variety of examples that histories offer us of the use of coaches in the service of war, varying according to the nations and according to the age; of great effect, it seems to me, and very necessary, so that it is a wonder that we have lost all knowledge of them. I will say only this, that quite recently, in our fathers' time, the Hungarians put coaches very usefully to work against the Turks, there being in each one a taosseger and a musketeer and a number of harquebusines lined up, loaded and ready, the whole thing covered with a wall of shields, like a galleon. They formed their battlefront of three thousand such coaches, and after the cannon had played, had them advance and made the enemy swallow this salvo before testing the rest, which was no slight advantage. Or they launched them into the enemy squadrons to break them open and clean them up; not to mention the advantage they could derive from them by flanking enemy troops on their march through open country where they were vulnerable, or by covering a camp in haste and fortifying it.

In my time a gentleman on one of our frontiers, who was unwisely of person and found no horse capable of bearing his weight, having a feed on his hands, went about the country in a coach of this very description, and made out very well. But let us leave these war coaches. The kings of our first dynasty went about the country in a chariot drawn by four oxen.

Mark Antony was the first who had himself drawn in Rome—and a minstrel girl beside him—by lions harnessed to a chariot. Helogabalus did as much later, calling himself Cybele, the mother of the gods; and also by tigers, instating the god Reclus; he also sometimes harnessed two stags to his coach, and another time four dogs, and yet again four naked wenches, having himself, streaked naked too, drawn by them in pomp. The Emperor Titus had his chariot drawn by ostriches of marvelous size, so that it seemed rather to fly than to roll.

The strangeness of these inventions puts into my head this other notion: that it is a sort of pusillanimity in monarchs, and evidence of not sufficiently feeling what they are, to labor at showing off and making
a display by excessive expense. It would be execusable in a foreign
country; but among his own subjects, where he is all-powerful, he
derives from his dignity the highest degree of honor he can attain. Just
as, it seems to me, for a gentleman it is superfluous to dress with studied
care at home: his house, his retinue, his cuisine, answer for him suffi-
ciently.

The advice that Iocrates gives his king seems to me not without
reason: that he be splendid in furniture and plate, since that is a lasting
investment which passes on to his successors; and that he avoid all mag-
nificentio that flow away immediately out of use and memory.

I liked to adorn myself when I was a youth, for lack of other ador-
ments, and it was becoming to me; there are those on whom fine clothes
weep. We have marvelous stories of the frugality of our kings about
their own persons and in their gifts—kings great in prestige, in valor,
and in fortune. Demosthenes fights tooth and nail against the law of his
city that allotted public monies to lavish games and feasts; he wants the
greatness of the city to be manifest in its quantity of well-equipped
ships and of good, well-supplied armies.

And Theophrastus is rightly blamed for setting forth a contrary
opinion in his book on riches, and maintaining that lavish expenditure
was the true fruit of opulence. These are pleasures, says Aristotle, that
touch only the lowest of the people, that vanish from memory as soon
as people are sated with them, and that no judicial and serious man
can estrem. The outcry would seem to me much more royal as well
as more useful, just, and durable, if it were spent on ports, harbors, fortifi-
cations, and walls, on sumptuous buildings, churches, hospitals, col-
leges, and the improvement of streets and roads, for which Pope Gregory
XIII is gratefully remembered in my time, and in which our Queen
Catherine would leave evidence for many years of her natural liberality
and munificence, if her means were equal to her wish. Fortune has
given me great displeasure by interrupting the construction of the
handsome new bridge of our great city, and depriving me of the hope
of seeing it in full use before I die.

Besides, it seems to the subjects, spectators of these triumphs, that
they are given a display of their own riches, and entertained at their
own expense. For peoples are apt to assume about kings, as we do about
our servants, that they should take care to prepare for us in abundance
all we need, but that they should not touch it at all for their own part.
And therefore the Emperor Gallus, having taken pleasure in a musician’s
playing during his supper, sent for his money box and gave into his hand
a handful of crowns that he fished out of it, with these words: "This is
not the public money, this is my own." At all events, it must often hap-
pens that the people are right, and that their eyes are seated with what
should go to feed their beliefs.

Liberality itself is not in its proper light in the hands of a sovereign;
private people have more right to exercise it. For, to be precise about

1 The Pont Neuf, as it is still called, was completed in 1604.

it, a king has nothing that is properly his own; he owes his very self to
others.
The authority to judge is not given for the sake of the judge, but for
the sake of the person judged. A superior is never appointed for his
own benefit, but for the benefit of the inferior, and a doctor for the sick,
not for himself. All authority, like all art, has its end outside of itself; no
art is directed to itself [Cicero].

Wherefore the tutors of young princes who make it a point to im-
press on them this virtue of liberality and preach to them not to know
how to refuse anything, and to think nothing so well spent as what
they give away (a lesson that I have seen in great favor in my time),
either look more to their own profit than to their master’s, or do not
well understand to whom they speak. It is all too easy to impress liberal-
ity on a man who has the means to practice it all he wants at the ex-
 pense of others. And since its value is reckoned not by the measure
of the gift, but by the measure of the giver’s means, it amounts to
nothing in such powerful hands. They find themselves prodigal before
they are liberal. Therefore liberality is little to be commended com-
pared with other royal virtues, and it is the only one, as the tyrant
Dionysius said, that goes with tyranny itself. I would rather teach him
this verse of the ancient farmer: that whoever wants to reap a good
crop must sow with the hand, not pour out of the sack; he must sact-
ter the seed, not spill it, and that since he has to give, or, to put it better,
pay and restore to so many people according to their deserts, he should
be a fair and wise distributor. If the liberality of a prince is without
discretion and without measure, I would rather he were a miser.

Royal virtue seems to consist most of all in justice; and of all the
parts of justice, that one best marks kings which accompanies liberalty;
for they have particularly reserved it as their function, whereas they
are prone to exercise all other justice through the intermediary of others.
Immoderate largeness is a feeble monus for them to acquire good will;
for it alienates more people than it wins over. The more you have
already practiced it on, the fewer you will be able to practice it on.
What is more foolish than to take pains so that you can no longer do what
you enjoy doing? [Cicero.] And if it is exercised without regard to
merit, it puts to shame him who receives it, and is received ungra-
ciously. Tyrants have been sacrificed to the hatred of the people by the
hands of the very ones when they have unjustly advanced; for such
men think to assure their possession of undiscovered goods by showing
contempt and hatred for the man from whom they received them, and
rallying to the judgment and opinion of the people in that respect.
The subjects of a prince who is excessive in gifts become excessive
in requests; they adjust themselves not to reason but to example. Surely
we often have reason to blush for our impudence; we are overpaid
according to justice when the recompense equals our service; for do we
owe no service to our prince by natural obligation? If he bears our

2 Montaigne translates the Greek verse of Catoius after quoting it.
expense, he does too much; it is enough that he helps out. The surplus is called benefit, and it cannot be exacted, for the very name of liberality rings of liberty. By our method, it is never done; the receipts are no longer taken into account; people love only the future liberality. Wherefore the more a prince exhausts himself in giving, the poorer he makes himself in friends. How could he assure desires that grow the more they are fulfilled? He who has his mind on taking, no longer has it on what he has taken. Covetousness has nothing so characteristic about it as ingratitude.

The example of Cyrus will not be amiss here to serve the kings of our time as a touchstone for ascertaining whether their gifts are well or ill bestowed, and to make them see how much more happily that emperor dealt them out than they do. Whereby they are reduced to doing their borrowing from unknown subjects, and rather from those they have wronged than from those they have benefited; and from them they receive no aid that is grateful in anything but the name.

Croesus reproached Cyrus for his extravagance and calculated how much his treasure would amount to if he had been more close-fisted. Cyrus, wanting to justify his liberality, sent dispatches in all directions to the grandees of his state whose career he had particularly advanced, and asked each one to help him out with as much money as he could for an urgent need of his, and to send him a declaration of the amount. When all these statements were brought to him, since each of his friends, thinking it was not enough to offer him merely as much as he had received from his munificence, added much that was more properly his own, it turned out that the total amounted to much more than the savings estimated by Croesus. Whereupon Cyrus said to him: 'I am no less in love with riches than other princes, and am rather a more careful manager of them. You see at how small a cost I have acquired the inestimable treasure of so many magistrates, and how much more faithful and useful they are to me than mercenary men without obligations, without affection, would be; and how much better my wealth is lodged than in coffers, where it would call down upon me the hatred, envy, and contempt of other princes.'

The emperors derived an excuse for the superfluity of their public games and spectacles from the fact that their authority depended somewhat (at least in appearance) on the will of the Roman people, who from time immemorial had been accustomed to be britered by that sort of spectacle and extravagance. But it was private citizens who had nourished this custom of gratifying their fellow citizens and companions, chiefly out of their own purse, by such profusion and magnificence; this had an altogether different flavor when it was the masters who came to imitate it. The transfer of money from its rightful owners to strangers should not be regarded as liberality [Cicero].

Philip, because his son was trying to win the good will of the Macedonians by presents, scolded him for it in a letter in this manner: 'What, do you want your subjects to regard you as their purer, not as their king? Do you want to win them over? Win them over with the benefits of your virtue, not the benefits of your coffers.'

III: 6

Of coaches

It was, however, a fine thing to bring and plant in the amphitheater a great quantity of big trees, all branching and green, representing a great shady forest, arranged in beautiful symmetry, and on the first day to cast into it a thousand ostriches, a thousand stags, a thousand wild boars, and a thousand fellow-deep, leaving them to be hunted down by the people; on the next day to have a hundred big lions, a hundred leopards, and three hundred bears slaughtered in their presence; and for the third day, to have three hundred pairs of gladiators fight it out to the death, as the Emperor Probus did.

It was also a fine thing to see those great amphitheaters faced with marble on the outside, wrought with ornaments and statues, the inside sparkling with many rare enrichments--

Here is the diamond circle, the golden portico CALPURNIUS

--all the sides of this vast space filled and surrounded from top to bottom with three or four score tiers of seats, also of marble, covered with cushions--

"Let him begone," he says,

"And leave the cushioned seats of knights, seeing he pays None of the lawful tax"

JUVENAL

--where a hundred thousand men could sit at their ease. Also, first of all, to have the place at the bottom, where the games were played, open artificially and split into crevasses representing caverns that vomited forth the beasts destined for the spectacle, and then, second, to flood it with a deep sea, full of sea monsters and laden with armed vessels to represent a naval battle; and third, to level it and dry it off again for the combat of the gladiators; and for the fourth show to strew it with venomous and stony animals instead of sand, in order to set up a stately basonet there for all that huge number of people--the final act of a single day:

How often have we seen Part of the sandy floor sink down, wild beasts emerge Out of the open chasm, and from its depths upsurge Forests of golden growing trees with yellow bark.

Not only forest monsters were for us to mark,

But I saw sea-calves mingled in with fighting bears,

And hippopotami, the shapeless herd that wears The name of river-horse.

CALPURNIUS

Sometimes they created a high mountain thee, full of fruit trees and other trees in leaf, spouting a stream of water from its top as from the mouth of a living spring. Sometimes they brought in a great ship which opened and came apart of itself and, after having spewed forth from its belly four or five hundred fighting beasts, closed up again and vanished without assistance. At other times, from the floor of the place, they made spouts and jets of water spring forth which shot upward to an infinite height, then sprinkled and perfumed that infinite multitude.
To protect themselves against damage from the weather, they had that immense space hung with awnings, sometimes made of purple worked with the needle, sometimes of silk of one color or another, and they drew them forward or back in a moment, as they had a mind to:

The awnings, though the sun scorches the skin,
Are, when Hermogenes appears, drawn in.

Martial

The nets, too, which they put in front of the people to protect them from the violence of the loosened beasts, were woven of gold:

Even the woven nets

Calpurnius

If there is anything excusable in such extravagances, it is when the inventiveness and the novelty of them, not the expense, provide amusement.

Even in these vanities we discover how fertile those ages were in minds different from ours. It is with this sort of fertility as with all other productions of Nature. This is not to say that she then put forth her utmost effort. We do not go in a straight line; we rather ramble, and turn this way and that. We retrace our steps. I fear that our knowledge is weak in every direction; we do not see very far ahead or very far behind. It embraces little and has a short life; short in both extent of time and extent of matter:

Eee Agamemnon, heroes were the same;
Many there were, but no one knows their name;
They all are buried on unwept
Into unending night.

Horace

Before the Trojan War, before Troy fell,
Were other bards with other tales to tell.

Lucius

And Solon’s story of what he had heard from the priests of Egypt about the long life of their state, and their manner of learning and preserving the histories of other countries, does not seem to me a testimony to be rejected in this consideration. If we could view that expanse of countries and ages, boundless in every direction, into which the mind, plunging and spreading itself, travels so far and wide that it can find no limit where it can stop, there would appear in that immensity an infinite capacity to produce immemorial forms (adapted from Cicero).

And if all that has come down to us by report from the past should be true and known by someone, it would be less than nothing compared with what is unknown. And of this very immensity of the world which glides along while we live on it, how puny and limited is the knowledge of even the most curious! Not only of particular events which fortune often renders exemplary and weighty, but of the state of great govern-

ments and nations, there escapes us a hundred times more than comes to our knowledge. We exclaim at the miracle of the invention of our artillery, of our printing; other men in another corner of the world, in China, enjoyed these a thousand years earlier. If we saw as much of the world as we do not see, we would perceive, it is likely, a perpetual multiplication and vicissitude of forms.

There is nothing unique and rare as regards nature, but there certainly is as regards our knowledge, which is a miserable foundation for our rules and which is apt to represent to us a very false picture of things. As vainly as we today infer the decline and decrepitude of the world from the arguments we draw from our own weakness and decay—

This age is broken down, and broken down the earth

Lucius

—so vainly did this poet infer the world’s birth and youth from the vigor he saw in the minds of his time, abounding in novelties and inventions in various arts:

The universe, I think, is very new.
The world is young, its birth not far behind;
Hence certain arts grow more and more refined
Even today; the naval art is one.

Lucius

Our world has just discovered another world (and who will guarantee us that it is the last of its brothers, since the diamons, the Sibyls, and we ourselves have up to now been ignorant of this one?) no less great, full, and well-ordered than itself, yet so new and so infasile that it is still being taught its ABC not fifty years ago it knew neither letters, nor weights and measures, nor clothes, nor wheat, nor vines. It was still quite naked at the breast, and lived only on what its nursing mother provided. If we are right to infer the end of our world, and that poet is right about the youth of his own age, this other world will only be coming into the light when ours is leaving it. The universe will fall into paralysis; one member will be crippled, the other in full vigor.

I am much afraid that we shall have very greatly hastened the de-
cline and ruin of this new world by our contagion, and that we will have sold it our opinions and our arts very dear. It was an infant world; yet we have not whipped it and subjected it to our discipline by the advan-
tage of our natural vule and strength, nor won it over by our justice and goodness, nor subjugated it by our magnanimity. Most of the re-
ponses of these people and most of our dealings with them show that they were not at all behind us in natural brightness of mind and perti-
nence.

The awesome magnificence of the cities of Cusco and Mexico (and, among many similar things, the garden of that king in which all the trees, the fruits, and all the herbs were exceedingly fashioned in gold, and of such size and so arranged as they might be in an ordinary garden; and in his curio room were gold replicas of all the living creatures native to his country and its waters), and the beauty of their workmanship in
jewelry, feathers, cotton, and painting, show that they were not behind us in industry either. But as for devotion, observance of the laws, goodness, liberality, loyalty, and frankness, it served us well not to have as much as they; by their advantage in this they lost, sold, and betrayed themselves.

As for boldness and courage, as for firmness, constancy, resolution against pains and hunger and death, I would not fear to oppose the examples I could find among them to the most famous ancient examples that we have in the memories of our world on this side of the ocean. For as regards the men who subjugated them, take away the ruses and tricks that they used to deceive them, and the people's natural astonishment at seeing the unexpected arrival of bearded men, different in language, religion, shape, and countenance, from a part of the world so remote, where they had never imagined there was any sort of human habitation, mounted on great unknown monsters, opposed to men who had never seen not only a horse, but any sort of animal trained to carry and endure a man or any other burden; men equipped with a hard and shiny skin and a sharp and glittering weapon, against men who, for the miracle of a mirror or a knife, would exchange a great treasure in gold and pearls, and who had neither the knowledge nor the material by which, even in full leisure, they could piece their steel; add to this the lightning and thunder of our cannon and harquebuses—capable of disturbing Caesar himself, if he had been surprised by them with as little experience and in his time—against people who were naked (except in some regions where the invention of some cotton fabric had reached them), without other arms at the most than bows, stones, sticks, and wooden bucklers; people taken by surprise, under color of friendship and good faith, by curiosity to see strange and unknown things: eliminate this disparity, I say, and you take from the conquerors the whole basis of so many victories.

When I consider that indomitable ardor with which so many thousands of men, women, and children came forth and hurled themselves so many times into inevitable dangers for the defense of their gods and of their liberty, and that noble, stubborn readiness to suffer all extremities and hardships, even death, rather than submit to the domination of those by whom they had been so shamefully deceived (for some of them when captured chose rather to let themselves perish of hunger and fasting than to accept food from the hands of such basely victorious enemies), I conclude that if anyone had attacked them on equal terms, with equal arms, experience, and numbers, it would have been just as dangerous for him as in any other war we know of, and more so.

Why did not such a noble conquest fall to Alexander or to those ancient Greeks and Romans? Why did not such a great change and alteration of so many empires and peoples fall into hands that would have gone polished and cleared away whatever was barbarous in them, and would have strengthened and fostered the good seeds that nature had produced in them, not only adding to the cultivation of the earth and the adornment of cities the arts of our side of the ocean, in so far as they would have been necessary, but also adding the Greek and Roman virtues to those originally in that region? What an improvement that would have been, and what an amelioration for the entire globe, if the first examples of our conduct that were offered over there had called those peoples to the admiration and imitation of virtue and had set up between them and us a brotherly fellowship and understanding! How easy it would have been to make good use of souls so fresh, so familiar to learn, and having, for the most part, such fine natural beginnings! On the contrary, we took advantage of their ignorance and inexperience to incline them the more easily toward treachery, treachery, avarice, and every sort of inhumanity and cruelty, after the example and pattern of our ways. Who ever set the utility of commerce and trading at such a price? So many cities razed, so many nations exterminated, so many millions of people put to the sword, and the richest and most beautiful part of the world turned upside down, for the traffic in pearls and pepper! Base and mechanical victories! Never did ambition, never did public eminences, drive men against one another to such horrible hostilities and such miserable calamities.

Coasting the sea in quest of their mines, certain Spaniards landed in a fertile, pleasant, well-populated country, and made their usual declarations to its people: that they were peaceable men, coming from distant voyages, sent on behalf of the king of Castile, the greatest prince of the habitable world, to whom the Pope, representing God on earth, had given the principality of all the Indies; that if these people would be tributaries to him, they would be very kindly treated. They demanded of them food to eat and gold to be used in a certain medicine, and expounded to them the belief in one single God and the truth of our religion, which they advised them to accept, adding a few threats.

The answer was this: As for being peaceable, they did not look like it, if they were. As for their king, since he was begging, he must be indigent and needy; and he who had awarded their country to him must be a man fond of dissension, to go and give another person something that was not his and thus set him at strife with its ancient possessors. As for food, they would supply them. Gold they had little of, and it was a thing they held in no esteem, since it was useless to the service of their life, their sole concern being with passing life happily and pleasantly; however, they might readily take any they could find, except what was employed in the service of their gods. As for one single God, the account had pleased them; but they did not want to change their religion, having followed it so advantageously for so long, and they were not accustomed to take counsel except of their friends and acquaintances. As for the threats, it was a sign of lack of judgment to threaten people whose nature and reasons were unknown to them. Thus they should promptly hurry up and vacate their land, for they were not accustomed to take in good part the civilities and declarations of armed strangers: otherwise they would do to them as they had done to these others—showing them the heads of some executed men around their city.
There we have an example of the babbling of this infancy. But at all events, neither in that place nor in several others where the Spaniards did not find the merchandise they were looking for, did they make any stay or any attack, whatever other advantages there might be; witness my Cannibals. 6

Of the two most powerful monarchs of that world, and perhaps of this as well, kings of so many kings, the last two that they drove out, one, the king of Peru, was taken in a battle and put to so excessive a ransom that it surpasses all belief; and when this had been faithfully paid, and the king in his dealings had given signs of a frank, liberal, and steadfast spirit and a clear and well-ordered understanding, the conquerors, after having extracted from him one million three hundred and twenty-five thousand five hundred ounces of gold, besides silver and other things that amounted to no less, so that their horses thenceforth went shod with solid gold, were seized with the desire to see also, at the price of whatever trachery, what could be the remainder of this king's treasures, and to enjoy freely what he had reserved. 7 They trumped up against him a false accusation and false evidence that he was planning to renew his provinces in order to regain his freedom. Whereupon, in a beautiful sentence pronounced by those very men who had set about this treachery against him, he was condemned to be publicly hanged and strangled, after being permitted to buy his way out of the torment of being burned alive by submitting to baptism at the moment of the execution. A horrible and unheard-of calamity, which nevertheless he bore without belying himself either by look or word, with a truly royal bearing and gravity. And then, to hum the people, stunned and dazed by such a strange thing, they counterfeited great mourning over his death and ordered a sumptuous funeral for him.

The other one, the king of Mexico, had long defended his besieged city and shown in this siege all that endurance and perseverance can do, if ever prince and people did so, when he had in turn put one in his enemies' hands alive, on their promise that they would treat him as a king; nor did he in his captivity show anything unworthy of this title. After this victory, his enemies, not finding all the gold they had promised themselves, first ransacked and searched everything, and then set about seeking information by inflicting the cruellest tortures they could think up on the prisoners they held. But having gained nothing by this, and finding their prisoners' courage stronger than their torments, they finally flew into such a rage that, against their word and against all law of nations, they condemned the king himself and one of the principal lords of his court to the torture in each other's presence. This lord, finding himself overcome with the pain, surrounded with burning braziers, in the end turned his gaze piteously toward his master, as if to ask his pardon because he could hold out no longer. The king, fixing his eyes profoundly and severely on him in reproach for his cowardice and pusillanimity, said to him only these words, in a stern, firm voice: "And I, 8

---

6 Described in Essays 1:31.
7 King Philip II of Spain.
8 Of coaches.
and skilled in the arts than the other nations over there. Thus they judged, as we do, that the universe was near its end, and they took as a sign of this the desolation that we brought upon them. They believed that the existence of the world was divided into five ages and into the life of five successive suns, of which four had already run their time, and that the one which gave them light was the fifth. The first perished with all other creatures by a universal flood of water. The second, by the heavens falling on us, which suffocated every living thing, to which age they assign the giants, and they showed the Spaniards some of their bones, judging by the size of which these men must have stood twenty hands high. The third, by fire, which burned and consumed everything. The fourth, by a turbulence of air and wind which beat down even many mountains; the men did not die, but they were changed into baboons (to what notions will the laxness of human credulity not submit!). After the death of this fourth sun, the world was twenty-five years in perpetual darkness, in the fifteenth of which a man and a woman were created who remade the human race; ten years later, on a certain day of their calendar, the sun appeared newly created, and since then they reckon their years from that day. The third day after its creation the old gods died; the new ones have been born since little by little. What they think about the manner in which this last sun will perish, my author did not learn. But their calculation of this fourth change coincides with that great conjunction of stars which produced, some eight hundred years ago, according to the reckoning of the astronomers, many great alterations and innovations in the world.

As for pomp and magnificence, whereby I entered upon this subject, neither Greece nor Rome nor Egypt can compare any of its works, whether in utility or difficulty or nobility, with the road which is seen in Peru, laid out by the kings of the country, from the city of Quito as far as Cuzco (a distance of three hundred leagues), straight, even, twenty-five paces wide, hayed on both sides with fine high walls, and along these, on the inside, two ever-flowing streams, bordered by beautiful trees, which they call molly. Wherever they encountered mountains and rocks, they cut through and leveled them, and filled the hollows with stone and lime. At the end of each day's journey there are fine palaces furnished with provisions, clothes, and arms, for travelers as well as for the armies that have to pass that way.

In my estimate of this work I have counted the difficulty, which is particularly considerable in that place. They did not build with any stones less than ten feet square; they had no other means of carrying than by strength of arm, dragging their load along; and they had not even the art of scaffolding, knowing no other device than to raise an equal height of earth against their building as it rose, and remove it afterward.

Let us fall back to our coaches. Instead of these or any other form of transport, they had themselves carried by men, and on their shoulders. That last king of Peru, the day that he was taken, was thus carried on shafts of gold, seated in a chair of gold, in the midst of his army. As many of these carriers as they killed to make him fall—for they wanted to take him alive—so many others tried to take the place of the dead ones, so that they never could bring him down, however great a slaughter they made of these people, until a horseman seized him around the body and pulled him to the ground.

7 Of the disadvantage of greatness

Since we cannot attain it, let us take our revenge by speaking ill of it. Yet it is not absolutely speaking ill of something to find some defects in it; there are some in all things, however beautiful and desirable they may be. In general greatness has this evident advantage, that it can step down whenever it pleases, and that it almost has the choice of both conditions. For one does not fall from every height; there are more from which one can descend without falling. It does indeed seem to me that we overvalue it, and overvalue too the resolution of people we have either seen or heard of who despised it or laid it down of their own accord. Its essence is not so obviously advantageous that it cannot be refused except by a miracle.

I find the effort to bear ill a very hard one, but as for being content with a mediocre measure of fortune, and eschewing greatness, I find very little difficulty in that. To eschew greatness is a virtue, it seems to me, which I, who am only a goading, could attain without great striving. What may not be done by those who would also put in consideration the glory that goes with this refusal, in which there may lurk more ambition than in the very desire and enjoyment of greatness, inasmuch as ambition never follows its own bent better than by some out-of-the-way and unusual path?

I sharpen my courage toward endurance, I weaken it toward desire. I have as much to wish for as another, and I allow my wishes and inclinations as much freedom and indiscretion; yet it has never occurred to me to wish for empire or royalty, or for the eminence of those high and commanding fortunes. I do not aim in that direction, I love myself too well. When I think of growing, it is in a low way, with a constrained and cowardly growth, strictly for myself; in resolution, wisdom, health, beauty, and even riches. But that prestige, that all that powerful authority, oppresses my imagination. And quite in contrast to that other, I would perhaps prefer to be second or third in Périgueux rather than be the first man there than the second in Rome.

1 Caesur, whose Pietrarca represents as saying of a tiny village that he would rather be the first man there than the second in Rome.