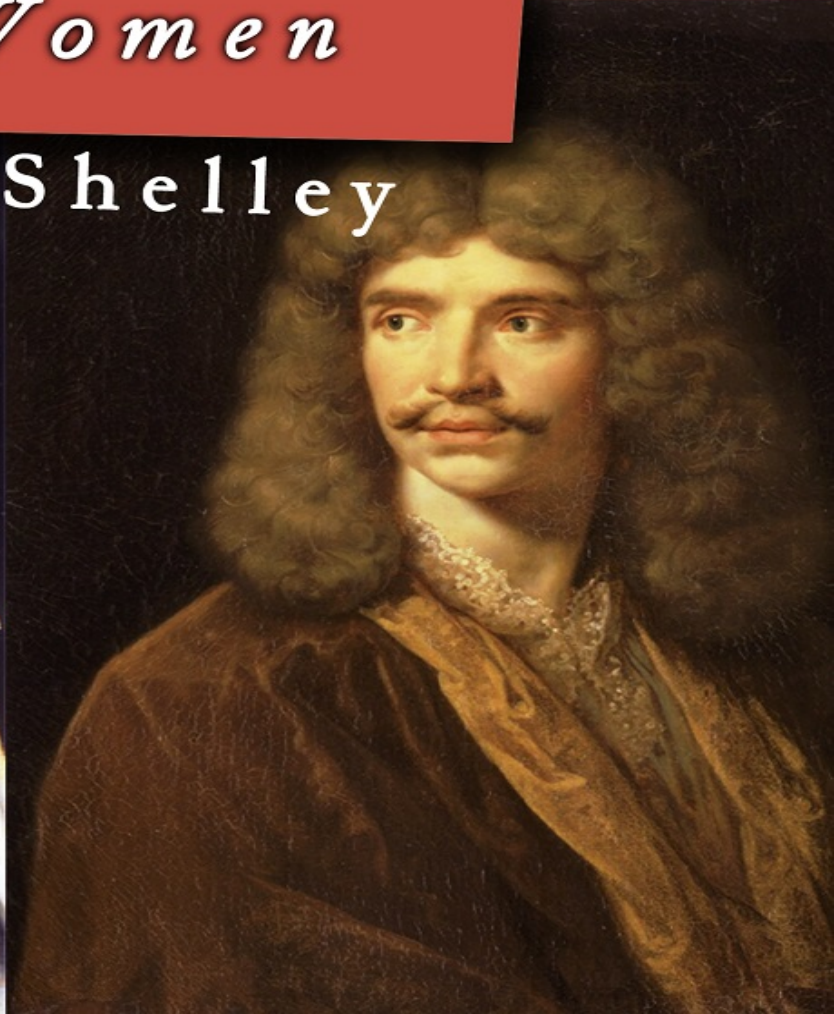


*Lives of the
Most Eminent
Literary and
Scientific Men
& Women*



Mary Shelley



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Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men & Women

**Biographies of Essential Literary Figures 14th-
19th Century**

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e-artnow, 2022

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EAN: 4066338123251

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MONTAIGNE

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1533-1592

There is scarcely any man into whose character we have more insight than that of Montaigne. He has written four volumes of "Essays," which are principally taken up by narrations of what happened to himself, or dissertations on his own nature, and this in an enlightened and philosophical, though quaint and naïve style, which renders him one of the most delightful authors in the world. It were easy to fabricate a long biography, by drawing from this source, and placing in a consecutive view, the various information he affords. We must abridge, however, into a few pages several volumes; while, by seizing on the main topics, a faithful and interesting picture will be presented.

Michel de Montaigne was born at his paternal castle of that name¹, in Périgord, on the 8th of February, 1533. He was the son of Pierre Eyquem, esquire—seigneur of Montaigne, and at one time elected mayor of Bordeaux. This portion of France, Gascony and Guienne, gives birth to a race peculiar to itself; vivacious, warm-hearted, and vain—they are sometimes boastful, but never false; often rash, but never disloyal; and Montaigne evidently inherited much of the disposition peculiar to his province. He speaks of his family as honourable and virtuous:—"We are a race noted as good parents, good brothers, good relations," he says,—and his father himself seems eminently to deserve the gratitude and praise which his son bestows. His description of him is an interesting specimen of a French noble of those days:

—"He spoke little and well, and mixed his discourse with allusions to modern books, mostly Spanish; his demeanour was grave, tempered by gentleness, modesty, and humility; he took peculiar care of the neatness and cleanliness of his dress, whether on horseback or on foot; singularly true in his conversation, and conscientious and pious, almost even to superstition. For a short slight man he was very strong; his figure was upright and well proportioned; he was dexterous and graceful in all noble exercises; his agility was almost miraculous; and I have seen him, at more than sixty years of age, throw himself on a horse, leap over the table, with only his thumb on it, and never going to his room without springing up three or four stairs at a time." Michel was the eldest of five sons. His father was eager to give him a good education, and even before his birth consulted learned and clever men on the subject. On these consultations and on his own admirable judgment he formed a system, such as may in some sort be considered the basis of Rousseau's; and which shows that, however we may consider one age more enlightened than another, the natural reason of men of talent leads them to the same conclusions, whether living in an age when warfare, struggle, and the concomitant ignorance were rife, or when philosophers set the fashion of the day. "The good father whom God gave me," says Montaigne, "sent me, while in my cradle, to one of his poor villages, and kept me there while I was at nurse and longer, bringing me up to the hardest and commonest habits of life. He had another notion, also, which was to ally me with the people, and that class of men who need our assistance; desiring that I should rather give my attention to those who should stretch out their arms to me, than those who would turn their backs; and for this reason he selected people of the lowest condition for my baptismal

sponsors, that I might attach myself to them." He was taught, also, in his infancy directness of conduct, and never to mingle any artifice or trickery with his games. With regard to learning, his good father meditated long on the received modes of initiating his son in the rudiments of knowledge. He was struck by the time given to, and the annoyance a child suffers in, the acquirement of the dead languages; this was exaggerated to him as a pause why the moderns were so inferior to the ancients in greatness of soul and wisdom. He hit, therefore, on the expedient of causing Latin to be the first language that his son should hear and speak. He engaged the services of a German, well versed in Latin, and wholly ignorant of French. "This man," continues Montaigne, "whom he sent for expressly, and who was liberally paid, had me perpetually in his arms. Two others of less learning, accompanied to relieve him; they never spoke to me except in Latin; and it was the invariable rule of the house, that neither my father nor my mother, nor domestic, nor maid, should utter in my presence any thing except the few Latin phrases they had learnt for the purpose of talking with me. It is strange the progress that every one made. My father and mother learnt enough Latin to understand it, and to speak it on occasions, as did also the other servants attached to me;—in short, we talked so much Latin, that it overflowed even into our neighbouring villages, where there still remain, and have taken root, several Latin names for workmen and their tools. As for me, at the age of six, I knew no more French than Arabic; and, without study, book, grammar, or instruction,—without rod and tears—I learnt as pure a Latin as my schoolmaster could teach, for I could not mix it with any other language. If, after the manner of colleges, I had a theme set me, it was given, not in French, but in bad Latin, to be turned into good; and my early

master, George Buchanan and others, have often told me that I was so ready with my Latin in my infancy, that they feared to address me. Buchanan, whom I afterwards saw in the suite of the marshal de Brissac, told me that he was about to write on education, and should give mine as an example. As to Greek, of which I scarcely know any thing, my father intended that I should not learn it as a study, but as a game—for he had been told to cause me to acquire knowledge of my own accord and will, and not by force, and to nourish my soul in all gentleness and liberty, without severity or restraint, and this to almost a superstitious degree; for having heard that it hurts a child's brain to be awoke suddenly, and torn from sleep with violence, he caused me to be roused in the morning by the sound of music, and there was always a man in my service for that purpose.

"The rest maybe judged of by this specimen, which proves the prudence and affection of my excellent father, who must not be blamed if he gathered no fruits worthy of such exquisite culture. This is to be attributed to two causes: the first is the sterile and troublesome soil; for although my health was good, and my disposition was docile and gentle, I was, notwithstanding, so heavy, dull, and sleepy, that I could not be roused from my indolence even to play. I saw well what I saw; and beneath this dull outside I nourished a bold imagination, and opinions beyond my age. My mind was slow, and it never moved unless it was led—my understanding tardy—my invention idle—and, amidst all, an incredible want of memory. With all this it is not strange that he succeeded so ill. Secondly, as all those who are furiously eager for a cure are swayed by all manner of advice, so the good man, fearing to fail in a thing he had so much at heart, allowed himself at last to be carried away

by the common opinion; and, not having those around him who gave him the ideas of education which he brought from Italy, sent me, at six years of age, to the public school of Guienne, which was then very flourishing, and the best in France. It was impossible to exceed the care he then took to choose accomplished private tutors; but still it was a school: my Latin deteriorated, and I have since lost all habit of speaking it; and my singular initiation only served to place me at once in the first classes; for when I left college, at the age of thirteen, I had finished my course, but, truly, without any fruit at present useful to me.

"The first love I had for books came to me through the pleasure afforded by the fables in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. For, at the age of seven or eight, I quitted every other pleasure to read them; the more that its language was my maternal one, and that it was the easiest book I knew, and, considering the matter, the best adapted to my age. I was more careless of my other studies, and in this was lucky in having a clever man for my preceptor, who connived at this and similar irregularities of mine; for I thus read through the *Æneid*, and then Terence and Plautus, led on by delight in the subject. If he had been so foolish as to prevent me, I believe I should have brought from college a hatred of all books, as most of our young nobles do. He managed cleverly, pretending not to see; and sharpened my appetite by only allowing me to devour these volumes by stealth, and being easy with me with regard to my other lessons; for the principal qualities which my father sought in those who had charge of me were kindness and good humour; consequently idleness and laziness were my only vices. There was no fear that I should do harm, but that I should do nothing—no one expected that I should become wicked, but only useless. It has continued the same: the complaints

I hear are of this sort: that I am indolent, slow to perform acts of friendship, too scrupulous, and disdainful of public employments. Meanwhile my soul had its private operations, and formed sure and independent opinions concerning the subjects it understood, digesting them alone, without communication; and among other things, I believe it had been incapable of submitting to force or violence."

It would require a volume almost to examine the effect that this singular education had on Montaigne's character. If absence of constraint strengthened the defects of his character, at least it implanted no extraneous ones. His defective memory was not cultivated, and therefore remained defective to the end. His indolence continued through life: he became somewhat of a humourist; but his faculties were not deadened, nor his heart hardened, by opposition and severity.

Montaigne's heart was warm; his temper cheerful², though unequal; his imagination lively³; his affections exalted to enthusiasm; and this ardour of disposition, joined to the sort of personal indolence which he describes, renders him a singular character. On leaving college he studied law, being destined for that profession; but he disliked it; and, though he was made counsellor to the parliament of Bordeaux, he, in the sequel, gave up the employment as by no means suited to him. He lived in troubled times. Religious parties ran high, and were so well balanced, the kingly power being diminished through the minority of Charles IX., and that of the nobles increasing in consequence, that the struggle between the two was violent and deadly. Montaigne was a catholic and a lover of peace. He did not mingle with the dissensions of the times, avoided

all public employments, and it is not in the history of his times that we must seek for the events of his life.

1559.

Ætat.

26.

The chief event, so to call it, that he himself records with fondness and care, is his friendship for Étienne de la Boëtie. To judge by the only writing we possess of this friend, composed when he was scarcely more than seventeen, his Essay on "Voluntary Servitude," he evidently deserved the high esteem in which Montaigne held him, though apparently very dissimilar from him in character. Boldness and vigour mark the thoughts and style; love of freedom, founded on a generous independence of soul, breathes in every line; the bond between him and Montaigne rested on the integrity and lofty nature of their dispositions—on their talents—on the warmth of heart that distinguished both—and a fervid imagination, without which the affections seldom rise into enthusiasm. Montaigne often refers to this beloved friend in his essays. "The greatest man I ever knew," he writes, "was Étienne de la Boëtie. His was indeed a soul full of perfections, a soul of the old stamp, and which would have produced great effects had fate permitted, having by learning and study added greatly to his rich natural gifts."⁴ In another essay, which is entitled "Friendship," he recounts the history of their intimacy. "We sought each other," he writes, "before we met, on account of what we heard of each other, which influenced our inclinations more than there seems to have been reason for, I think through a command of Heaven. We, as it were, embraced each other's names; and at our first meeting,

which was by chance, and at a large assembly, we found ourselves so drawn together, so known to each other, that nothing hereafter was nearer than we were one to the other. He wrote a beautiful Latin poem to excuse the precipitation of our intimacy, which so promptly arrived at its perfection. As it was destined to last so short a time, and began so late, for we were both arrived at manhood, and he was several years the elder, it had no time to lose; it could not regulate itself by slow and regular friendships, which require the precaution of a long prelude acquaintance. Ours had no idea foreign to itself, and could refer to itself alone; it did not depend on one special cause, nor on two, nor three, nor four, nor a thousand, but was the quintessence of all which seized on *my* will, and forced it to merge and lose itself in his, and which, having seized *his* will, led him to merge and lose his in mine, with equal desire and eagerness. I use the word *lose* as the proper one, for we neither reserved any thing that was not common to both. Our souls mingled so entirely, and penetrated with such ardent affection into the very essence of each other, that not only was I as well acquainted with his as with my own, but certainly I should have more readily trusted him than myself. This attachment must not be put in the same rank with common friendships. I have known the most perfect of a slighter kind; and, if the rules are confounded, people will deceive themselves. In other friendships you must proceed bridle in hand; in the more exalted one, the offices and benefits which support other intimacies do not deserve even to be named. The perfect union of the friends causes them to hate and banish all those words that imply division and difference, such as benefit, obligation, gratitude, entreaty, thanks, and the like. All is in common with them; and, if in such a friendship one could give to the other, it would be him who received that

would benefit his companion. Menander pronounced him happy who should meet only with the shadow of such a friend: he was right; for if I compare the rest of my life, though, with the blessing of God, I have passed it agreeably and peacefully, and, save from the loss of such a friend, exempt from any poignant affliction, with a tranquil mind, having taken the good that came to me originally and naturally, without seeking others; yet, if I compare the whole of it, I say, with the four years during which it was given me to enjoy the dear society of this person, it is mere smoke,—it is a dark and wearisome night. I have dragged it out painfully since I lost him; and the very pleasures that have offered themselves to me, instead of consoling, doubled the sense of my loss. We used to share every thing, and methinks I rob him of his portion. I was so accustomed to be two in every thing that I seem now but half of myself. There is no action nor idea that does not present the thought of the good he would have done me, for as he surpassed me infinitely in every talent and virtue, so did he in the duties of friendship."

1553.

Ætat.

30.

A severe illness of a few days carried off this admirable friend. Montaigne recounts, in a letter to his father, the progress of the malady, and his death bed; and nothing can be more affecting, nor better prove the noble and virtuous qualities of both, than these sad hours when the one prepared to die, and the other ministered to the dying. This loss was never forgotten; and we find, in the journal of his travels in Italy, written eighteen years after, an observation,

that he fell one morning into so painful a reverie concerning M. de la Boëtie that his health was affected by it.

Montaigne married at the age of thirty-three: he married neither from wish nor choice. "Of my own will," he says, "I would have shunned marrying Wisdom herself, had she asked me. But we strive in vain; custom, and the uses of common life, carry us away: example, not choice, leads me in almost all my actions. In this, truly, I did not go of my own accord, but was led, or carried, by extraneous circumstances; and certainly I was then less prepared, and more averse than now that I have tried it. But I have conducted myself better than I expected. One may keep one's liberty prudently; but, when once one has entered on the obligation, one must observe the laws of a common duty." Montaigne made, therefore, a good husband, though not enthusiastically attached, and a good father—indeed, in all the duties of life, he acted better than was expected of him. At his death, his father⁵ left him his estate, fancying that it would be wasted through his indolence and carelessness; but Montaigne's faults were negative; and he easily brought himself to regard his income as the limit of his expenses, and even kept within it. His hatred of business and trouble, joined to sound common sense, led him to understand that ease could be best attained by limiting his desires to his means, and by the degree of order necessary to know what these means were; and his practice accorded with this conclusion.

Montaigne's father lived to old age. He married late in life, and we are ignorant of the date of his death; from that period Montaigne himself seems to have lived chiefly at his paternal castle. It would appear that he was at that time under forty⁶; and henceforth his time was, to a great degree, spent in domestic society, among the few books he

loved, writing his essays, and attending to the cares that wait upon property. It is not to be supposed, however, that he lived a wholly sedentary and inactive life. Though he adhered to no party, and showed no enthusiasm in the maintenance of his opinions, his disposition was inquisitive to eagerness, ardent and fiery. The troubles that desolated his country throughout his life fostered the activity of mind of which his writings are so full. He often travelled about France, and, above all, was well acquainted with Paris and the court. He loved the capital, and calls himself a Frenchman only through his love of Paris, which he names the glory of France, and one of the noblest ornaments of the world. He attended the courts at the same time of the famous duke de Guise and the king of Navarre, afterwards Henry IV. He had predicted that the death of one or the other of these princes could alone put an end to the civil war, and even foresaw the likelihood there was that Henry of Navarre should change his religion. He was at Blois when the duke de Guise was assassinated; but that event took place long subsequent to the period of which we at present write.

During his whole life civil war raged between catholic and huguenot. Montaigne, attached to the kingly and catholic party, abstained, however, from mingling in the mortal struggles going on.⁷ Yet sometimes they intruded on his quiet, and he was made to feel the disturbances that desolated his country. It is a strange thing to picture France divided into two parties, belonging to which were men who risked all for the dearest privilege of life, freedom of thought and faith; and were either forced, or fancied that they were forced, to expose life and property to attain it; and to compare these religionists in arms with the tranquil philosopher, who dissected human nature in his study, and

sounded the very depths of all our knowledge in freedom and ease, because he abstained from certain watchwords, and had no desire for proselytes or popular favour. "I regard our king," he says, "with a mere legitimate and political affection, neither attracted nor repelled by private interest; and in this I am satisfied with myself. In the same way I am but moderately and tranquilly attached to the general cause, and am not subject to entertain opinions in a deep-felt and enthusiastic manner. Let Montaigne, if it must, be swallowed up in the public ruin; but, if there is no necessity, I shall be thankful to fortune to save it. I treat both parties equally, and say nothing to one that I could not say to the other, with the accent only a little changed; and there is no motive of utility that could induce me to lie." This moderation, on system, of course led him, in his heart, to be inimical to the reformers. "They seek reformation," he says, in the worst of destructions, "and aim at salvation by the exact modes in which we are sure to reap damnation; and think to aid divine justice and humanity by overturning law and the rulers, under whose care God has placed them, tearing their mother (*the church*) to pieces, to give portions to be gnawed by her ancient enemies, filling their country with parricidal hatreds." This is no lofty view of the great and holy work of reformation, the greatest and (however stained by crime, the effect of the most cruel persecutions) the most beneficent change operated in modern times in human institutions. Montaigne goes on:—"The people suffered greatly then, both for the present and the future, from the devastation of the country. I suffered worse, for I encountered all those injuries which moderation brings during such troubles—I was pillaged by all parties. The situation of my house, and my alliance with my neighbours, gave me one appearance, my life and actions another; no

formal accusations were made, for they could get no hold against me; but mute suspicion was secretly spread. A thousand injuries were done me one after another, which I could have borne better had they come altogether."

His mode of preserving his castle from pillage was very characteristic. "Defence," he says, "attracts enterprise, and fear instigates injury. I weakened the ardour of the soldiery by taking from their exploit all risk or matter for military glory, which usually served them as an excuse: what is done with danger is always honourable at those periods when the course of justice is suspended. I rendered the conquest of my house cowardly and treacherous; it was shut against no one who knocked; a porter was its only guard, an ancient usage and ceremony, and which did not serve so much to defend my abode as to offer an easier and more gracious entrance. I had no sentinel but that which the stars kept for me. A gentleman does wrong to appear in a state of defence who is not perfectly so. My house was well fortified when built, but I have added nothing, fearing that such might be turned against myself. So many garrisoned houses being taken made me suspect that they were lost through that very reason. It gave cause and desire for assault. Every guarded door looks like war. If God pleased I might be attacked, but I would not call on the assailant. It is my retreat wherein to repose myself from war. I endeavour to shelter this corner from the public storm, as also another corner in my soul. Our contest vainly changes its forms, and multiplies and diversifies itself in various parties—I never stir. Among so many armed houses, I alone, in France, I believe, confided mine to the protection of Heaven only, and have never removed either money, or plate, or title-deed, or tapestry. I was resolved neither to fear nor to save myself by halves. If an entire gratitude can acquire divine favour, I

shall enjoy it to the end; if not, I have gone on long enough to render my escape remarkable; it has lasted now thirty years." And he preserved his philosophy through all. "I write this," he says, in one of his essays, "at a moment when the worst of our troubles are gathering about me; the enemy is at my gates, and I endure all sorts of military outrage at once." He gives an interesting account of how, on one occasion, by presence of mind and self-possession, he saved his castle. A certain leader, bent on taking it and him, resolved to surprise him. He came alone to the gate and begged to be let in. Montaigne knew him, and thought he could rely on him as his neighbour, though not as his friend: he caused his door to be opened to him as to every one. The visitant came in a hurried manner, his horse panting, and said that he had encountered the enemy, who pursued him, and he being unarmed, and with fewer men about him, he had taken shelter at Montaigne's, and was in great trouble about his people, whom he feared were either taken or killed. Montaigne believed the tale and tried to reassure and comfort him. Presently five or six of his followers, with the same appearance of terror, presented themselves; and then more and more, to as many as thirty, well equipped and armed, pretending that they were pursued by the enemy. Montaigne's suspicions were at last awakened; but finding that he must go on as he had begun, or break out altogether, he betook himself to what seemed to him the easiest and most natural course, and ordered all to be admitted; "being," he says, "a man who gladly commits himself to fortune, and believing that we fail in not confiding sufficiently in Heaven." The soldiers having entered remained in the court yard—their chief, with his host, being in the hall, he not having permitted his horse to be put up, saying he should go the moment his people arrived. He now

saw himself master of his enterprise,—the execution alone remained. He often said afterwards—for he did not fear to tell the tale—that Montaigne's frankness and composure had disarmed his treachery. He remounted his horse and departed, while his people, who kept their eyes continually upon him to see if he gave the signal, were astonished to behold him ride off and abandon his advantage.

On another occasion, confiding in some truce, he undertook a journey, and was seized by about thirty gentlemen, masked, as was the custom then, followed by a little army of arquebusiers. Being taken, he was led into the forest and despoiled of his effects, which were valuable, and high ransom demanded. He refused any, contending for the maintenance of the truce; but this plea was rejected, and they were ordered to be marched away. He did not know his enemies, nor, apparently, did they know him; and he and his people were being led off as prisoners, when suddenly a change took place: the chief addressed him in mild terms, caused all his effects to be collected and restored, and the whole party set at liberty. "The true cause of so sudden a change," says Montaigne, "operated without any apparent cause, and of repentance in a purpose then through use held just, I do not even now know. The chief among them unmasked, and told his name, and several times afterwards said that I owed my deliverance to my composure, to the courage and firmness of my words, which made me seem worthy of better treatment."

As Montaigne advanced in life he lost his health. The stone, which he believed he inherited from his father, and painful nephritic colics that seized him at intervals, put his philosophy to the test. He would not allow his illnesses to disturb the usual tenor of his life, and, above all, refused medical aid, having also inherited, he says, from his father a

contempt for physicians. There was a natural remedy, however, by which he laid store, one much in favour at all times on the continent—mineral and thermal springs. The desire to try these, as well as a wish to quit for a time his troubled country, and the sight of all the misery multiplying around him, caused him to make a journey to Italy. His love of novelty and of seeing strange things sharpened his taste for travelling; and, as a slighter motive, he was glad to throw household cares aside; for, though the pleasures of command were something, he received perpetual annoyances from the indigence and sufferings of his tenants, or the quarrels of his neighbours: to travel was to get rid of all this at once.

Of course, his mode of proceeding was peculiar: he had a particular dislike to coaches or litters,—even a boat was not quite to his mind; and he only really liked travelling on horseback. Then he let every whim sway him as to the route: it gave him no annoyance to go out of his way: if the road was bad to the right, he took to the left: if he felt too unwell to mount his horse, he remained where he was till he got better: if he found he had passed by any thing that he wished to see, he turned back. On the present occasion his mode of travelling was, as usual, regulated by convenience: hired vehicles carried the luggage while he proceeded on horseback. He was accompanied by several friends, and, among others, by his brother, M. de Mattecoulon. Montaigne had the direction of the journey. We have a journal of it, partly written in his own hand, partly dictated to his valet, who, though he speaks of his roaster in the third person, evidently wrote only the words dictated. This work, discovered many years after Montaigne's death, never copied nor corrected, is singularly interesting. It seems to tell us more of Montaigne than the Essays themselves: or,

rather, it confirms much said in those, by relating many things omitted, and throws a new light on various portions of his character. For instance, we find that the eager curiosity of his mind led him to inquire into the tenets of the protestants; and that, at the Swiss towns, he was accustomed, on arriving, to seek out with all speed some theologian, whom he invited to dinner, and from whom he inquired the peculiar tenets of the various sects. There creeps out, also, an almost unphilosophical dislike of his own country, springing from the miserable state into which civil war had brought it.⁸

1580.

Ætat.

47.

The party set off from the castle of Montaigne on the 22d of June, 1580: they proceeded through the north-east of France to Plombieres, where Montaigne took the waters, and then went on by Basle, Baden, in the canton of Zurich, to Constance, Augsburgh, Munich, and Trent. It is not to be supposed that he went to these places in a right line: he often changed his mind when half way to a town, and came back; so that at last his zigzag mode of proceeding rendered several of his party restive. They remonstrated; but he replied, that, for his own part, he was bound to no place but that in which he was; and that he could not go out of his way, since his only object was to wander in unknown places; and so that he never followed the same road twice, nor visited the same place twice, his scheme was accomplished. If, indeed, he had been alone, he had probably gone towards Cracovia, or overland to Greece, instead of to Italy; but he could not impart the pleasure he took in seeing

strange places, which was such as to cause him to forget ill health and suffering, to any other of his party: they only sought to arrive where they could repose; he, when he rose after a painful uneasy night, felt gay and eager when he remembered that he was in a strange town and country; and was never so little weary, nor complained so little of his sufferings, having his mind always on the stretch to find novelties and to converse with strangers; for nothing, he says, hurt his health so much as indolence and *ennui*.

With all his windings, after he had visited Venice, which "he had a hunger to see," he found himself in Rome on the last day of November, having the previous morning risen at three hours before daylight in his haste to behold the eternal city. Here he had food in plenty for his inquiring mind; and, getting tired of his guide, rambled about, finding out remarkable objects alone; making his shrewd remarks, and trying to discover those ancient spots with which his mind was familiar. For Latin being his mother-tongue, and Latin books his primers, he was more familiar with Roman history than with that of France, and the names of the Scipios and Metelli were less of strangers to his ear than those of many Frenchmen of his own day. He was well received by the pope, who was eager to be courteous to any man of talent and rank who would still abide by the old religion. Montaigne, before he set out, had printed two books of his "Essays:" these were taken at the custom-house and underwent a censorship: several faults were found—that he had used the word fortune improperly; that he cited heretical poets; that he found excuses for the emperor Julian; that he had said that a man must of necessity be exempt from vicious inclinations while in the act of prayer; that he regarded all tortuous modes of capital punishment as cruel; that he said that a child ought to be

brought up to do every thing. Montaigne took this fault-finding very quietly, saying that he had put these things down as being his opinions, and without supposing that they were errors; and that sometimes the censor had mistaken his meaning. Accordingly, these censures were not insisted upon; and when he left Rome, and took leave of the prelate, who had discoursed with him on the subject, he begged him not to pay any regard to the censure, which was a mistaken one, since they honoured his intentions, his affection for the church, and his talents; and so esteemed his frankness and conscientiousness, that they left it to him to make any needful alterations in another edition: and they ended by begging him to assist the church with his eloquence, and to remain at Rome, away from the troubles of his native country. Montaigne was much flattered by this courtesy and much more so by a bull being issued which conferred on him the citizenship of Rome, pompous in seals and golden letters, and gracious in its expressions. Nothing, he tells us, ever pleased him more than this honour, empty as it might seem, and had employed to obtain it, he says, all his five senses, for the sake of the ancient glory and present holiness of the city.

1581.

Ætat.

48.

The descriptions which he gives of Rome, of the pope, and all he saw, are short, but drawn with a master's hand—graphic, original, and just; and such is the unaltered appearance of the eternal city, that his pages describe it as it now is, with as much fidelity as they did when he saw it in the sixteenth century. Its gardens and pleasure-grounds

delighted him; the air seemed to him the most agreeable he had ever felt; and the perpetual excitement of inquiry in which he lived, his visits to antiquities, and to various beautiful and memorable spots, delighted him; and neither at home nor abroad was he once visited by gloom or melancholy, which he calls his death.

On the 19th of April he left Rome, and passing by the eastern road, and the shores of the Adriatic, he visited Loretto, where he displayed his piety by presenting a silver tablet, on which were hung four silver figures,—that of the virgin, with those of himself, his wife, and their only child, Eleanor, on their knees before her; and performed various religious duties, which prove the sincerity of his catholic faith. In the month of May he arrived at the baths of Lucca, where he repaired for the sake of the waters. He took up his abode at the Bagni di Villa, and with the exception of a short interval, during which he visited Florence and Pisa, he remained till September, when, on the 7th of that month, he received letters to inform him that he had been elected mayor of Bordeaux,—a circumstance which forced him to hasten his return; but he did not leave Italy without again visiting Rome. His journey home during winter, although rendered painful by physical suffering, was yet tortuous and wandering among the northern Italian towns. He re-entered France by Mont Cenis, and, visiting Lyons, continued his route through Auvergne and Périgord, till he arrived at the château de Montaigne.

Montaigne, though flattered by the unsought for election of the citizens of Bordeaux, the more so that his father had formerly been elected to that office, yet, from ill health and natural dislike to public employments, would have excused himself, had not the king interposed with his commands. He represented himself to his electors such as he conceived

himself to be,—without party spirit, memory, diligence, or experience. Many, indeed, in the sequel considered him too indolent in the execution of the duties of his office, while he deemed his negative merits as deserving praise, at a period when France was distracted by the dissensions of contending factions: the citizens, probably, entertained the same opinion, since he was re-elected at the end of the two years, when his office expired, to serve two years more.

1585.

Ætat.

52.

Montaigne's was a long-lived family; but he attained no great age, and his latter years were disturbed by great suffering. Living in frequent expectation of death, he was always prepared for it,—his affairs being arranged, and he ready to fulfil all the last pious catholic duties as soon as he felt himself attacked by any of the frequent fevers to which he was subject. One of the last events of his life was his friendship with mademoiselle Marie de Gournay le Jars, a young person of great merit, and afterwards esteemed one of the most learned and excellent ladies of the day; and honoured by the abuse of pedants, who attacked her personal appearance and her age, in revenge for her transcending even their sex in accomplishments and understanding: while, on the other hand, she was regarded with respect and friendship by the first men of her time. She was very young when Montaigne first saw her, which happened during a long visit he made to Paris, after his mayorship at Bordeaux was ended. Having conceived an enthusiastic love and admiration of him from reading his essays, she called on him, and requested his acquaintance.

He visited her and her mother at their château de Gournay, and allied himself to her by adopting her as his daughter, and entertaining for her a warm affection and esteem. His picture of her is not only delightful, as a testimony of the merits of this young lady⁹, but a proof of the unfailing enthusiasm and warmth of his own heart, which, even in suffering and decay, eagerly allied itself to kindred merit.

The illness of which he died was a quinsey, that brought on a paralysis of the tongue. His presence of mind and philosophy did not desert him at the end: he is said, as one of his last acts, to have risen from his bed, and, opening his cabinet, to have paid his servants and other legatees the legacies he had left them by will, foreseeing that his heirs might raise difficulties on the subject. When getting worse, and unable to speak, he wrote to his wife to beg her to send for some gentlemen, his neighbours, to be with him at his last moments. When they arrived, he caused mass to be celebrated in his chamber: at the moment of the elevation he tried to rise, when he fell back fainting, and so died, on the 13th of September, 1592, in the sixtieth year of his age. He was buried at Bordeaux, in a church of the commandery of St. Anthony, and his widow raised a tomb to his memory.

Montaigne was rather short of stature, strong, and thick set: his countenance was open and pleasing. He enjoyed good health till the age of forty-six, when he became afflicted by the stone. Vivacious as a Gascon, his spirits were unequal,—but he hated the melancholy that belonged to his constitution, and his chief endeavour was to nourish pleasing sensations, and to engage his mind, when his body was unemployed, in subjects of speculation and inquiry.

Of three daughters who had been born to him, one, named Eleonora, alone survived.¹⁰ But his other daughter by adoption, mademoiselle de Gournay, deserved also that

name, by the honour and care she bestowed on his memory. Immediately on his decease, the widow and her daughter invited her to come and mourn their loss with them; and she crossed all France to Bordeaux in compliance with their desire. She afterwards published several editions of his "Essays," which she dedicated to the cardinal de Richelieu, and accompanied by a preface, in which she ably defended the work from the attacks made against it. This preface, though somewhat heavy, is full of sound reasoning, and displays learning and acuteness, and completely replies to all the blame ever thrown on his works.

Montaigne's "Essays" have also been attacked in modern times. It requires that the reader should possess some similarity to the author's own mind to enter fully into their merits, and relish their discursive style. The profoundest and most original thinkers have ever turned to his pages with delight. His skilful anatomy of his own mind and passions,—his enthusiasm, clothed as it is in apparent indifference, which only renders it the more striking,—his lively and happy descriptions of persons,—his amusing narratives of events,—his happy citations of ancient authors,—and the whole instinct with individuality;—perspicuity of style, and the stamp of good faith and sincerity that reigns throughout;—these are the charms and merits of his "Essays,"—a work that raises him to the rank of one of the most original and admirable writers that France has produced.

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1. This château was situate in the parish of Saint Michael de Montaigne, not far from the town of Saint Foi, in the diocese of Perigueux, at the distance of about ten leagues from the episcopal city. It was solidly and well built, on high ground, and enjoyed a good air.

2. "Je suis des plus exempt de la passion de tristesse, et ne l'aime ni l'estime; quoique le monde a entrepris, comme à prix faist de l'honorer de faveur particulière: ils en habillent la sagesse, la vertu, la conscience; sot et monstreux ornement!"
3. "Je suis de ceulx qui sentent tres grand effort de l'imagination; chascun en est heurte mais aulcuns en sont renversez. Son impression me perce; et mon art est de lui eschapper par faulte de force à luy resister. Je vivroys de la seule assistance de personnes saines et gayes; la veue des angoisses d'autruy m'angoisses materiellement, et a mon sentiment souvent usurpé le sentiment d'un tiers. Je visite plus mal volontiers les malades auxquels, le devoir m'interesse que ceux auxquels je m'attends moins et que je considere moins, je saisis le mal que j'estudie et le couche en moi."
4. Tom III. liv. II. chap. 17.
5. He displayed his affectionate gratitude towards his excellent father by a tender veneration for his memory. He preserved with care the furniture of which he made personal use; and wore, when on horseback, the cloak his father wore,—“Not for comfort,” he says, “but pleasure—methinks I wrap myself in him.”
6. In one of his early essays, he says, “Exactly fifteen days ago I completed my thirty-ninth year” (liv. I. chap. 19.); and in a former one he says, “Having lately retired to my own residence, resolved, as well as I can, to trouble myself with nothing but how to pass in repose what of life is left to me, it appeared to me that I could not do better than to allow my mind, in full idleness, to discourse with itself, and repose in itself, which I hoped it would easily do, having become slower and riper with time; but I find, on the contrary, that, like a runaway horse, it takes a far swifter course for itself than it would for another, and brings forth so many fantastic and chimerical ideas, one after the other, without order or end, that, for the sake of contemplating their folly and strangeness at my ease, I have resolved to put them down, hoping in time to make it ashamed of itself.”
7. One of his reasons for abstaining from attacking the huguenots, may be found in the circumstance that one of his brothers, M. de Beauregard, had been converted to the reformed religion.
8. “M. de Montaigne trouvoit à dire trois choses en son voyage: l'un qu'il n'eut mené un cuisinier pour l'instruire de leurs façons, et en pouvoir un jour faire a preuve chez lui; l'autre qu'il n'avait mené un valet Allemand, on n'avait cherché la compagnie de quelque gentilhomme du pais, car de vivre à la merci d'un belitre de guide il y sentoit une grande incommodité; la tierce qu'avant faire le voyage il n'avait veu les livres qui le pouvoient avertir, des choses rares et remarquables de chaque lieu. Il meloli à la vérité à son jugement un peu de passion de mepris de son pais, qu'il avait à haine et à contre-cœur pour autres considerations.”

9. "J'ai pris plaisir de publier en plusieurs lieux l'espérance que j'ai de Marie de Gournay le Jars, ma fille d'alliance, et certes aimée de moi beaucoup plus que paternellement, et enveloppée en ma retraite et solitude comme l'une des meilleures parties de mon propre estre: je ne regarde plus qu'elle au monde. Si l'adolescence peut donner présage, cette alme sera quelque jour capable des plus belles choses, et entre autre de la perfection de cette très sainte amitié, ou nous ne lisons point que son sexe ayt peu monter encores: la sincérité et la solidité de ses mœurs y sont déjà bastantes; son affection vers moi, plus que surrabondante, et telle, en somme, qu'il n'y a rien a souhaiter, sinon que l'appréhension qu'elle a de ma fin par les cinquante et cinq ans auxquels elle ma rencontré, la travaillant moins cruellement. Le jugement qu'elle fait de mes premiers Essais, et femme, et si jeune, et seule en son quartier, et la véhémence fameuse dont elle m'aima et me désira longtems, sur la seule estime qu'elle eu prins de moi, longtems avant m'avoir vue, sont des accidents de très digne considération."
10. Eleonore de Montaigne married twice. She had no children by her first marriage. Her second husband was the viscount de Gamache. From this marriage the counts of Segur are descended in the female line.

RABELAIS

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1483-1553

Francis Rabelais,—“the great jester of France,” as he is designated by Lord Bacon; a learned scholar, physician, and philosopher, as he appears from other and eminent testimonies,—was one of the most remarkable persons who figured in the revival of letters. It is his fortune, like the ancient Hercules, to be noted with posterity for many feats to which he was a stranger,—but which are always to his disadvantage. The gross buffooneries amassed by him in his nondescript romance have made his name a common mark for any extravagance or impertinence of unknown or doubtful parentage. The purveyors of anecdotes have even fixed upon him some of the lazzi, as they are called, which may be found in the stage directions of old Italian farce. Those events and circumstances of his life which are really known, or deserving of belief, may be given within a narrow compass. We, of course, reject, in this notice, all that would offend the decencies of modern and better taste.

Rabelais was born at Chinon, a small town of Touraine. The date of his birth is not ascertained; but the generally received opinion of his death, at the age of 70, in 1553, would place his birth in 1483. There is the same uncertainty respecting the condition of his father; whether that of an innkeeper or apothecary. His predilection for the study of medicine favours the latter supposition, whilst the imputed habits of his life countenance the former. If, however, he was really abandoned to intemperance, as he is represented