

much as no profit is made except at the expense of others, and by this reckoning you would have to condemn every sort of gain.

The merchant does good business only by the extravagance of youth; the plowman by the high cost of grain; the architect by the ruin of houses; officers of justice by men's lawsuits and quarrels; the very honor and function of ministers of religion is derived from our death and our vices. No doctor takes pleasure in the health even of his friends, says the ancient Greek comic writer, no soldier in the peace of his city; and so for the rest. And what is worse, let each man sound himself within, and he will find that our private wishes are for the most part born and nourished at the expense of others.

Considering which, it strikes me how nature in this does not belie her general policy. For students of natural law hold that the birth, nourishment, and growth of each thing is the alteration and corruption of another:

Whenever anything is changed and leaves its bounds,
Instantly this brings death to that which was before.

LUCRETIVS

23 *Of custom, and not easily changing an accepted law*

^AThat man seems to me to have very well understood the power of habit¹ who first invented this story: that a village woman, having learned to pet and carry in her arms a calf from the hour of its birth, and continuing always to do so, gained this by habit, that even when he was a great ox she still could carry him. For in truth habit is a violent and treacherous schoolmistress. She establishes in us, little by little, stealthily, the foothold of her authority; but having by this mild and humble beginning settled and planted it with the help of time, she soon uncovers to us a furious and tyrannical face against which we no longer have the liberty of even raising our eyes. We see her at every turn forcing the rules of nature. ^C*Habit is the most effective teacher of all things* [Pliny].

^AFor this I hold with ^CPlato's cave in his *Republic*, and I trust ^Athe doctors who so often abdicate the reasonings of their art to the authority of habit. I refer to that king who trained his stomach to feed on poison; and the girl whom Albertus reports as having accustomed herself to live on spiders. ^BAnd in that world of the new Indies there were found great nations, and in very varied climates, who lived on spiders,

¹ The French word *coutume* here, in the title, and throughout the chapter, has either of its usual meanings of *custom* or *habit*.

made provision of them, and raised and fattened them, as they did also with grasshoppers, ants, lizards, and bats; and a toad was sold for six crowns during a food shortage. They cook them and prepare them with various sauces. Other nations were found to whom our meats and foods were fatally poisonous. *The force of habit is great. Hunters spend the night in the snow; they endure the burning sun in the mountains. Boxers bruised by the cestuses do not even groan* [Cicero].

These examples from strange lands are not strange if we consider what we regularly experience: how much habit stupefies our senses. We do not need to go and find out what they say of those who live near the cataracts of the Nile, and what the philosophers believe about the music of the heavenly spheres—that the bodies of these spheres, being solid, and coming to touch and rub on one another as they roll, cannot fail to produce a marvelous harmony, whose rhythms and modulations regulate the circles and the changing figures of the dances of the stars; but that the sense of hearing of all the creatures of the universe, put to sleep, like that of the Egyptians, by the continuousness of this sound, cannot perceive it, however great it be. Smiths, millers, armorers could not endure the noise that strikes them if they were stunned by it as we are.

My perfumed doublet is pleasant to my nose, but after I have worn it three days in a row it is pleasant only to the noses of others. It is even more strange that, notwithstanding long intervals and intermissions, habit can combine and establish the effect of its impression on our senses, as those people experience who live near belfries. At home I live in a tower where at dawn and at sunset every day a very big bell rings out the *Ave Maria*. This jangling frightens my very tower; to me, it seems unendurable at first, but in a short time it has me tamed, so that I hear it without disturbance and often without awaking.

Plato scolded a child who was playing at cobnuts. He answered him: "You scold me for a small matter." "Habit," replied Plato, "is no small matter."

I find that our greatest vices take shape from our tenderest childhood, and that our most important training is in the hands of nurses. It is a pastime for mothers to see a child wring the neck of a chicken or amuse itself by hurting a dog or a cat; and there are fathers stupid enough to take it as a good omen of a martial soul when they see a son unjustly striking a peasant or a lackey who is not defending himself, and as a charming prank when they see him trick his playmate by a bit of malicious dishonesty and deceit. Nevertheless these are the true seeds and roots of cruelty, tyranny, and treason; they sprout there, and afterward shoot up lustily, and flourish mightily in the hands of habit. And it is a very dangerous educational policy to excuse our children for these ugly inclinations on the grounds of their tender age and the triviality of the subject. In the first place, it is nature speaking, whose voice then is all the purer and stronger because it is more tenuous. Second, the ugliness of cheating does not depend on the difference between crown pieces and pins: it depends on itself. I find it much more just to come

to this conclusion: "Why would he not cheat for crowns, since he cheats for pins?" than, as they do: "It is only for pins, he would never do it for crowns." Children must be carefully taught to hate vices for their own sake, and taught the natural deformity of vices, so that they will shun them not only in their actions but above all in their heart, so that the very thought of them may be odious, whatever mask they wear.

I know very well from having trained myself in my childhood always to walk in my own straight open road, and having had an aversion for mixing trickery or ruse in my childish games—as indeed it must be noted that children's games are not games, and must be judged in children like their more serious actions—that there is no pastime so trivial that I do not bring to it, from within, by a natural and unstudied propensity, an extreme repugnance to cheating. I handle the cards and keep score for a couple of pennies just as for double doubloons; when winning or losing, against my wife and daughter, is indifferent to me, just as when playing for keeps. In all things and all places my own eyes are enough to keep me in line; there are none that watch me so carefully, nor that I respect more.

^AI have just seen in my house a little man, a native of Nantes, born without arms, who has so well adapted his feet for the service his hands owed him that in truth they have half forgotten their natural function. Moreover he calls them his hands; he carves, he loads a pistol and fires it, he threads his needle, he sews, he writes, he doffs his hat, he combs his hair, he plays cards and dice, and moves them with as much dexterity as any other could do. The money I gave him—for he gains his living by exhibiting himself—he carried off in his foot as we do in our hand. I saw another when I was a child who handled a two-handed sword and a halberd in the crook of his neck for lack of hands, threw them in the air and caught them again, hurled a dagger, and cracked a whip as well as any wagoner in France.

But you discover the effects of habit much better in the strange impressions she makes in our souls, where she does not find so much resistance. What power does she not have in our judgments and in our beliefs? Is there any opinion so bizarre—I leave aside the gross impostures of religions, with which so many great nations and so many able men have been seen to be besotted, for since this matter is beyond the scope of our human reason, it is more excusable for anyone who is not extraordinarily enlightened by divine favor to be lost in it; but of other opinions is there any so strange—that habit has not planted and established it by law in the regions where she saw fit to do so? ^CAnd that ancient exclamation is very just: *The natural philosopher, who should be the observer and quester of nature, brazenly seeks the proof of truth from minds imbued with habit* [Cicero].

^BI think that there falls into man's imagination no fantasy so wild that it does not match the example of some public practice, and for which, consequently, our reason does not find a stay and a foundation. There are countries where they turn their back to the person they greet, and never look at the one they wish to honor. There are some where,

when the king spits, the most favored of the ladies of his court holds out her hand; and in another nation the most eminent persons around him stoop to the ground to pick up his ordure in a linen cloth.

Let us here steal room for a story. One French gentleman always used to blow his nose in his hand, a thing very repugnant to our practice. Defending his action against this reproach (and he was famous for his original remarks), he asked me what privilege this dirty excrement had that we should prepare a fine delicate piece of linen to receive it, and then, what is more, wrap it up and carry it carefully on us; for that should be much more horrifying and nauseating than to see it dropped in any old place, as we do all other excrements. I found that what he said was not entirely without reason; and habit had led me not to perceive the strangeness of this action, which nevertheless we find so hideous when it is told us about another country.

Miracles arise from our ignorance of nature, not from the essence of nature. Habituation puts to sleep the eye of our judgment. Barbarians are no more marvelous to us than we are to them, nor for better cause; as everyone would admit if everyone knew how, after perusing these new examples, to reflect on his own and compare them sanely. Human reason is a tincture infused in about equal strength in all our opinions and ways, whatever their form: infinite in substance, infinite in diversity.

To come back to the point. There are countries where, except for his wife and children, no one speaks to the king except through a tube. In one and the same nation the virgins openly show their pudenda, and the married women carefully cover and conceal them. To which another custom that exists elsewhere has some relation: chastity is prized there only in attendance to marriage, for girls may abandon themselves as they like and, if pregnant, have abortions by suitable drugs, as a matter of public knowledge. And in another place, if it is a merchant that is getting married, all the merchants invited to the wedding lie with the bride before him; and the more there are, the more honor and commendation she has for endurance and capacity. If an officer marries, it is the same; the same if it is a nobleman, and so for all others, except if it is a plowman or someone of the lowest class, for then the privilege is for the lord. And yet there they do not fail strictly to recommend fidelity during marriage.

There are places where there are public brothels of males, and even marriages between them; where the women go to war alongside their husbands, and take their place not only in the combat but also in command. Where they not only wear rings on the nose, lips, cheeks, and toes, but also have very heavy gold rods thrust through their breasts and buttocks. Where in eating they wipe their fingers on their thighs, on the pouch of their genitals, and on the soles of their feet. Where it is not the children that are the heirs, but the brothers and nephews; and elsewhere the nephews only, except in the succession of the prince. Where to regulate the community of goods that is observed, certain sovereign magistrates have universal charge of the cultivation of lands

and the distribution of crops, according to each man's need. Where they mourn the death of children and celebrate that of old men. Where they sleep ten or twelve together in beds, husbands and wives. Where the wives who lose their husbands by violent death may remarry, the others no. Where they have such a bad opinion of the condition of women that they kill the females that are born, and buy wives from neighboring nations to satisfy their needs. Where husbands can repudiate their mates without alleging any cause, the wives not for any cause whatever. Where the husbands have the right to sell them if they are sterile.

Where they cook the body of the deceased and then crush it until a sort of pulp is formed, which they mix with their wine, and drink it. Where the most desirable sepulture is to be eaten by dogs, elsewhere by birds. Where they believe that happy souls live in all liberty, in pleasant fields, furnished with all comforts; and that it is they who make the echo that we hear. Where they fight in the water, and shoot accurately with their bows while swimming. Where for a sign of subjection you must shrug your shoulders and lower your head, and take off your shoes when you enter the king's dwelling. Where the eunuchs who guard the religious women also lack nose and lips, so that they cannot be loved; and the priests put out their eyes in order to communicate with their demons and receive their oracles. Where each man makes a god of what he likes—the hunter of a lion or a fox, the fisherman of a certain fish—and idols of each human action or passion; the sun, the moon, and the earth are the principal gods; the form of swearing an oath is to touch the ground while looking at the sun; and they eat flesh and fish raw.

^cWhere the great oath is to swear by the name of some dead man who has had a good reputation in the country, while touching his tomb with the hand. Where the king's annual present to his vassal princes is fire: when the envoy who brings it arrives, the old fire is extinguished throughout the house, and from this new fire the people who depend on this prince must come to take some, each for himself, on pain of the crime of *lèse-majesté*. Where, when the king retires from his office to devote himself completely to piety (as they often do), his immediate successor is obliged to do as much, and the right to the kingdom passes to the third in line. Where they vary the form of government according as affairs require: depose the king when it seems good, and substitute elders to assume the governing of the state, and also sometimes leave it in the hands of the people. Where men and women are circumcised as well as baptized. Where the soldier who in one or several battles has succeeded in presenting to the king seven enemies' heads is made a noble.

^BWhere they live in the belief, so rare and uncivilized, in the mortality of souls. Where the women bear children without complaint or fright. ^cWhere the women wear copper greaves on both legs; and, if a louse bites them, they are bound by the code of bravery to bite it back; and they dare not marry until they have offered their king their virginity,

if he wants it. ^BWhere people greet one another by putting their finger to the ground and then raising it to heaven. Where the men carry their burdens on their head; the women, on their shoulders; and where women piss standing, men squatting. Where they send some of their blood as a sign of friendship, and burn incense to the men they wish to honor, as to gods. Where kinship is forbidden in marriages not only to the fourth degree, but to some even more remote one. Where children are four years nursing, and often twelve; and in that very place, it is considered fatal to give the child suck throughout the first day. Where the fathers have charge of the punishment of the male children, and the mothers, separately, of the females; and where the punishment is to hang them by the heels and smoke them. Where they have women circumcised. Where they eat every kind of herbs with no discrimination except to refuse those that seem to them to have a bad odor. Where everything is open, and the houses, however beautiful and rich they may be, without a door, without a window, without a strongbox that locks; and there robbers are punished twice as severely as elsewhere. Where they kill lice with their teeth like monkeys, and think it horrible to see them crushed between the fingernails. Where in all their lives they cut neither hair nor nails; another place where they cut only the nails of the right hand, and those of the left are grown as a sign of nobility. ^CWhere they grow all the hair of the body on the right side as much as it can grow, and keep the hair on the other side clean-shaven. And one of two neighboring provinces grows the hair in front, the other in back, and they shave the opposite side. ^BWhere the fathers lend their children, the husbands their wives, to their guests to enjoy, for money. Where a man can respectably have children by his mother, and fathers have sexual relations with their daughters, and with their sons. ^CWhere at their festival assemblies they lend their children to one another.

^AHere they live on human flesh; there it is an act of piety to kill one's father at a certain age; elsewhere the fathers ordain, while the children are still in their mothers' wombs, which ones they want to have brought up and kept, and which abandoned and killed. Elsewhere old husbands lend their wives to the young for their use; and elsewhere still they are had in common, without sin: indeed, in one country they wear as a mark of honor as many fine tassels as a fringe at the edge of their dresses as there are men they have lain with. Did not custom also make a commonwealth of women alone? Did it not put weapons in their hands, make them raise armies and fight battles?

And what all philosophy cannot implant in the head of the wisest men, does not custom by her sole ordinance teach the crudest common herd? For we know whole nations where death was not merely scorned, but celebrated; where seven-year-old children endured being whipped to death without changing expression; where riches were in such contempt that the most wretched citizen of the town would not have deigned to lower his arm to pick up a purse of crowns. And we know regions very fertile in all forms of foods where nevertheless the most

usual and savory dishes were bread, cress, and water. ^BDid not custom also perform this miracle in Chios, that seven hundred years passed with no memory that woman or maid ever failed of her honor?

^AIn short, to my way of thinking, there is nothing that custom will not or cannot do; and with reason Pindar calls her, so I have been told, the queen and empress of the world.

^CThe man whom they found beating his father replied that it was the custom of his house: that his father had beaten his grandfather thus, his grandfather his great-grandfather; and, pointing to his son: "And this one will beat me when he has come to my present age."

And the father whom his son was dragging and bumping along the street ordered him to stop at a certain door, for he had dragged his own father only that far; this was the limit of the hereditary rough treatment that the sons traditionally practiced upon the fathers in their family. By custom as often as by derangement, says Aristotle, women tear out their hair, gnaw their nails, eat coals and earth; and as much by custom as by nature do males have sexual relations with males.

The laws of conscience, which we say are born of nature, are born of custom. Each man, holding in inward veneration the opinions and the behavior approved and accepted around him, cannot break loose from them without remorse, or apply himself to them without self-satisfaction.

^BWhen the Cretans in times past wanted to curse someone, they would pray the gods to entice him into some bad habit.

^ABut the principal effect of the power of custom is to seize and ensnare us in such a way that it is hardly within our power to get ourselves back out of its grip and return into ourselves to reflect and reason about its ordinances. In truth, because we drink them with our milk from birth, and because the face of the world presents itself in this aspect to our first view, it seems that we are born on condition of following this course. And the common notions that we find in credit around us and infused into our soul by our fathers' seed, these seem to be the universal and natural ones. ^CWhence it comes to pass that what is off the hinges of custom, people believe to be off the hinges of reason: God knows how unreasonably, most of the time.

If, as we who study ourselves have learned to do, each man who hears a true statement immediately considered how it properly pertains to him, each man would find that it is not so much a good saying as a good whiplash to the ordinary stupidity of his judgment. But men receive the advice of truth and its precepts as if addressed to the common people, never to themselves; and each man, instead of incorporating them into his behavior, incorporates them into his memory, very stupidly and uselessly. Let us return to the sovereignty of custom.

Nations brought up to liberty and to ruling themselves consider any other form of government monstrous and contrary to nature. Those who are accustomed to monarchy do the same. And whatever easy chance fortune offers them to change, even when with great difficulties they

have rid themselves of the importunity of one master, they run to supplant him with another, with similar difficulties, because they cannot make up their minds to hate domination itself.²

^ADarius asked certain Greeks for how much they would adopt the Indian custom of eating their dead fathers (for that was their way, considering that they could not give them a more favorable sepulture than in themselves); they answered him that not for anything in the world would they do it. And when he tried to persuade the Indians to give up their practice and adopt that of Greece, which was to burn their fathers' bodies, he horrified them still more. Everyone acts the same way, inasmuch as usage robs us of the true appearance of things.

There's nothing seems at first so wonderful, so great,
But that men's wonder will not presently abate
Little by little.

LUCRETIVS

Once, having to justify one of our observances, which was received with steadfast authority far and wide around us, and preferring to establish it, not as is usually done, merely by force of laws and examples, but by tracking it to its origin, I there found its foundation so weak that I nearly became disgusted with it, I who was supposed to confirm it in others.

^CThis is the prescription by which Plato undertakes to drive out the unnatural loves of his time, and which he considers supreme and fundamental: to wit, that public opinion must condemn them, that the poets and everyone should tell bad stories about them. Thanks to this same prescription even the most beautiful daughters no longer attract their fathers' amorousness, nor do brothers whose beauty is outstanding attract the amorousness of their sisters; for the very fables of Thyestes, Oedipus, and Macareus have, through the pleasure of their song, infused this useful belief into the tender brains of children.

In truth, chastity is a fine virtue, whose utility is well enough known; but to treat it and justify it according to nature is as hard as it is easy to justify it according to custom, laws, and precepts. The first and universal reasons are hard to scrutinize, and our masters either skim over them lightly or, not even daring to touch them at all, cast themselves immediately into the protection of custom, where they puff themselves up and enjoy a cheap triumph. Those who will not let themselves be dragged out of this original source err even more and bind themselves to barbarous opinions, like Chrysippus, who in so many places strewed his writings with remarks displaying the little account he took of incestuous unions, of whatever kind they might be.

^AWhoever wants to get rid³ of this violent prejudice of custom will

² Here the 1595 edition adds: "It is by the mediation of custom that every man is content with the place where nature has planted him, and the savages of Scotland have no concern with Touraine, nor the Scythians with Thessaly."

³ In all the versions of this passage except the final one, it reads: "And whoever wants to essay himself in the same way, and get rid . . ."

find many things accepted with undoubting resolution, which have no support but in the hoary beard and the wrinkles of the usage that goes with them; but when this mask is torn off, and he refers things to truth and reason, he will feel his judgment as it were all upset, and nevertheless restored to a much surer status. For example, I shall ask him then, what can be stranger than to see a people obliged to obey laws that they never understood, bound in all their domestic affairs, marriages, donations, wills, sales, and purchases, to rules that they cannot know, since they are neither written nor published in their language, and whose interpretation and use they must of necessity purchase? ^cNot according to the ingenious notion of Isocrates, who advises his king to make the trades and negotiations of his subjects free, gratuitous, and lucrative, and their disputes and quarrels onerous, by loading these with heavy taxes; but according to a monstrous idea, that of putting reason itself on the market, and treating laws as merchandise. ^aI am grateful to fortune that, so our historians say, it was a Gascon gentleman, and from my part of the country, who first opposed Charlemagne when he wanted to give us Latin and imperial laws.

What is more barbarous to see than a nation where by lawful custom the charge of judging is sold, and judgments are paid for in ready cash, and where justice is lawfully refused to whoever has not the wherewithal to pay; and where this merchandise has such good credit that in a government a fourth estate is formed of people handling lawsuits, to add to the three ancient ones of Church, Nobility, and People; which estate, having charge of the laws and sovereign authority over property and life, forms a body apart from that of the nobility? (Whence it comes about that there are two sets of laws, those of honor and those of justice, in many matters quite opposed. The former condemn as rigorously a man's enduring being given the lie as the latter condemn his avenging it.) What could be more barbarous than that by the code of arms the man who endures an insult should be degraded from honor and nobility, and by the civil code he who avenges an insult should incur capital punishment? (He who appeals to the laws to get satisfaction for an offense to his honor, dishonors himself; and he who does not appeal to them is therefore punished and chastised by the laws.) And that of these two bodies,⁴ so different but nevertheless joined to a single head, one should have charge of peace, the other of war; one should have gain as its share, the other honor; one knowledge, the other virtue; one words, the other action; one justice, the other valor; one reason, the other force; one the long robe, the other the short?

As for indifferent things such as clothes, if any man wants to restore them to their true purpose, which is the service and comfort of the body, on which depend their original grace and fitness, I will offer him, among other examples, as in my opinion the most monstrous that can be imagined, our square bonnets, that long tail of pleated velvet that hangs from our women's heads with its many-colored trappings, and

⁴ The men of justice and the nobles.

that empty and useless model of a member that we cannot even decently mention by name, which however we show off and parade in public.

These considerations, however, do not deter a man of understanding from following the common style. On the contrary, it seems to me that all peculiar and out-of-the-way fashions come rather from folly and ambitious affectation than from true reason, and that the wise man should withdraw his soul within, out of the crowd, and keep it in freedom and power to judge things freely; but as for externals, he should wholly follow the accepted fashions and forms. Society in general can do without our thoughts; but the rest—our actions, our work, our fortunes, and our very life—we must lend and abandon to its service and to the common opinions, just as the great and good Socrates refused to save his life by disobedience to the magistrate, even to a very unjust and very iniquitous magistrate.⁵ For it is the rule of rules, and the universal law of laws, that each man should observe those of the place he is in:

It is a fine thing to obey your country's laws.

CRISPIN

Here is something from another vat. It is very doubtful whether there can be such evident profit in changing an accepted law, of whatever sort it be, as there is harm in disturbing it; inasmuch as a government is like a structure of different parts joined together in such a relation that it is impossible to budge one without the whole body feeling it. The lawmaker of the Thurians ordained that whoever should want either to abolish one of the old laws or to establish a new one should present himself to the people with a rope around his neck; so that if the innovation were not approved by each and every man, he should be promptly strangled. And the one of Lacedaemon employed his life to draw from his citizens a certain promise not to infringe any of his ordinances. The ephor who so rudely cut out the two strings that Phrynis had added to music does not worry whether music is the better for their addition or whether the chords are richer; for him to condemn them, it is enough that they represent an alteration of the old fashion. That was the meaning of that rusty sword of justice in Marseilles.

^BI am disgusted with innovation, in whatever guise, and with reason, for I have seen very harmful effects of it. The one that has been oppressing us for so many years⁶ is not the sole author of our troubles, but one may say with good reason that it has accidentally produced and engendered everything, even the troubles and ruins that have been happening since without it, and against it; it has itself to blame.

Alas, I smart from wounds that my own darts have made.

OVID

⁵ This clause, from "just as the" to "magistrate" is an addition of 1582.

⁶ The Reformation.

Those who give the first shock to a state are apt to be the first ones swallowed up in its ruin. ^cThe fruits of the trouble rarely go to the one who has stirred it up; he beats and disturbs the water for other fishermen. ^bThe unity and contexture of this monarchy, this great structure, having been dislocated and dissolved, especially in its old age, by this innovation, as wide an entry as one could wish is opened to similar attacks. ^cThe majesty of kings, says an ancient, declines less easily from the summit to the middle than it plunges from the middle to the bottom.

But if the inventors have done more harm, the imitators⁷ are more vicious in that they wholeheartedly follow examples whose horror and evil they have felt and punished. And if there is some degree of honor even in evil-doing, they must concede to the others the glory of invention and the courage of making the first effort.

^bAll sorts of new depravity gleefully draw, from this first and fertile source, examples and models to trouble our government. Men read in our very laws, made for the remedy of this first evil, an apprenticeship and excuse for all sorts of wicked enterprises; and we are experiencing what Thucydides says of the civil wars of his time, that men baptized public vices with new milder names to excuse them, adulterating and softening their true titles. Yet the purpose of this is to reform our conscience and belief. *The plea is fair* [Terence]. But even the best pretext for innovation is very dangerous: *so true it is that no change from the ancient ways is to be approved* [Livy]. ^bThus it seems to me, to speak frankly, that it takes a lot of self-love and presumption to have such esteem for one's own opinions that to establish them one must overthrow the public peace and introduce so many inevitable evils, and such a horrible corruption of morals, as civil wars and political changes bring with them in a matter of such weight—and introduce them into one's own country. ^cIsn't it bad management to encourage so many certain and known vices in order to combat contested and debatable errors? Is there any worse kind of vices than those which attack our conscience and our understanding of one another?

The Senate, in its dispute with the people over the administration of their religion, was bold enough to give them this evasion as payment: *that this concerned the gods rather than themselves, and the gods would see that their rites were not profaned* [Livy]—modeling itself on the reply made by the oracle to the men of Delphi in the Median war. Fearing the invasion of the Persians, they had asked the god what they were to do with the sacred treasures of his temple, whether to hide them or carry them off. He answered that they should not budge a thing; that they should take care of themselves; that he was capable of looking after what belonged to him.

^bThe Christian religion has all the marks of the utmost justice and utility, but none more apparent than the precise recommendation of

⁷ The inventors are the Protestants, the imitators the intransigent Catholic party of the League.

obedience to the magistrate and maintenance of the government. What a marvelous example of this the divine wisdom has left us, which, to establish the salvation of the human race and to conduct its glorious victory over death and sin, willed to do so only with the sanction of our political order; and subjected its progress, and the conduct of such a lofty and salutary action, to the blindness and injustice of our observances and usages; letting flow the innocent blood of so many of its beloved elect, and suffering a long loss of years in ripening this priceless fruit!

There is a great difference between the cause of the man who follows the forms and laws of his country and that of the one who undertakes to control and change them. The former pleads, as his excuse, simplicity, obedience, and example; whatever he may do, it cannot be malice, it is at most misfortune. *“For who is the man who is not swayed by an antiquity attested and certified by the clearest records?”* [Cicero]—quite apart from what Isocrates says: that deficiency has a greater share of moderation than excess.

^BThe other man is in a much rougher position. *“For whoever meddles with choosing and changing usurps the authority to judge, and he must be very sure that he sees the weakness of what he is casting out and the goodness of what he is bringing in. The following very vulgar consideration has confirmed me in my position and kept me in check even during my rasher youth: not to burden my shoulders with so heavy a load as the responsibility for a knowledge of such importance, and not to dare to do in this area what in sane judgment I could never dare to do even in the easiest of the disciplines in which I had been instructed and in which rashness of judgment does no harm. For it seems to me very iniquitous to want to subject public and immutable institutions and observances to the instability of a private fancy (private reason has only a private jurisdiction), and to attempt against divine laws what no government would endure against civil laws. These last, although human reason has much more to do with them, are still supremely the judges of their judges; and the utmost ability serves at best to expound and extend their accepted use, not to turn it aside and innovate.”*

If sometimes divine Providence has passed over the rules to which it has necessarily constrained us, the intention was not to give us any dispensation from them. These are strokes of the divine hand, which we must not imitate but admire: extraordinary examples, marked with an express and particular sign, of the same nature as the miracles which it offers us as evidence of its omnipotence, above our categories and our powers. These it is folly and impiety to try to reproduce; we must not follow them, but contemplate them with awe: acts of its character, not of ours.

Cotta protests very opportunely: *When it is a question of religion, I follow T. Coruncanius, P. Scipio, P. Scaevola, the sovereign pontiffs, not Zeno or Cleanthes or Chrysippus* [Cicero].

^BGod knows, in our present quarrel, where there are a hundred articles to remove and replace, great and deep articles, how many there

are who can boast of having exactly understood the reasons and grounds of both parties. It is a number, if it is any number, that would not have much power to disturb us. But all this other mob, where are they going? Under what colors are they breaking away? Their medicine has the same effect as other medicines that are weak and ill applied: the humors that it wanted to purge in us it has heated, exasperated, and embittered by the conflict, and still it has remained in our body. It has not been able to purge us because of its weakness, and yet it has weakened us so that we cannot evacuate it either; and all we get from its operation is long intestinal pains.

^AYet it is true that Fortune, always reserving her authority above our reasonings, sometimes presents us with such an urgent necessity that the laws must needs give some place to it.

^BAnd when you resist the growth of an innovation that has come to introduce itself by violence, it is a dangerous obligation and a handicap to keep yourself in check and within the rules, in all matters and places, against those who are free as air, to whom everything is permissible that can advance their plan, who have neither law nor order except to follow their advantage:

^CFaith in a faithless man can give him means to harm.

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^BFor the ordinary discipline of a state that is in a healthy condition does not provide for these extraordinary accidents; it presupposes a body that holds together in its principal parts and functions, and a common consent to its observance and obedience. ^CThe law-abiding pace is a cold, deliberate, and constrained one, and is not the kind that can hold up against a lawless and unbridled pace.

^AIt is well known that those two great personages, Octavius⁸ and Cato, one in the civil war with Sulla, the other in the civil war with Caesar, are still reproached for having let their country incur the last extremities rather than disturb things by rescuing it at the expense of the laws. For in truth, in these ultimate necessities where there is nothing more to hold on to, it would perhaps be more wisely done to lower your head and give way a little to the blow, than, by struggling to let nothing go when this is impossible, to give violence an occasion to trample everything underfoot; and it would be better to make the laws will what they can do, since they cannot do what they will. Thus did the man who ordered that the laws should sleep for twenty-four hours, and he who for one occasion removed a day from the calendar, and that other who of the month of June made a second month of May. The Lacedaemonians themselves, such religious observers of the ordinances of their country, being hampered by a law that forbade them to elect the same man admiral twice, but finding it absolutely necessary to their affairs that Lysander should take this office again, did indeed

⁸ Cnaeus Octavius, a consul who supported Marius against Sulla. Plutarch tells about him in his "Life of Marius."

make one Aracus admiral, but made Lysander superintendent of the navy. And by the same subtlety, one of their ambassadors, being sent to the Athenians to obtain a change of some ordinance, and hearing from Pericles that it was forbidden to remove the tablet on which a law had once been inscribed, advised him simply to turn it over, inasmuch as that was not forbidden. This is what Plutarch praises Philopoemen for: that, being born to command, he knew not only how to command according to the laws, but how to command the laws themselves, when the public necessity required.

24 *Various outcomes of the same plan*

^AJacques Amyot, Grand Almoner of France, one day told me the following story to the honor of one of our princes¹ (and he was ours by very good tokens, even though his extraction was foreign). During our first troubles, at the siege of Rouen, this prince was warned by the Queen Mother of a plot against his life and particularly informed by her letters of the person who was to carry it out, a gentleman of Anjou or Maine who was then for that purpose regularly frequenting this prince's house. He told no one of this warning; but when walking the next day on the Mont Sainte-Catherine, from which our battery was firing on Rouen (for it was at the time when we held it besieged), having beside him the said Grand Almoner and another bishop, he saw this man, who had been pointed out to him, and had called him over. Upon his arrival, the prince, seeing him already turn pale and tremble from the alarms of his conscience, spoke to him thus: "Monsieur So-and-So, you certainly suspect what I want with you, and your face shows it. You have nothing to hide from me, for I am so thoroughly informed about your business that you would only make your plight worse by trying to conceal it. You very well know such-and-such matters (which were the ins and outs of the most secret parts of this undertaking); do not fail, as you value your life, to confess to me the truth about this whole plan." When this poor man found himself caught and convicted (for the whole thing had been revealed to the queen by one of the accomplices), there was nothing for him but to clasp his hands and pray for grace and mercy from this prince, at whose feet he tried to throw himself. But the prince kept him from doing so, and continued his talk thus: "Come here. Have I ever done anything against you? Have I harmed one of your family through private hatred? I haven't known

¹ François, duke of Guise.