

Of Vain-glory

IT WAS prettily devised of AEsop, The fly sat upon the axle-tree of the chariot wheel, and said, What a dust do I raise! So are there some vain persons, that whatsoever goeth alone, or moveth upon greater means, if they have never so little hand in it, they think it is they that carry it. They that are glorious, must needs be factious; for all bravery stands upon comparisons. They must needs be violent, to make good their own vaunts. Neither can they be secret, and therefore not effectual; but according to the French proverb, Beaucoup de bruit, peu de fruit; Much bruit little fruit. Yet certainly, there is use of this quality in civil affairs. Where there is an opinion and fame to be created, either of virtue or greatness, these men are good trumpeters. Again, as Titus Livius noteth, in the case of Antiochus and the AEtolians, There are sometimes great effects, of cross lies; as if a man, that negotiates between two princes, to draw them to join in a war against the third, doth extol the forces of either of them, above measure, the one to the other: and sometimes he that deals between man and man, raiseth his own credit with both, by pretending greater interest than he hath in either. And in these and the like kinds, it often falls out, that somewhat is produced of nothing; for lies are sufficient to breed opinion, and opinion brings on substance. In militar commanders and soldiers, vain-glory is an essential point; for as iron sharpens iron, so by glory, one courage sharpeneth another. In cases of great enterprise upon charge and adventure, a composition of glorious natures, doth put life into business; and those that are of solid and sober natures, have more of the ballast, than of the sail. In fame of learning, the flight will be slow without some feathers of ostentation. Qui de contemnenda gloria libros scribunt, nomen, suum inscribunt. Socrates, Aristotle, Galen, were men full of ostentation. Certainly vain-glory helpeth to perpetuate a man's memory; and virtue was never so beholding to human nature, as it received his due at the second hand. Neither had the fame of Cicero, Seneca, Plinius Secundus, borne her age so well, if it had not been joined with some vanity in themselves; like unto varnish, that makes ceilings not only shine but last. But all this while, when I speak of vain-glory, I mean not of that property, that Tacitus doth attribute to Mucianus; Omnium quae dixerat feceratque arte quadam ostentator: for that proceeds not of vanity, but of natural magnanimity and discretion; and in some persons, is not only comely, but gracious. For excusations, cessions, modesty itself well governed, are but arts of ostentation. And amongst those arts, there is none better than that which Plinius Secundus speaketh of, which is to be liberal of praise and commendation to others, in that, wherein a man's self hath any perfection. For saith Pliny, very wittily, In commending another, you do yourself right; for he that you commend, is either superior to you in that you commend, or inferior. If he be inferior, if he be to be commended, you much more; if he be superior, if he be not to be commended, you much less. Glorious men are the scorn of wise men, the admiration of fools, the idols of parasites, and the slaves of their own vaunts.

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