

Plutarch's Morals
***On how we may profit
from our enemies***

Translated by John Hartcliffe

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The threatened swan (c 1650) Jan Asselyn, Amsterdam



Train of thought

- Ill-will always to be expected.
- It is not enough that our enemies do us no harm.
- We may not be able to change bad men into good men.
- But it is possible to derive good even from bad men.
- An enemy, in order to discover our failings, carefully watches all our movements and affairs.
- Learn from this to be wary and circumspect.
- Learn to be discreet and sober, and to give offence to nobody.
- Live above reproach.
- When censured and accused, examine if there be just cause for it.
- Be willing to hear the truth even from the lips of enemies.
- If accused unjustly, avoid even the appearance of the supposed wrong.
- Have you given any occasion for the false accusation?
- Learn to keep the tongue in subjection.
- Be magnanimous and kind to your enemy.
- Indulge no malignant passion.
- Envy not your enemy's success.



1 Not to mention, Cornelius Pulcher, your gentle as well as skilful administration of public affairs, for which goodness and humanity you have gotten an interest in mankind, we clearly perceive that in your private conversation you have made a quiet and peaceable way of living your choice and continual practice. By this means you are justly esteemed a useful member of the commonwealth in general, and also a friendly affable companion to those who familiarly converse with you, as being a person free from all sour, rough, and peevish humors. For, as it is said of Crete, we may by great chance discover one single region of the world that never afforded any dens or coverts for wild beasts. But through the long succession of ages, even to this time, there scarce ever was a state or kingdom that hath not suffered under envy, hatred, emulation, the love of strife, fierce and unruly passions, of all others the most productive of enmity and ill-will among men. Nay, if nothing else will bring it to pass, familiarity will at last breed contempt, and the very friendship of men doth frequently draw them into quarrels, that prove sharp and sometimes implacable. Which that wise man Chilo did well understand, who, when he heard another assert that he had no enemy, asked him very pertinently whether he had no friend. In my judgment therefore it is absolutely necessary that a man, especially if he sit at the helm and be engaged to steer the government, should watchfully observe every posture and motion of his enemy, and subscribe to Xenophon's opinion in this case; who hath set it down as a maxim of the greatest wisdom, that a man should make the best advantage he can of him that is his adversary.

2 Wherefore, having lately determined to write somewhat on this argument, I have now gathered together all my scattered thoughts and meditations upon it, which I have sent to you, digested into as plain a method as I could; forbearing all along to mention those observations I have heretofore made and written in my Political Precepts, because I know you have that treatise at your hand, and often under your eye.

Our ancestors were well satisfied and content if they could safely guard themselves from the violent incursions of wild beasts, and this was the end and object of all their contests with these creatures. But their posterity have laid down their weapons of defence, and have invented a quite contrary use of them, making them serviceable to some of the chief ends of human life. For their flesh serves for food, and their hair for clothing; medicines and antidotes are devised out of their entrails; and their skins are converted into armor. So that we may upon good grounds fear that, if these supplies should fail, their manner of life would appear savage, destitute of convenient food and raiment, barbarous and naked.

Although we receive these benefits and comforts from the very beasts, yet some men suppose themselves happy and secure enough, provided they escape all harm from enemies, not regarding Xenophon's judgment, whom they ought to credit in this matter, that every man endowed with common sense and understanding may, if he please, make his opposites very useful and profitable to him.

Because then we cannot live in this world out of the neighborhood of such as will continually labor to do us injury or oppose us, let us search out some way whereby this advantage and profit from enemies may be acquired.



The best experienced gardener cannot so change the nature of every tree, that it shall yield pleasant and well tasted fruit; neither can the craftiest huntsman tame every beast. One therefore makes the best use he can of his trees, the other of his beast; although the first perhaps are barren and dry, the latter wild and ungovernable. So seawater is unwholesome and not to be drunk; yet it affords nourishment to all sorts of fish, and serves as it were for a chariot to convey those who visit foreign countries. The Satyr would have kissed and embraced the fire the first time he saw it; but Prometheus bids him take heed, else he might have cause to lament the loss of his beard,¹ if he came too near that which burns all it touches. Yet this very fire is a most beneficial thing to mankind; it bestows upon us the blessings both of light and heat, and serves those who know how to use it for the most excellent instrument of mechanic arts. Directed by these examples, we may be able to take right measures of our enemies, considering that by one handle or other we may lay hold of them for the use and benefit of our lives; though otherwise they may appear very untractable and hurtful to us.

There are many things which, when we have obtained them by much labor and sweat, become nauseous, ungrateful, and directly contrary to our inclinations; but there are some (you know) who can turn the very indispositions of their bodies into an occasion of rest and freedom from business. And hard pains that have fallen upon many men have rendered them only the more robust through vigorous exercise. There are others who, as Diogenes and Crates did, have made banishment from their native country and loss of all their goods a means to pass out of a troublesome world into the quiet and serene state of philosophy and mental contemplation. So the Stoic Zeno welcomed the good fortune, when he heard the ship was broken wherein his adventures were, because she had reduced him to a torn coat, to the safety and innocence of a mean and low condition. For as some creatures of strong constitutions eat serpents and digest them well, — nay, there are some whose stomachs can by a strange powerful heat concoct shells or stones, — while on the contrary, there are the weak and diseased, who loathe even bread and wine, the most agreeable and best supports of human life; so the foolish and inconsiderate spoil the very friendships they are engaged in, but the wise and prudent make good use of the hatred and enmity of men.

3 To those then who are discreet and cautious, the most malignant and worst part of enmity becomes advantageous and useful. But what is this you talk of all this while? An enemy is ever diligent and watchful to contrive stratagems and lay snares for us, not omitting any opportunity whereby he may carry on his malicious purposes. He lays siege to our whole life, and turns spy into the most minute action of it; not as Lynceus is said to look into oaks and stones, but by arts of insinuation he gets to the knowledge of our secrets, by our bosom friend, domestic servant, and intimate acquaintance. As much as possibly he can, he enquires what we have done, and labors to dive into the most hidden counsels of our minds. Nay, our friends do often escape

¹ *Τράγος γένειον ἄρα πενθήσεις σὶ γέ, Thou goat, soon thou shalt bewail the loss of thy beard.* This verse is supposed to belong to the Satyrdrama *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, which was exhibited with the trilogy to which the Persians belong. The whole tetralogy, according to the *didascalía*, consisted of the *Phineus*, *Persians*, *Glaucus*, and *Prometheus*. (G.)



our notice, either when they die or are sick, because we are careless and neglect them; but we are apt to examine and pry curiously almost into the very dreams of our enemies.

Now our enemy (to gratify his ill-will towards us) doth acquaint himself with the infirmities both of our bodies and mind, with the debts we have contracted, and with all the differences that arise in our families, all which he knows as well, if not better, than ourselves. He sticks fast to our faults, and chiefly makes his invidious remarks upon them. Nay, our most depraved affections, that are the worst distempers of our minds, are always the subjects of his inquiry; just as vultures pursue putrid flesh, noisome and corrupted carcasses, because they have no perception of those that are sound and in health. So our enemies catch at our failings, and then they spread them abroad by uncharitable and ill-natured reports.

Hence we are taught this useful lesson for the direction and management of our conversations in the world, that we be circumspect and wary in every thing we speak or do, as if our enemy always stood at our elbow and overlooked every action. Hence we learn to lead blameless and inoffensive lives. This will beget in us vehement desires and earnest endeavors of restraining disorderly passions. This will fill our minds with good thoughts and meditations, and with strong resolutions to proceed in a virtuous and harmless course of life.

For as those commonwealths and cities know best how to value the happiness of having good and wholesome laws, and most admire and love the safety of a quiet and peaceable constitution of things, which have been harassed by wars with their neighbors or by long expeditions; so those persons who have been brought to live soberly by the fear and awe of enemies, who have learned to guard against negligence and idleness, and to do every thing with a view to some profitable end, are by degrees (they know not how) drawn into a habit of living so as to offend nobody, and their manners are composed and fixed in their obedience to virtue by custom and use, with very little help from the reason. For they always carry in their minds that saying of Homer, if we act any thing amiss,

Priam will laugh at us, and all his brood;

our enemies will please themselves and scoff at our defects; therefore we will do nothing that is ridiculous, sinful, base, or ignoble, lest we become a laughing-stock to such as do not love us.

In the theatre we often see great artists in music and singing very supine and remiss, doing nothing as they should, whilst they play or sing alone; but whenever they challenge one another and contend for mastery, they do not only rouse up themselves, but they tune their instruments more carefully, they are more curious in the choice of their strings, and they try their notes in frequent and more harmonious consorts. Just so a man who hath an adversary perpetually to rival him in the well ordering of his life and reputation is thereby rendered more prudent in what he does, looks after his actions more circumspectly, and takes as much care of the accurateness of them as the musician does of his lute or organ. For evil hath this peculiar quality in it, that it dreads an enemy more than a friend. For this cause Nasica, when some thought the Roman affairs were established for ever in peace and safety, after they



had razed Carthage and enslaved Greece, declared that even then they were in the greatest danger of all and most likely to be undone, because there were none left whom they might still fear and stand in some awe of.

4 And here may be inserted that wise and facetious answer of Diogenes to one that asked him how he might be revenged of his enemy: The only way, says he, to gall and fret him effectually is for yourself to appear a good and honest man. The common people are generally envious and vexed in their minds, as oft as they see the cattle of those they have no kindness for, their dogs, or their horses, in a thriving condition; they sigh, fret, set their teeth, and show all the tokens of a malicious temper, when they behold their fields well tilled, or their gardens adorned and beset with flowers. If these things make them so restless and uneasy, what dost thou think they would do, what a torment would it be to them, if thou shouldst demonstrate thyself in the face of the world to be in all thy carriage a man of impartial justice, a sound understanding, unblamable integrity, of a ready and eloquent speech, sincere and upright in all your dealings, sober and temperate in all that you eat or drink;

While from the culture of a prudent mind,
Harvests of wise and noble thought you reap.²

Those that are conquered, saith Pindar, must seal up their lips; they dare not open their mouths, no, not even to mutter.³ But all men in these circumstances are not so restrained; but such chiefly as come behind their opposites in the practice of diligence, honesty, greatness of mind, humanity, and beneficence. These are beautiful and glorious virtues, as Demosthenes⁴ says, that are too pure and great to be touched by an ill tongue, that stop the mouths of backbiters, choke them and command them to be silent. Make it thy business therefore to surpass the base; for this surely thou canst do.⁵ If we would vex them that hate us, we must not reproach our adversary for an effeminate and debauched person, or one of a boorish and filthy conversation; but instead of throwing this dirt, we ourselves must be remarkable for a steady virtue and a well-governed behavior; we must speak the truth, and carry ourselves civilly and justly towards all who hold any correspondence or maintain any commerce with us. But if at any time a man is so transported by passion as to utter any bitter words, he must take heed that he himself be not chargeable for those crimes for which he upbraids others; he must descend into himself, examine and cleanse his own breast, that no putrefaction nor rottenness be lodged there; otherwise he will be condemned as the physician is by the tragedian: —

Wilt thou heal others, thou thyself being full of sores?⁶

If a man should jeer you and say that you are a dunce and illiterate, upon this motive you ought to apply your mind to the taking of pains in the study of philosophy and all kinds of learning. If he abuses you for a coward, then raise up your mind to a

² Aeschyl. *Septem*, 593. See note on page 202. (G.)

³ Fragment 253.

⁴ *Fals. Legat.* p. 406, 4.

⁵ Eurip. *Orest.* 251.

⁶ Eurip. Frag. No. 1071.



courageous manliness and an undaunted boldness of spirit. If he tells you you are lascivious and wanton, this scandal may be wiped off by having your mind barred up against all impressions of lust, and your discourse free from the least obscenity. These are allowable returns, and the most cutting strokes you can give your enemy; there being nothing that carries in it more vexation and disgrace, than that scandalous censures should fall back upon the head of him who was the first author of them. For as the beams of the sun reverberated do most severely affect and punish weak eyes, so those calumnies are most vexatious and intolerable which truth retorts back upon their first broachers. For as the north-east wind gathers clouds, so does a vicious life gather unto itself opprobrious speeches.

5 Insomuch that Plato, when he was in company with any persons that were guilty of unhandsome actions, was wont thus to reflect upon himself and ask this question, Am I of the like temper and disposition with these men? In like manner, whosoever passes a hard censure upon another man's life should presently make use of self-examination, and enquire what his own is; by which means he will come to know what his failings are, and how to amend them. Thus the very censures and backbitings of his enemy will redound to his advantage, although in itself this censorious humor is a very vain, empty, and useless thing. For every one will laugh at and deride that man who is humpbacked and baldpated, while at the same time he makes sport with the natural deformities of his brethren; it being a very ridiculous unaccountable thing to scoff at another for those very imperfections for which you yourself may be abused. As Leo Byzantinus replied upon the humpbacked man, who in drollery reflected on the weakness of his eyes, You mock me for a human infirmity, but you bear the marks of divine vengeance on your own back.

Wherefore no man should arraign another of adultery, when he himself is addicted to a more bestial vice. Neither may one man justly accuse another of extravagance or looseness, when he himself is stingy and covetous. Alcmaeon told Adrastus, that he was near akin to a woman that killed her husband; to which Adrastus gave a very pat and sharp answer, — Thou with thy own hands didst murder thy mother.⁷ After the same sarcastical way of jesting did Domitius ask Crassus whether he did not weep for the death of the lamprey that was bred in his fish-pond; to which Crassus makes this present reply, — But have I not heard that you did not weep when you carried out three wives to their burial.

Whence we may infer that it behooves every man who takes upon him to correct or censure another not to be too clamorous or merry upon his faults, but to be guilty of no such crime as may expose him to the chastisement and reproach of others. For the great God seems to have given that commandment of *Know thyself* to those men more especially who are apt to make remarks upon other men's actions and forget themselves. So, as Sophocles hath well observed, They often hear that which they would not, because they allow themselves the liberty of talking what they please.

⁷ From the *Adrastus* of Euripides.



6 This is the use that may be lawfully made of censuring and judging our enemies; that we may be sure we are not culpable for the same misdemeanors which we condemn in them. On the contrary, we may reap no less advantage from our being judged and censured by our enemies. In this case Antisthenes spake incomparably well, that if a man would lead a secure and blameless life, it was necessary that he should have either very ingenuous and honest friends, or very furious enemies, because the first would keep him from sinning by their kind admonitions, the latter by their evil words and vehement invectives.

But for as much as in these times friendship is grown almost speechless, and hath left off that freedom it did once use, since it is loquacious in flattery and dumb in admonition, therefore we must expect to hear truth only from the mouths of enemies. As Telephus, when he could find no physician that he could confide in as his friend, thought his adversary's lance would most probably heal his wound; so he that hath no friend to give him advice and to reprove him in what he acts amiss must bear patiently the rebukes of an enemy, and thereby learn to amend the errors of his ways; considering seriously the object which these severe censures aim at, and not what the person is who makes them. For as he who designed the death of Prometheus the Thessalian, instead of giving the fatal blow, only lanced a swelling that he had, which did really preserve his life and free him from the hazard of approaching death; just so may the harsh reprehensions of enemies cure some distempers of the mind that were before either unknown or neglected, though these angry speeches do originally proceed from malice and ill-will. But many, when they are accused of a crime, do not consider whether they are guilty of the matter alleged against them, but are rather solicitous whether the accuser hath nothing that may be laid to his charge; like the combatants in a match at wrestling, they take no care to wipe off the dirt that sticks upon them, but they go on to besmear one another, and in their mutual strugglings they wallow and tumble into more dirt and filthiness.

It is a matter of greater importance and concern to a man when he is lashed by the slanders of an enemy, by living virtuously to prevent and avert all objections that may be made his life, than it is to scour the spots out of his clothes when they are shown him. And even if any man with opprobrious language object to you crimes you know nothing of, you ought to enquire into the causes and reasons of such false accusations, that you may learn to take heed for the future and be very wary, lest unwittingly you should commit those offences that are unjustly attributed to you, or something that comes near them. Lacydes, king of the Argives, was abused as an effeminate person, because he wore his hair long, used to dress himself neatly, and his mien was finical. So Pompey, though he was very far from any effeminate softness, yet was reflected upon and jeered for being used to scratch his head with one of his fingers. Crassus also suffered much in the like kind, because sometimes he visited a vestal virgin and showed great attention to her, having a design to purchase of her a little farm that lay conveniently for him. So Postumia was suspected of unchaste actions, and was even brought to trial, because she would often be very cheerful and discourse freely in men's company. But she was found clear of all manner of guilt in that nature. Nevertheless at her dismissal, Spurius Minucius the Pontifex Maximus gave her this good admonition, that her words should be always as pure, chaste, and modest as her life was. Themistocles, though he had offended in nothing, yet was



suspected of treachery with Pausanias, because he corresponded familiarly with him, and used every day to send him letters and messengers.

7 Whenever then any thing is spoken against you that is not true, do not pass it by or despise it because it is false, but forthwith examine yourself, and consider what you have said or done, what you have ever undertaken, or what converse you have ever had that may have given likelihood to the slander; and when this is discovered, decline for the future all things that may provoke any reproachful or foul language from others.

For if troubles and difficulties, into which some men fall either by chance or through their own inadvertency and rashness, may teach others what is fit and safe for them to do, — as Merope says,

Fortune hath taken for her salary
My dearest goods, but wisdom she hath given;⁸

why should not we take an enemy for our tutor, who will instruct us gratis in those things we knew not before? For an enemy sees and understands more in matters relating to us than our friends do; because love is blind, as Plato⁹ says, in discerning the imperfections of the thing beloved. But spite, malice, ill-will, wrath, and contempt talk much, are very inquisitive and quick-sighted. When Hiero was upbraided by his enemy for having a stinking breath, he returned home and demanded of his wife why she had not acquainted him with it. The innocent good woman makes this answer: I thought all men's breath had that smell. For those things in men that are conspicuous to all are sooner understood from the information of enemies than from that of friends and acquaintance.

8 Furthermore, an exact government of the tongue is a strong evidence of a good mind, and no inconsiderable part of virtue. But since every man naturally is desirous to propagate his conceits, and without a painful force cannot smother his resentments, it is no easy task to keep this unruly member in due subjection, unless such an impetuous affection as anger be thoroughly subdued by much exercise, care, and study. For such things as "saying let fall against our will," or "a word flying by the range of our teeth,"¹⁰ or "a speech escaping us by accident," are all likely to happen to those whose ill-exercised minds (as it were) fall and waste away, and whose course of life is licentious; and we may attribute this to hasty passion or to unsettled judgment. For divine Plato tells us that for a word, which is the lightest of all things, both Gods and men inflict the heaviest penalties.¹¹ But silence, which can never be called to account, doth not only, as Hippocrates hath observed, extinguish thirst, but it bears up against all manner of slanders with the constancy of Socrates and the courage of Hercules, who was no more concerned than a fly at what others said or did. Now it is certainly not grander or better than this for a man to bear silently and quietly the revilings of an enemy, taking care not to provoke him, as if he were

⁸ From Euripides.

⁹ *Laws*, V. p. 731e.

¹⁰ *Il.* IV. 350.

¹¹ Plato, *Laws*, XI. p. 935a.



swimming by a dangerous rock; but the practice is better. For whosoever is thus accustomed to endure patiently the scoffs of an enemy will, without any disturbance or trouble, bear with the chidings of a wife, the rebukes of a friend, or the sharper reproofs of a brother. When a father or mother corrects you, you will not be refractory or stubborn under the rod. Xanthippe, though she was a woman of a very angry and troublesome spirit, could never move Socrates to a passion. By being used to bear patiently this heavy sufferance at home, he was ever unconcerned, and not in the least moved by the most scurrilous and abusive tongues he met withal abroad. For it is much better to overcome boisterous passions and to bring the mind into a calm and even frame of spirit, by contentedly undergoing the scoffs, outrages, and affronts of enemies, than to be stirred up to choler or revenge by the worst they can say or do.

9 Thus we may show a meek and gentle temper and a submissive bearing of evil in our enmities; and even integrity, magnanimity, and goodness of disposition are also more conspicuous here than in friendship. For it is not so honorable and virtuous to do a friend a kindness, as it is unworthy and base to omit this good office when he stands in need; but it is an eminent piece of humanity, and a manifest token of a nature truly generous, to put up with the affronts of an enemy when you have a fair opportunity to revenge them. For if any one sympathizes with his enemy in his affliction, relieves him in his necessities, and is ready to assist his sons and family if they desire it, any one that will not love this man for his compassion, and highly commend him for his charity, “must have a black heart made of adamant or iron,” as Pindar says.

When Caesar made an edict that the statues of Pompey which were tumbled down should be rebuilt and restored to their former beauty and magnificence, Tully tells him that by setting up again Pompey’s statues he has erected one for himself, an everlasting monument of praise and honor to after ages. So that we must give to every one his due, to an enemy such respect and honor as he truly deserves. Thus a man that praises his enemy for his real deserts shall himself obtain the more honor by it; and whenever he shall correct or censure him, he will be credited in what he does, because every one will believe that he does it out of a dislike and just abhorrence of his vice and not of his person.

By this practice we shall be brought at length to perform the most honorable and worthy actions; for he who is wont to praise and speak the best things of his enemies will never repine at the prosperity or success of his friends and acquaintance; he is never troubled, but rather rejoices, when they thrive and are happy. And what virtue can any man exercise that will be more profitable and delightful to him than this, which takes away from him the bitterness of malice, and doth not only break the teeth of envy, but, by teaching him to rejoice at another man’s felicity, doth double his own enjoyment and satisfaction. As in war many things, although they are bad and evil in themselves, yet have become necessary, and by long custom and prescription have obtained the validity of a law, so that it is not easy to root them out, even by those who thereby suffer much harm; just so doth enmity usher in the mind a long train of vices, meagre envy coupled with grim hatred, restless jealousy and suspicion, unnatural joy at other men’s miseries, and a long remembrance of injuries.



Fraud, deceit, and snares, joined to these forces of wickedness, work infinite mischief in the world, yet they appear as no evils at all when they are exerted against an enemy. By this means they make a deep entrance into the mind; they get fast hold of it, and are hardly shaken off. So that, unless we forbear the practice of these ill qualities towards our enemies, they will by frequent acts become so habitual to us, that we shall be apt to make use of them to the manifest wrong and injury of our friends. Wherefore, if Pythagoras was highly esteemed for instructing his disciples to avoid all manner of cruelty against beasts themselves, — so that he himself would redeem them out of their captivity in either the fowler's or the fisherman's net, and forbade his followers to kill any creature, — it is surely much better and more manly in our differences with men to show ourselves generous, just, and detesters of all falsehood, and to moderate and correct all base, unworthy, and hurtful passions; that in all our conversation with our friends we may be open-hearted, and that we may not seek to overreach or deceive others in any of our dealings.

For Scaurus was a professed enemy and an open accuser of Domitius; whereupon a treacherous servant of Domitius comes to Scaurus before the cause was to be heard, and tells him that he has a secret to communicate to him in relation to the present suit, which he knows not of, and which may be very advantageous on his side. Yet Scaurus would not permit him to speak a word, but apprehended him, and sent him back to his master. And when Cato was prosecuting Murena for bribery, and was collecting evidence to support his charge, he was accompanied (according to custom) by certain persons in the interest of the defendant, who watched his transactions. These often asked him in the morning, whether he intended on that day to collect evidence or make other preparation for the trial; and so soon as he told them he should not, they put such trust in him that they went their way. This was a plain demonstration of the extraordinary deference and honor they paid to Cato; but a far greater testimony, and one surpassing all the rest, is it to prove that, if we accustom ourselves to deal justly and uprightly with our enemies, then we shall not fail to behave ourselves so towards our friends.

10 Simonides was wont to say that there was no lark without its crest; so the disposition of men is naturally pregnant with strife, suspicion, and envy, which last (as Pindar observes) is “the companion of empty-brained men.” Therefore no man can do any thing that will tend more to his own profit and the preservation of his peace than utterly to purge out of his mind these corrupt affections, and cast them off as the very sink of all iniquity, that they may create no more mischief between him and his friends. This Onomademus, a judicious and wise man, understood well, who, when he was of the prevailing side in a civil commotion at Chios, gave this counsel to his friends, that they should not quite destroy or drive away those of the adverse party, but let some abide there, for fear they should begin to fall out among themselves as soon as their enemies were all out of the way. Therefore, if these uneasy dispositions of the mind be spent and consumed upon enemies, they would never molest or disquiet our friends. Neither doth Hesiod approve of one potter or one singer's envying another, or that a neighbor or relation or brother should resent it ill that another



prospers and is successful in the world.¹² But if there be no other way whereby we may be delivered from emulation, envy, or contention, we may suffer our minds to vent these passions upon the prosperity of our enemies, and whet the edge and sharpen the point of our anger upon them. For as gardeners that have knowledge and experience in plants expect their roses and violets should grow the better by being set near leeks and onions, — because all the sour juices of the earth are conveyed into these, — so an enemy by attracting to himself our vicious and peevish qualities, may render us less humorsome and more candid and ingenuous to our friends that are in a better or more happy state than ourselves.

Wherefore let us enter the lists with our enemies, and contend with them for true glory, lawful empire, and just gain. Let us not so much debase ourselves as to be troubled and fret at any possessions they enjoy more than we have. Let us rather carefully observe those good qualities wherein our enemies excel us, so that by these motives we may be excited to outdo them in honest diligence, indefatigable industry, prudent caution, and exemplary sobriety; as Themistocles complained that the victory Miltiades got at Marathon would not let him sleep. But whosoever views his adversary exalted far above him in dignities, in pleading of great causes, in administration of state affairs, or in favor and friendship with princes, and doth not put forth all his strength and power to get before him in these things, — this man commonly pines away, and by degrees sinks into the sloth and misery of an envious and inactive life. And we may observe, that envy and hatred do raise such clouds in the understanding, that a man shall not be able to pass a right judgment concerning things which he hates; but whosoever with an impartial eye beholds, and with a sincere mind judges, the life and manners, discourses, and actions of his enemy, will soon understand that many of those things that raise his envy were gotten by honest care, a discreet providence, and virtuous deeds. Thus the love of honorable and brave actions may be kindled and advanced in him, and an idle and lazy course of life may be contemned and forsaken.

11 But if our enemies arrive at high places in the courts of princes by flattery or frauds, by bribery or gifts, we should not be troubled at it, but should rather be pleased in comparing our undisguised and honest way of living with theirs which is quite contrary. For Plato, who was a competent judge, was of opinion that virtue was a more valuable treasure than all the riches above the earth or all the mines beneath it. And we ought evermore to have in readiness this saying of Solon:¹³ But we will not give up our virtue in exchange for their wealth. So will we never give up our virtue for the applause of crowded theatres, which may be won by a feast, nor for the loftiest seats among eunuchs, concubines, and royal satraps. For nothing that is worth any one's appetite, nothing that is handsome or becoming a man, can proceed from that which is in itself evil and base. But, as Plato repeats once and again, the lover cannot see the faults of the thing or person that he loves, and we apprehend soonest what our enemies do amiss; therefore we must let neither our joy at their miscarriages nor our sorrow at their successes be idle and useless to ourselves, but we are bound to con-

¹² Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 23.

¹³ Solon, Frag. No. 16.



sider in both respects, how we may render ourselves better than they are, by avoiding what is faulty and vicious in them, and how we may not prove worse than they, if we imitate them in what they do excel.



Flowers still-life (1810) Jean Joseph Xavier Bidauld, Private collection

