

Distance in space decreases the size of things, for it contracts them and so makes their defects and deficiencies disappear. This is why everything looks so much finer in a contracting mirror or in a _camera obscura_ than it is in reality; and the past is affected in the same way in the course of time. The scenes and events that happened long ago, as well as the persons who took part in them, become a delight to the memory, which ignores everything that is immaterial and disagreeable. The present possesses no such advantage; it always seems to be defective. And in space, small objects near at hand appear to be big, and if they are very near, they cover the whole of our field of vision; but as soon as we stand some little distance away they become minute and finally invisible. And so it is with time: the little affairs and misfortunes of everyday life excite in us emotion, anxiety, vexation, passion, for so long as they are quite near us, they appear big, important, and considerable; but as soon as the inexhaustible stream of time has carried them into the distance they become unimportant; they are not worth remembering and are soon forgotten, because their importance merely consisted in being near.

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It is only now and then that a man learns something; but he forgets the whole day long.