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Montaigne's Essays

In Three Books. With Notes and Quotations. And an Account of The Author's Life ; With a short Character of the Author and Translator, by the late Marquis of Halifax; With the Addition of A Complete Table to each Volume

Montaigne, Michel Eyquem de

London, 1743

Chap. 5. Whether the Governor of a Place besieged ought himself to go out and parley.

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*Point ne se faut courouer aux Affaires,
Il ne leur chaut de toutes nos cholers †.*

We must not quarrel Heaven in our Affairs,
That little for a Mortal's Anger cares.

But we can never enough decry, nor sufficiently condemn, the senseless and ridiculous Sallies of our unruly Passions.



C H A P. V.

Whether the Governor of a Place besieg'd, ought himself to go out to parley.

Lucius Marcius, the Roman Legate, in the War against Perseus King of Macedon, to gain Time wherein to re-inforce his Army, set on Foot some Overtures of Accommodation, with which the King being lull'd asleep, concluded a Cessation for certain Days; by this Means giving his Enemy Opportunity and Leisure to repair his Army, which was afterward the Occasion of his own Ruin. The elder Sort of Senators, notwithstanding, mindful of their Fore-fathers Virtue, were by no Means satisfied with this Proceeding; but on the contrary condemn'd it, as degenerating from their ancient Practice, which they said was by Valour, and not by Artifice, Surprizes, and Night Encounters; neither by pretended Flight, Ambuscades, and deceitful Treaties, to overcome their Enemies; never making War till having first denounc'd it, and very often assign'd both the Hour and Place of Battle. Out of this generous Principle it was that they deliver'd up to Pyrrhus his treacherous Physician, and to the *Hetrurians* their disloyal School-Master. And this was indeed a Procedure truly *Roman*, and nothing ally'd to the *Græcian* Subtilty, nor the *Punick* Cunning, where it was reputed a Victory

† *Plutarch.*

of less Glory to overcome by Force than Fraud. Deceit may serve for a Need, but he only confesses himself overcome who knows he is neither subdued by Policy, nor Misadventure, but by Dint of Valour, in a fair and manly War. And it very well appears by the Discourse of these good old Senators, that this fine Sentence was not yet receiv'd amongst them,

— *Dolus an virtus quis in Hoste requiret* *?

No Matter if by Valour, or Deceit,
We overcome, so we the better get.

The *Achaians* (says *Polybius*) abhorr'd all manner of Double-dealing in War, not reputed it a Victory unless where the Courages of the Enemy were fairly subdued. *Eam vir sanctus & sapiens sciet veram esse victoriam, quæ salva fide, & integra dignitate parabitur* †. An honest and a prudent Man will acknowledge that only to be a true Victory which he has obtain'd without Violation of his own Faith, or any Blemish upon his own Honour; says another,

*Vosne velit, an me regnare hera, quidve ferat fors,
Virtute experiamur* †.

If you or I shall rule, lets fairly try,
And Force or Fortune give the Victory.

In the Kingdom of *Ternates*, amongst those Nations which we so broadly call *Barbarians*, they have a Custom never to commence War till it be first denounc'd; adding withal, an ample Declaration of what they have to do it withal, with what, and how many Men, what Ammunitions, and what both offensive and defensive Arms; but that being done, they afterwards conceive it lawful to employ this Power without Reproach, any Way that may best conduce to their own Ends. The ancient *Florentines* were so far from obtaining any Advantage over their Enemies by Surprize, that they always gave them a Month's Warning before they drew their Army into the Field, by the continual Tolling of a Bell they call'd *Martinella*. For what concerns us who are not so scrupulous in this Affair, and who attribute the Honour of the War to him who has

* *Virg. Æneid. l. 2.* † *Tacit. in Agric.* ‡ *Ennius.*
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the better of it, after what Manner soever obtained, and who after *Lysander* say, *Where the Lion's Skin is too short, we must etch it out with the Fox's Case*. The most usual Occasions of Surprize are derived from this Practice, and we hold that there are no Moments, wherein a Chief ought to be more circumspect, and to have his Eye so much at Watch, as those of Parleys and Treaties of Accommodation; as it is therefore become a general Rule amongst the martial Men of these latter Times, that a Governor of a Place never ought in Time of a Siege to go out to parley. It was for this that in our Fathers Days the *Signeurs de Montmard* and *d'Assigni* defending *Mousson* against the Count *de Nassau*, were so highly censured; yet in this Case it would be excusable in that Governor, who going out should notwithstanding do it in such Manner, that the Safety and Advantage should be on his Side; as *Count Guido de Rangoni* did at *Reggio* (if we are to believe *Bellay*, for *Guicciardine* says it was he himself) when *Monsieur de l'Escut* approached to parley, who stept so little a Way from his Fort, that a Disorder happening in the interim of Parley, not only *Monsieur de l'Escut* and his Party, who were advanced with him, found themselves by much the weaker, (insomuch that *Alleffandro de Trivulcio* was there slain) but he himself was constrained, as the safest Way to follow the Count, and relying upon his Honour to secure himself from the Danger of the Shot within the very Walls of the Town. *Eumenes*, being shut up in the City of *Nora* by *Antigonus*, and by him importuned to come out to speak with him, as he sent him Word it was fit he should to a better Man than himself, and one who had now an Advantage over him, returned this notable Answer, *Tell him*, said he, *that I shall never think any Man better than myself, whilst I have my Sword in my Hand*; and would never consent to come out to him, till first, according to his own Demand, *Antigonus* had delivered him his own Nephew *Ptolomeus* in Hostage. And yet some have done rather better than worse, in going out in Person to parley with the Assailant; witness *Henry de Vaux*, a Cavalier of *Champagne*, who being besieged by the *English* in the Castle of *Commerce*, and *Bartholomew de Bone*, who commanded at the *Leagure*, having so sapped the greatest Part of the Castle without, that nothing remained but setting

ting Fire to the Props to bury the besieged under the Ruins, he required the said *Henry* to come out to speak with him for his own Good; which the other accordingly doing, with three more in Company with him, and his own evident Ruin being made apparent to him, he conceived himself singularly obliged to his Enemy, to whose Discretion, after he and his Garrison had surrendered themselves, Fire being presently applied to the Mine, the Props no sooner began to fail but the Castle was immediately turned topsyturvy, no one Stone being left upon another. I could, and do, with great Facility, rely upon the Faith of another; but I should very unwillingly do it in such a Case, as it should thereby be judged that it was rather an Effect of my Despair and Want of Courage, than voluntary and out of Confidence and Security in the Faith of him with whom I had to do.



CHAP. VI.

That the Hour of Parley is dangerous.

I Saw, notwithstanding, lately at *Mussidan*, a Place not far from my House, that those who were driven out thence by our Army, and others of their Party, highly complained of Treachery, for that, during a Treaty of Accommodation, and in the very *interim* that their Deputies were treating, they were surprized and cut to Pieces: A Thing that, peradventure in another Age, might have had some Colour of foul Play; but (as I said before) the Practice of Arms in these Days is quite another Thing, and there is now no Confidence in an Enemy excusable, till after the last Seal of Obligation; and even then the Conqueror has enough to do to keep his Word; so hazardous a Thing it is to intrust the Observation of the Faith a Man has engaged to a Town that surrenders upon easy and favourable Conditions, to the Necessity, Avarice, and Licence of a victorious Army, and to give the Soldiers free Entrance into
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