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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. 14. That Men are justly punished for being obstinate in the Defence of a Fool, that is not in Reason to be desended.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53388](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53388)



C H A P. XIV.

That Men are justly punished for being obstinate in the Defence of a Fort that is not in reason to be defended.

VAlour has it's Bounds, as well as other Virtues, which once transgressed, the next Step is into the Territories of Vice, so that by having too large a Proportion of this heroick Virtue, unless a Man be very perfect in it's Limits, which upon the Confines are very hard to discern, he may very easily unawares run into Temerity, Obstinacy, and Folly. From this Consideration it is, that we have derived the Custom in Times of War, to punish even with Death those who are obstinate to defend a Place that is not tenable by the Rules of War. In which Case, if there were not some Examples made, Men would be so confident upon the Hopes of Impunity, that not a Hen-roost but would resist, and stop a Royal Army. The Constable *Monsieur de Montmorency*, having at the Siege of *Pavie* been ordered to pass the *Tesine*, and to take up his Quarters in the *Fauxburg St. Antonie*, being hindered so to do by a Tower that was at the End of the Bridge, which was so impudent as to endure a Battery, hanged every Man he found within it for their Labour. And again, since accompanying the *Dauphin* in his Expedition beyond the *Alps*, and taking the Castle of *Villane* by Assault, and allwithin it being put to the Sword, the Governor and his Ensign only excepted, he caused them both to be trussed up for the same Reason; as also did Captain *Martin du Bellay*, then Governor of *Turin*, the Governor of *St. Bony*, in the same Country, all his People being cut in Pieces at the taking of the Place. But forasmuch as the Strength or Weakness of a Fortrefs is always measured by the Estimate and Counterpoise of the Forces that attack it, (for a Man might reasonably enough despise two Culverines, that would be a Mad-man to abide a Battery of thirty Pieces of Cannon) where also the Greatness

of the Prince who is Master of the Field, his Reputation, and the Respect that is due unto him, is always put into the Balance; 'tis dangerous to affront such an Enemy: And besides, by compelling him to force you, you possess him with so great an Opinion of himself and his Power, that thinking it unreasonable any Place should dare to shut their Gates against his victorious Army, he puts all to the Sword, where he meets with any Opposition, whilst his Fortune continues; as is very plain in the fierce and arrogant Forms of summoning Towns and denouncing War; favouring so much of *Barbarian* Pride and Insolence in Use amongst the oriental Princes, and which their Successors to this Day do yet retain and practise. And even in that remote Part of the World where the *Portuguese* subdued the *Indians*, they found some States where it was an universal and inviolable Law amongst them, that every Enemy, overcome by the King in Person, or by his Representative Lieutenant, was out of Composition both of Ransom and Mercy. So that above all Things a Man should take heed of falling into the Hands of a Judge who is an Enemy and victorious.



C H A P. XV.

Of the Punishment of Cowardice.

I Once heard of a Prince, and a great Captain, having a Narration given him as he sat at Table of the Proceeding against Monsieur *de Vervins*, who was sentenced to Death for having surrendered *Bullen* to the *English*, openly maintained, that a Soldier could not justly be put to Death for his Want of Courage. And in Truth, a Man should make a great Difference betwixt Faults that merely proceed from Infirmary, and those that are visibly the Effects of Treachery and Malice; for in the last they wilfully act against the Rules of Reason that Nature has imprinted on us; whereas in the former it seems as if we might produce the same Nature, who left us in such a State of Imperfection, and