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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. 23. Various Events from the same Counsel.

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C H A P. XXIII.

Various Events from the same Counsel.

**J** *Aques Amiot*, great Almoner of *France*, one Day related to me this Story, much to the Honour of a Prince of ours (and ours he is upon several very good Accounts, though originally of foreign Extraction) that in the time of our first Commotions at the Siege of *Rouen*, this Prince, having been advertised by the Queen-Mother of a Conspiracy against his Life, and in her Letters particular Notice being given him of the Person who was to execute the Business (who was a Gentleman of *Anjou*, or else of *Mayne*, and who to this Effect did frequently haunt this Prince's House) discovered not the least Syllable of this Intelligence to any one whatever, but going the next Day to *St. Katharine's Mount*, from whence our Battery play'd against the Town (for it was during the Time of a Siege) and having in Company with him the said Lord Almoner, and another Bishop, he was presently aware of this Gentleman, who had been denoted to him, and presently caused him to be called into his Presence; to whom being come before him, seeing him pale, and trembling with the Conscience of his Guilt, he thus said, *Monseur* such a one, *You already guess what I have to say to you, your Countenance discovers it, and therefore 'tis in vain to disguise your Practice; for I am so well informed in your Business, that it will but make worse for you, to go about to conceal or to deny it; you know very well such and such Passages, (which was the most secret Circumstances of his Conspiracy) and therefore be sure, as you tender your own Life, to confess to me the whole Truth of your Design.* The poor Man seeing himself thus trapped, and convinced (for the whole Business had been discovered to the Queen by one of the Complices) was in so great a Confusion, he knew not what to do; but joining his Hands to sue and beg for Mercy, he meant to throw himself at this Prince's Feet, who taking him up proceeded to say, *Come on, Sir, and tell me, have*



have I at any time heretofore done you any Injury? or have I through my particular Hatred or private Malice, offended your Kinsman or Friend of yours? It is not above three Weeks that I have known you; What Inducement then could move you, to attempt my Death? To which the Gentleman, with a trembling Voice, replied, That it was no particular Grudge he had to his Person, but the general Interest and Concern of the Party, and that he had been put upon it by some who had persuaded him it would be a meritorious Act, by any Means to extirpate so great and so powerful an Enemy of their Religion. Well, said the Prince, I will now let you see, how much more charitable the Religion is that I maintain, than that which you profess; Yours persuaded you to kill me, without hearing me to speak, and without ever having given you any Cause of Offence; and mine commands me to forgive you, convicted as you are, by your own Confession, of a Design to murder me without Reason. Get you gone, that I see you no more; and if you are wise, choose henceforward honest Men for your Counsellors in your Designs. The Emperor Augustus, being in Gallia had certain Information of a Conspiracy L. Cinna was contriving against him, who thereupon resolved to make him an Example; and to that End sent to summon his Friends to meet the next Morning in Council; but the Night between he passed over with Unquietness of Mind, considering that he was to put to Death a young Man, of an illustrious Family, and Nephew to the great Pompey, which made him break out into several Ejaculations of Passion: What then, said he, shall it be said that I live in perpetual Anxiety, and continual Alarm, and suffer my Assassins in the mean Time to walk Abroad at Liberty? Shall he go unpunished after having conspired against my Life, a Life I have hitherto defended in so many civil Wars, and so many Battles both by Land and Sea? And after having settled an universal Peace of the whole World, shall this Man be pardoned, who has conspired not only to murder, but to sacrifice me? For the Conspiracy was to kill him at Sacrifice. After which, remaining for some Time silent, he began again louder, and straining his Voice more than before to exclaim against himself, and say, Why livest thou? If it be for the good of many that thou shouldst die? Must there be no End of thy Revenges and Cruelties? Is thy Life of so great Value, that



that so many Mischiefs must be done to preserve it? His Wife *Livia*, seeing him in this Perplexity; Will you take a Woman's Counsel, said she? Do as the Physicians do, who, when the ordinary *Recipe's* will do no good, make Trial of the contrary. By Severity you have hitherto prevailed nothing; *Lepidus* has followed *Sarvidienus*, *Murena Lepidus*, *Cæpio Murena*, and *Ignatius Cæpio*. Begin now and try how Sweetness and Clemency will succeed. *Cinna* is convict, forgive him, he will never henceforth have the Heart to hurt thee, and it will be an Act of Glory. *Augustus* was glad that he had met with an Advocate of his own Humour; wherefore having thanked his Wife, and in the Morning countermanded his Friends he had before summoned to Council, he commanded *Cinna* all alone to be brought to him; who being come, and a Chair by his Appointment set him, having commanded every one out of the Room, he spake to him after this Manner: In the first Place, *Cinna*, I demand of thee patient Audience; do not interrupt me in what I am about to say, and I will afterwards give thee Time and Leisure to answer. Thou knowest, *Cinna*, that having taken thee Prisoner in the Enemies Camp, and that an Enemy not only made, but born so, I gave thee thy Life, restored thee all thy Goods, and finally put thee in so good a Posture, by my Bounty, of living well and at thy Ease, that the Victorious envy'd the Conquer'd. The Sacerdotal Office which thou madest Suit to me for, I conferred upon thee, after having deny'd it to others, whose Fathers have ever born Arms in my Service: And after so many Obligations thou hast undertaken to kill me. At which *Cinna* crying out, that he was very far from entertaining any so wicked a Thought: Thou dost not keep thy Promise, *Cinna*, (continued *Augustus*) that thou wouldst not interrupt me. Yes thou hast undertaken to murder me in such a Place, such a Day, in such and such Company, and in such a Manner. At which Words seeing *Cinna* astonished and silent, not upon the Account of his Promise so to be, but interdicted with the Conscience of his Crime; Why, proceeded *Augustus*, to what End wouldst thou do it? Is it to be Emperor? Believe me, the Republick is in a very bad Condition, if I am the only Man betwixt thee and the Empire. Thou art not able so much as to defend thy own House, and but  
t'other



'other Day wast baffled in a Suit, by the opposed Interest of a mean manumitted Slave. What, hast thou neither Means nor Power in any other Thing, but only to attempt against *Cæsar*? I quit Claim to the Empire, if there is no other but I to obstruct thy Hopes: Canst thou believe, that *Paulus*, that *Fabius*, that the *Cassians* and *Servilians*, and so many noble *Romans*, not only so in Title, but who by their Virtue honour their Nobility, would suffer or endure thee? After this, and a great deal more that he said to him, (for he was two long Hours in speaking) Well, *Cinna*, go thy Way, said he, I again give thee that Life in the Quality of a Traitor and a Parricide, which I once before gave thee in the Quality of an Enemy. Let Friendship from this Time forward begin betwixt us, and let us try to make it appear whether I have given, or thou hast received thy Life with the better Faith; and so departed from him. Some Time after, he preferred him to the consular Dignity, complaining, that he had not the Confidence to demand it; had him ever after for his very great Friend, and was at last made by him sole Heir to all his Estate. Now from the Time of this Accident, which befel *Augustus* in the fortieth Year of his Age, he never had any Conspiracy or Attempt against him, and therein reaped the due Reward of this his so generous and exemplary Clemency. But it did not so well succeed with our Prince in the former Story; his Moderation and Mercy not being sufficient so to secure him, that he did not afterwards fall into the Toils of the like Treason: So vain and frivolous a Thing is human Prudence; and in Spite of all our Projects, Counsels and Precautions, Fortune will still be Mistress of Events. We repute Physicians fortunate when they hit upon a lucky Cure, as if there was no other Art but theirs that could not stand upon it's own Legs, and whose Foundations are too weak to support itself upon it's Basis, and as if no other Art stood in Need of Fortune's Hand to assist in it's Operations. For my Part, I think of Physick as much Good or Ill as any one would have me: For, Thanks be to God, we have no great Traffick together. I am of a quite contrary Humour to other Men, for I always despise it; but when I am sick, instead of recanting, or entering into Composition with it, I begin yet more to hate, nauseate, and fear it, telling them who importune me to enter into a

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Course of Physick, that they must give me Time to recover my Strength and Health, that I may be the better able to support and encounter the Violence and Danger of the Potion: So that I still let Nature work, supposing her to be sufficiently armed with Teeth and Claws to defend herself from the Assaults of Infirmity, and to uphold that Contexture, the Dissolution of which she flies and abhors: For I am afraid, lest instead of assisting her when grappled, and struggling with the Disease, I should assist her Adversary, and procure new Work, and new Accidents to encounter. Now I say, that not in Physick only, but in other more certain Arts, Fortune has a very great Interest and Share. The poetick Raptures, and those prodigious Flights of Fancy, that ravish and transport the Author out of himself, why should we not attribute them to his good Fortune, since the Poet himself confesses they exceed his Sufficiency and Force, and acknowledges them to proceed from something else than himself, and has them no more in his Power than the Orators say they have those extraordinary Motions and Agitations that sometimes push them beyond their Design. It is the same in Painting, where Touches shall sometimes slip from the Hand of the Painter, so surpassing both his Fancy and his Art, as to beget his own Admiration. But Fortune does yet more accidentally manifest the Share she has in all Things of this Kind, by the Graces and Elegancies are found out in them, not only beyond the Intention, but even without the Knowledge of the Artist. A judicious Reader does often find out in other Men's Writings, other Kind of Perfections, and finds in them a better Sense and more quaint Expression than the Author himself either intended or perceived. And, as to military Enterprizes and Executions, every one sees how great a Hand Fortune has in all those Affairs; even in our very Counsels and Deliberations there must certainly be something of Chance and good Luck mixed with human Prudence, for all that our Wisdom can do alone is no great Matter; the more piercing, quick, and apprehensive it is, the weaker it finds itself, and is by so much more apt to mistrust it's own Virtue. I am of *Sylla's* Opinion, and when I most strictly and nearer Hand examine the most glorious Exploits of War, I perceive, methinks, that those who carry them on, make Use of Counsel and Debate only for Custom's Sake, and leave the best Part of  
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the Enterprize to Fortune, and relying upon her Favour and Assistance, transgress at every Turn the Bounds of Military Conduct, and the Rules of War. There happens sometimes accidental Alacrities and strange Furies in their Deliberations, that for the most Part prompt them to follow the worst, and worst grounded Counsels, and that swell their Courages beyond the Limits of Reason: From whence it falls out, that many great Captains, to justify those temerarious Deliberations, have been forced to tell their Soldiers, that they were by some Inspiration and good Omen encouraged and invited to such Attempts\*. Wherefore, in this Doubt and Uncertainty that the Short-sightedness of human Wisdom to see and chuse the best, (by Reason of the Difficulties that the various Accidents and Circumstances of Things bring along with them) does perplex us withal, the surest Way, in my Opinion, did no other Consideration invite us to it, were to pitch upon that wherein is the greatest Appearance of Honesty and Justice, and not being certain of the shortest, to go the straightest and most direct Way; as in these two Examples I have before laid down, there is no Question to be made but it was more noble and generous in him who had received the Offence, to pardon it, as they both did, than to do otherwise; and if the former miscarried in it, he is not nevertheless to be blamed for his good Intention: Neither does any one know if he had proceeded otherwise, whether by that Means he had avoided the End his Destiny had appointed for him; and he had however lost the Glory of so generous an Act. You will find in History many who have been in this Apprehension, that the most Part have taken the Course to meet, and prevent Conspiracies by Punishment and Revenge: But I find but very few who have reap'd any Advantage by this Proceeding, witness so many *Roman* Emperors: And whoever finds himself in this Danger ought not to expect much, either from his Vigilancy or Power; for how hard a Thing is it for a Man to secure himself from an Enemy, who lyes concealed under the Countenance of the most officious Friend we have, and to discover and know the Wills and inward Thoughts of those who are continually doing us Service?

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\* *Monluc* in his *Commentarisse*.



'Tis to much Purpose to have a Guard of Strangers about a Man's Person, and to be always fenced about with a Pale of armed Men; whosoever despises his own Life, is always Master of that of another Man's. And moreover, this continual Suspicion, that makes a Prince jealous of all the World, must of Necessity be a strange Torment to him, and therefore it was, that *Dion*, being advertis'd that *Callipus* watch'd all Opportunities to take away his Life, had never the Heart to enquire more particularly into it, saying, That he had rather die, than live in that Misery that he must continually stand upon his Guard, not only against his Enemies, but his Friends also; which *Alexander* much more lively manifested in Effect, when having Notice by a Letter from *Parmenio*, that *Philip*, his most belov'd Physician, was by *Darius's* Money corrupted to poison him, at the same Time that he gave the Letter to *Philip* to read, supp'd off the Potion he had brought him. Was not this by such a Resolution to express, that if his Friends had a Mind to dispatch him out of the World, he was willing to give them Opportunity to do it? This Prince is indeed the sovereign Precedent of all hazardous Actions; but I do not know whether there be another Passage in his Life wherein there is so much Steadiness and Constancy as in this, nor so illustrious an Image of the Greatness of his Mind. Those who preach to Princes so circumspect, and vigilant a Jealousy and Distrust under Colour of Security, preach to them Ruin and Dishonour. Nothing noble can ever be perform'd without Danger. I know a Person, naturally of a very great, daring and enterprizing Courage, whose good Fortune is continually prevented, and forestall'd by such Persuasions, that he must retire into the Grofs of his own Body, and keep those he knows are his Friends continually about him, that he must not hearken to any Reconciliation with his ancient Enemies, that he must stand off, and not trust his Person in Hands stronger than his own, what Promises or Offers soever they make him, or what Advantages soever he may see before him. And I know another, who has unexpectedly made his Fortune by following a contrary Advice. Courage, the Reputation and Glory of which Men seek with so greedy an Appetite, represents and sets itself out when Need requires, as magnificently in Querpo, as in the neatest Arms; in a Closet, as well as a

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Camp;



Camp; and this over-circumspect and wary Prudence is a mortal Enemy to all high and generous Exploits. *Scipio*, to find the Intentions of *Syphax*, leaving his Army, and abandoning *Spain*, not yet secure nor well settled in his new Conquest, could pass over into *Africk* with only two contemptible Vessels, to commit himself, in an Enemy's Country, to the Power of a *Barbarian King*, to a Faith untry'd and unknown, without Precaution, without Hottage, under the sole Security of the Greatness of his Courage, his good Fortune, and the Promise of his elevated Hopes. *Habita fides ipsam plerumque fidem obligat* \*. *Trust oftentimes obliges Fidelity*. On the contrary, Fear and Diffidence invite and draw on Injury and Offence. The most mistrustful of all our Kings settled his Affairs principally by voluntarily giving up his Life and Liberty into his Enemies Hands, by that Action manifesting that he had an absolute Confidence in them, to the End they might repose as great an Assurance in him. *Cæsar* did only opposte the Authority of his Countenance, and the Sharpness of his Rebukes to his mutinous Legions, and rebellious Army.

— *stetit agere fulti,*

*Cespites, intrepidus vultu, meruitque timeri  
Nil metuens †.*

Upon a Parapet of Turf he stood,  
His manly Face with Resolution shone,  
And froze the Mutineers rebellious Blood,  
Challenging Fear from all by fearing none.

But it is true withal, that this undaunted Assurance is not to be represented in it's true and lively Form, but by such whom the Apprehension of Death, and the worst that can happen, does no Way terrify and affright; for to represent a pretended Resolution with a pale and doubtful Countenance, and trembling Limbs for the forc'd Service of an important Reconciliation, will effect nothing to purpose. 'Tis an excellent Way to gain the Heart, and conquer the Will of another, to submit, and intrust a Man's Person to him, provided it appear to be frankly done, and without the Constraint of Necessity, and in such a Condition, that a Man manifestly does it out of a pure and intire Confidence

\* *Livius.*

† *Lucan. l. 5.*



in the Party, at least with a Countenance clear from any Cloud of Suspicion. When I was a Boy I saw a Gentleman, who was Governor of a great City, upon Occasion of a popular Commotion and Fury, not knowing what other Course to take, go out of a Place of very great Strength and Security, and commit himself to the Mercy of a seditious Rabble, in Hopes by that Means to appease the Tumult before it grew to a more formidable Head: But it was ill for him that he did so, for he was there miserably slain. But nevertheless I am not of Opinion that he committed so great an Error in going out, as Men commonly reproach his Memory with, as he did in choosing a gentle and submissive Way for the effecting his Purpose, and in endeavouring to quiet this Storm, rather by obeying than commanding, and by Entreaty rather than Remonstrance: I am rather inclined to believe, that a gracious Severity, with a Soldier-like way of commanding, full of Security, and Confidence suitable to the Quality of his Person, and the Dignity of his Command, would have succeeded better with him; at least, he had perish'd with greater Decency and Reputation. There is nothing so little to be expected, or hop'd for from that many-headed Monster the Mob, when incens'd, as Humanity and Good-nature; it is much more capable of Reverence and Fear. I should also reproach him, that, having taken a Resolution (which in my Judgment was rather brave than rash) to expose himself weak and naked in this tempestuous Sea of enraged Franticks, he ought boldly to have stemm'd the Torrent, and to have borne himself bravely aloft; whereas coming to discover his Danger nearer Hand, and his Nose thereupon happening to bleed, he again chang'd that submissive and fawning Countenance he had at first put on, into another of Fear and Amazement, filling both his Mouth and Eyes with Entreaties and Tears, and in that Posture endeavouring to withdraw and secure his Person; that Carriage more inflam'd their Fury, and soon brought the Effects of it upon him. Upon a certain Occasion and in a certain Place, some, who had no honest Meaning, order'd that there should be a general Muster of several Troops in Arms (for that is the most proper Scene of secret Revenges, and there is no Place where they can be executed with greater Safety) and there were publick and manifest



Appearances, that there was no safe coming for some whose principal and necessary Office it was to view them Whereupon a Consultation was call'd and several Counsels were propos'd, as in a Case that was not only very nice of great Difficulty, but of important Consequence. Mine amongst the rest, was, that they should by all Means avoid giving any Sign of Suspicion, but that the Officers who were most in Danger should boldly go, and with cheerful and erect Countenances ride boldly and confidently through the Files and Divisions, and that instead of sparing Fire (which the Advice of the major Part tended to) they should desire the Captains to command the Soldiers to give round and full Volleys in Honour of the Spectators, and not to save their Powder: Which was accordingly done, and had so good an Effect as not only to please and gratify the suspected Troops, but from thenceforth to beget mutual and salutary Confidence and Intelligence amongst them. I look upon *Julius Cæsar's* Way of gaining Men's Affections to him, as the best, and most plausible, that can possibly be put in Practice. First, he try'd by Civility and Commodity to make himself belov'd even by his very Enemies, contenting himself in detected Conspiracies, and publickly to declare, that he was pre-acquainted with them, which being done, he took a noble Resolution to expose himself without Solicitude or Fear, whatever might be the Event, wholly resigning himself up to the Protection of the Gods and Fortune: For questionless in this very Estate he was at the Time when he was kill'd. A Stranger having publickly said, that he could teach *Dionysius*, the Tyrant of *Syracuse*, an infallible way to find out and discover all Conspiracies his Subjects should contrive against him, he would give him a good Sum of Money for his Pain, *Dionysius*, hearing of it, caus'd the Man to be brought to him, that he might learn an Art so necessary to his Preservation; and having asked him by what Art he might make such Discoveries, the Fellow made Answer, That all the Art he knew, was, That he should give him a Talent, and afterwards boast, that he had obtain'd a singular Secret from him. *Dionysius* lik'd the Invention, and accordingly caus'd six hundred Crowns to be counted out to him. It was not likely he should give so great a Sum to a Person unknown, but upon the Account of some extraordinary



dinary Discovery, the Belief of which serv'd to keep his Enemies in Awe. Princes however do very wisely, to publish the Informations they receive of all the Practices against their Lives, to possess Men with an Opinion that they have such good Intelligence, and so many Spies abroad, that nothing can be plotted against them, but they have immediate Notice of it. The Duke of Athens did a great many ridiculous Things to establish his new Tyranny over Florence: But this especially was most remarkable; that having receiv'd the first Intimation of the Conspiracies the People were hatching against him, from *Mattheo di Morofo*, one of the Conspirators, he presently put him to Death, to stifle that Rumour, that it might not be thought any of the City dislik'd his Government. I remember to have formerly read a Story of some Roman of great Quality, who, flying the Tyranny of the *Triumvirate*, had a thousand Times, by the Subtilty of as many Inventions, escap'd from falling into the Hands of those that pursu'd him. It happened one Day, that a Troop of Horse which was sent out to take him pass'd close by a Brake where he was squat, and miss'd very narrowly of spying him: But he considering, upon the Instant, the Pains and Difficulties wherein he had so long continued, to evade the strict and continual Searches every Day made for him, the little Pleasure he could hope for in such a Kind of Life, and how much better it was for him to die once for all, than to be perpetually at this Pass, he started from his Seat himself, call'd them back, shew'd them his Hiding-Place, and voluntarily deliver'd himself up to their Cruelty, by that Means to free both himself and them from farther Trouble. To invite a Man's Enemies to come and cut his Throat was a Resolution that appears a little extravagant and odd; and yet I think he did better to take that Course, than to live in a *Quotidian* Ague, for which there was no Cure. But seeing all the Remedies a Man can apply to such a Disease are full of Unquietness and uncertain, 'tis better with a manly Courage to prepare one's self for the worst that can happen, and to extract some Consolation from this, that we are not certain the Thing we fear will ever come to pass.