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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. 41. Not to communicate a Man's Honour.

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



C H A P. XLI.

Not to communicate a Man's Honour.

OF all the Follies of the World, that which is most universally received is the Solitude of Reputation and Glory, which we are fond of to that Degree, as to abandon Riches, Peace, Life and Health, which are effectual and substantial Goods, to pursue this vain Phantom, and empty Word, that has neither Body nor Hold to be taken of it.

*La fama ch' invaghisce a un dolce suono
Gli superbi mortali, & par' si bella
Eun echo, un Sogno, anzi d' un Sogno un' ombra
Ch' ad ogni vento si dilegua, & sgombra*.*

Honour, that with such an alluring Sound,
Proud Mortals charms, and does appear so fair,
An Echo, Dream, Shade of a Dream is found,
Dispers'd abroad by ev'ry Breath of Air.

And of all the irrational Humours of Men, it should seem, that even the Philosophers themselves have the most ado, and do the latest disengage themselves from this, as the most resty and obstinate of human Follies. *Quia etiam bene proficientis animos tentare non cessat †: Because it ceases not to attack even the wisest and best lettered Minds.* There is not any one Vice, of which Reason does so clearly accuse the Vanity, as of that; but it is so deeply rooted in us, that I dare not determine, whether any one ever clearly sequestered himself from it or no. After you have said all, and believed all that has been said to it's Prejudice, it creates so intestine an Inclination in Opposition to your best Argu-

* *Tasso. Canto 10.*

† *Aug. de Civit. Dei.*

ments,

ments, that you have little Power and Constancy to resist it: For (as *Cicero* says) even those who most controvert it, would yet, that the Books they write should visit the Light under their own Names, and seek to derive Glory from seeming to despise it. All other Things are communicable, and fall into Commerce; we lend our Goods, and stake our Lives for the Necessity and Service of our Friends; but to communicate a Man's Honour, and to rob another with a Man's own Glory, is very rarely seen. And yet we have some Examples of that Kind. *Catulus Lucretius* in the *Cymbrian* War, having done all that in him lay to make his flying Soldiers face about upon the Enemy, ran himself at last away with the rest, and counterfeited the Coward, to the End his Men might rather seem to follow their Captain, than to fly from the Enemy; which was to abandon his own Reputation, to palliate the Shame of others. When *Charles* the Fifth came into *Provence* in the Year 1537, 'tis said, that *Antonio de Leva* seeing the Emperor positively resolved upon this Expedition, and believing it would redound very much to his Honour, did nevertheless very stiffly oppose it in the Council, to the End that the entire Glory of that Resolution should be attributed to his Master; and that it might be said, his own Wisdom and Foresight had been such, as that, contrary to the Opinion of all, he had brought about so great, and so generous an Enterprize, which was to do him Honour at his own Expence. The *Thracian* Embassadors, coming to comfort *Archileonida*, the Mother of *Brasidas*, upon the Death of her Son, and commending him to that Height, as to say, he had not left his Like behind him; she rejected this private and particular Commendation, to attribute it to the Publick: Tell me not that (said she) I know the City of *Sparta* has several Citizens both greater, and of greater Valour than he. In the Battle of *Cressy*, the Prince of *Wales*, being then very young, had the Vant-guard committed to him, and the main Strefs of the Battle happened to be in that Place, which made the Lords that were with him, finding themselves over-match'd, to send to King *Edward*, that he would please to advance to their Relief; who thereupon enquiring what Condition his Son was in, and being answered, that he was yet living, and on Horse-back: I should then do
him

him Wrong (said the King) now to go, and deprive him of the Honour of winning this Battle he has so long, and so bravely disputed, what Hazard soever he runs, it shall be entirely his own: And accordingly would neither go nor send, knowing that if he went, it would be said all had been lost without his Succour, and that the Honour of the Victory would be wholly attributed to him. *Semper enim quod postremum adjectum est, id rem totam videtur traxisse.* For the last Stroke to a Business seems to draw along with it the Performance of the whole Action. Many at Rome thought, and would usually say, that the greatest of *Scipio's* Acts were, in Part, due to *Lelius*, whose constant Practice it was still to advance, and shoulder *Scipio's* Grandeur and Renown, without any Care of his own. And *Theopompus*, King of *Sparta*, to him who told him the Republick could not miscarry, since he knew so well how to command. 'Tis rather (answered he) because the People know so well how to obey. As Women succeeding to Peerages, had, notwithstanding their Sex, the Privilege to assist, and give in their Votes in the Causes that appertained to the Jurisdiction of Peers: So the Ecclesiastical Peers, notwithstanding their Profession, were obliged to assist our Kings in their Wars, not only with their Friends and Servants, but in their own Persons. As the Bishop of *Beauvais* did, who being with *Philip Augustus* at the Battle of *Bouvines*, had a notable Share in that Action; but he did not think it fit for him to participate in the Fruit and Glory of that violent and bloody Trade. He with his own Hand reduced several of the Enemy that Day to his Mercy, whom he delivered to the first Gentleman he met, either to kill, or to receive them to Quarter, referring the Execution to another Hand. As also did *William*, Earl of *Salisbury*, to Messire *Jane de Nesle*, with a like Subtlety of Conscience to the other we named before, he would kill, but not wound him, and for that Reason ever fought with a Mace. And a certain Person of my Time, being reproached by the King, that he had laid Hands on a Priest, stiffly and positively deny'd he had done any such Thing: The Meaning of which was, he had cudgell'd and kick'd him.