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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. 47. Of the Uncertainty of our Judgment.

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

Survivors indeed tickle themselves with these Praises, and by them incited to Jealousy or Desire, inconsiderately, and according to their own Fancy, attribute to the Dead those Virtues themselves pretend to most: God knows how vainly flattering themselves, that they shall one Day in Turn be capable of the same Characters: However,

Ad hæc se
 Romanus, Grajusque & Barbarus, *Induperator*
Erexit; causas discriminis, atque laboris
Inde habuit, tanto major famæ sitis est, quam
Virtutis †.

Greek, Roman, and Barbarian Chiefs to these,
 Devote their Valour and Contrivances,
 And to the Greediness of Glory woe
 The Dangers and Fatigues they undergo;
 So much more potent is the Thirst of Fame
 Than that of Virtue.



C H A P. XLVII.

Of the Uncertainty of our Judgment.

IT was well said of the Poet,

Ἐπέων δὲ πολλὸς νόμος ἔνθα κ' ἔνθα †.

There is every where Liberty of Arguing enough, and enough to be said on both Sides: For Example;

Vince Annibal', & non seppe usar' poi
Ben la vittoriosa sua ventura †.

* *Juvenal. Sat. 10.* † *Homer. Iliad. 20.* ‡ *Vetrar. Son. 83.*

Hannibal

Hannibal conquered ; but was not wise
To make the best Use of his Victories.

Such as would improve this Argument, and condemn the Oversight of our Leaders, in not pushing home the Victory at *Moncontour* ; or accuse the King of *Spain* of not knowing how to make his best Use of the Advantage he had against us at *St. Quintin*, may conclude these Oversights to proceed from a Soul already drunk with Success, or from a Courage, which being full, and over-gorged with this Beginning of good Fortune, had lost the Appetite of adding to it, having already enough to do to digest what it had taken in : He has his Arms full, and can embrace no more : Unworthy of the Benefit conferred upon him, and the Advantage she had put into his Hands : For what Utility does he reap from it, if, notwithstanding, he gives his Enemy Respite to rally, recover his Astonishment, and to make head against him ? What Hope is there, that he will dare at another Time to attack an Enemy re-united and re-composed, and armed a-new with Spite and Revenge, who did not dare to pursue him when routed, and unmanned by Fear ?

Dum fortuna calet, dum conficit omnia terror *.

Whilst Fortune's in the Heat, and Terror does,
More than their sharpest Swords, subdue their Foes.

But withal, what better Opportunity can he expect, than that he has lost : 'Tis not here, as in Fencing, where the most Hits gain the Prize : For so long as the Enemy is on Foot, the Game is new to begin, and that is not to be called a Victory, that puts an End to the War. In the Encounter where *Caesar* had the worse, near to the City of *Oricum*, he reproached *Pompey's* Soldiers, that he had been lost, had their General known how to overcome ; and afterwards beat him in his Turn. But why may not a Man also argue on the contrary, that it is the Effect of a precipitous and

* *Lucret. l. 7.*

infatiate

insatiate Spirit, not to know how to bind and restrain it's Ardour: That it is to abuse the Favours of God, to exceed the Measure he has prescribed them: And that again, to throw a Man's self into Danger, after a Victory obtained, is again to expose himself to the Mercy of Fortune: And that it is one of the greatest Discretions in the Rule of War, not to drive an Enemy to Despair. *Sylla* and *Marius*, in the Associate War, having defeated the *Marfians*; seeing yet a Body of Reserve, that, prompted by Despair, was coming on like enraged Brutes to charge in upon them, thought it not convenient to stand their Charge. Had not *Monfieur De Foix's* Ardour transported him so precipitously to pursue the Remains of the Victory of *Ravenna*, he had not obscur'd it by his own Death. And yet the recent Memory of his Example served to preserve *Monfieur d'Anguien* from the same Misfortune at the Battle of *Serifoles*. 'Tis dangerous to attack a Man you have deprived of all Means to escape, but by his Arms: For Necessity teaches violent Resolutions: *Gravissimi sunt morsus irritatæ Necessitatis**: Enrag'd Necessity bites deep.

Vincitur haud gratis jugulo qui provocat hostem †.

The Foe that meets the Sword ne'er gratis dies.

This was that made *Pharax* with-hold the King of *Lacedæmon*, who had won a Battle of the *Mantineans*, from going to charge a thousand *Argians*, who were escaped in an entire Body from the Defeat; but rather let them steal off at Liberty, that he might not encounter Valour whetted and enraged by Mischance; *Clodomire*, King of *Aquitaine*, after his Victory pursuing *Gondemar*, King of *Burgundy*, beaten, and making off as fast as he could for Safety, compelled him to face about, and make head, wherein his Obstinacy deprived him of the Fruit of his Conquest; for he there lost his Life.

In like Manner, if a Man were to chuse, whether he would have his Soldiers *Ainquant*, and richly accouter'd with *Damask* Arms, or armed only for necessary Defence;

* *Port. Lat. in Decla.* † *Luc. lib. 4. Majes Luc.*
this

this Argument would step in, in Favour of the first (of which Opinion was *Sertorius*, *Philopœmen*, *Brutus*, *Cæsar*, and others) that it is to a Soldier an Enflaming of Courage, and a Spur to Glory, to see himself brave, and withal an Imitation to be more obstinate in Fight, having his Arms, which are in a Manner his Estate, and whole Inheritance, to defend; which is the Reason, says *Xenophon*, why those of *Asia* carried their Wives, Concubines, with their choicest Jewels, and greatest Wealth, along with them to the Wars. But then these Arguments would be as ready to stand up for the other Side; that a General ought rather to render his Men careless and desperate, than to increase their Solitude of preserving themselves: That by this Means they will be in a double Fear of hazarding their Persons; as it will be a double Temptation to the Enemy to fight with greater Resolution, where so great Booty and so rich Spoils are to be obtained: And this very Thing has been observed in former Times, notably to encourage the *Romans* against the *Samnites*. *Antiochus* shewing *Hannibal* the Army he had raised, wonderfully splendid, and rich in all Sorts of Equipage, asked him, If the *Romans* would be satisfied with that Army? Satisfied! replied the other, yes, doubtless, were their Avarice never so great. *Lycurgus* not only forbid his Soldiers all Manner of Bravery in their Equipage, but moreover to strip their conquer'd Enemies, because he would (as he said) that Poverty and Frugality should shine with the rest of the Battle.

At Sieges and elsewhere, where Occasion draws us near to the Enemy, we willingly suffer our Men to brave, rate, and affront the Enemy with all Sorts of injurious Language; and not without some Colour of Reason: For it is of no little Consequence to take from them all Hopes of Mercy and Composition, in representing to them, that there is no fair Quarter to be expected from an Enemy they have incensed to that Degree, nor other Remedy remaining, but in the Victory. And yet *Vitellius* found himself deceived in his Way of Proceeding; for having to do with *Otho*, weaker in the Valour of his Soldiers, long unaccustom'd to War, and effeminated with the Delights of the City; he so nettled them at last with injurious Language, reproaching them with Cowardice, and the Regret of the
Mistresses,

Mistresses, and Entertainments they had left behind at *Rome*, that by this Means he inspired them with such Resolution, as no Exhortation would have had the Power to have done; and himself made them fall upon him, with whom their own Captains before could by no Means prevail. And, indeed, when they are Injuries that touch to the Quick, it may very well fall out, that he who went but ill-favouredly to work in the Behalf of his Prince, will fall to't with another Sort of Mettle when the Quarrel is his own;

To consider of how great Importance is the Preservation of the General of an Army, and that the universal Aim of an Enemy is levelled directly at the Head, upon which all the others depend; the Advice seems to admit of no Dispute, which we know has been taken by so many great Captains, of changing their Habit, and disguising their Persons, upon the Point of going to engage. Nevertheless the Inconvenience a Man, by so doing, runs into, is not less than that he thinks to avoid: For the Captain by this Means being concealed from the Knowledge of his own Men, the Courage they should derive from his Presence and Example, happens by degrees to cool and to decay;

and not seeing the wonted * Marks and
 * *As at the Battle of Ivry, in the Person of Henry the Great.* Ensigns of their Leader, they presently conclude him either dead, or that, despairing of the Business, he is gone to shift for himself; and Experience shews

us that both these Ways have been both successful, and otherwise. What befel *Pyrrhus* in the Battle he fought against the Consul *Levinus* in *Italy*, will serve us to both Purposes: For though by shrouding his Person under the Arms of *Demogacles*, and making him wear his own, he undoubtedly preserved his own Life, yet by that very Means he was withal very near running into the other Mischief of losing the Battle. *Alexander, Cæsar, and Lucullus*, loved to make themselves known in a Battle, by rich Furniture, and Arms of a particular Lustre and Colour: *Agis, Agesilaus*, and that great *Gilippus*, on the contrary, used to fight obscurely armed, and without any imperial Attendance or Distinction.

Amongst other Over-sights *Pompey* is charged withal at the Battle of *Pharsalia*, he is condemned for making his
 Army

Army stand still to receive the Enemies Charge; by Reason that (I shall here steal *Plutarch's* own Words, that are better than mine) he, by so doing, deprived himself of the violent Impression the Motion of running adds to the first Shock of Arms, and hindred the Justle of the Combatants (who were wont to give great Impetuosity and Fury to the first Encounter; especially when they came to rush in with their utmost Vigour, their Courages increasing by the Shouts and the Career) thereby rendering his Soldiers Animosity and Ardour, as a Man may say, more reserved and cold. This is what *Plutarch* says: But if *Cæsar* had come by the worse, why might it not as well have been urged by another, That, on the contrary, the strongest and most steady Posture of Fighting, is that wherein a Man stands planted firm without Motion; and that they, who make a Halt upon their March, closing up, and reserving their Force within themselves for the Push of the Business, have a great Advantage against those who are disordered, and who have already spent half their Breath in running on precipitously to the Charge: Besides, that an Army being a Body made up of so many individual Members, it is impossible for it to move in this Fury with so exact a Motion as no: to break the Order of Battle, and that the best of the Foot are engaged before their Fellows can come in to relieve them. In that unnatural Battle betwixt the two *Persian* Brothers, the *Lacedæmonian Clearchus*, who commanded the *Greeks* of *Cyrus's* Party, led them on softly, and without Precipitation, to the Charge; but coming within fifty Paces, hurry'd them on full Speed, hoping in so short a Career, both to look to their Order, to husband their Breath, and, at the same Time, to give an Advantage of Violence and Impression both to their Persons and their missive Arms: Others have regulated this Question in charging thus; if your Enemy come running upon you, stand firm to receive him; if he stand to receive you, run full drive upon him.

In the Expedition of the Emperor *Charles* the Fifth into *Provence*, King *Francis* was put to chuse either to go meet him in *Italy*, or to expect him in his own Dominions; wherein, though he very well considered of how great Advantage it was to preserve his own Territories entire, and clear from the Troubles and Inconveniencies of the War, to
the

the End, that being unexhausted of her Stores, it might continually supply Men and Money at Need, that the Necessity of War requires at every Turn to spoil, and lay waste the Country before them, which cannot very well be done upon one's own; to which may be added, that the Country People do not so easily digest such a Havock by those of their own Party, as from an Enemy, so that Seditions and Commotions might by such Means be kindled amongst us; that the Licence of Pillage and Plunder (which are not to be tolerated at home) is a great Ease and Refreshment against the Fatigues and Sufferings of War; and that he who has no other Prospect of Gain than his bare Pay, will hardly be kept from running Home, being but two Steps from his Wife and his own House; that he who lays the Cloth, is ever at the Charge of the Feast: That there is more Alacrity in Assaulting than Defending; and that the Loss of a Battle in our own Bowels gives so violent a Shock, as to endanger the disjointing of the whole Body, there being no Passion so contagious as that of Fear, that is so easily believed, or that so suddenly diffuses it's Poison; and that the Cities that should hear the Rattle of this Tempest, that should take in their Captains and Soldiers, yet trembling and out of Breath, would be in Danger, in this Heat and Hurry, to precipitate themselves upon some untoward Resolution: Notwithstanding all this, so it was, that he chose to recal the Forces he had beyond the Mountains, and to suffer the Enemy to come to him. For he might, on the other Side, imagine, that being at Home, and amongst his Friends, he could not fail of Plenty of all Manner of Conveniencies; the Rivers and Passes he had at his Devotion, would bring him in both Provisions and Money in all Security, and without the Trouble of Convoy; that he should find his Subjects by so much the more affectionate to him, by how much their Danger was more near and pressing; that having so many Cities and Stops to secure him, it would be in his Power to give the Law of Battle at his own Opportunity and best Advantage; and if it pleased him to delay the Time, that, under Covert, and at his own Ease, he might see his Enemy founder, and defeat himself with the Difficulties he was certain to encounter, being engaged in an Enemy's Country, where before, behind,

behind, and on every Side, War would be upon him; no Means to refresh himself, or to enlarge his Quarters, should Diseases infest them, or to lodge his wounded Men in Safety: No Money, no Victuals, but all at the Point of the Lance; no Leisure to repose and take Breath; no Knowledge of the Ways or Country, to secure him from Ambushes and Surprizes: And in Case of losing a Battle, no possible Means of saving the Remains. Neither is there Want of Example in both these Cases. *Scipio* thought it much better to go and attack his Enemy's Territories in *Africk*, than to stay at home to defend his own, and fight him in *Italy*; and it succeeded well with him: But, on the contrary, *Hannibal*, in the same War, ruin'd himself, by abandoning the Conquest of a strange Country, to go defend his own. The *Athenians* having left the Enemy in their own Dominions, to go over into *Sicily*, were not favoured by Fortune in their Design; but *Agathocles*, King of *Syracuse*, found her favourable to him, when he went over into *Africk*, and left the War at home. By which Examples, and divers others, we are wont to conclude, and with some Reason, that Events, especially in War, do for the most Part depend upon Fortune, who will not be govern'd by, nor submit unto human Prudence, according to the Poet,

*Et male consultis pretium est, prudentia fallax,
Nec fortuna probat causas, sequiturque merentes:
Sed vaga per cunctos nullo discrimine fertur.
Scilicet est aliud quod nos cogatque, regatque
Majus, & in proprias ducat mortalia leges*.*

Prudence deceitful and uncertain is,
Ill Counsels sometimes hit, where good Ones miss;
Nor yet does Fortune the best Cause approve,
But wildly does, without Distinction, rove.
So that some greater and more constant Cause,
Rules and subjects us to more powerful Laws:

But if Things hit right, it should seem that our Counsels
and Deliberations depend as much upon Fortune, as any

* *Manil. Astron. lib. 4.*

Thing else we do, and that she engages our very Reason and Arguments in her Uncertainty and Confusion. We argue rashly and adventurously, says *Timæus* in *Plato*, by Reason that, as well as ourselves, our Discourses have great Participation with the Temerity of Chance.



C H A P. XLVIII.

Of Horses dressed to the Manage, called Destriers.

I AM now become a *Grammarian*; I, who never learned any Language but by rote, and who do not yet know *Adjective*, *Conjunctive*, or *Ablative*, think I have read, that the *Romans* had a Sort of Horses by them called *Funales*, or *Dextrarios*, which were either Led-Horses, or Horses laid in at several Stages to be taken fresh upon Occasion; and thence it is, that we call our Horses of Service, *Destriers*: And our *Romances* commonly use the Phrase of *Destrier* for *Accompagner*, to accompany. They also called these Horses *Defultorios Equos*, which were taught to run full Speed Side by Side, without Bridle or Saddle, so as that the *Roman* Gentlemen armed at all Pieces, would shift and throw themselves from the one to the other. The *Numidian* Men at Arms had always a Led-Horse in one Hand, besides that they rode upon, to change in the Heat of Battle: *Quibus, Defultorum in modum, binos trabentibus equos, inter acerrimam sæpe pugnam in recentam equum ex fesso armatis, transultare, mos erat. Tanta velocitas ipsis, tamque docile equorum genus**. Whose Custom it was, leading along two Horses, after the Manner of the *Defultorum*, armed as they were, in the Heat of Fight, to vault from a tired Horse to a fresh one; so active were the Men, and the Horses so docile. There are many Horses trained up to help their Riders, so as to run upon any one that appears with a drawn Sword, to fall

* *Liv. l. 23.*