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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**

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## C H A P. XXXIV.

*Observation of the Means to carry on a War according to Julius Cæsar.*

'TIS said of many great Leaders, *That they have had certain Books in particular Esteem*, as *Alexander the Great, Homer; Scipio Africanus, Xenophon; Marcus Brutus, Polybius; Charles the Fifth, Philip de Comines*; and 'tis said, *That in our Times Machiavel is elsewhere in Repute*; but the late *Mareschal Strossy*, who took *Cæsar* for his Man, doubtless made the best Choice, being that that Book in Truth ought to be the Breviary of every great Soldier, as being the true and most excellent Pattern of all Military Art. And moreover, God knows with what Grace and Beauty he has embellish'd that rich Matter, with so pure, delicate, and perfect Expression, that, in my Opinion, there are no Writings in the World comparable to his, as to that. I will set down some rare and peculiar Passages of his Wars that remain in my Memory.

His Army being in some Consternation upon the Rumour that was spread of the great Forces that King *Juba* was leading against him, instead of abating the Apprehension which his Soldiers had conceiv'd at the News, and of lessening the Forces of the Enemy, having call'd them all together to encourage and re-assure them, he took a quite contrary way to what we are us'd to do, for he told them, *that they needed no more to trouble themselves with enquiring after the Enemy's Forces, for that he was certainly inform'd thereof*, and then told them of a Number much surpassing the Truth and Report that was rumour'd in his Army; following the Advice of *Cyrus* in *Xenophon*; forasmuch as the Imposture is not of so great Importance to find an Enemy weaker than we expected, than to find him really strong, after having been made to believe that

he

he was weak. It was also his Use to accustom his Soldiers simply to obey, without taking upon them to controul, or so much as to speak of their Captain's Designs; which he never communicated to them but upon the Point of Execution, and took a Delight, if they discover'd any thing of what he intended, immediately to change his Orders to deceive them; and to that Purpose would often, when he had assign'd his Quarters in a Place, pass forward and lengthen his Days March, especially if it was foul Weather. The *Swisse*, in the Beginning of his Wars in *Gaul*, having sent to him to demand a free Passage over the Roman Territories; tho' resolved to hinder them by Force, he nevertheless spoke kindly to the Messengers, and took some respite to return an Answer, to make use of that time for recalling his Army together. These silly People did not know how good a Husband he was of his Time: For he does often repeat, *That it is the best Part of a Captain to know how to make use of Occasions*, and his Diligence in his Exploits are in Truth unparallel'd and incredible. If he was not very Conscientious in taking Advantage of an Enemy under colour of a Treaty of Agreement, he was as little in this, that he requir'd no other Virtue in a Soldier, but Valour only, and seldom punish'd any other Faults but Mutiny and Disobedience. He would oft after his Victories turn them loose to all sorts of Licence, dispensing with them, for some time, from the Rules of Military Discipline, saying withal, *That he had Soldiers well train'd up, that powder'd and perfum'd; they would run furiously to the Fight*. In truth, he lov'd to have them richly arm'd, and made them wear engraved, gilded and damask'd Arms, to the End that the Care of saving their Arms might engage them to a more obstinate Defence. Speaking to them, he call'd them by the Name of *Fellow-Soldiers*, which we yet use; which his Successor *Augustus* reform'd, supposing he had only done it upon Necessity, and to cajole those who only follow'd him as Volunteers;

*The Obedience of Cæsar's Soldiers.*

*Rheni mihi Cæsar in undis,*

*Dux erat, hic socius, facinus quos inquinat æquat \**.

\* *Lucan. l. 5.*

H h

Great

Great *Cæsar*, who my Gen'ral did appear  
 Upon the Banks of *Rhine*, 's my Fellow here ;  
 For Wickedness where it once hold does take.  
 All Men whom it defiles does equal make.

but that this Carriage was too mean and low for the Dignity of an Emperor and General of an Army ; and therefore brought up the Custom of calling them *Soldiers* only. With this Courtesy *Cæsar* mixt great Severity to keep them in Awe. The ninth *Legion* having mutiny'd near *Placentia*, he ignominiously cashier'd them, tho' *Pompey* was then yet on Foot, and receiv'd them not again to Grace till after many Supplications. He quieted them more by Authority and Boldness than by gentle ways. In that Place where he speaks of his Passage over the *Rhine* towards *Germany*, he says, *That thinking it unworthy of the Honour of Roman People to waft over his Army in Vessels, he built a Bridge that they might pass over Dry Foot.* There it was that he built that wonderful *Bridge*, of which he gives a particular Description : For he no where so willingly insits upon his own Actions, as in representing to us the Subtilty of his Inventions in such Kind of Things.

*Exhortations to Soldiers before a Battle of great Importance.*

I have also observ'd this, that he set a great Value upon his Exhortations to the Soldiers before the Fight ; for where he should shew that he was either surpriz'd, or reduc'd to a Necessity of Fighting, he always brings in this, *That he had not so much as Leisure to Harangue his Army.* Before that great Battle with those of *Tournay*, *Cæsar*, says he, *having given Order for every thing else, presently ran where Fortune carried him to encourage his People, and meeting with the tenth Legion, had no more time to say any thing to them but this, That they should remember their wonted Valour, not be astonish'd, but bravely sustain the Enemies Encounter ;* and being the Enemy was already approach'd within a Dart's cast, he gave the Signal of Battle ; and going suddenly thence elsewhere to encourage others, he found that they were already engag'd. His Tongue has indeed done him notable Service upon several Occasions, and his Military Eloquence was in his own Time so highly reputed, that many of his Army writ down his *Harangues* as

as he spoke them, by which Means there were Volumes of them collected that continued a long Time after him. He had so particular a Grace in speaking, that they who were particularly acquainted with him, and *Augustus*, amongst others, hearing those Orations read, could distinguish even to the Phrases and Words that were none of his. The first time that he went out of *Rome* with any publick Command, he arriv'd in eight Days at the River *Rhine*, having with him in his Coach a Secretary or two before him who were continually writing, and him that carried his Sword behind him. And certainly, though a Man did nothing but intend his way, he could hardly have perform'd that Journey so soon. With which Promptness having been every where Victorious in *Gaul*, he left it, and following *Pompey* to *Brundisium*, in eighteen Days time he subdued all *Italy*, return'd from *Brundisium* to *Rome*, and from *Rome* went into the very Heart of *Spain*, where he underwent extreme Difficulties in the War against *Afranius* and *Petrius*, and in the long Siege of *Marcelles*; from thence he returned into *Macedonia*, beat the *Roman* Army at *Pharsalia*; passed from thence in Pursuit of *Pompey* into *Egypt*, which he also subdu'd; from *Egypt* he went into *Syria*, and the Territories of *Pontus*, where he fought *Pharnaces*; from thence into *Africk*, where he defeated *Scipio* and *Juba*; again returned through *Italy* into *Spain*, where he defeated *Pompey's* Sons.

Cæsar's  
Promptness in  
his Expeditions.

Ocior & cæli flammis & tigride fleta.  
Ac veluti montis saxum de vertice præceps  
Cum ruit avulsum vento, seu turbidus imber  
Proluit, aut annis solvit sublapsa vetustas,  
Fertur in abruptum magno mons improbus actu,  
Exultatque solo, silvas, armenta, virosque,  
Involvens secum \*.

\* *Lucan. lib. 5. Virg. Æn. lib. 12.*

Swifter than Lightning, or the furious Course  
 Of the fell Tigress when she is a Nurse ;  
 And as a Stone, torn from the Mountain's crown  
 By some rough Wind, thence tumbles headlong down,  
 Whether wash'd off by Torrents of a Shower  
 Or loos'd by Age's all subduing Power,  
 The pond'rous Mass falls with a mighty Force,  
 And grazing here and there, does in its Course  
 Sweep all before it, Men, and Flocks, and Doves,  
 And levels with the Earth opposing Groves.

Speaking of the Siege of *Avaricum*, he says, *that it was his Custom to be Night and Day with the Pioneers*. In all Enterprizes of Consequence he still reconnoitred in Person, and never brought his Army into Quarters till he had first view'd the Place. And if we may believe *Suetonius*, when he resolv'd to pass over into *England*, he was the first Man that sounded the Passage. He used to say, *that he more valu'd a Victory obtain'd by Counsel than Force*. And in the War against *Petreius*, and *Afranius*, Fortune presenting him with an Occasion of manifest Advantage, he declin'd it, saying, *that he hop'd with a little more Time and less Hazard to overthrow his Enemies*. He there also play'd a notable Part, in commanding his whole Army to pass the River by Swimming, without any manner of Necessity.

— *rapuitque ruens in prælio miles*  
*Quod fugiens timuisset iter, mox uda receptis*  
*Membra fovent armis, gelidosque à gurgite, cursu*  
*Restituunt artus* \*.

The Soldiers rush thorough a Pass to fight  
 They would have been afraid t' have ta'en in flight  
 Then with their Arms their wet Limbs cover o'er,  
 And their numb'd Joints by running do restore.

I find him a little more temperate and considerate in his Enterprizes than *Alexander*, for this seems to seek and run headlong upon Dangers, like an impetuous Torrent that

\* *Lucan. lib. 4.*

attacks and rushes against every thing it meets, without Choice or Discretion.

*Sic tauriformis volvitur Aufidus,  
Qui regna Dauni perfluit Appuli  
Dum sævit, horrendamque ; cultis  
Diluviem meditatur agris \*.*

So the biforked *Aufidus* amain  
Runs bellowing forth along th' *Apulian* Plain,  
When he with Rage, and swelling Floods abounds,  
Threatning a Deluge to the tilled Grounds.

And indeed he was a General in the Flower and first Heat of his Youth, whereas *Cæsar* took up at the Trade at a ripe and well advanc'd Age. To which may moreover be added, that *Alexander* was of a more sanguine, hot and choleric Constitution, apt to push him on to such Extravagancies, which he also inflam'd with Wine, from which *Cæsar* was very abstinent : But where necessary Occasion requir'd, never did any Man venture his Person more than he : So much that for my part, methinks, I read in many of his Exploits a determinate Resolution to throw himself away, to avoid the Shame of being overcome. In his great Battle with those of *Tournay*, he charg'd up to the Head of the Enemies without his Shield, as he was surpriz'd, seeing the Van of his own *Army* beginning to give ground, which was also several Times befallen him. Hearing that his People were besieg'd, he pass'd through the Enemies Army in Disguise to go encourage them with his Presence. Having cross'd over to *Dyrrachium* with very slender Forces, and seeing the Remainder of his *Army*, which he left to *Antonius's* Conduct, slow in following him, he attempted alone to repass the Sea in a very great Storm ; and privately stole away to fetch the rest of his Forces, the Ports on the other Side being seiz'd by *Pompey*, and the whole Sea being in his Possession. And as to what he perform'd by force of Hand, there are very many Exploits that in Hazard exceed all the Rules of War : For with how small means did he undertake to subdue the Kingdom of *Egypt*, and afterwards to attack the Forces

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\* *Horat. lib. 4. Ode 14.*

of *Scipio* and *Juba*, ten times greater than his? These People have had I know not what of more than Human Confidence in their Fortune, and his usual Saying was, *that Men must execute and not deliberate upon Enterprizes*. After the Battle of *Pharsalia*, when he had sent his Army away before him into *Asia*, and was passing in one single Vessel the Streight of the *Hellepont*, he met *Lucius Cassius* at Sea with ten tall Men of War, where he had the Courage not only to stay his coming, but to stand up with him, and summon him to yield, and did his Business. Having undertaken that furious Siege of *Alexia*, where there were fourscore thousand Men in Garrison, and that all *Gaul* was in Arms to raise the Siege, having set an Army on foot of a hundred and nine thousand *Horse*, and of two hundred and forty thousand *Foot*, what a Boldness and mad Confidence was it in him, that he would not give over his Attempt and retire, in two so invincible Difficulties? which nevertheless he underwent: And after having won that great Battle against those without, soon reduc'd those within to his Mercy. The same happen'd to *Lucullus* at the Siege of *Tigranocerta* against King *Tigranes*, but the Condition of the *Enemy* was not the same, considering the Effeminaey of those with whom *Lucullus* had to deal. I will here set down two rare and extraordinary Events concerning this Siege of *Alexia*; one, that the *Gauls* having drawn their Powers together to encounter *Cæsar*, after they had made a general Muster of all their Forces, resolv'd in their *Council of War* to dismiss a good Part of this great Multitude, that they might not fall into Confusion, This Example of fearing being too many is new; but to take it right, it stands to reason, that the Body of an Army should be of a moderate Greatness, and regulated to certain Bounds, both out of respect to the Difficulty of providing for them, and the Difficulty of governing and keeping them in Order. At least it is very easy to make it appear by Example, that Armies so monstrous in Number have seldom done any thing to Purpose. According to the saying of *Cyrus* in *Xenophon*, 'Tis not the Number of Men, but the Number of Good Men that gives the Advantage; the Remainder serving rather to trouble than assist. And *Bajazet* principally grounded his Resolution of giving

*Tamerlane*



*Tamerlane* Battle, contrary to the Opinion of all his Captains, upon this, that his Enemies numberless number of Men gave him assured Hopes of Confusion. *Scanderberg*, a very good and expert Judge in such Matters, was used to say, *that ten or twelve thousand faithful fighting Men were sufficient to a good Leader, to secure his Reputation in all sorts of Military Occasions.*

*That great numbers of Men cause Confusion.*

The other Thing I will here record, which seems to be contrary both to Custom and Rules of War, is, that *Vercingetorix*, who was made General of all the Parts of revolted *Gaul*, should go shut up himself in *Alexia*: For he who has the Command of a whole Country, ought never to engage his Person but in Case of the last Extremity, that the only Place he had left was in the Defence of that City; Otherwise he ought to keep himself always at Liberty, that he may have means to provide in general for all parts of his Government.

To return to *Cæsar*. He grew in time more slow, and more considerate, as his Friend *Oppius* bears witness; conceiving that he ought not easily to hazard the Glory of so many Victories, of which one Blow of Fortune might deprive him. 'Tis what the *Italians* say, when they would reproach the Rashness and Fool-hardiness of young People, calling them *Bisognosi d'honore, necessitous of Honour*; and that being in so great a Want and Dearth of Reputation, they have reason to seek it at what Price soever, which they ought not to do, who have acquir'd enough already. There might reasonably then be some Moderation, and some Satiety in this Thirst and Appetite of Glory, as well as in other things; and there are enough that practise it. He was far remote from the religious Observation of the ancient *Romans*, who would never prevail in their Wars, but by dint of Truce, and simple Valour; and yet he was more Conscientious than we should be in these Days, and did not approve all sorts of Means to obtain a Victory. In the War against *Ariovistus*, whilst he was parlying with him, there happen'd a great Tumult, which was occasioned by the Fault of *Ariovistus's Light-Horse*, wherein, though *Cæsar* saw he had a very great Advantage of the Enemy, he would make no use on't, lest he should be reproach'd with a treacherous Proceeding. He always used to wear a rich Garment, and

of a shining Colour in Battle, that he might be the more remarkable, and better observ'd. He always carried a stricter Hand over his Soldiers, and kept them closer together when near an Enemy. When the antient *Greeks* would accuse any one of extreme Insufficiency, they would say in common *Proverb*, that he could neither Read nor Swim; he was of the same Opinion, that Swimming was of great use in War, and himself found it so; for being to use Diligence, he commonly swam over the Rivers in his way; for he loved to march on Foot, as also did *Alexander* the Great. Being in *Egypt* forc'd, to save himself, to go into a little Boat, and so many People leaping in with him, that it was in danger of Sinking, he chose rather to commit himself to the *Sea*, and recover'd his Fleet, which lay two hundred Paces off, holding in his left Hand his Tablets, and drawing his Coat-Armour in his Teeth, that it might not fall into the Enemies Hand, by swimming at a pretty advanc'd Age. Never had any *General* so much Credit with his Soldiers: In the Beginning of the *Civil Wars*, his *Centurions* offer'd him to find every one a Man at *Arms* at his own Charge, and the Foot Soldiers to serve him at their own Expence; those who were most at their Ease moreover undertaking *Soldiers not* to defray the most Necessitous. The late *Mercenary.* *Admiral Chastillon* shew'd us the like Example in our *Civil War*; for the *French* of his Army laid out Money out of their own Purfes to pay the Strangers that were with them. There are but rarely found Examples of so ardent and so ready an Affection amongst the Soldiers of Elder Times, who kept themselves strictly to their Rules of War. Passion has a more absolute Command over us than Reason; and yet it has happened in the War against *Hannibal*, that by the Examples of the People of *Rome*, in the City, the Soldiers and Captains refus'd their Pay in the Army; and in *Marcellus's* Camp those were branded with the Name of *Mercenaries* who would receive any. Having come by the worse near *Dyrrachium*, his Soldiers came and offer'd themselves to be chastis'd and punish'd, so that there was more need to comfort than reprove them. One single *Cohort* of his withstood four of *Pompey's* *Legions* above four Hours together, till they were almost killed with Arrows;

Arrows; so that there were a hundred and thirty thousand Shafts found in the *Trench*. A Soldier call'd *Scæva*, who commanded at one of the *Avenues*, invincibly maintain'd his Ground, having lost an Eye, one Shoulder, and one Thigh shot through, and his Shield shot through in two hundred and thirty Places. It happened that many of his Soldiers being taken Prisoners, rather chose to Die than promise to take the contrary side. *Granius Petronius*, taken by *Scipio* in *Africk*, *Scipio* having put the rest to Death, sent him Word that he gave him his Life, for he was a Man of Quality, and *Questor*; to whom *Petronius* sent answer back, that *Cæsar's* Soldiers were accusom'd to give others their Lives, and not to receive it, and immediately with his own Hand kill'd himself.

Of their Fidelity there are infinite Exam-  
 ples; amongst which that which was done  
 by those who were besieg'd in *Salona*,  
 a City that stood for *Cæsar* against *Pom-*  
*pey*, is not, for the Rarity of an Accident that there  
 happen'd, to be forgot. *Marcus Octavius* kept them  
 close Besieg'd; they within being reduc'd to the extrem-  
 est Necessity of all things, so that to supply the want of  
 Men, most of them being either slain, or wounded, they  
 had manumitted all their Slaves, and had been constrain'd  
 to cut off all the Women's Hair to make Ropes, besides a  
 wonderful Dearth of Victuals, and yet continuing resolute  
 never to yield: After having drawn the Siege to a great  
 Length, by which *Octavius* was grown more Negligent  
 and less Attentive to his Enterprize, they made choice of  
 one Day about Noon, and having first plac'd the Women  
 and Children upon the Walls to make a Shew, sallied  
 upon the Besiegers with such Fury, that having routed  
 the first, second and third Court of *Guards*, and after-  
 wards the fourth, and all the rest, and beaten them all out  
 of their *Trenches*, they pursu'd them even to their Ships, and  
*Octavius* himself was fain to fly to *Dyrrachium* where *Pom-*  
*pey* lay. I do not at present remember that I have met with  
 any other Example where the Besieged ever gave the Be-  
 siegers a total Defeat, and won the Field; nor that a  
*Sally* ever arriv'd at the Consequence of a pure and entire  
 Victory of Battle.

Fidelity of  
 the Garrison  
 of Salona.