

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS

Book 1 · Chapter 13



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The Ceremony of the Interview of Princes

THERE is no Subject so frivolous, that does not merit a Place in this Rhapsody. According to the common Rule of Civility, it would be a kind of an Affront to an Equal, and much more to a Superiour, to fail of being at home, when he has given you notice he will come to visit you. Nay, Queen *Margaret of Navarr* further adds, that it would be a Rudeness in a Gentleman to go out to meet any that is coming to see him, let him be of what condition soever; and that it is more respective, and more civil to stay at home to receive him, if only upon the account of missing of him by the way, and that it is enough to receive him at the door, and to wait upon him to his Chamber. For my part, who as much as I can endeavour to reduce the Ceremonies of my House, I very often forget both the one and the other of these vain Offices, and peradventure some one may take Offence at it; if he do, I am sorry, but I cannot find in my heart to help it; it is much better to offend him once, than my self every day, for it would be a perpetual slavery; and to what end do we avoid the servile attendance of Courts, if we bring the same, or a greater trouble, home to our own private Houses? It is also a common Rule in all Assemblies, that those of less quality are to be first upon the Place, by reason that it is a State more due to the better Sort to make others wait and expect them. Nevertheless, at the Interview betwixt Pope *Clement* and King *Francis* at *Marselles*, the King, after he had in his own Person taken order in the necessary Preparations for his Reception and Entertainment, withdrew out of the Town, and gave the Pope two or three days respite for his Entry, and wherein to repose and refresh himself before he came to him. And in like manner, at the Assignation of the Pope and the Emperour at *Bologna*, the Emperour gave the Pope leave to come thither first, and came himself after; for which, the reason then given was this; that at all the Interviews of such Princes, the greater ought to be first at the appointed Place, especially before the other, in whose Territories the Interview is appointed to be, intimating thereby a kind of deference to the other, it appearing proper for the less to seek out, and to apply themselves to the greater, and not the greater to them. Not every Country only, but every City, and so much as every Society, have their particular Forms of Civility. There was care enough taken in my Education, and I have liv'd in good Company enough to know the Formalities of our

own Nation, and am able to give lessons in it; I love also to follow them, but not to be so servilely tyed to their observation, that my whole Life should be enslav'd to Ceremony, of which there are some, that provided a man omits them out of Discretion, and not for want of Breeding, it will be every whit as handsome. I have seen some People rude, by being over-civil and troublesome in their Courtesie: though, these Excesses excepted, the knowledge of Courtesie and good Manners is a very necessary study. It is, like grace and Beauty, that which begets liking and an inclination to love one another at the first sight, and in the very beginning of Acquaintance and Familiarity; and consequently, that which first opens the door, and intromits us to Better our selves by the Example of others, if there be any thing in their Society worth taking notice of.