

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS

Book 1 · Chapter 14



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That Men are justly punish'd for being obstinate in the Defence of a Fort that is not in reason to be defended

Valour has its bounds, as well as other Vertues, which once transgress'd, the next step is into the Territories of Vice, so that by having too large a Proportion of this Heroick Vertue, unless a man be very perfect in its limits, which upon the Confines are very hard to discern, he may very easily unawares run into Temerity, Obstinacy, and Folly. From this consideration it is, that we have deriv'd the Custom, in times of War, to punish even with Death those who are obstinate to defend a Place that is not tenable by the Rules of War. In which case, if there were not some Examples made, men would be so confident upon the hope of Impunity, that not a Hen-roost but would resist, and stop an Royal Army. The Constable *Monsieur de Montmorency*, having at the Siege of *Pavie* been order'd to pass the *Tesine*, and to take up his Quarters in the *Fauxburg St. Antonie*, being hindred so to do by a Tower that was at the end of the Bridge, which was so impudent as to endure a Battery, hang'd every man he found within it for their labour. And again since, accompanying the *Dauphine* in his Expedition beyond the *Alpes*, and taking the Castle of *Villane* by Assault, and all within it being put to the Sword, the Governour and his Ensign only excepted, he caus'd them both to be truss'd up for the same reason; as also did the Captain *Martin du Bellay*, then Governour of *Turin*, with the Governour of *St. Bony*, in the same Country, all his People being cut in pieces at the taking of the Place. But forasmuch as the Strength or Weakness of a Fortress is always measur'd by the Estimate and Counterpoise of the Forces that attack it (for a Man might reasonably enough despise two Culverines, that would be a Mad-man to abide a Battery of thirty pieces of Cannon) where also the greatness of the Prince who is Master of the Field, his Reputation, and the Respect that is due unto him, is always put into the Balance, 'tis dangerous to affront such an Enemy: and besides, by compelling him to force you, you possess him with so great an Opinion of himself and his Power, that thinking it unreasonable any Place should dare to shut their Gates against his victorious Army, he puts all to the Sword, where he meets with any Opposition, whilst his Fortune continues; as is very plain in the fierce and arrogant Forms of summoning Towns, and denouncing War: savouring so much of *Barbarian* Pride and Insolence in use amongst the Oriental

Princes, and which their Successors to this day do yet retain and practise. And even in that remote Part of the World where the *Portuguese* subdued the *Indians*, they found some States where it was an universal and inviolable Law amongst them, that every Enemy overcome by the King in Person, or by his representative Lieutenant, was out of Composition both of Ransome and Mercy. So that above all things, a Man should take heed of falling into the hands of a Judge who is an Enemy and victorious.