

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS

Book 1 · Chapter 5



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Whether the Governour of a place besieg'd, ought himself to go out to parley

Lucius Marcius, the Roman Legate in the War against *Perseus* King of *Macedon*, to gain time wherein to re-inforce his Army, set on foot some Overtures of Accommodation, with which the King being lull'd asleep, concluded a Cessation for certain days; by this means giving his Enemy opportunity and leisure to repair his Arms, which was afterward the Occasion of his own Ruine. The elder sort of Senators, notwithstanding mindfull of their Fore-fathers Vertue, were by no means satisfied with this Proceeding; but on the contrary condemn'd it, as degenerating from their ancient Practice, which they said was by Valour, and not by Artifice, Surprizes, and Night-Encounters; neither by pretended Flight, Ambuscadoes, and deceitful Treaties, to overcome their enemies; never making War till having first denounc'd it, and very often assign'd both the Hour and Place of Battel. Out of this generous Principle it was that they deliver'd up to *Pyrrhus* his treacherous Physician, and to the *Hetrurians* their disloyal School-Master. And this was indeed a Procedure truly Roman, and nothing ally'd to the *Grecian* Subtility, nor to the *Punick* Cunning, where it was reputed a Victory of less Glory to overcome by Force than Fraud. Deceit may serve for a need, but he only confesses himself overcome who knows he is neither subdued by Policy, nor Misadventure, but by dint of Valour, in a fair and manly War. And it very well appears by the Discourse of these good old Senators, that this fine Sentence was not yet receiv'd amongst them,

Dolus, an virtus, quis in hoste requirat?

*No Matter if by Valour, or Deceit,
We overcome, so we the better get.*

The *Achaians* (says *Polybius*) abhorr'd all manner of double-dealing in War, not reputed it a Victory, unless where the Courages of the Enemy were fairly subdued. *Eam uir sanctus, & sapiens sciet ueram esse uictoriam, quæ salua fide, & integra dignitate parabitur. An honest and a prudent Man will acknowledge that only to be a true Victory which he has obtain'd without Violation of his own Faith, or any Blemish upon his own Honour,* says another:

*Uosne uelit, an me regnare hera quidue ferat fors
Uirtute experiamur.*

*If you or I shall rule, lets fairly try,
And Force and Fortune give the Victory.*

In the kingdom of *Ternates*, amongst those Nations which we so broadly call *Barbarians*, they have a Custom never to commence War till it be first denounc'd; adding withall, an ample Declaration of what they have to do it withall, with what, and how many Men, what Ammunitions, and what both offensive and defensive Arms; but that being done, they afterward conceive it lawful to employ this Power without reproach, any way that may best conduce to their own ends. The ancient *Florentines* were so far from obtaining any Advantage over their Enemies by Surprize, that they always gave them a Months Warning before they drew their Army into the Field, by the continual Tolling of a Bell they call'd *Martinella*. For what concerns us who are not so scrupulous in this Affair, and who attributed the Honour of the War to him who has the better of it, after what manner soever obtain'd, and who after *Lysander* say, *Where the Lion's Skin is too short we must etch it out with the Fox's Case*. The most usual Occasions of Surprize are deriv'd from this Practice, and we hold that there are no moments, wherein a Chief ought to be more circumspect, and to have his Eye so much at watch, as those of Parlies, and Treaties of Accommodation; and it is therefore become a general Rule amongst the Martial men of these latter Times, that a Governour of a Place never ought in a time of Siege to go out to parly. It was for this that in our Fathers days the Seigneurs *de Montmard* and *d'Assigni*, defending *Mouson* against the Count *de Nassau*, were so highly censur'd; yet in this Case it would be excusable in that Governour, who going out, should notwithstanding do it in such manner, that the Safety and Advantage should be on his side; as Count *Guido de Rangoni* did at *Reggio* (if we are to believe *Bellay*, for *Guicciardin* says it was he himself) when Monsieur *de l'Escut* approach'd to parly, who stepped so little a way from his Fort, that a Disorder hapning in the *interim* of Parly, not only Monsieur *de l'Escut* and his Party who were advanc'd with him, found themselves by much the weaker, (insomuch that *Alessandro de Trivulcio* was there slain) but he himself was constrain'd, as the safest way, to follow the Count, and relying upon his Honour to secure himself from the danger of the Shot within the very Walls of the Town. *Eumenes*, being shut up in the City of *Nora* by *Antigonus*, and by him importun'd to come out to speak with him, as he sent him word it was fit he should to a better Man than himself, and one who had now an Advantage over him, return'd this notable Answer, Tell him, said he, that *I shall never think any Man greater than my self, whilst I have my Sword in my hand*: and would never consent to come out to him, till first, according to his own Demand, *Antigonus* had deliver'd him his own Nephew *Ptolomeus* in Hostage. And yet some have done, rather better than worse in going out in Person to parly with the Assailant; witness *Henry de Vaux*, a Cavalier of *Champagne*, who being besieg'd by the *English* in the Castle of *Commercy*, and *Bartholomew de Bone*, who commanded at the *Leaquer*, having so sapp'd the greatest part of the Castle without, that nothing remain'd but setting Fire to the Props to bury the Besieg'd under the Ruines, he requested the said *Henry* to come out to speak with him for his own Good; which the other accordingly doing, with three more in Company with him, and his own evident Ruine being made apparent to him, he conceiv'd himself singularly oblig'd to his Enemy, to

whose Discretion after he and his Garrison had surrendered themselves, Fire being presently apply'd to the Mine, the Props no sooner began to fail, but the Castle was immediately turn'd topsy turvy, no one Stone being left upon another. I could, and do, with great Facility, relie upon the Faith of another; but I should very unwillingly do it in such a Case, as it should thereby be judg'd that it was rather an Effect of my Despair, and want of Courage, than voluntary, and out of Confidence and Security in the Faith of him with whom I had to do.