

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS

Book 1 · Chapter 6



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That the Hour of Parly is dangerous

I saw, notwithstanding lately at *Mussidan*, a Place not far from my House, that those who were driven out thence by our Army, and others of their Party, highly complain'd of Treachery, for that during a Treaty of Accommodation, and in the very *interim* that their Deputies were treating, they were surprized, and cut to pieces: a thing that peradventure in another Age, might have had some colour of foul Play; but (as I said before) the Practice of Arms in these days is quite another thing, and there is now no Confidence in an Enemy excusable, till after, the last Seal of Obligation; and even then the Conqueror has enough to do to keep his Word: so hazardous a thing it is to intrust the Observation of the Faith a Man has engag'd to a Town that surrenders upon easie and favourable Conditions, to the Necessity, Avarice, and Licence of a victorious Army, and to give the Souldier free Entrance into it in the heat of Blood. *Lucius Æmilius Regillus*, a Roman Prætor, having lost his time in attempting to take the City of *Phocæa* by force, by reason of the singular valour wherewith the Inhabitants defended themselves against him, condition'd at last to receive them as Friends to the People of *Rome*, and to enter the Town, as into a Confederate City, without any manner of Hostility; of which he also gave them all possible Assurance: but having for the greater Pomp brought his whole Army in with him, it was no more in his Power, with all the Endeavour he could use, to command his People: so that Avarice and Revenge despising and trampling under foot both his Authority and all Military Discipline, he there at once saw his own Faith violated, and a considerable part of the City sack'd and ruin'd before his Face. *Cleomenes* was wont to say, *That what Mischiefsoever a Man could do his Enemy in time of War was above Justice, and nothing accountable to it in the Sight of Gods and Men.* And according to this Principle, having concluded a Cessation with those of *Argos* for seven days, the third Night after he fell upon them when they were all buried in Security and Sleep, and put them to the Sword; alledging for his Excuse, That there had no Nights been mention'd in the Truce: but the Gods punish'd his Perfidy. In a time of Parly also, and while the Citizens were intent upon their Capitulation, the City of *Cassilinum* was taken by Surprize, and that even in the Age of the justest Captains, and the best Discipline of the *Roman* Militia: for it is not said, that it is not lawful for us in Time and Place, to make Advantage of our Enemies want of Understanding, as well as their

want of Courage: and doubtless War has a great many Privileges, that appear reasonable, even to the Prejudice of Reason. And therefore here the Rule fails, *Neminem id agere ut ex alterius prædetur inscitia*, That no one should prey upon another's Folly. But I am astonish'd at the great Liberty allow'd by *Xenophon* in such Cases, and that both by Precept, and by the Example of several Exploits of his compleat General. An Author of very great Authority, I confess, in those Affairs, as being in his own Person both a great Captain and a Philosopher of the first Form of *Socrates* his Disciples; and yet I cannot consent to such a measure of Licence as he dispenses in all Things and Places. Monsieur *d'Aubigny*, having besieg'd *Capua*, and play'd a furious Battery against it, Signior *Fabricio Colonne*, Governour of the Town, having from a Bastion begun to parly, and his Souldiers in the mean time being a little more remiss in their Guard, our People took advantage of their Security, enter'd the Place at unawars, and put them all to the Sword. And of later Memory, at *Yvoy*, Signior *Juliano Romero* having play'd that part of a Novice to go out to Capitulate with the Constable, at his Return found his Place taken. But, that we might not scape Scot-free, the Marquiss of *Pescara* having laid Siege to *Genoa*, where Duke *Octavio Fregosa* commanded under our Protection, and the Articles betwixt them being so far advanc'd that it was look'd upon as a done thing, and upon the Point to be concluded, several *Spaniards* in the mean time being slip'd in under the Privilege of the Treaty, seiz'd on the Gates, and made use of this Treachery as an absolute and fair Victory: and since at *Ligny* in *Barrois*, where the Count *de Brienne* commanded, the Emperor having in his own Person beleaguerr'd that Place, and *Bartheville*, the said Count's Lieutenant, going out to parly, whilst he was Capitulating the Town was taken.

*Fu il vincer sempre maji laudabil cosa
Vinca si o per fortuna, o per ingegno,*

*Fame ever does the Victor's Praises ring,
And Conquest ever was a glorious thing,
Which way so'er the Conqu'rour purchas'd it,
Whether by Valour, Fortune, or by Wit.*

say they: But the Philosopher *Chrysippus* was of another Opinion, wherein I also concur; for he was us'd to say, That those who Run a Race, ought to imploy all the Force they have in what they are about, and to run as fast as they can; but that it is by no means fair in them to lay any hand upon their Adversary to stop him, nor to set a Leg before him to throw him down. And yet more generous was the Answer of that great *Alexander* to *Polypercon* who persuaded him to take the Advantage of the Nights Obscurity to fall upon *Darius*; By no means (said he) it is not for such a Man as I am to steal a Victory, *Malo me fortunæ pœniteat, quam uictoriæ pudeat*, I had rather repent me of my Fortune, than be asham'd of my Victory.

*Atque idem fugientem haud est dignatus Oroden
Sternere, nec jacta cœcum dare Cuspide uulnus
Obuius, aduersoque occurrit, seque uiro uir
Contulit, haud furto melior, sed fortibus armis.*

*His Heart disdain'd to strike Orodes dead,
Or, unseen, basely wound him as he fled;*

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*But gaining first his Front, wheels round, and there
Bravely oppos'd himself to his Career:
And fighting Man to Man, would let him see
His Valour scorn'd both Odds and Policy.*