

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS



Book 1 · Chapter 13

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Of Ceremonies in the interview of Kings

THERE IS NO SUBJECT so vaine, that deserveth not a place in this rapsodie. It were a notable discourtesie unto our common rules, both towards an equall, but more toward a great person, not to meete with you in your house, if he have once warned you that he will come: And *Margaret* Queene of *Navarre*, was wont to say to this purpose, *That it was a kinde of incivilitie in a gentleman, to depart from his house, as the fashion is, to meete with him that is comming to him, how worthie soever he be: and that it more agreeth with civility and respect, to stay for him at home, and there to entertaine him: except it were for feare the stranger should misse his way: and that it sufficeth to accompanie and waite upon him, when he is going away againe.* As for me, I oftentimes forget these vaine offices; as one that endevoureth to abolish all maner of ceremonies in my house. Some will bee offended at-it, what can I doe withall? I had rather offend a stranger once, than my selfe every day; for it were a continuall subjection. To what end doe men avoyde the servitude of courtes, and entertaine the same in their owne houses? Moreover it is a common rule in all assemblies, that hee who is the meaner man, commeth first to the place appointed, forsomuch as it belongs to the better man to be staide-for, and waited upon by the other. Neverthelesse wee saw that at the enterview, prepared at *Marceilles* betweene Pope *Clement* the seaventh, and *Francis* the first, King of *France*, the King having appointed all necessarie preparations, went him-selfe out of the Towne, and gave the Pope two or three dayes-leasure, to make his entrie into-it, and to refresh him-selfe, before he would come to meete him there. Likewise at the meeting of the saide Pope with the Emperour at *Bologna*, the Emperour gave the Pope advantage and leasure to be first there, and afterward came himselfe. It is (say-they) an ordinarie ceremonie at enterparlies betweene such Princes, that the better man, should ever come first to the place appointed; yea before-him in whose countrie the assembly is: and they take it in this sence, that it is, because this complement should testifie, he is the better man, whome the meaner goeth to seeke, and that hee sueth unto-him. Not only each countrie, but every Cittie, yea and every vocation hath his owne particular decorum. I have very carefully beene brought up in mine infancie, and have lived in verie good company, because I would not be ignorant of the good maners of our countrie of *France*, and I am perswaded I might

keepe a schoole of them. I love to follow them, but not so cowardly, as my life remaine thereby in subjection. They have some painefull formes in them, which if a man forget by discretion, and not by error, he shall no whit be disgraced. I have often seene men prove unmannerly by too much manners, and importunate by over-much curtesie. The knowledge of entertainment is otherwise a profitable knowledge. It is, as grace and beautie are, the reconciler of the first accoastings of society and familiarity: and by consequence, it openeth the entrance to instruct us by the example of others, and to exploite and produce our example, if it have any instructing or communicable thing in it.