

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

# ESSAYS

## Book 1 · Chapter 14

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## Men are punished by too-much opiniating themselves in a place without reason

VALOR HATH HIS LIMITES, as other vertues have: which if a man out-go, hee shall finde himselfe in the traine of vice: in such sort, that unlesse a man know their right bounds, which in truth are not on a sudaine, easily hit upon, he may fall into rashness, obstinacie, and follie. From this consideration grew the custome we hold in warres, to punish, and that with death, those who wilfully opiniate themselves to defend a place, which by the rules of warre, can not be kept. Otherwise upon hope of impunitie, there should bee no cotage, that might not entertaine an Armie. The Lord Constable *Momorancie* at the siege of *Pavia*, having beene appointed to passe over the river *Tesine*, and to quarter himselfe in the suburbs of *Saint Antonie*, being impeached by a tower, that stood at the end of the bridge, and which obstinately would needes hould out, yea and to be battered, caused all those that were within-it, to be hanged. The same man afterward, accompanying my Lord the *Dolphin* of *France* in his journey beyond the *Alpes*, having by force taken in the castle of *Villane*, and all those that were within the same, having by the furie of the Souldiers bin put to the sworde, except the Captaine, and his Ancient, for the same reason, caused them both to be hanged and strangled: As did also, Captaine *Martin du Belay*, the Governour of *Turin*, in the saide countrie, the Captaine of *Saint Bony*: all the rest of his men having beene massacred at the taking of the place. But for somuch as the judgement of the strength or weaknesse of the place, is taken by the estimate and counterpoise of the forces that assaile it (for some man might justly opiniate him selfe against two culverins, that would play the mad-man to expect thirtie cannons) where also the greatnesse of the Prince conquering must be considered, his reputation, and the respect that is due unto him: there is danger a man should somewhat bend the ballance on that side. By which termes it hapneth, that some have so great an opinion of themselves, and their meanes, and deeming it unreasonable, any thing should be worthie to make head against them, that so long as their fortune continueth, they over-passe what hill or difficultie soever they finde to withstand or resist them: As is seene by the formes of summonings, and challenges, that the Princes of the East, and their successors yet remaining have in use, so fierce, so haughtie, and so full of a barbarous kinde of commandement.

And in those places where the Portugales abated the pride of the Indians, they found some states observing this universall and inviolable law, that what enemy soever he be, that is overcome by the King in person, or by his Lieutenant, is exempted from all composition of ransome or mercie. So above all, a man who is able should take heed, lest he fall into the hands of an enemy-judge, that is victorious and armed.