

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS



Book 1 · Chapter 45

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Of the battell of Dreux

THERE HAPPENED divers rare accidents, and remarkable chances in our battell of *Dreux*: but those who doe not greatly favour the reputation of the Duke of *Guise*, doe bouldly aledge, that he cannot be excused, to have made a stand, and temporised with the forces he commaunded, whilst the Lord Constable of *France*, Generall of the Armie, was engaged and suppressed with the enemies Artillerie, and that it had beene better for him, to hazard himselfe, to charge the enemy flankwise, then by expecting any advantage, to have him come behinde him, to suffer so reprochfull an overthrow, and so shamefull a losse. But omitting what the event thereof witnessed, hee that shall without passion debate the matter, shall easily (in my conceite) confesse, that the ayme and drift, not onely of a Captaine, but of every particular Souldier, ought chiefly to respect a victorie in great: And that no particular occurrences, of what consequence soever, or what interest may depend on them, should never divert-him from that point. *Philopæmen* in an encounter with *Machanidas*, having sent before, a strong troupe of Archers, and good marke men, to beginne the skirmish: and the enemy, after he had put them to route and dis-ranked them, amusing himselfe in mainly pursuing them, and following the victorie alongst the maine battell, where *Philopæmen* was, although his Souldiers were much moved and offended to see their fellowes put to the worst, he could not be induced to bouge from his place, nor make head against his enemy, to succour his men; but rather, having suffered them to bee defeated, and cutte in pieces before his face, beganne then to charge his enemies in the battalion of their Infanterie, when he perceived them forsaken of their horsemen: And albeit they were Lacedemonians, forasmuch as he charged them, at what time (supposing to have gained the day) they beganne to disorder themselves, hee easily overcame them; which done, hee pursued *Machanidas*. This case, is cousin-german unto that of the Duke of *Guise*. In that sharpe-bloodie battell of *Agesilaus* against the Boetians, which *Xenophon* (who was there present) saith, *To have beene the whottest and rudest, that ever he had seene*: *Agesilaus* refused the advantage, which fortune presented him, to let the battalion of the Boetians passe, and to charge them behinde, what certaine victorie soever he saw likely to follow the same, esteeming that it were rather skill then valor, and to shoue his prowes, and matchles-haughtie courage, chose rather to charge them in the front of their

forces: But what followed? He was well beaten, and himselfe sore-hurt, and in the end compelled to leave his enterprise, and embrace the resolution, which in the beginning he had refused, causing his men to open themselves, to give passage unto that torrent of the Bœtians; who when they were past-through, perceiving them to march in disaray, as they who perswaded themselves to be out of all danger, he pursued them, and charged them flank-wise. All which notwithstanding, he could never put to route, or force them run-away, for they, orderly, and faire and softly made their retreat, ever showing their face, untill such time as they got safely into their houldes and trenches.