

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS

Book I · Chapter 5



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Whether the Captaine of a place besieged ought to sallie forth to parlie

LVCIVS MARCIUS Legate of the Romans, in the warre against *Perseus* King of desirous to get so much time, as he wanted to prepare his army, gave out some motives of accord, wherewith the king inveigled, yeelded unto a truce for certaine daies: by which meanes he furnished his enemie with opportunitie and leasure to arme himselfe: whereof proceeded the Kings last ruine and over-throw. Yet is it, that the elders of the Senate, mindfull of their fore-fathers customes, condemned this practice as an enemie to their ancient proceedings, which was, said they, to fight with vertue, and not with craft, not by surprises, or stratagemes by night, nor by set-flights, and unlookt-for approaches, never undertaking a warre, but after it was proclaimed, yea many times after the appointed houre and place of the battell. With this conscience did they send backe to *Pirrhus* his traitorous Physitian, and to the *Phaliscs* their disloyall schoolemaster. These were true Romane proceedings, and not Grecian policies, nor Punike whes, with whom to vanquish by force is lesse glorious than to conquer by treacherie. To deceive may serve for the instant but hee only is judged to be overcome, that knowes he was not vanquished by craft or deceit, nor by fortune or chance, but by meere valour, betweene troupe and troupe, in an overt and just warre. It appeareth manifestly by the speech of these good men, they had not yet received this sentence.

Dolus, an virtus, quis in hoste requirat?

Deceit, or vertue, either, in foes, it skills not whether.

The Achaians, saith *Polibius*, detested all manner of deceit in their warres, deeming that no victorie, where their enemies courages were not quelled. *Eam vir sanctus, et sapiens sciat esse victoriam veram, quæ salva fide, et integra dignitate parabitur.* A wise and religious man will know that is victorie indeed, which shall be attained with credit unimpeached, and dignitie untainted, saith another.

*Vos ne velit, an me regnare hera, quid-ve ferat fors,
Virtute experiamur.*

*If fortune will have you to raigne, or me,
And what chance brings, let vertue's triall be.*

In the Kingdome of *Ternates*, among those nations, which wee so full-mouthed, call barbarous, the custome beareth, that they never undertake a warre, before the same be denounced; thereunto adding an ample declaration of the meanes they have to employ therein, what manner, and how many men, what munition, and what Armes either offensive or defensive: which done, they also establish as a law, that without reproach or imputation, it shall be lawfull for any man, in their warres, to use what advantage soever, may in any sort further or help them to vanquish.

The ancient *Florentines* were so far from desiring any advantage of their enemies by sudden surprises, that a moneth before they could bring their Armie into the field, they would give them warning, by the continuall sound of their common bell, which they called *Martinella*.

As for us, who are lesse superstitious, and deeme him to have the honour of the warre, that hath the profit of it, and according to *Lisander*, say, that *Where the Lions-skinne will not suffice, wee must adde a scantling of the Foxes*; the most ordinarie occasions of surprises are drawne from this practice, and as wee say, there is no time, wherein a Captaine ought to be more warie and circumspect to looke about him, than that of parlies, and treaties of accord: And therefore is it a common rule in the mouth of all our modern men of warre, that the Governour or Commaunder of a besieged place, ought never to sallie forth himselfe to parlie. In the time of our forefathers, the same was cast in the teeth (as a reproach) unto the Lord of *Montford* and *Assigni*, who defended *Mouson*, against the Earle of *Nanseaw*. Yet in this case it were excusable in him, that should so sallie out, that the assurance and advantage, might still be on his side. As did the Earle *Guido Rangoni* in the Cittie of *Reggio* (if credit may be given to *Bellay*: for *Guicciardin* affirmeth, that it was himselfe) when as the Lord of *Escute*, comming to parlie made his approaches unto it; for he did so little forsake his fort, that whilst they were in parlie, a commotion being raised, the Lord of *Escute* and the troupes which came with him, in that tumult found himselfe to be the weakest, so that *Alexander Trivultio* was there slaine, and hee deeming it the safest way, was forced to follow the Earle, and on his word to yield himselfe to the mercie and shelter of blowes, into the citty.

Eumenes in the City of *Nera*, being urged by *Antigenus*, that besieged him, to sallie forth to parlie, alleaging that there was reason he should come to him, sith he was the better man, and the stronger: after he had made, this noble answer, *I will never thinke any man better than myselfe, so long as I can hold or rule my sword*; nor did he ever yeeld untill *Antigonus* had delivered him *Ptolomey*, his owne nephew for a pledge, whom he required.

Yet shall we see some to have prospered well in sallying forth of their holdes to parlie, upon the word and honor of the assailant; witnes, *Henrie* of *Vaulx*, a knight of *Champaigne*, who being beleagred by the Englishmen in the Castle of *Commercie*, and *Bartholmew* of *Bones*, who at that siege commaunded as Chiefe having caused the greatest part of the Castle to be undermined, so that there wanted nothing but the giving of fire, utterly to subvert the same, under the ruines of it, summoned the

said *Henrie* to issue out, and for his owne good to parlie with him, which he did, accompanied but with three more, who manifestly seeing the evident ruine, wherein he was undoubtedly like to fall, acknowledged himselfe infinitely beholding to his enemies unto whose discretion, after he had yeilded together with his troupe, and that fire the Castle was given to the Mine, the maine props of the Castle failing, it was utterly overthrowne and carried away.

I am easily perswaded to yeeld to other mens words and faith, but hardly would I doe it, when I should give other men cause to imagine, that I had rather done it through despere and want of courage, than of a free and voluntary choise, and confidence in his honestie and well-meaning.