

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS



Book 1 · Chapter 5

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

LUCIUS MARCUS Legate of the Romans, in the warre against *Perseus* King of *Macedon*, desirous to get so much time, as he wanted to prepare his army, gave out some motives of accorde, wherewith the King inveagled, yeelded unto a truce for certaine daies: by which meanes he furnished his enimie 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 enimie 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 approches, 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 Phisitian, and to the *Phaliscs* their disloyall schoole-maister. These were true Romane proceedings, and not Grecian pollicies, nor Punike wyles, with whome to vanquish by force is lesse glorious then to conquer by trecherie. To deceive may serve for the instant, but hee onely is judged to be overcome, that knowes he was not vanquished by crafte or deceite, 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?

Deceite, or vertue, either, in foes, it skill's not whether.

The Achaians, saith *Polibius*, detested all manner of deceite in their warres, deeming that no victorie, where their enemies courages were not quelled. *Eam uir sanctus, & sapiens sciat esse uictoriam ueram, quæ salua fide, & integra dignitate parabitur.* A wise and religious man will know that is victorie indeede, which shall be attained with credite unimpeached, and dignitie untainted, saith another.

*Uos ne uelit, an me regnare era, quid-ue ferat fors,
Uirtute experiamur.*

*If fortune will have you to raigne, or me,
And what chance bring's, let vertues 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 reproch or imputation, it shall be lawfull for any man, in their warres, to use what advantage soever, may in any sorte further or helpe them to vanquish. The ancient *Florentines* were so far from desiring any advantage of their enemies by suddaine 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, then that of parlies, and treaties of accorde: 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 credite may be given to *Bellay*, for *Guicciardin* affirmeth, that it was himselfe) when as the Lord of *Escute*, for to parlie, made his approaches unto it, for he did so little forsake his forte, 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 him-selfe to be the weakest, so that *Alexander Trivultio* was there slaine, and hee deeming it the safest way, was forced to followe the Earle, and on his word to yeelde himselfe to the mercie and shelter of blowes, into the citty. *Eumenes* in the Cittie of *Nera*, being urged by *Antigonus*, that besieged him, to sallie forth to parlie, alleaging that there was reason he should come to him, sith hee was the better man, and the stronger: after he had made, this noble answer, *I will never thinke any man better then my selfe, so long as I can hold or rule my sworde*; 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 foorth of their houldes to parlie, upon the worde and honor of the assailant; witnes, *Henrie* of *Vaulx*, a knight of *Champaigne*, who being beleagred by the English-men in the Castle of *Commercie*, and *Bartholomew* of *Bones*, who at that siege commaunded as Chiefe, having caused the greatest parte of the Castle to be sapped, so that there wanted nothing but the giving of fire, utterly to subvert the same, under the ruines of it, summoned the saide *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 yeelded together with his troupes,

and that fire 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 do it, when I should give other men cause to imagine, that I had rather done it through dispaire and want of courage, then of a free and voluntary choise, and confidence in his honestie and well-meaning.