

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS

Book 1 · Chapter 6



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That the houre of parlies is dangerous

NOTWITHSTANDING I saw lately, that those of *Musidan*, a place not farre from mee, who with others of their partie, were by our forces compelled to dislodge thence, exclaimed, they were betraid, because during the speach of accord, and the treatie yet continuing, they had beene surprised and defeated; which thing might happily, in other ages have had some apparance of truth; but, I say, our manner of proceeding in such cases, is altogether differing from these rules, and no man ought to expect performance of promise from an enemie, except the last seale of bond be fully annexed thereunto, wherein notwithstanding is then much care and vigilancie required, and much a doe shal be found. And it was ever a dangerous counsell to trust the performance of word or othe given unto a Cittie, that yeelds unto gentle and favourable composition, and in that furie to give the needie, blood-thirstie, and pray-greed Souldier free entrance into it, unto the free choise and licence of a victorious armie. *Lucius Æmilius Regulus* a Romane Prætor, having lost much time in attempting by force to take the cittie of *Phoce*, by reason of the singular prowess, which the inhabitants shewed, in stoutly defending themselves, covenanted to receive them as friends unto the people of *Rome*, and to enter their Cittie as a place confederate, remooving all feare of hostile-action from them. But to the end hee might apeare more glorious, and dreadfull, having caused his armie to enter with him, do what he might, he could not bridle the rage of his Souldiers; and with his owne eies saw most part of the Cittie ransacked and spoyled, the rights of covetousnesse and revenge supplanting those of his authoritie and militarie discipline. *Cleomenes* was woont to say, that *What hurte soever a man might doe his enemies in time of warre, was beyond Justice, and not subject unto it, as well towardes the Gods as towardes men*: who for seaven dayes having made truce with those of *Argia*, the third night, whilst they were all asleepe mistrusting no harme, hee charged and overthrew them, alleaging for his excuse, that in the truce no mention had bin made of nights. But the Gods left not his perfidious policie unrevenged: For during their enter-parlie and businesse about taking hostages, the Cittie of *Casilinum* was by surprise taken from him: which happened in the times of the justest Captaines, and of the most perfect Romane discipline: For it is not saide, that time and place serving, wee must not make use and take advantage of our enemies foolish oversight, as we do

of their cowardise. And verily warre hath naturally many reasonable priviledges to the prejudice of reason. And here failes the rule; *Neminem id agere, ut ex alterius prædetur inscitia: That no man should indeavour to prey upon another mans ignorance.* But I wonder of the scope that *Xenophon* allows them, both by his discourse, and by diverse exploytes of his perfect Emperour: an Author of wonderfull consequence in such things, as a great Captaine and a Philosopher, and one of *Socrates* chiefest Disciples, nor do I altogether yeeld unto the measure of his dispensation. The Lord of *Aubigny* besieging *Capua*, after he had given it a furious batterie, the Lord *Fabritius Colonna*, Captaine of the towne, having from under a bastion or skonce begunne to parlie, and his men growing negligent and carelesse in their offices and garde, our men did sodainely take the advantage offered-them, entered the towne, overranne it, and put all to the sworde. But to come to later examples, yea in our memorie, the Lord *Julio Romero* at *Yvoy*, having committed this oversight to issue out of his holde, to parlie with the Constable of *France*, at his returne found the Towne taken, and himselfe jack-out-of-doores. But that we may not passe unrevenge. The Marques of *Pescara* beleagering *Genova*, where the Duke *Octavian Fregoso* commaunded under our protection, and an accord betweene them having so long bin treated, and earnestly solicited, that it was held as ratified, and upon the point of conclusion, the Spaniards being entred the Towne, and seeing themselves the stronger, tooke their opportunitie, and used it as a full and compleate victorie: and since at *Lygnie* in *Barrois*, where the Earle of *Brienne* commaunded, the Emperour having besieged him in person, and *Bertheuille* Lieutenant to the saide Earle being come forth of his hold to parlie, was no sooner out, whilst they were disputing, but the Towne was surprised, and he excluded. They say,

*Fu il vincer sempre mai laudabil cosa,
Vincasi per fortuna ô per ingegno.*

*To be victorious, evermore was glorious,
Be we by fortune or by wit victorious.*

But the Philosopher *Chrisippus* would not have beene of that opinion; nor I neither, for he was wont to say, *That those who runne for the maisterie may well employ all their strength to make speede, but it is not lawfull for them to lay handes on their adversaries, to stay him, or to crosse legges, to make him trippe or fall.* And more generously answered *Alexander* the great, at what time *Polypercon* perswaded him to use the benefit of the advantage which the darknesse of the night afforded him, to charge *Darius*; *No, no, saide hee, it fittes not mee to hunt after night-stolne victories; Malo me fortunæ pœniteat, quàm uictoriæ pudeat. I had rather repent me of my fortune, then be ashamed of my victorie.*

*Atque idem fugientem haud est dignatus Orodem
Sternere, nec iacta cæcum dare cuspidè uulnus:
Obuius aduersóque occurrit, séque uiro uir
Contulit, haud furto melior, sed fortibus armis.*

*He deign'd not to strike-downe Orodes flying,
Or with his throwne-launce blindly-wound him running:
But man to man affront himselſe applying,
Met him, as more esteem'd for strength then cunning.*