

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS

Book 1 · Chapter 6



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That the houres of Parlies are 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 speech of accord, and the treatie yet continuing, they had beene surprized and defeated; which thing might haply other ages have had some apparence 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 adoe shall be found.

And it was ever a dangerous counsell to trust the performance of word or oath given unto a Cittie, that yeelds unto gentle and favourable composition, and in that furie to give the needie, bloudthirstie, and prey-greed Souldier free entrance into it, unto the free choise and licence of a victorious armie. *Lucius Æmilius Regulus* a Romane Proctor, having lost his 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, removing 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, doe 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 spoiled: the rights of covetousnesse and revenge supplanting those of his authoritie and militarie discipline.

Cleomenes was wont to say, that *What hurt soever a man might doe his enemies in time of warre, was beyond justice, and not subject unto it, as well towards the Gods as towards men:* who for seven 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 beene 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 said, that time and place serving, wee must not make use and take advantage of our enemies foolish oversight, as we doe of their cowardise. And verily warre hath naturally many reasonable privileges to the prejudice of reason. And here failes the rule; *Neminem id agere, ut ex alterius prædetur inscitia*: That no man should endeavour to prey upon another mans ignorance.

But I wonder of the scope that *Xenophon* allowes them, both by his discourse, and by divers exploits 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 doe 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 guard, our men did suddenly take the advantage offered them, entered the towne, over-ranne it, and put all to the sword. But to come to later examples, yea in our memorie, the Lord *Iulio 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 wee may not pass out unrevenged, the Marques of *Pescara* beleaguering *Genova*, where the Duke *Octavian Fregoso* commanded under our protection, and an accord between them having so long been 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* commanded, the Emperour having besieged him in person, and *Bertheuille* Lieutenant to the saide Earle, being come foorth of his hold to parlie, was no sooner out, whilest they were disputing, but the Towne was surprised, and he excluded, They say,

*Fu il vincer sempre mai laudabil cosa,
Vincasi o per fortuna o 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 run for the masterie may well employ all their strength to make speed, but it is not lawfull for them to lay hands on their adversaries, to stay him, or to crosse legges, to make him trip 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, said hee, *it fits not mee to hunt after night-stolne victories; Malo me fortunæ pæniteat, quam victoriæ pudeat. I had rather repent me of my fortune, than be ashamed of my victorie.*

*Atque idem fugientem haud est dignatus Orodem
Sternere, nec jacta caecum dare cuspidē vulnus:
Obvius adversoque occurrit, seque viro vir
Contulit, haud furto melior, sed fortibus armis.*

*He deign'd not to strike downe Orodēs flying,
Or with his throwne-launce blindely-wound him running:
But man to man afront himselfe applying,
Met him, as more esteem'd for strength than cunning.*