

Of Fame

THE poets make Fame a monster. They describe her in part finely and elegantly, and in part gravely and sententiously. They say, look how many feathers she hath, so many eyes she hath underneath; so many tongues; so many voices; she pricks up so many ears.

This is a flourish. There follow excellent parables; as that, she gathereth strength in going; that she goeth upon the ground, and yet hideth her head in the clouds; that in the daytime she sitteth in a watch tower, and flieth most by night; that she mingleth things done, with things not done; and that she is a terror to great cities. But that which passeth all the rest is: They do recount that the Earth, mother of the giants that made war against Jupiter, and were by him destroyed, thereupon in an anger brought forth Fame. For certain it is, that rebels, figured by the giants, and seditious fames and libels, are but brothers and sisters, masculine and feminine. But now, if a man can tame this monster, and bring her to feed at the hand, and govern her, and with her fly other ravening fowl and kill them, it is somewhat worth. But we are infected with the style of the poets. To speak now in a sad and serious manner: There is not, in all the politics, a place less handled and more worthy to be handled, than this of fame. We will therefore speak of these points: What are false fames; and what are true fames; and how they may be best discerned; how fames may be sown, and raised; how they may be spread, and multiplied; and how they may be checked, and laid dead. And other things concerning the nature of fame. Fame is of that force, as there is scarcely any great action, wherein it hath not a great part; especially in the war. Mucianus undid Vitellius, by a fame that he scattered, that Vitellius had in purpose to remove the legions of Syria into Germany, and the legions of Germany into Syria; whereupon the legions of Syria were infinitely inflamed. Julius Caesar took Pompey unprovided, and laid asleep his industry and preparations, by a fame that he cunningly gave out: Caesar's own soldiers loved him not, and being wearied with the wars, and laden with the spoils of Gaul, would forsake him, as soon as he came into Italy. Livia settled all things for the succession of her son Tiberius, by continual giving out, that her husband Augustus was upon recovery and amendment, and it is an usual thing with the pashas, to conceal the death of the Great Turk from the janizaries and men of war, to save the sacking of Constantinople and other towns, as their manner is. Themistocles made Xerxes, king of Persia, post apace out of Grecia, by giving out, that the Grecians had a purpose to break his bridge of ships, which he had made athwart Hellespont. There be a thousand such like examples; and the more they are, the less they need to be repeated; because a man meeteth with them everywhere. Therefore let all wise governors have as great a watch and care over fames, as they have of the actions and designs themselves.

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