

OF ANGER

Sir Francis Bacon

To seek to extinguish anger utterly is but a boast of the Stoics. We have better oracles: Be angry, but sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your anger.

Anger must be limited and confined, both in speed and in time. We will first speak how the natural inclination and habit to be angry may be attempted and calmed. Secondly, how the particular motions of anger may be repressed, or at least refrained from doing mischief. Thirdly, how to raise anger or appease anger in another.

For the first, there is no other way but to meditate, and reflect well upon the effects of anger, how it troubles man's life. And the best time to do this is to look back upon anger when the fit is thoroughly over. Seneca said well, "Anger is like ruin, which breaks itself upon that it falls." The Bible exhorts us to possess our souls in patience. "Whosoever is out of patience, is out of possession of his soul."

Anger is certainly a kind of baseness, as it appears often in the weakness of those subjects in whom it reigns. Men must beware to they carry their anger rather with scorn than with fear, so that they may seem rather to be above the injury than below it.

For the second point; the causes and motives of anger are chiefly three. First, to be too sensitive to hurt; for no man is angry who is not himself hurt, and therefore tender and delicate persons are often angry for they have so many things to trouble them, of which more robust natures have little. The next is the belief that the injury offered is full of hatred and contempt, for hatred and contempt put an edge upon anger as much or more than the hurt itself. And therefore, when men see motives of hatred and contempt, it increases their anger. Lastly, attacks upon a man's reputation multiplies and sharpens anger. But in all refrainings of anger, it is the best remedy to buy time and to make one believe that the opportunity of his revenge has not yet come, but that he shall foresee a time for it; and so to calm himself in the meantime and reserve it. He will then often avoid it altogether.

To contain anger from mischief, though it takes hold of a man, there are two things about which you must have special caution. The one is of extreme bitterness of words, especially if they be aculeate and proper, and also, that in anger a man should not reveal secrets, for that, makes him not fit for society. The other caution is that you should not peremptorily break off in any business in a fit of anger, but however you show your bitterness, do not do anything that is not revocable.

The raising and appeasing anger in another is done chiefly by choosing times to incense them when men are the most stubborn and the worst disposed, again, by gathering (as was touched upon before) all that you can do to aggravate their contempt. The two remedies are by the opposites, the former to take good times when first to relate to a man an angry business; for the first impression is much; and the other is to sever, as much as you can, the construction of the injury from the point of their contempt, blaming it on misunderstanding, fear, or passion.