

## Which Is Mightier?

### “The pen is mightier than the sword” From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

"The pen is mightier than the sword" is a metonymic adage coined by English author Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1839 for his play *Richelieu; Or the Conspiracy*.<sup>[1][2]</sup> The play was about Cardinal Richelieu, though in the author's words "license with dates and details... has been, though not unsparingly, indulged."<sup>[1]</sup> The Cardinal's line in Act II, scene II, was more fully:<sup>[3]</sup>

True, This! —  
Beneath the rule of men entirely great,  
The pen is mightier than the sword. Behold  
The arch-enchanters wand! — itself a nothing! —  
But taking sorcery from the master-hand  
To paralyse the Cæsars, and to strike  
The loud earth breathless! — Take away the sword —  
States can be saved without it!

### The Sword Mightier than the Pen? The *Aeneid*, by Virgil

“Years later, a wonderful thing happened. Two babies, children of a princess descended from Aeneas, were left out to die by a cruel uncle. But a she-wolf that had lost her own cubs nursed them, and they grew up to be the strongest men in the country. As time went on, the village was turned into a town, and the town was made a strong place. The people who lived in it called themselves Romans. Little by little they made wider their boundaries and increased their power. More than once their city was taken. Still, however low it fell, it rose again, stronger than before. It conquered first all Italy, and then countries nearest to it, then faraway nations in Asia and Africa. Most wonderful of all, I say, is that we have from them Law and Order. But this is a matter of which you will hear more when you are older.”

[http://www.geocities.com/mesontag2002/aeneas7\\_9.htm#Battle](http://www.geocities.com/mesontag2002/aeneas7_9.htm#Battle)

Augustus Caesar had Virgil write the *Aeneid* to promote the idea that the Roman Caesars were descendants of the gods – that power was one of the most important virtues. How is this idea different from that expressed by Cardinal Richelieu in Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s play, mentioned above? What is your opinion? Does the fact that many of our English words come from either French or Latin roots support or refute the idea that “the pen is mightier than the sword?” Why or why not?



An illustration of Cardinal Richelieu holding a sword, by H. A. Ogden, 1892, from *The Works of Edward Bulwer Lytton*