

<http://montesquieu.ens-lyon.fr/spip.php?article3376>



- Persian Letters - Letters -

Date de mise en ligne : mardi 14 avril 2020

---

**Copyright © Montesquieu - Tous droits réservés**

---

<a href="#">Letter 114</a>	<a href="#">Letter 116</a>
----------------------------	----------------------------

*Usbek to the same*

---

The fecundity of a people sometimes depends on the smallest circumstances in the world, so that it often requires no more than a new turn in one's imagination to make it much more numerous than it was.

The Jews, forever exterminated and forever rebounding, have restored their continual losses and continual destructions by this single hope that all families have among them of seeing born to them a powerful king who will be master of the world. [1]

The ancient kings of Persia had so many thousands of subjects only because of this dogma of the religion of the fakirs, that the acts most agreeable to God that men could do was to make a child, till a field, and plant a tree.

If China has in its bosom so prodigious a people, that only comes from a certain manner of thinking : for as children regard their fathers as gods, whom they respect as such even in this life, as they honor them after their deaths by sacrifices in which they think that their souls, obliterated in the t'ien, take on a new life, everyone is inclined to increase his family, so submissive in this life, and so necessary in the next.

On the other hand the Muhammadan countries become more empty by the day because of an opinion which, holy as it is, still has very pernicious effects when it is rooted in the minds. We see ourselves as travellers who should think only of another homeland ; useful and durable works, cares to assure the fortune of our children, and projects that tend beyond a short and transient life, appear to us as something extravagant. Tranquil for the present, without anxiety for the future, we do not take the trouble either to repair public buildings, to clear fallow lands, nor to cultivate those that are in a condition to receive our labors ; we live in a generalized insensitivity, and let Providence take care of everything.

It is a spirit of vanity that has established among the Europeans the unjust right of the firstborn, so unfavorable to propagation [2] in that it focuses a father's attention on just one of his children and averts his eyes from all the others ; in that it obliges him, in order to consolidate the fortune of a single child, to oppose the establishment of several [3] ; and finally in that it destroys the equality of the citizens which makes for all their prosperity.

*Paris this 4th day of the moon of Rhamazan 1718*

---

[1] This is true in the sense that every house can hope to be the house of David, from which, according to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 73a ; Succah 52a) and rabbinical commentaries on the prophet Isaiah (XI, 1-16), was to arise the Messiah. According to Calmet, the Jews of Jesus' time "had already created a false notion of the Messiah, as a monarch and conqueror, who was to rule the entire world" (Calmet D, art. "Messie", vol. II, p. 55).

[2] *The Spirit of Law* (XXXI, 33) studies the origin of this practice without criticism of it.

[3] *I.e.*, by endowing daughters for marriage or providing sons with capital.