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Letter 121

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*Rica to Usbek in ****

I expect you here tomorrow ; meanwhile I am sending your letters from Isfahan. Mine report that the ambassador of the Great Mogul has been ordered to leave the kingdom. They add that the king's uncle the prince, who is charged with his education, has been arrested, [1] that he has been taken to a chateau where he is very closely guarded, and that he has been stripped of all his honors. [2] I am saddened by the fate of this prince, and I pity him.

I confess, Usbek, that I have never seen anyone shed tears without being moved by it. I feel humanity for the unfortunate as if only they were men, and even the grandees, for whom my heart is hardened while they are elevated ; I love them the minute they fall.

Indeed, what use of superfluous empathy have they in prosperity ? It is too similar to equality. They much prefer respect, which asks for no return ; but the minute they are fallen from their grandeur, only our pity can remind them of it.

I find something very naive, and even very grand, in the words of a prince who, about to fall into the hands of his enemies, seeing his courtiers about him weeping : I can feel by your tears, he told them, that I am still your king. [3]

Paris this 3rd day of the moon of Chalval 1718

[1] See letter 89.

[2] An allusion to the plot of the prince de Cellamare, ambassador of king Philip V of Spain to the French court during the minority of Louis XV. Alberoni, chief minister of Spain, attempted with his intermediary to have the regency of France conferred on Philip V. Cellamare then conspired with the Duke and Duchess du Maine to have the regent deposed ; the duchess indeed blamed him for the abolition of the testamentary dispositions of Louis XIV which gave significant power withing the Regency Council to the legitimated "bastards" of the late king, the Duke du Maine and the Count of Toulouse. The duke and duchess were arrested on 29 December 1718 after discovery of the conspiracy ; the duke was sent to the chateau de Dullens, the duchess to the chateau de Dijon, and their servants to the Bastille. Arrested on 9 December, Prince Cellamare was escorted to the border.

[3] According to Quintus Curcius, V, 8 : "Fides vestra et constantia ut regem me esse credam feci."