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- Persian Letters - Letters -

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Letter 121	Letter 123
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Rica to Ibben in Smyrna

You have heard a thousand times about the famous king of Sweden. He was besieging a stronghold in a kingdom they call Norway ; as he was visiting the trench alone with an engineer, he received a blow in the head from which he died. Immediately they had his prime minister arrested ; the Estates assembled, and condemned him to lose his head. [1]

He was accused of a great crime, which was to have slandered the nation, and causing it to lose its king's confidence : a deed which, as I see it, deserves a thousand deaths.

For if it is an evil deed to tarnish the least of his subjects in the mind of the prince, what is it when one tarnishes the entire nation, causes it to lose the benevolence of him whom Providence has established to protect its happiness ?

I would like for men to speak to kings the way angels speak to our holy Prophet.

You know that at sacred banquets, where the Lord of lords [2] descends from earth's most sublime throne to mingle with his slaves, I have made it a stern rule to cage an indocile tongue. No one has ever heard me let loose a single word that could be bitter for the least of his subjects ; when I have had to cease being discreet, I have never ceased being a gentleman, and in this test of our loyalty I have risked my life, and never my virtue.

I do not know how it happens that there is almost never a prince so cruel that his minister is not even more so ; if he commits some evil deed, it has almost always been suggested to him, so the ambition of princes is never as dangerous as the baseness of spirit of his counselors. But do you understand that a man who has only been in the ministry since yesterday, and who may not be tomorrow, can the enemy of himself, his family, his homeland, and of the people that will forever arise from the man he is going to oppress ?

A prince has passions, the minister stirs them ; that is the direction in which he steers his ministry. He has no other goal, nor wishes to know one. The courtiers seduce him with their praise, and he flatters him more dangerously with his counsel, with the designs he suggests to him, and by the maxima he proposes to him.

Paris this 25th day of the moon of Saphar 1719

[1] The *Gazette d'Amsterdam* of 7 February 1719 reported the circumstances of Görtz's arrest ; it was said then that a council was formed to examine his conduct on 10 January. On 10 February it related the confiscation of the money he had amassed. To assure Charles XII's warlike policy, Görtz had taxed private fortunes and created paper money ; his unpopularity was to favor an aristocratic reaction and the king's death. All this suggests a connection with Law.

[2] The same epithets are employed in letter 49 to put into relief the idolatrous aspects of despotism : cf. I Timothy 6:15 : "the King of kings, and Lord of lords."