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- Persian Letters - Letters -

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Letter 125	Letter 127
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*Rica to ****

Five or six months ago I was in a café ; I noticed there a rather well-dressed gentleman who was attracting attention ; he was speaking of the pleasure it was to be living in Paris, and deploring his situation which obliged him to live in the provinces. I have fifteen thousand livres of land income, he said, and I would feel happier if I had the quarter of that worth in money and assets transportable anywhere. [1] However I pressure my farmers and weigh them down with judicial expenses, I only make the them more insolvent ; I have never been able to see a hundred pistoles [2] at a time ; if I owed ten thousand francs, they would have all my properties seized, and I would be in the poorhouse.

I left without paying much attention to all this talk ; but finding myself yesterday in that neighborhood, I entered the same house, and saw there a grave man with a pale and elongated face who in the middle of five or six speechifiers seemed somber and distracted until the moment when, suddenly speaking up : Yes, messieurs, he said, raising his voice, I am ruined. I have nothing left to live on : for I presently have in my house two hundred thousand livres in bank notes and a hundred thousand écus of silver ; I find myself in a deplorable situation : I thought I was rich, and here I am in the poorhouse. If at least I had just a small piece of land where I could retire, I would be sure of having something to live on ; but I have nothing anything even as big as this hat in real estate.

By chance I turned my head in another direction, and saw another man who was grimacing like a man possessed. Who can you trust today ? he cried. There is a traitor whom I thought such a good friend that I had lent him my money, and he has paid it back : what a horrible betrayal ! No matter what he does now, in my mind he will forever be dishonored. [3]

Right nearby him was a very poorly dressed man, who, raising his eyes to heaven, was saying : God bless the projects of our ministers ; may I see stocks at two thousand [4] and all the footmen in Paris richer than their masters. I had the curiosity to ask his name. He is an extremely poor man, I was told, for he has a poor trade : he is a genealogist, and he hopes his art will be profitable if fortunes continue, and all these nouveaux riches will have need of him to reform their names, scrub clean their ancestors, and put arms on their carriages. [5] He imagines he is going to make as many men of quality as he wants, and quivers with joy at seeing his clients multiply.

Finally I saw an old man enter, pale and thin, whom I recognized as a newsmonger before he had taken a seat [6] ; he was not among those who have a victorious assurance against all setbacks, and are forever foreseeing victories and trophies ; he was on the contrary one of those quakers who have nothing but bad news. Business is really bad on the Spanish side, he said ; we have no cavalry on the border, and it is to be feared lest Prince Pio, who has a large corps, raise levies throughout Languedoc [7] Opposite me was a rather seedy philosopher, who took pity on the newsmonger and shrugged his shoulders as the other raised his voice ; I approached him, and he whispered to me : You see that this smug fellow has been telling us for an hour about his fears for Languedoc, and I yesterday evening sighted a spot on the sun, which, if it increased, could cause all of nature to atrophy ; and I said not a word.

Paris this 17th day of the moon of Rhamazan 1719

[1] *I.e.*, such as letters of credit, loans, etc., in contrast to the real estate values that constitute his present fortune.

[2] About a thousand livres or francs.

[3] This is either an irony on the indebtedness of much of the nobility, or a protest at being paid back in devalued paper money in the fluctuations of 1720 (an anachronism, since this letter is from November 1719).

[4] Those of the *Compagnie des Indes*, which had soared in the summer of 1719.

[5] *I.e.*, (fanciful) coats of arms.

[6] See letter 124.

[7] Pio de Savoye-y-Corte Real became governor of Madrid in February 1714 and of all of Catalonia in May 1715 (Moréri, 1732, art. "Pio de Savoye-y-Corte Real").