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- Persian Letters - Letters -

Date de mise en ligne : mardi 14 avril 2020

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### *Rica to Ibben in Smyrna*

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Ministers come and go and destroy each other here like the seasons ; in three years I have seen four changes in the financial system. [1] Today in Persia and Turkey subsidies are raised in the same way the founders of these monarchies raised them ; that is hardly the case here. It is true that we do not put so much wit into it as do the Occidentals ; we believe there is no more difference between the administration of the prince's revenues and those of an individual than there is between counting a hundred thousand tomans or counting a hundred. But here there is much more finesse and secrecy. Great geniuses must work night and day ; they must constantly and painfully beget new projects ; they must listen to the opinions of innumerable persons who work for them without being asked ; they must withdraw and live in an office impenetrable by the great and sacred to the small ; they must ever have their heads filled with important secrets, miraculous designs, and new systems ; and, absorbed in meditations, they must be deprived not only of the use of speech, but even sometimes of politeness.

As soon as the late king had closed his eyes, they began to establish a new administration. They could tell things were awry, but they did not know what to do to make them better. The unbounded authority of the previous ministers had not worked well, so they tried dividing it : for this purpose they created six or seven councils, and it is perhaps this ministry which of all has governed France with the most sense. It was short-lived, as was the good it produced. [2]

France at the death of its late king was a body suffering a thousand ills. N\*\*\* [3] took a blade in hand, cut away the excess flesh, and applied some topical remedies. But there still remained an inner vice to cure. A foreigner [4] came who undertook this cure. After many violent remedies, he thought he had restored its stoutness, and had simply made it bloated.

Everyone who was rich six months ago is presently in poverty, and those who had no bread abound in riches. Never have these two extremes come so close. The foreigner has turned the state the way a used clothes dealer does with a suit : he makes visible on top what was underneath, and what was underneath he turns over. What unhopd-for fortunes, unbelievable even to those who made them ! God does not more rapidly raise men from nowhere. How many manservants being served by their comrades, and perhaps tomorrow by their masters !

All this often produces things that are passing strange. The footmen who had made their fortune under the previous reign now boast of their birth ; they greet those who have just doffed their liveries in a certain street [5] with all the contempt people had for them six months ago ; they cry with all their strength : The nobility is ruined, what disorder in the state ! What confusion in the ranks ! All we see is unknowns making a fortune ! I promise you that these will avenge themselves well on those who will come after them, and that in thirty years these men of quality will be clamoring.

*Paris this 1st day of the moon of Zilcadé 1720*

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[1] These changes might relate to men (Noailles succeeded by d'Argenson and then Law) or to numerous new fiscal, financial and commercial policies in the period 1718-1720.

[2] The seven counsels of the "polysynodie" (adjuncts of the council of the Regency), torn by inner strife, were suppressed in September 1718.

[3] Duke Adrien Maurice de Noailles, president of the financial council from 1715 to 1718 ; see letters 80 and 95 and the notes.

[4] The Scotsman John Law.

[5] Rue Quincampoix, center of all the transactions and commotion.