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- Persian Letters - Letters -

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### *Rica to Ibben in Smyrna*

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The women of Persia are more beautiful than those of France, but those of France are prettier. It is impossible not to love the former, and not to enjoy the company of the latter ; the ones are more tender and more modest ; the others more cheerful and more light-hearted.

What makes the blood so fair in Persia is the ordered life that women lead there ; they neither gamble nor stay up late ; they drink no wine, and almost never expose themselves to the air. It must be admitted that the seraglio is better suited to health than to pleasures. It is a consistent life, which does not itch ; everything there shows the effects of subordination and duty ; even pleasures there are grave and joys austere, and they are almost never indulged except as signs of authority and dependency.

Even the men do not have in Persia the same cheerfulness as the French ; they do not manifest the freedom of spirit and contented air that I find here in all the estates and all stations.

It is much worse in Turkey, where you could find families in which, generation after generation, no one has laughed since the founding of the monarchy.

This gravity of Asians comes from the paucity of intercourse between them ; they see each other only when they are forced to by ceremony. Their friendship, that gentle engagement of the heart which here gives such pleasure in life, is almost unknown to them ; they withdraw into their houses, where they always find a company awaiting them, in such a way that each family is, so to speak, isolated from the others.

One day when I was discussing this with a man of this country, he said to me : What I find most surprising about your ways is that you are obliged to live with slaves, whose heart and mind is ever marked by the abjection of their station ; those cowardly persons weaken in you the sentiments of virtue which one receives from nature, and ruin them from the time of your childhood which they envelop.

For - shed your prejudices - what can you expect from an education which you receive from a wretch [1] whose honor consists in guarding someone else's wives, and boasts of the basest employ that exists among humans ; who is contemptible even by his fidelity, which is his only virtue, since he comes to it by envy, jealousy, and despair ; who, eager to take vengeance on both sexes, of which he is the reject, is willing to be tyrannized by the stronger, provided he can afflict the weaker ; who, deriving from his own imperfection, his ugliness, and his deformity all the brilliance of his station, is esteemed only because he is unworthy of it ; who, in short, forever shackled to the door where he is attached, harder than the hinges and bolts that hold it, boasts of living fifty years in this unworthy post where, responsible for his master's jealousy, he has exercised all his baseness.

*Paris this 14th day of the moon of Zilhagé 1713*

[1] See Chardin : "The eunuchs in the great houses are also the children's tutors and governors. [...] The king's sons [...] have no other regents nor other masters" (II, 284).