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## Letter 48

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*Rica to \*\*\**

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I have seen people in whom virtue was so natural that it was not even noticeable ; they adhered to their duty without bending to it, and attended to it as if by instinct. Far from heightening their rare qualities in their speech, they seemed not even to have heard of them. Those are the people I like : not those men who seem surprised at their own virtue, and regard a good deed as a wonder which makes for a striking tale.

If modesty is a necessary virtue to those endowed by heaven with great talents, what can we say about those insects that dare to manifest a pride that would dishonor the greatest of men ?

I see people on all sides who are constantly talking about themselves ; their conversations are a mirror that always presents their impertinent face ; they will tell you about the pettiest things that have happened to them, and they would have the interest they take in them inflate them in your eyes. They have done everything, seen everything, said everything, thought everything ; they are a universal model, an inexhaustible subject of comparisons, a spring of examples that never runs dry. Oh how insipid is praise, when it reflects back on where it came from !

A few days ago a man of this character was overwhelming us for two hours with himself, his merit, and his talents ; but as there is no such thing as perpetual motion, he ceased to speak ; the conversation therefore returned to us, and we seized it.

First a man who seemed rather annoyed complained about the boredom prevalent in conversations : Always fools who portray themselves, and bring everything back to themselves ! Quite right, our windbag abruptly rejoined ; you just have to do like me : I never praise myself : I am a man of means and good birth ; I spend ; my friends say I am clever ; but I never talk about all that. If I have some good qualities, the one I most pride myself on is my modesty.

I marvelled at the impertinent fellow ; and while he was talking out loud, I was saying quietly : Happy is the man who has enough vanity never to speak well of himself, who fears those who are listening, and does not compromise his merit with the pride of others.

*Paris this 20th day of the moon of Rhamazan 1713*