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- Persian Letters - Letters -

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### *Rica to Rhedi in Venice*

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In Paris, my dear Rhedi, there are many trades. Here for a little silver an obliging man comes and offers you the secret of making gold. [1]

Another promises you to make you sleep with aerial spirits, [2] provided only that you have not seen seeing any women for only thirty years.

Next you will find soothsayers so skillful that they will tell you your entire life, provided they can spend just fifteen minutes in conversation with your servants.

Skillful women make of virginity a flower that dies and is born anew every day, and is picked the hundredth time more painfully than the first. [3]

There are others who, repairing all the ravages of time by the power of their art, are able to restore faltering beauty to a face, and even recall a woman from the height of old age and bring her back to her tenderest youth.

All these people are living or trying to live in a city that is the mother of invention. [4]

The revenues of the citizens are not collectivized here : the consist solely in wit and application ; everyone has his own, which he exploits as best he can.

He who would calculate all the men of the law [5] who pursue the revenue of some mosque would as soon have counted the sands of the sea [6] and the slaves of our monarch.

An infinite number of language, arts, and sciences masters teach what they do not know ; and this talent is very considerable, for it does not take much wit to show what you know, but it takes an infinite amount to teach what you do not know.

Here one can only die suddenly ; there is no way for death to exercise its domination otherwise : for there are people in every corner who have infallible remedies for all imaginable illnesses. [7]

All the shops are strung with invisible nets in which all the buyers get themselves caught ; nevertheless sometimes one can get away cheaply : a young merchant woman cajoles a man for a whole hour to get him to buy a packet of toothpicks.

There is no one who does not leave this city more cautious than he entered ; by dint of sharing one's wealth with others, one learns to preserve it, the sole advantage of foreigners in this enchanting city.

*Paris this 10th day of the moon of Saphar 1714*

[1] See letter 43.

[2] Doubtless a cabalist, basing his art on the theory of spirits (of four classes, corresponding to the four elements) ; coupling with a spirit requires renunciation of all carnal intercourse with women.

[3] An allusion to the astringents utilized for this purpose.

[4] "It is said proverbially that necessity is the mother of inventions ; that a man lives by invention, to say that he possesses nothing, or lives by artifice and swindles" (Furetière 1690).

[5] That is, of sacred law (see letter 27 : "Bishops are men of the law") : ecclesiastics seeking a stipend, for example.

[6] A Biblical image : "As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply the seed of David my servant" (Jeremiah 33:22).

[7] An allusion to innumerable hawkers of potions, remedies and snake oils.