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*Rica to Usbek in ****

The other day I went to dine at the house of a man of the robe [1] who had invited me several times. After talking about many things, I said to him : Monsieur, I have the impression that that your profession is very difficult. Not as much as you imagine, he replied ; the way we go about it, it is just an amusement. But how ? Is your head not always full of other people's business ? Are you not always occupied by things that are uninteresting ? You are right, these things are not interesting, for we take no interest whatever in them, and that itself makes the profession not as onerous as you say. When I saw him taking the matter in so detached a way, I continued, and said to him : Monsieur, I have not seen your office. I should think not, for I have none. When I took this charge I needed money to pay for my provisions [2] : I sold my library, and the bookseller who took it, from a prodigious number of volumes, left me only my book of accounts. It is not that I miss them : we judges do not puff ourselves up with vain science ; what need do we have of all those volumes of laws ? Almost all the cases are hypothetical, and outside the general rule. But could that not be, monsieur, because you force them outside ? For after all, why would every people on earth have laws, if they did not have their application ? And how can you apply them, if you do not know them ? If you know the Palace, [3] added the magistrate, you would not speak as you do : we have living books, which are the lawyers ; they work for us and their duty is to instruct us. And do they not sometimes also make it their duty to deceive you ? I rejoined. You would therefore not be wrong to protect yourself from their traps. They have weapons with which they attack your equity ; it would be good for you also to have some to defend it, and not to join in the battle lightly clad among men armored to the teeth.

Paris this 13th day of the moon of Chahban 1714

[1] A member of the judicial nobility.

[2] Letters patent officially confirming purchase of a charge as justice at the Parlement. Montesquieu himself owned a position (*président à mortier*) in the Bordeaux parlement.

[3] The *Palais de justice*, courthouse and seat of the Paris Parlement.