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*Rica to ****

They say that man is a social animal. On that basis it seems to me that the Frenchman is more of a man than another, he is the man par excellence, for he seems to be made solely for society.

But I have observed some among them who are not only sociable, but are themselves the universal society. They multiply in every corner, and populate in a moment the four quarters of a city ; a hundred men of this sort abound more than two thousand citizens ; to foreigners' eyes they could make up for the ravages of the plague or famine. In schools they ask whether a body can be at the same time in several places : they are a proof of the question the philosophers are debating.

They are always hurried, because they have the important business of asking everyone they see where they are going and whence they come.

You would never convince them that propriety does not require them to visit the public in retail every day, not counting the visits they make wholesale in the places where people assemble ; but as the path to them is too abbreviated, they are counted as nothing in the rules of their ceremonial.

They stress the doors of houses more with their knocking than do the winds and tempests. If you went to check all of the porters' lists, you would find their name every day mangled in a thousand ways in Swiss characters. [1] They spend their lives following funeral processions, expressing condolences or congratulations for marriages. The king never grants a benefice to any of his subjects but it costs them a coach to go express their joy to him. [2] Finally they return home worn out to rest so they can resume their heavy duties the next day.

One of them died the other day of weariness, and this epitaph was placed on his tomb : Here rests the man who has never rested. He has walked to five hundred thirty burials. He has rejoiced at the birth of two thousand six hundred eighty babies. The annuities for which he has congratulated his friends in ever-varied terms come to two million six hundred thousand livres. The distance he has covered on the pavement is nine thousand six hundred stadia ; the distance he has covered in the country is thirty-six. [3] His conversation was entertaining ; he had a ready repertory of three hundred sixty-five tales. He had moreover possessed since his youth one hundred eighteen apophthegms taken from the Ancients, which he utilized on brilliant occasions. Finally he died in his sixtieth year of age. I desist, traveller ; for how could I ever tell you all that he did and all that he saw ?

Paris this 3rd day of the moon of Gemmadi II, 1715

[1] The names of those who have called at the house in the owner's absence were recorded by the Swiss "to whom the guard of the door was entrusted" : the term is attested in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* in 1718 (art. "Ecrire").

[2] *I.e.*, the cost of hiring a coach.

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[3] A stadium is about 250m (the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* of 1704 gives twenty stadia as making up nearly a league, in other words about four kilometers).