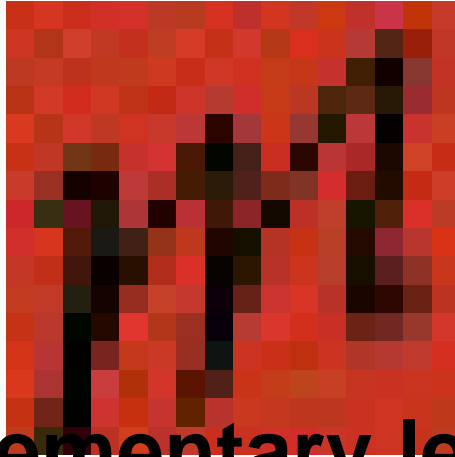


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Supplementary letter VI

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Date de mise en ligne : mardi 14 avril 2020

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Usbek to Rhedi in Venice [1]

What can be the motive of these immense liberalities that princes shower on their courtiers ? Are they trying to bind them ? They are already as beholden to him as they can be. And moreover, if they acquire some of their subjects by buying them, they must also, for the same reason, lose countless others by impoverishing them.

When I think of the situation of princes, ever surrounded by greedy and insatiable men, I can only pity them ; and I pity them even more when they lack the strength to resist the always onerous demands of those who are demanding nothing.

I never hear of their liberalities, of the favors and pensions they grant, without indulging myself in a thousand reflections. A flock of thoughts comes to mind ; I seem to be hearing this edict proclaimed :

"The indefatigable courage of some of our subjects in seeking pensions having exercised our royal magnificence without pause, we have finally yielded to the multitude of petitions which they have presented, the which have until now caused the greatest solicitude of our throne. They have maintained to us that they have not failed, since our accession to the crown, to be present at our arising ; that we have always seen them immobile, like milestones, along our passage ; and that they have stood very high to see, over the highest shoulders, our serene highness. [2] We have even received several petitions from some persons of the fair sex, who have entreated us to be aware that it is public knowledge how difficult they are to maintain ; some even very old-fashioned ones have begged us, with shaking heads, to be aware that they were once the ornament of the court of the kings our predecessors ; and that if the generals of their armies have made the state fearsome by their military feats, they have not made the court less famous with their intrigues. Thus, desiring to deal generously with the suppliants, and grant them all their prayers, we have ordered what follows :

"That every laborer who has five children shall reduce each day by one-fifth the bread he gives them. We enjoin the paterfamilias to make the reduction to each of them as fair as is possible.

"We expressly forbid all those who apply themselves to cultivating their inheritance, or who have leased them, from making any repairs of any kind whatever.

"We command that all persons who practice base and mechanical labors, but have never been present at the arising of our majesty, shall never more buy clothing for themselves, their wives, or their children, except every four years ; we forbid them moreover very strictly those small celebrations they were wont to hold in their families on the principal feast days of the year.

"And whereas we are informed that most of the bourgeois of our good cities are entirely occupied by making provision for the establishment of their daughters, the which have only made themselves worthy, in our state, by a sad and dreary modesty, we command that they shall wait to marry them until, having attained the statutory age limit, they shall petition to force them to do so. [3] We forbid our magistrates to provide for the education of their children."

Supplementary letter VI

Paris this 1st day of the moon of Chalval 1718

[1] First published in edition B (1721).

[2] "A title which the Venitians give to their doge to distinguish him from the other dukes, with the idea that this title is higher than that of highness" (Richelet, 1680).

[3] See letter 84, note 2 on the recourse of a girl to justice against her father to be married.