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Rica to Ibben in Smyrna

Although the French talk a lot, there is nevertheless among them a kind of taciturn dervich who are called Carthusians : it is said they cut off their tongues when they enter the convent, and it would be most desirable for all other dervishes similarly to take away everything their profession renders useless to them.

On the subject of taciturn people, there are some far more singular than those, and who have a very extraordinary talent. It is those who know how to talk without saying anything, and who occupy a conversation for two hours' time without it being possible to divine their thought, to plagiarize them, or to remember a word of what they have said.

These sorts of people are adored by women ; yet they are not adored as much as others, who have received from nature the amiable talent of smiling appropriately, which is to say at every moment, and who bestow the grace of joyous approbation on everything they say.

But they are at the height of wit when they can detect delicacy in everything, and find a thousand ingenious little subtleties in the commonest things.

I know others who have done very well by introducing inanimate objects into conversations and have their brocaded suit speak, and their blond wig, their snuffbox, their cane and gloves. It is good to start from the street making people listen by the noise of the carriage and the knocker that pounds the door heavily ; this preface anticipates the rest of the discourse ; and when the exordium is elegant, it makes bearable all the idiocies that follow it, but which fortunately arrive too late. [1]

I promise you that these petty talents which have no importance in Persia here well serve those who are fortunate enough to possess them, and that a man of good sense is no standout among these sorts of people.

Paris this 6th day of the moon of Rebiab II, 1715

[1] See the portrait of Theodectes in La Bruyère (*Les Caractères*, "De la société et de la conversation", 12).