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- Persian Letters - Letters -

Publication date: mercredi 15 avril 2020

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<a href="#">Letter 71</a>	<a href="#">Letter 73</a>
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*Rica to Usbek in \*\*\**

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A few days ago a man of my acquaintance said to me : I have promised to introduce you into the important houses in Paris ; I am taking you now to the house of a great lord, who is one of the men who represents as well as any in the realm. [1]

What does that mean, monsieur ? Is he more polished, more affable than another ? It is not that, he said. Ah, I get it : at every moment he makes you feel his superiority over everyone who approaches him : if that is so, I hardly care to go ; I already acquiesce, and completely concede it to him.

Nevertheless, I had to go along ; and I saw a little man so proud ; he took his snuff with such loftiness ; he blew his nose so pitilessly ; he spat with such phlegm, he petted his dogs in a manner so offensive to men, that I could not tire of marvelling at him. Oh, good Lord, I said inwardly, if while I was at the Persian court I represented like that, I was representing a great fool ! We would have had to be very ill-natured, Usbek, to go making a hundred little insults to people who came to our house every day to express their good will. They were quite aware that we were above them, and had they not been, our benevolence would have informed them of it each day. Having to do nothing to make them respect us, we did everything to make ourselves likable ; we acted familiarly with the least of them ; in the midst of grandeurs, which always harden, they found us sensitive ; what they saw above them was only our hearts ; we stooped to their needs. But when we needed to support the prince's majesty in public ceremonies ; when we needed to make foreigners respect the nation, or when we needed in perilous situations to motivate the soldiers, we ascended a hundred times higher than we had stooped, we brought the pride back to our faces, and sometimes people found that we represented rather well.

*Paris this 10th day of the moon of Saphar 1715*

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[1] "It is said of a person of dignified station, and who in the functions of his charge maintains a suitable gravity [...] that 'He is a man who represents well, who represents with dignity' [...]. It is also said of a man of quality, who has a grand manner, even though he has no particular function" ( *Académie*, 1718).