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- Persian Letters - Letters -

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*Rica to Usbek in ****

I was in my room the other day when I saw an extraordinarily dressed dervish enter ; his beard descended to his belt of rope ; he was barefoot ; his habit was gray, crude, and pointed in some places ; the whole appeared so bizarre to me that my first reaction was to send for a painter to make a portrait.

He at once made me a little speech in which he informed me that he was a man of merit, and a Capuchin besides. [1] I have been told, monsieur, he added, that you soon return to the Persian court, where you hold a distinguished rank ; I have come to ask your protection, and entreat you to obtain for us from the king a small settlement in the vicinity of Casbin [2] for two or three religious. Father, I said, so you desire to go to Persia ? I, monsieur ? he said. I shall be sure not to ; I am a provincial [3] here, and I would not trade my lot for that of all the Capuchins in the world. Then what on earth are you asking me for ? It's just that if we had this hospice, he replied, our Fathers in Italy would send two or three of their religious there. You know them of course, these religious, I said. No, monsieur, I do not know them. Well, I'll be ! Then why do you care to send them to Persia ? It is a fine project to have two Capuchins breathe the air of Casbin : that will be very useful to Europe and to Asia ; it is most necessary to engage monarchs in this. In other words, it is colonies you want ! Go : you and your ilk are not apt for being transplanted, and you will do well to continue creeping in the places where you have spawned yourselves.

Paris this 15th day of the moon of Rhamazan 1713

[1] A Franciscan order identified by gray clothing, pointed hats, bare feet, and unshaven beards.

[2] "A town of Persia in the province of Airach [...]. It is seated at the foot of the mountains, between Isfahan and the Caspian Sea. Casbin is held to be one of the greatest and most populous of all Persia" (Collier 1701).

[3] Head of a religious order in a particular province.