

ON THE COURTIER'S AND FAMILIARS OF A KING

THE NIZÁMU 'L MULK

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No king can be without worthy courtiers with whom he may be at his ease and behave without restraint. For the constant society of dignitaries, of princes, and of generals, by emboldening them, detracts from the dignity and majesty of the sovereign. Speaking generally, the king should not make a familiar of anyone whom he has appointed to office, for the reason that the freedom which he enjoys on the king's carpet may lead him to practise extortion and so do harm to the king's subjects. The governor of a province should for ever stand in awe of the king, while the courtier must be ever at his ease, so that the king may derive pleasure from him and the kingly mind find relaxation through him. They should have a fixed time for one another; and it should be after the king has held audience and the great officers have all departed.

There are certain advantages in having a courtier. One of these is that he is a friend to the king; another, this, that seeing he is in the king's company day and night, he acts as his bodyguard; another, that should any danger appear (which Heaven forbid!) he sacrifices his own body and makes it a shield to ward off the peril; still a fourth is that the king may hold conversation on a thousand topics with his courtiers in a way impossible with officers and functionaries of the king. Fifthly, courtiers, like spies, bring the king information about his vassals. Sixthly, they converse in the freest manner of all things, good or ill, being drunk or sober; and in that there is great benefit.

The courtier should be essentially honourable and of excellent character, of cheerful disposition and irreproachable in respect of his religion, discreet and a clean liver. He should be able to tell a story and repeat a narrative either humorous or grave, and he should remember news. He should also be consistently a carrier of pleasant tidings and the announcer of felicitous happenings. He should also have acquaintance of backgammon and chess, and if he can play a musical instrument and can handle a weapon, it is all the better.

The courtier also must ever be in agreement with the king. Whatever he hears the king say, he must cry "Bravo!" or "Excellent!" and let him never play the pedagogue, saying "Do this," or "Don't do that," or "Why did you do that?" or "This is a thing one should not do." Such conduct will prove disagreeable to the king and may lead to dislike. However, when questions arise of wine or amusements, or of excursions out of doors, or of convivial gatherings, or of hunting or polo-playing and the like, it is permissible for courtiers to deal with them, for they are practised in these matters.

On the other hand, whenever the question is one appertaining to kingship, or campaigning, or raiding, or administration, or supplies, or gifts, or war and peace, or the army, or the king's subjects, and the like matters, then such question had better be decided with the aid of the vizier and the great experts in these faculties, and the elders of experience, in order that affairs may follow their proper course.

There are some kings who have made familiars of a physician or astrologer in order to learn how to govern the people, what fate is destined for themselves, or what they should do; and their constitution and temperament have been carefully watched. Now the astrologer keeps observation of times and hours, and in any matter in which the king decides to engage, the astrologer gives advice and chooses the propitious hour. But there are some kings who have refused to have dealings with these two, saying: "The physician restrains us from enjoyable foods and agreeable pleasures, gives us medicines when we are suffering neither from sickness nor disease and his one object is to cause illness. And the astrologer is no better. He forbids everything that is worth doing, sets restrictions upon matters of importance, and spoils all our pleasure in life." It were better therefore to summon these two only when there is need.

Still, if the courtier is a man of the world, one who has been here and there and seen service with the great, it is to the good. When men wish to know the disposition and character of the king they judge it by analogy from his familiars. If they are pleasant-tempered, good-natured, generous, modest, and patient, people draw a corresponding inference and conclude that the king is not notoriously ill-tempered, nor ill-disposed, nor of evil

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way of life and conduct, nor miserly.

Every courtier should have a rank and position allotted to him. Some should be permitted to be seated while others should be required to remain standing, as has been the custom from ancient times in the presence of kings and caliphs; the caliph always having as his courtiers the men who served his father. The Sultan of Ghazna always had twenty courtiers, of whom ten might be seated while the other ten stood. They derived this custom and practice from the Sámánid dynasty.

Lastly, courtiers should be well remunerated by the king, who should assure their being honoured amongst his retainers, whilst they in their turn should keep watch on themselves, be of upright conduct, and the king's friends.