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*Rica to Usbek in ****

I am sending you the copy of a letter which a Frenchman who is in Spain has written here ; I think you will be most gratified to see it [1] :

For six months I have been travelling in Spain and Portugal, and living with peoples who, looking down on all others, pay only the French the honor of detesting them.

Gravity is the outstanding trait of the two nations ; it manifests itself principally in two ways : with eyeglasses and with mustaches.

Eyeglasses make one demonstrably aware that their wearer is a man consummately versed in the sciences, and buried in profound readings, to such a point that his eyesight has been diminished ; and every nose that is graced or burdened with them can pass without objection as the nose of a scholar.

As for the mustaches, it is respectable in itself, and independently of the consequences ; although nonetheless it does not fail often to render great benefits for the prince's service and the honor of the nation, as was shown by a famous Portuguese general in the Indies [2] : for finding himself in need of money, he cut off half his mustache, and sent to ask the inhabitants of Goa for twenty thousand pistoles on that security ; they were promptly loaned to him, and subsequently he honorably redeemed his mustache.

It is easily conceived that grave and phlegmatic peoples like these can have some vanity, and so they do. They base it ordinarily on two very considerable things. Those who live on the continent of Spain and Portugal feel their hearts extremely exalted when they are what they call old Christians, in other words they are not descendants of those whom the Inquisition persuaded these past centuries to embrace the Christian religion. [3] Those who are in the Indies are not less flattered when they consider that they have the sublime merit of being, as they say, men of white flesh. There has never been in the seraglio of the Great Lord a sultana so proud of her beauty as the oldest and ugliest dog is of the olive-toned whiteness of his skin when he is in a city in Mexico sitting at his door with his arms crossed. A man of such consequence, a creature so perfect, would not work for all the treasures on earth, and would never consent by base and mechanical effort to compromise the honor and dignity of his skin. [4]

For you must know that when a man has a certain merit in Spain, as for example when he can add to the qualities I have just mentioned that of being the owner of a large sword or having learned from his father the art of plunking an off-key guitar, he no longer works ; his honor is invested in the repose of his limbs. He who remains seated for ten hours per day obtains precisely half again as much consideration as another who remains for only five, because it is on chairs that nobility is acquired. [5]

But although these invincible enemies of work make a great show of philosophical tranquility, still they have it not in their hearts, for they are forever in love. They are the premier men in the world for dying of languor under the windows of their mistresses, and no Spaniard who does not have a cold could possibly pass for a gallant man.

They are primarily devout, and secondarily jealous. They will strictly avoid exposing their wives to the enterprises of a soldier with multiple wounds or a decrepit magistrate, but they will enclose them with a fervent novice [6] who lowers his eyes, or a robust Franciscan who lifts them.

They are more familiar than others with women's weaknesses ; they do not want anyone to see their heel, or glimpse of the tip of their toes. [7] They know that the imagination always goes forward, and that nothing distracts it along the way ; it arrives, and there one was sometimes warned in advance. [8]

People say everywhere that the rigors of love are cruel. They are even more so for the Spaniards : the women cure them of their pains, but they only make them change pains, and they always retain a long and disagreeable memory of an extinguished passion. [9]

They have petty forms of politeness that in France would seem out of place : for example, a captain never beats his soldier with first asking his permission, [10] and the Inquisition never has a Jew burned without first offering an apology. [11]

The Spaniards who are not burned seem so attached to the Inquisition that it would be inconsiderate to take it away from them. I would simply like them to establish another one, not against heretics, but against heresiarchs, who attribute to trivial monastic practices the same efficaciousness as to the seven sacraments ; who worship everything they venerate, and are so devout that they are hardly Christians.

You can find wit and good sense in the Spanish ; but do not look for any in their books. See one of their libraries, novels on one side and the scholastics on the other : you would say the parts have been made, and the whole assembled, by some secret enemy of human reason.

The only one of their books that is good is the one that exposed the stupidity of all the others. [12]

They have made immense discoveries in the New World, and do not yet know their own continent : on their rivers are ports not yet discovered, and in their mountains peoples unknown to them. [13]

They say the sun rises and sets in their country [14] ; but it must also be said that it encounters nothing in its path but ruined countryside and empty lands. [15]

I would not be displeased, Usbek, to see a letter written to Madrid by a Spaniard travelling in France : I think he would avenge his nation well. What a vast field for a phlegmatic and thoughtful man ! I imagine he would begin his description of Paris this way :

There is a house here where they put lunatics [16] ; offhand you would think it is the largest in the city : no, the remedy is very small for the disease. No doubt the French, extremely decried by their neighbors, lock a few lunatics up in a house to make it appear that those outside are something else.

I leave there my Spaniard. Adieu, my dear Usbek.

Paris this 17th day of the moon of Saphar 1715

- [1] This letter is a parody of relations of travel to Spain, above all of the factitious *Relation du voyage d'Espagne* by Mme d'Aulnoy (1691), who is one of the sources of abbé Jean de Vayrac's *État présent de l'Espagne* (1718) ; she denounces in her work "a tissue of fictional tales, or sharp satires to make the Spanish look ridiculous" (vol. I, p. 7).
- [2] Jean de Castro [*author's note*], i.e. João de Castro (1500-1548). It is not known where Montesquieu got this anecdote ; Vernière speculates that it could have come, directly or indirectly, from the *Vida de Joam de Castro* by Freire de Andrada (Lisbon, 1651).
- [3] "New Christians" were Jews, converted on pain of expulsion or worse, and their descendants.
- [4] An allusion to the fact that the Aztecs, and in particular their chief Mochtezuma, had taken the so-called conquistadores for gods in virtue of a legend about a white god. This allusion is rendered ironic by the characterization of these proud "whites" as having skin of "olive-toned whiteness" ; see also letter 117.
- [5] An implicit criticism of a nobility transformed into "pillars of the antechamber" under Louis XIV, and of the fact that in France, manual or merchant labor was unworthy of nobility.
- [6] *I.e.*, a young priest.
- [7] Mme d'Aulnoy quotes a woman who barricades her door to put on her shoes, saying she would rather lose her life than let men see her feet (vol. II, p. 190).
- [8] Camusat cites this sentence with the comment : "I admit in good faith that I have not understood the meaning of this sentence, and I am not the only one who has sweated over the understanding of this passage" (p. 21).
- [9] According to Mme d'Aulnoy, foreigners coming to Madrid find that the women who are available carry dangers to one's health. Vayrac confirms the endemic state of venereal diseases and discusses their effects on depopulation (vol. I, p. 73-74).
- [10] The source of this anecdote has not been identified.
- [11] A paraphrase of instructions found in the inquisitors' manual. On the operation of the Inquisition in Spain, see letter 27, note 1 ; on the hypocrisy of the inquisitors, see letter 27.
- [12] *Don Quixote*.
- [13] Las Batuecas [*author's note (added in edition D)*]. An old legend analyzed by Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro in "Fábula de las Batuecas, y payses imaginarios", in vol. IV (1730) of his *Teatro critico universal* (Madrid : Real Compañía des Impresores y Libreros, 1777, p. 261-292). Its nonexistence had been definitively proven, according to him, by the publication of the *Verdadera Relacion, y manifiesto apologético de la antigüedad de las Batuecas* by Thomás Gonzalez de Manuel (Madrid 1693).
- [14] "When the sun sets on one part of its realms, it rises on another" (d'Aulnoy, vol. II, p. 97), according to the proud assertion of Charles V.
- [15] This theme is again taken up in the letters on depopulation, 108-118, notably letter 108.
- [16] The hospice called *Petites Maisons*, founded in 1557 for the infirm and sick as well as for the insane.