

Montesquieu

Selected Political Writings

Edited and Translated by
Melvin Richter

For Micha

Montesquieu: 1689-1755

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PERSIAN LETTERS

Myth of the Troglodytes

Letter X

Mirza to his Friend Usbek at Erzerum

Only you could make up for the absence of Rica; only Rica could console me for your departure. We miss you, Usbek, you were the soul of our group. It required much violence to break the obligations created by heart and mind.

Here we continue to argue much; and at the center of our discussion is the question of ethics. The issue yesterday was whether men achieve happiness through the pleasures and satisfactions of the senses, or by the practice of virtue. I have often heard you say that men are born to be virtuous, that justice is a quality as proper to them as existence. Please explain to me what you mean.

I have talked with some mullahs, but their citation of passages from the Koran made me despair.¹ For I speak to them not as a true believer, but as a man, as a citizen, as a father of a family.² Adieu.

From Ispahan, the last of the moon of Saphar, 1711

Letter XI

Usbek to Mirza at Ispahan

You disparage your own reason and seek out mine. You demean yourself when you consult me in the belief that I am capable of instructing you. My dear Mirza, only one thing is more flattering than your high opinion of me and that is your friendship.

To do what you have asked of me does not, in my view, require highly abstract reasoning. There are certain truths that cannot be learned by rational persuasion alone, but in addition need to be felt. Such are the truths of ethics. Perhaps a bit of history will touch you more than subtle philosophical argument.

In Arabia there once was a small people called the Troglodytes,

descendants of the ancient Troglodytes, who, if the historians are to be believed,³ resembled beasts more than men. Their descendants were in no way deformed, they were neither hairy like bears, nor did they hiss [like serpents]; they had two eyes. But they were at once so wicked and cruel that they lacked any principle of equity or of justice.

They were ruled by a king of foreign origin who treated them severely in order to correct their wicked nature. But conspiring against him, they put him to death, and exterminated the entire royal family.

Having succeeded in their coup, they assembled to choose a government. After many a disagreement, they created magistrates. Immediately after having been chosen, these were found unendurable and were massacred in turn.

Once liberated from their new yoke, this people consulted only the savage disposition natural to them. All of them agreed that they would no longer obey anybody, that everyone would confine himself to looking out for his own interests without taking into account those of others.

This unanimous decision pleased everyone. They said: "Why should I become involved and kill myself working for people about whom I could not care less. I shall think of myself alone. I shall live happily without concern for others. I shall provide for all my needs. If successful, I shall not care if all the other Troglodytes are miserable."

It was the season to plant the fields. Every individual said: "I shall cultivate my land only to the extent that I need grain; anything more would be useless to me; I shall not take such trouble for nothing."

Not all the soil in this little kingdom was of the same quality. Some of the terrain was arid and mountainous; some, located on lower ground, was watered by several streams. That year there was a great drought. The land on high ground had no water; while that below could be irrigated and was very fertile. Thus the mountain people all died of hunger because the others were so hard-hearted that they refused to share their harvest.

The next year was very rainy. The high lands were extraordinarily fertile; those below were submerged. Half of the people once again cried famine. These miserable people found themselves confronted by others as unyielding as they themselves had been.

One of the principal inhabitants had a very beautiful wife. His neighbor fell in love with her and carried her off. A great quarrel broke out. After many insults and many blows, they agreed to

submit the matter for decision to a Troglodyte, who had had a good reputation at the time of the republic. They went to him and attempted to state their respective cases. "What difference does it make to me," said this man, "whether this woman belongs to one or another of you? I have my field to cultivate. Perhaps I have a better way of using my time than to settle your differences and to work on your business while neglecting my own. Please leave me in peace and don't bother me with your disputes." With that, he left them to attend to his land. The abductor, who was the stronger, swore that he would die before giving up this woman. Her husband was wounded by the injustice done him by his neighbor and the harshness of the judge. Returning home in despair, he came across a young and beautiful woman on her way back from the fountain. He no longer had a wife, and this woman pleased him. His satisfaction became even greater upon learning that she was the wife of the man whom he had wished to act as a judge, the man so insensitive to his misfortune. He carried her off to his home.

There was another man who owned a fertile field, which he cultivated with great care. Two of his neighbors united, expelled him from his house and took over his field. They agreed to join in defending themselves against anyone who might seek to take it from them and indeed managed to stay there for several months. But then one of them, tired of sharing what he might have for himself, killed the other and became sole master of the field. His tenure did not last long. Two other Troglodytes came and attacked him. Since he was too weak to defend himself, he was massacred.

Another Troglodyte, who was very close to being naked, saw some wool for sale, and asked its price. The merchant replied, "Naturally I ought not to expect more for my wool than what would enable me to buy two measures of grain. But I am going to sell it for four times that amount. Then I can get eight measures." Needing the wool, the first had to pay that price. "That pleases me," said the merchant. "Now I can buy grain." "What did you say?" replied the buyer. "You need grain? I have some for sale. But the price may surprise you. As you know, grain costs a great deal, and famine prevails almost everywhere. Give me back my money, and I shall give you one measure of wheat. I shall not dispose of it on any other terms, even if you were to die of hunger."

Meanwhile a cruel disease was ravaging the country. A skilled physician from a neighboring country arrived and prescribed reme-

dies so effective that he cured everyone in his care. Once the disease was over, he went to all those he had treated and asked for his fee. Everywhere he was met by the refusal to pay. He returned to his country, exhausted by the rigors of his long voyage. But soon after he heard that the same disease had reappeared and once again was afflicting that ungrateful land. This time its inhabitants did not wait for him to come to them, but came to him. "Go away," he told them. "You are unjust men. Your souls are filled with a poison more lethal than the disease you wished cured. You do not deserve a place on earth because you have no humanity; the rules of equity are unknown to you. Were I to oppose the justice of the angry gods punishing you, I should myself offend them."

From Erzerum, the 3rd of the moon of Gemmadi II, 1711

Letter XII

Usbek to the Same at Ispahan

You have seen, my dear Mirza, how the Troglodytes perished because of their wickedness, how they were the victims of their own injustice. Out of all their families, only two escaped the misfortunes that befell their nation. Those surviving families included two extraordinary men: they possessed humanity; they knew justice; they loved virtue. They were as much united by their upright hearts as by the corruption of the others. When they saw how widespread was the desolation, they could feel only pity. This furnished the purpose of a new union. With a mutual solicitude, they worked for the common interest; between them, there were no differences other than those that stemmed from a sweet and tender friendship. In the most remote part of the country, separated from compatriots unworthy of them, they led a happy and tranquil life. The earth, cultivated by such virtuous hands, seemed to produce almost spontaneously.⁴

They loved their wives, and were tenderly cherished by them. All their attention was devoted to raising their children in the ways of virtue. To their children, they always pointed out the misfortunes of their compatriots; and continually held up their sad example. Above all, their children were made to feel that the interest of individuals always consists of the common interest; that he who wills the separation of these interests wills their loss; that virtue neither costs us dear nor is painful to practice; that justice to others is a blessing to ourselves.

Soon they had the consolation of virtuous fathers – that is, to have children like themselves. The young people growing up under their eyes increased because of happy marriages; their numbers continued to grow; their union remained what it had always been; and virtue, far from being weakened by such numbers, was strengthened by the greater number of examples.

Who could describe the happiness of the Troglodytes? So just a people must have been cherished by the gods. As soon as the Troglodytes opened their eyes and recognized the gods, they learned to fear them. Thus religion came to make gentler those *moeurs* that Nature had left too unrefined.

They instituted festivals in honor of the gods. Young girls decked in flowers joined the young boys in celebration by dances to the harmonies of rural music. Then followed banquets characterized by both joy and frugality. Here simple Nature spoke, and taught how to give and receive their hearts. Here virginal chastity made that surprised confession which was soon to be ratified by paternal consent. Here tender mothers were delighted to predict from afar tender and faithful unions.

The Troglodytes would go to the Temple to request favors of the gods. But they prayed neither for riches nor for burdensome abundance; to do so would have been unworthy of the happy Troglodytes. Rather they came to the foot of the altars only to seek health for their fathers, marriage for their brothers, the tender love of their wives, the love and obedience of their children. Girls came for no other purpose than to make the tender sacrifice of their hearts; they sought no blessing other than to be able to make a Troglodyte happy.

In the evening, after the flocks had returned from the meadows and the weary oxen had brought back their plows, the Troglodytes would assemble and after a frugal meal, sing of the injustices and misfortunes of the first Troglodytes, of the rebirth of virtue in a new people and its consequent felicity. They celebrated the greatness of the gods, who always bestowed their favors upon those men who prayed for them, and punished by their inevitable wrath those who did not fear them. Then they would describe the delights of life in the country and the happiness of an existence graced by innocence. Soon they yielded to a sleep undisturbed by care or pain.

Nature supplied their desires as well as their needs. In this fortunate country, cupidity was unknown. When they exchanged presents, the giver always thought himself to be the most fortunate. The Troglodyte people regarded itself as a single family. Their

flocks were almost always intermingled; the only trouble the Troglodytes spared themselves was to separate them.⁵

From Erzerum, the 6th of the moon of Gemmadi II, 1711

Letter XIII

Usbek to the Same

I could not tell you enough about the virtue of the Troglodytes. Once upon a time one of them said, "My father must plow his field tomorrow. I shall get up two hours before he does, and when he goes to his field, he will find it already plowed."

Another said to himself, "It seems to me that my sister has taken a liking for a young Troglodyte, who is related to us. I must speak to my father and persuade him to arrange the marriage."

Another was told that robbers had carried off his flock. "I am very angry about that," he said. "There was a pure white heifer that I had wished to offer to the gods."

One of them was heard to tell another, "I must go to the Temple to thank the gods. My brother, so much loved by my father and dear to me, has recovered his health."

Or else, "A field that borders on my father's is so exposed to the heat of the sun that those who cultivate it must suffer every day that they do so. I must go there and plant two trees so that those poor people may from time to time rest in their shade."

One day when a number of Troglodytes had come together, an old man spoke of a young person whom he suspected of having committed a crime and whom he had reproached for it. "We cannot believe that he has committed this crime," said the young Troglodytes, "but if he has, may he be the last of his family to die."

Another Troglodyte was informed that strangers had pillaged his house and carried away everything there. "If they had not been unjust men," he replied, "I would have wished that the gods might grant them a longer enjoyment of those goods than was given to me."

So much prosperity did not go unenvied. Their neighbors joined together and on the basis of some empty pretext sought to seize the Troglodytes' flocks. As soon as they heard of this resolve, the Troglodytes sent ambassadors to them, who spoke as follows:

"What have the Troglodytes done to you? Have they carried off your wives, or stolen your cattle? No, we are just and we fear the

gods. What, then, do you ask of us? Do you wish wool for your clothes? Do you wish milk for your flocks, or the fruits of our soil? Put down your arms, come to us, and we shall give you all that. But we swear by all that is most sacred, if you enter our land as enemies, we shall regard you as an unjust people, and treat you as wild beasts."

Those words were rejected with scorn. These savage peoples came armed into the lands of the Troglodytes, which they thought to be defended only by their innocence.

But the Troglodytes were well prepared to defend themselves; they had placed their wives and children in the midst of their defenses. They were more astonished by their neighbors' injustice than by their numbers. A new ardor burned in their hearts. One man wished to die for his father; another, for his wife and children; a third, for his brothers; a fourth, for his friends; and everyone for the Troglodyte people. Anyone killed in battle was at once replaced by another, who was spurred not only by the common cause, but also by the death of an individual he had to revenge.

Such was the combat between injustice and virtue. Those cowardly peoples who sought only booty were not ashamed to flee. They yielded to the virtue of the Troglodytes without even being touched by it.

From Erzerum, the 9th of the moon of Gemmadi II, 1711

Letter XIV

To the Same

Since their people was increasing in number every day, the Troglodytes thought it appropriate to choose a king. They agreed that the crown should be offered to whomever was most just. They all cast their eyes upon an old man who was venerated both for his age and long-continued virtue. He had not wished to attend this meeting, and had retired to his home, his heart filled with sadness.

Deputies were sent to inform him that he had been chosen. "God forbid," he said, "that I commit this wrong against the Troglodytes, that anyone should think that I am the most just among them. You offer me the crown, and if you absolutely insist, I must accept it. But realize that I shall die of grief to have seen Troglodytes born free, but now become subjects." After these words, he burst into tears. "O miserable day," he said. "Why did I have to live so long?" Then he cried out in a severe voice: "I see well what is happening, O Troglodytes: Your virtue is beginning to

weigh upon you. In your present situation without a chief, you must be virtuous despite yourself. Otherwise you could not carry on: you would relapse into the misfortunes of the first Troglodytes who were your ancestors. But this yoke appears too difficult to you; you would prefer to be in submission to a prince and to be governed by his laws, for they would be less rigorous than your *moeurs*. You know that from then on you could satisfy your ambition, acquire riches, and languish amidst the pleasures of a coward. Provided only that you avoid major crimes, you would no longer need virtue." He stopped a moment, and his tears began to flow even more than before. "Well then, what would you have me do? How could I give orders to a Troglodyte? Do you hope that because I have issued an order he will do a virtuous deed? But he would have done the same thing without me, urged on by nothing more than the inclination of his nature. O Troglodytes, I am coming to the end of my days. My blood is becoming colder in my veins. Before long I shall be seeing again your revered ancestors. Why do you ask me to afflict them? Why must I be obliged to tell them that I have left you under another yoke than that of virtue?"⁶

From Erzerum, the 10th of the moon of Gemmadi II, 1711

Sequel to the Myth of the Troglodytes⁷

It was a grand spectacle to see all the Troglodytes joyous while the prince was dissolved in tears. When he appeared the next day before the Troglodytes, his face showed neither sadness nor joy. He appeared to be preoccupied with the task of government. But the secret disquiet that was devouring him soon put an end to his life. Thus died the greatest king who ever ruled over men.

For forty days, he was mourned; everyone believed that he had lost his own father. Everyone said: "What has happened to the hope of the Troglodytes? We lose you, dear Prince. You believed that you were unworthy of commanding us. Heaven has revealed that we were not worthy of obeying you. But we swear by your sacred spirit that since you did not wish to govern us by your laws, we shall conduct ourselves by the example you provided us."

It became necessary to elect another prince. One remarkable aspect of the situation was that no member of the dead monarch's family claimed his throne. The wisest and most just member of this family was chosen to be king.

Toward the end of his reign, some believed it necessary for the Troglodytes to establish commerce and the arts. The nation was assembled, and that course was decided.

The king spoke in the following way: "You wished me to assume the throne and believed me virtuous enough to govern you. Heaven is my witness that the happiness of the Troglodytes has been the only object of my concerns. I have the honor of knowing that my reign has not been sullied by the cowardice of even a single Troglodyte. Would you now prefer riches to your virtue?"

"My Lord," replied one of them, "we are fortunate; we work upon excellent soil. Shall I dare to say it? You alone will decide whether or not wealth will be pernicious to your people. If they see that you prefer wealth to virtue, they will soon accustom themselves to do the same; and in that your taste will govern theirs. If you promote someone in your service, or choose him simply because he is rich, you may be certain that this will be a mortal blow that you have delivered to virtue. You will have created imperceptibly as many dishonest men as have observed this cruel distinction made by you. You know, my lord, what is the basis of your people's virtue: it is education. Once this education is changed, even the man who is not daring enough to become a criminal will soon blush at being virtuous.

"We have two things to do: to make avarice and prodigality equally disgraceful. Everyone must be responsible to the state for the administration of his property. Any coward who lowers himself to the point of denying himself an honest subsistence ought to be judged no less severely than the man who dissipates the inheritance of his children. Every citizen must dispense his own wealth as fairly as he would that belonging to another."

"Troglodytes," said the king, "wealth will be admitted into your country. But I tell you that if you are not virtuous, you will rank among the most miserable peoples in the world. In your present state, I need only be more just than you. This is what marks my royal authority, and I could never find anything more majestic. If you seek to distinguish yourselves only by your wealth, which is intrinsically worthless, then I shall have to distinguish myself by the same means in order not to remain in the

poverty that you will scorn. Then it will become necessary for me to load you down with taxes, and for you to devote a considerable part of your subsistence to support me in the pomp and magnificence that will serve to make me respectable. At present I find all my wealth within myself. But if the situation were to alter, then you would have to spend everything you have in order to enrich me. Then you will not at all enjoy the wealth of which you make so much; it will all pass into my treasury. O Troglodytes: There is a lovely tie that can bind us together. If you are virtuous, then I shall be; if I am virtuous, then you will be."

Seraglio Sequence

Letter II

Usbek to the Chief Black Eunuch at His Seraglio at Ispahan

You are the faithful guardian of the most beautiful women in Persia. To you I have confided those who are dearest to me in all the world; in your hands, you hold the keys to those fateful doors that open only to me. As long as it is you who guard this place so dear to my heart, it is at ease and is perfectly secure. You stand guard in the silence of the night, as in the tumult of the day. When virtue falters, you correct it by the infinite pains you take. Should the women you guard ever be inclined to stray from their duty, you would make them lose hope of ever succeeding. You are the scourge of vice and the pillar of fidelity.

You command them; you obey them. You fulfill blindly their every wish; you make them carry out in the same way everything prescribed by the laws of the seraglio. You attain glory in performing for them the most degrading services; you submit with respect and fear to their legitimate orders; you serve them like the slave of their slaves. But by a reversal of power, you take on the prerogative to command like myself as master whenever you fear that the laws of decency and modesty are not being fully observed.

Never forget the oblivion from which I rescued you. Once you were the meanest of my slaves; I put you where you now are, and confided to you the delights of my heart. Maintain the most com-

plete humility toward those who share my love; at the same time, make them feel how completely they are subordinated to you. Make every innocent pleasure available to them; beguile them when they feel uneasy; amuse them with music, dancing, and delicious drinks; persuade them to come together often. If they wish to go to the country, take them there. But strike down any man who attempts to speak to them. Encourage cleanliness, the image of the soul's clarity. From time to time, speak to them of me. How much I should like to see them once again in that charming place they so adorn. Farewell.

Tauris, the 18th of the moon of Saphar, 1711

Letter IX

The First Eunuch to Ibbi at Erzerum

As you accompany your master on his voyage, and cross provinces and kingdoms, cares do not much affect you. At every moment, you see something new, and this in turn diverts you and makes time pass imperceptibly.

That is not at all my situation. Imprisoned in the most dreadful of places, I am always surrounded by the same objects, and devoured by the same preoccupations. Weighed down by fifty years of effort and anxiety, I groan when I realize that during all of my long life, I have not enjoyed one serene day, not one tranquil moment.

At the time my first master conceived of his cruel plot to confide his women to me, he used a combination of promises and threats to force me into the act that separated me forever from my true self. Tired of the debasing services I was forced to perform, I reasoned that I was sacrificing my passions for the sake of ease and wealth. What an unhappy decision that was! Preoccupied by what I would gain as compensation, I failed to realize the extent of my sacrifice. I expected to gain immunity from the attacks of love once I lost the capacity to satisfy it. Alas, the effects of the passions were extinguished, not the causes. Far from being relieved of them, I found myself surrounded by stimulants that have never ceased to provoke me. When I entered the seraglio, everything there made me regret what I had lost; I was continually excited; the thousand charms bestowed by nature on my charges only made me miserable. My situation was made even less tolerable by the sight of my happy master. During that time of troubles, I

never led a woman to his bed, never undressed her, without another attack of rage in my heart and despair in my soul.

In this way I passed my miserable youth. I had no confidant. I was consumed by the melancholy and anger that weighed upon me. I had to assume the greatest air of severity toward precisely those women that most tempted me. Otherwise I should have been lost. Had they discovered my true feelings, what advantage would they have not taken?

I remember that one day, while putting a woman into her bath, I was so overcome that reason left me, and I dared to touch a forbidden place. My first thought was that I should not survive that day. However, I was fortunate, and escaped the thousand deaths that awaited me. But the beauty to whom I had revealed my weakness, exacted a high price for her silence. My authority over her came to an end, and after that, she forced me to overlook any number of things, which, if discovered, would have cost me my life.

At last the fires of youth were extinguished. Now that I am old, I find myself at peace in that regard. I look at women with indifference, and I pay back all the scorn and torments they once made me suffer. I remember always that I was born to command them, and when in fact I do so, I feel as though I have once again become a man. Ever since I have been able to view women coldly, I have hated them. My reason now serves to expose all their weaknesses. Although I guard them for another, I feel a secret joy when I make them obey. When I deprive them of everything, I feel as though it were I who had exercised the prerogative. This always provides vicarious satisfaction. The seraglio has become my little empire, and there, my ambition, the only passion left me, is in part satisfied. It gratifies me to see that everything depends upon me, that I am at all times indispensable. I accept willingly the hatred of all the women I guard, for this strengthens my position. Thus they are not dealing with someone who fails to appreciate what they are doing for him. I put an end to their pleasures, however innocent. I make myself into a barrier that cannot be removed; I put a stop to whatever plans they may make; I arm myself with refusals; I bristle with scruples; I never stop talking of duty, virtue, decency, and modesty. I drive them to despair by my constant reminders of the weakness of their sex, and the authority due their master. Then I complain of the severity I am forced to use. I pretend that I have no motives other than their own interest and my great affection for them.

This is not to say that I have been spared an infinite number of disagreeable experiences. Every day these revengeful women seek retaliation for what I do to them, since they suffer great setbacks at my hands. Between us there is an ebb and flow of command and submission. They seek constantly to have the most humiliating tasks assigned to me; they affect boundless contempt for me. Without any regard for my age, they awaken me ten times a night for the merest trifle. I am overwhelmed by orders, commands, tasks, caprices. They seem to take turns in keeping me occupied and to become increasingly bizarre in their wishes. Often they amuse themselves by making me redouble my vigilance; they pretend to confide in me. Sometimes one comes to tell me that a young man has appeared outside the walls; sometimes that a noise has been heard, or that a letter is to be passed. All this causes me much apprehension, and this amuses them. They are delighted to see me torturing myself in this way. On other occasions, they cause me to guard them day and night. They know very well how to feign illnesses, fits of fainting and of terror; no pretext is lacking to manipulate me into doing what they wish. At such times, I must obey blindly and comply without qualification, for a refusal to do so from someone like me would be unprecedented, and they would have the right to ask that I be punished. And, my dear Ibbi, I should rather die than have that happen.

Nor is that all. Never for a moment am I certain of my master's favor, so many are the enemies who possess his heart and wish my ruin. When they are with him, I am not heard; at those times, nothing is denied them and I am always wrong. The women I lead to my master's bed are incensed against me. Is it likely that they will act in my behalf, or that my side will emerge the stronger? I have everything to fear from their tears and sighs, from their embraces and even the pleasures they give. Here is the place of their triumphs; their charms terrify me; their services of the moment efface everything I have done in the past; no satisfaction can be expected by me from a master who no longer is himself.

How many times have I been in favor when I went to sleep, only to find myself in disgrace when I awoke? The day I was so ignominiously whipped around the seraglio – what was it that I had done? I left a woman in the arms of my master. As soon as she saw his passions were inflamed, she launched torrents of tears. She complained, and so orchestrated her demands, that they increased in proportion to the love she aroused. How could I defend myself at such a critical moment? I was lost when least I expected it; I

was the victim of an amorous negotiation, of a treaty signed by sighs. This, my dear Ibbi, is the cruel situation in which I have always lived.

How fortunate you are! You need concern yourself only with the person of Usbek himself. You can easily please him and maintain yourself in his favor until the end of your days.

*From the seraglio of Ispahan, the last day of
the moon of Saphar, 1711*

Letter XXII

Jaron to the Chief Eunuch

The further Usbek travels from his seraglio, the more his mind is filled with thoughts of the women dedicated to him. He sighs, his eyes fill with tears; his grief turns bitter, his suspicions increase. He wishes to increase the number of those guarding his women. He is sending me back, along with all the other negroes who accompany him. He fears no longer for his own security, but rather for those who are a thousand times dearer to him than himself.

I am coming, therefore, to live under your laws, and to share your concerns. Great God! How much must be done to make a single person happy!

Nature seems to have put women into a condition of dependence, from which it then released them. This created disorder between the two sexes, because their rights were now reciprocal. You and I are now involved in a scheme for a new sort of harmony: we serve to create hatred between women and ourselves; love between men and women.

My face will become severe, I shall assume a somber expression. Joy will no longer be seen on my lips. On the outside, I shall appear tranquil; but within, I shall be uneasy. Long before old age, I shall be wrinkled by care.

It would have been pleasant to have followed my master into the Occident. But my will belongs to him. Since he wishes that I guard his wives, I shall do so faithfully. I know how I ought to conduct myself with that sex, which, if not allowed to be vain, then tends to become proud. It is easier to destroy women than to humiliate them.

I prostrate myself before you.

From Smyrna, the 12th of the moon of Zilcade, 1711

Letter XXVI

Usbek to Roxana at the Seraglio at Ispahan

How fortunate you are, Roxana, to be in the gentle land of Persia, rather than in these corrupt countries, where neither decency nor virtue are known! How fortunate you are! You live in my seraglio, as in the abode of innocence, inaccessible to the assaults of men. You live happily in a situation where, fortunately, it is impossible for you to falter in your virtue. Never has anyone sullied you with lascivious glances. . . .

. . . women here have lost all discretion. They present themselves without veils to men, as though seeking to be conquered; they invite men's stares; they talk to men in mosques, during walks, and even receive the opposite sex in their own homes; the custom of attendance by eunuchs is unknown to them. Instead of that noble simplicity and charming modesty that reigns where you are, there is a brutish impudence, to which it is impossible to become accustomed.

. . .

But what am I to think of European women? Their skill in making up their faces, the ornaments with which they adorn themselves, the care they take with their bodies, their preoccupation with pleasing the opposite sex – these are so many stains upon their virtue, and outrages to their husbands.

Do not think, Roxana, that I believe these women carry their impropriety as far as their conduct might suggest, that their excesses extend to what is most horrible of all, of actually violating their marriage vows. Very few women are so abandoned as that. In their hearts, they carry a certain mark of virtue engraved there at birth, and which their upbringing weakens but does not destroy. They may be lax in those external duties imposed by modesty, but when it comes to taking the final step, nature revolts. Thus when we imprison you so strictly, and have you guarded by so many slaves, when we restrain your desires when they go too far, it is not that we fear the ultimate infidelity, but because we know that it is impossible that purity be excessive, and that it may be corrupted by the slightest stain.

. . .

From Paris, the 7th of the moon of Rhegeb, 1712

Letter XXXIV

Usbek to Ibben at Smyrna

Although Persian women are more beautiful than French women, the French are prettier. It is as difficult not to love the first, as it is not to be pleased by the second; the first are more tender and modest, the second, gayer and livelier.

What makes women so beautiful in Persia is their ordered life: they neither gamble, nor keep late hours; they drink almost no wine, and almost never expose themselves to the air. It must be admitted that the seraglio is better fitted for health than for pleasure. Life there is uniform and unexciting; it is based on subordination and duty. Even its pleasures are grave; its joys, severe. These are seldom enjoyed, except as connected with authority and dependence.

Even Persian men lack the gaiety of the French. In Persia, there is nowhere to be seen that freedom of spirit, and that look of satisfaction which I find here in all ranks and conditions of men.

This is even worse in Turkey, where whole families may be found, no member of which, from father to son, has laughed since the establishment of the monarchy.

This Asiatic gravity is due to the absence of social intercourse; they see each other only when ceremony prescribes that they do so. Friendship, that gentle engagement of the heart, which makes life so pleasant here, is there almost unknown. They retire into their homes, where always the same company awaits them. Thus each family is isolated.

One day, while discussing this with an inhabitant of this country, he said to me: "What repels me most about your *moeurs* is that you are obliged to live with slaves, whose hearts and minds can never transcend their base condition. From your infancy, which they dominate, these craven creatures weaken those sentiments of virtue that derive from nature. Really, you must put your prejudices aside. What can be expected of an upbringing at the hands of a wretch, whose honor depends upon guarding the wives of another man, and prides himself upon the vilest of human occupations? Even fidelity, the one virtue possessed by such a person, is contemptible because it stems from envy, jealousy, and despair. Burning with vengeance against both sexes, and rejected by both, he consents to being tyrannized by the stronger on the condition that he be allowed to torment the weaker. Since every-

thing that distinguishes his position presupposes imperfection, ugliness, and deformity, he is esteemed only because he is unworthy. Riveted forever to the door he guards, he is harder than the bolts and bars securing it. Yet he prides himself upon having held for fifty years this unworthy post, where as the representative of his master's jealousy, he has made full use of his own sordid qualities.

From Paris, the 14th of the moon of Zilhage, 1713

Letter LXII

Zélis to Usbek at Paris

Since your daughter is now seven, I thought it was time for her to be brought into the interior of the seraglio, rather than waiting until she was ten before confiding her to the care of the black eunuchs. It is never too early to take away the liberties of childhood from a young person, and give her a pious upbringing within those holy walls where modesty dwells.

For I am not of the opinion of those mothers who confine their daughters only when they are about to receive their husband. To do so is to condemn them to the seraglio, rather than to consecrate them to it; is to force them to submit to a mode of life, which they should have been taught to love. Must everything be made to await the force of reason, and nothing be left to the gentle effects of habit?

It is futile to speak to us of the subordinate position in which nature has put us. It is not enough to make us feel this submission; we must be made to practice it, so that it may sustain us at that critical time when the passions begin to make themselves felt and encourage independence.

Were it only duty that attached us to you, we might sometimes forget it. Were it only inclination that served as the bond, a stronger inclination might overcome the first. But when the laws give us over to one man, they remove us so far from all others, that we might as well be a hundred thousand leagues away.

Nature, so industrious when favoring men, did not limit itself to giving them desires; it also wished that we too should have them, in order to become active instruments of their felicity. Within us, nature has kindled the fire of passion, so that men might live in tranquillity. If they lose it, we are meant to return them to this condition in which they are exempt from strong feelings in a way that we ourselves never can be.

Nevertheless, Usbek, you ought not imagine that your situation

is more fortunate than my own. I have sampled here a thousand pleasures unknown to you; my imagination has worked incessantly to make me realize their worth. I have lived, and you have but languished.

I remain freer than you in the very prison in which you confine me. If you redouble your efforts to guard me, I only enjoy your uneasiness. Your suspicions, jealousy, and irritation are but marks of your dependence.

Continue, dear Usbek, to have me guarded night and day; do not believe that even ordinary precautions are enough. Add to my happiness, while assuring your own. Know that I dread nothing but your indifference.

*From the seraglio at Ispahan, the 2nd of
the moon of Rebiab I, 1714*

Letter LXIV

The Chief of the Black Eunuchs to Usbek at Paris

I am, magnificent lord, in a plight I scarcely know how to describe. The seraglio is in appalling disorder and confusion: among your women, a state of war exists; your eunuchs are divided among themselves; nothing but complaints, grumbling, and reproaches can be heard. My remonstrances are scorned, everything seems permissible in this time of license, and my title now means nothing in this seraglio.

Every one of your wives considers herself superior to all the rest by birth, beauty, wealth, wit, and your love for her, and, on the basis of one or another of these qualities, demands preference on all other points as well. At every moment, I lose that long-suffering patience, which nevertheless has unfortunately had the effect of making all of them discontent. My prudence, even my good nature (a virtue rare and almost unknown in the post I occupy) have become useless.

May I reveal to you, magnificent lord, the cause of all these disorders? It is altogether due to your heart and the tender regard you have for them. If you did not stay my hand; if, instead of remonstrances, you allowed me to use punishments; if, instead of allowing yourself to hear their complaints and tears, you sent them to weep before me, who am never softened by this sight – I should soon fit them with the yoke they ought to bear; and wear down their imperious and independent humor.

At the age of fifteen, I was abducted from the depths of my native Africa. I was first sold to a master who had more than twenty wives or concubines. Having judged from my grave and taciturn air that I was fitted for the seraglio, he ordered that I be made ready. I was forced to undergo an operation that was painful at the beginning, but then turned out to be fortunate for me, since it gave me access to the ear and confidence of my masters. I entered the seraglio, a new world for me. The chief eunuch, the most severe man I have ever seen, exercised absolute rule. Divisions and quarrels were unknown there; a profound silence reigned everywhere. All the women were put to bed and awakened at the same times throughout the year. They entered the bath in turn; they left it at the slightest sign from us. As for the rest of the time, they were almost always confined to their rooms. He had one rule, which was to make them observe the strictest cleanliness. On this point he took inexpressible pains, the slightest refusal to obey was punished mercilessly. "I am a slave," he said, "but I belong to a man who is your master and mine, and the power I hold over you was given to me by him. It is he who chastises you, not I, who only aid him." Those women never entered my master's room without being summoned. This favor they received with joy, but did not complain if denied it. In short, I, who was the lowliest of the black eunuchs in that peaceful seraglio, was a thousand times more respected there than in your own, where I command everyone.

As soon as the chief eunuch recognized my talent, he began to take notice of me. He recommended me to my master as capable of working in accordance with his own views, and of succeeding him in his post. That I was very young did not disturb him; he believed that my vigilance would compensate for my inexperience. Shall I tell you? I became so trusted by him, that he no longer made the slightest difficulty about entrusting me with the keys to those terrible places he had so long guarded. It was under this great master that I learned the difficult art of command, and was trained according to the maxims of inexorable government. Under him I studied the feminine heart. I learned how to profit from the weakness of women and never to be surprised by their haughtiness. Often he liked to watch me carry them to the point where their last defenses against instant obedience were broken down. Then he allowed them to return to their previous condition gradually, and desired that I appear to give way for a time to them. But to appreciate him, he had to be seen at those moments when he

found them on the verge of despair, suspended between entreaty and reproach. Withstanding their tears without being touched in the least by them, he prided himself upon such triumphs. "This is how women must be governed," he would say contentedly. "Their number present no difficulty to me; no change would be needed to rule all the women of our great monarch. How can a man hope to enslave their hearts, if his faithful eunuchs have not previously broken their spirits?"

He was not only firm, but astute as well. He read their thoughts and their dissimulations; their studied gestures, the faces they prepared, did not protect them in the least from him. He knew of even those acts they took most pains to conceal, and of their most secret words. He made use of some of them to inform him about others; he rewarded willingly even the slightest confidence. Since they came to their husband only after having been summoned, the eunuch could choose anyone he wished, and call his master's attention to whomever he wished to favor. This distinction was their reward for having revealed a secret. His master had been convinced that good order required that the eunuch make the choice, so that his authority might thus be increased. That was how he governed, magnificent lord, in that seraglio that was, I believe, the best ordered in Persia.

Free my hands, allow me to do what obedience requires. In a week, order will replace confusion. This is what your glory demands, and your safety requires.

*From the seraglio at Ispahan, the 9th of
the moon of Rebiab 1, 1714*

Letter LXV

Usbek to His Wives at the Seraglio at Ispahan

I hear that the seraglio is in disorder, that it is full of quarrels and internal divisions. When I departed, did I not bid you to live in peace and on good terms? You promised me to do so. Was this done only to deceive me?

It is you who will be deceived, if I decide to take the advice of the grand eunuch and use my authority to make you live in the way I urged you.

But I can resort to such violent means only after having ex-

hausted all others. Thus do on your own account what you would not do on mine.

The first eunuch has good reason to complain. He says that you do not respect him. How can you reconcile such conduct with the modesty prescribed by your condition? During my absence, is not the care of your virtue confided to him? It is he who is the guardian of this sacred treasure. But the scorn with which you treat him shows how much of a burden to you are those charged with making you live according to the laws of honor.

And so I am requesting you to change your conduct. Behave in such a way as to enable me to reject again those proposals that would affect adversely your liberty and repose.

For I should like to make you forget that I am your master, and think of me only as your husband.

From Paris, the 5th of the moon of Chahban, 1714

Letter CXLVII

The Chief Eunuch to Usbek at Paris

Things have arrived at a state that can no longer be tolerated; your wives have the illusion that your departure has left them immune to any punishment whatever. Horrible things are happening here. I myself tremble at the prospect of telling you this painful story.

Several days ago, Zélis, while going to the mosque, let her veil drop and appeared with her face virtually exposed before the entire populace.

I have found Zachi in bed with one of her slaves, something completely prohibited by the laws of the seraglio.

By sheer chance, I have intercepted a letter that I am sending you. I have never been able to discover to whom it was sent.

Yesterday evening, a young man was found in the seraglio garden; he escaped by scaling the walls.

If you add to that everything else that has not come to my attention, surely you have been betrayed. I await your orders. Until the happy moment when I receive them, I shall be in a desperate situation. But if you do not permit me to treat all these women as my discretion dictates, I cannot answer for any of them. Every day the news I shall have to give you will be as sad as this.

*From the seraglio at Ispahan, the 1st of
the moon of Rhegeb, 1717*

Letter CXLVIII**Usbek to the Chief Eunuch at the Seraglio at Ispahan**

Receive by this letter unlimited power over the entire seraglio; command with as much authority as I myself possess. Let fear and terror be your accompaniment. As you hasten from one apartment to the next, inflict punishment and correction. Put everyone into a state of dismay; make them dissolve in tears before you. Interrogate everyone in the seraglio; begin with the slaves. Do not spare the objects of my love; subject them all to your formidable inquiry. Expose the most hidden secrets. Purify this sordid place and return it to the virtue it once possessed. From this moment, I make you responsible for even the slightest fault. I suspect Zélis of being the one to whom was addressed that letter you intercepted. Investigate that with the eyes of a lynx.

From . . . , the 11th of the moon of Zilhage, 1718

Letter CXLIX**Narsit to Usbek at Paris**

The chief eunuch has just died, magnificent lord. Since I am the oldest of your slaves, I have assumed his place until you make known your choice of his successor.

Two days after his death, one of your letters, addressed to him, was brought to me; I have taken good care not to open it. Respectfully I wrapped and locked it away until you reveal your holy will to me.

Yesterday a slave came in the middle of the night to tell me that he had found a young man in the seraglio. I arose, investigated the matter, and concluded that it was a vision.

I kiss your feet, sublime lord, and I beg of you to have confidence in my zeal, experience, and age.

*From the seraglio at Ispahan, the 5th of
the moon of Gemmadi I, 1718*

Letter CL**Usbek to Narsit at the Seraglio at Ispahan**

Wretch that you are! You have in your hands letters that contain orders to be carried out immediately and with violence. At a time

when the slightest delay makes me despair, you remain calm for no reason whatever.

Terrible things are taking place; perhaps a half of my slaves deserve to die. I am sending you the letter on that subject, which the chief eunuch wrote me before his death. Had you opened the package addressed to him, you would have found orders to shed blood. And so read these orders. Unless you carry them out, you yourself will die.

From . . . , the 25th of the moon of Chalval, 1718

Letter CLI

Solim to Usbek at Paris

If I remained silent any longer, I should be as guilty as all the criminals you have in your seraglio.

I was the confidant of the chief eunuch, the most faithful of your slaves. When he saw that his end was near, he summoned me and said these words: "I am dying with but one regret: that my last view of the world has revealed the criminal guilt of my master's wives. May Heaven protect him from all the evils I foresee. After I am dead, may my ghost return to warn these perfidious women by my threats to return to their duty, and thus intimidate them once again. Here are the keys to these fearful places; take them to the oldest of the black eunuchs. But if after my death, he fails to be vigilant, make certain to warn your master of this." After saying these words, he died in my arms.

I know what, some time before his death, he wrote you about your wives' conduct. In the seraglio there is a letter that, had it been opened, would have spread terror. The letter you wrote after that was intercepted three leagues from here. I do not know what is going on; everything is turning out for the worst.

Meanwhile your wives have shown no discretion whatever. Since the death of the chief eunuch, it seems as though they can do anything they wish. Only Roxana has remained within the bounds of duty and retains her modesty. Every day sees the further decline of *moeurs*. The faces of your wives no longer have their former expression of vigorous and austere virtue. In such a place as this any new joy is, in my view, an infallible proof of some new satisfaction. Even in the smallest things, I perceive hitherto unknown liberties being taken. Even among your slaves there prevails

a certain laxity toward their duties and the maintenance of rules – that surprises me. No longer do they display that ardent zeal to serve you which once seemed to animate the entire seraglio.

For a week your wives have been in the country at one of the most isolated of your houses. It is said that the slave in charge of it has been bribed, and that the day before their arrival, he hid two men in a stone compartment in the wall of the main room. It was from there that they emerged after we had retired at night. The old eunuch now in charge of us is an imbecile who can be made to believe anything.

I am possessed by the anger to revenge all these betrayals. If Heaven willed that you be better served, and you were to consider me capable of command, I promise you that even if your wives were not virtuous, they at least would be faithful.

*From the seraglio at Ispahan, the 6th of
the moon of Rebiab I, 1719*

Letter CLII

Narsit to Usbék at Paris

Roxana and Zélis wished to go to the country; I did not believe that I ought to refuse them. Fortunate Usbek! Your wives are faithful; your slaves, vigilant: the places I command are those that virtue seems to have chosen as her sanctuary. Rest assured that nothing will happen here that could offend your eyes.

An unfortunate occurrence has caused me much pain. Some Armenian merchants, newly arrived at Ispahan, had carried one of your letters for me. I sent a slave to get it. On his return, he was robbed and the letter lost. Therefore write to me soon, for I suppose that with this change of command, you will have important orders for me.

*From the seraglio at Fatima, the 6th of
the moon of Rebiab I, 1719*

Letter CLIII

Usbek to Solim at the Seraglio at Ispahan

I put my sword into your hand. I entrust to you what now is most precious to me in all the world – my vengeance. Take up your new office; but bring to it neither tenderness nor pity. I am writing to my wives that they are to obey you blindly. Distracted by their

many crimes, they will not be able to withstand your eyes. I must rely upon you to assure my happiness and peace of mind. Return my seraglio to me as it was when I left it; but begin by making it atone for what it has done. Exterminate the guilty; make those tremble who consider becoming so. What can you not expect from your master for such signal services? It depends only upon yourself for you to surmount your condition and to gain as reward everything you have ever desired.

From Paris, the 4th of the moon of Chahban, 1719

Letter CLIV

Usbek to His Wives at the Seraglio at Ispahan

May this letter fall upon you like thunder in the midst of lightning and storm. Solim is your chief eunuch, not to guard you, but to punish you. The entire seraglio will abase itself before him. He is to judge your actions in the past, and, in future, he will make you live under a yoke so severe that even if you do not regret having lost your virtue, you will regret having lost your liberty.

From Paris, the 4th of the moon of Chahban, 1719

Letter CLV

Usbek to Nessir at Ispahan

Happy is the man who, knowing the value of a gentle and quiet life, puts his heart at ease among his family and knows no country other than that in which he was born.

I am living in a barbarous place, exposed to everything that annoys me, removed from everything that interests me. A somber sadness seizes me; I am falling into a dejection beyond belief – it seems to me that I am destroying myself, and that I shall rediscover myself only after grim jealousy has been kindled in my soul where it gives birth to fear, suspicions, hatred, and regret.

...

What a poor thing I am. I want to see my country again, perhaps only to become even more wretched. Yet what am I to do there? I am going to expose my head to my enemies. Nor is that all. I shall enter my seraglio where I must demand an accounting for that disastrous period of my absence. And if I find some who are guilty, what shall I do? If even the notion is overwhelming from this distance, what will it be like when my presence creates

the inescapable reality? What will it be like if I am forced to see and hear what I cannot imagine without becoming furious? And, finally, what will be the outcome, if the punishments I myself pronounce become eternal scars inflicted by my confusion and despair?

I shall return to imprison myself within those walls more terrifying to me than to the women guarded there. With me I shall bring back all my suspicions, none of which will ever be allayed, no matter how eager my wives' embraces. In my own bed, in their arms, I shall feel nothing more than disquiet. At a time when reflection is inappropriate, I shall be driven to it by my jealousy. Scum unworthy of human nature, debased slaves, whose hearts are forever closed to all feelings of love – you would cease lamenting your condition, if you knew the misery of mine.

From Paris, the 4th of the moon of Chahban, 1719

Letter CLVI

Roxana to Usbek at Paris

Horror, darkness, and terror reign in the seraglio; it is shrouded in terrifying gloom. Within a tiger vents his rage upon us: he has had two white eunuchs tortured, who only continue to avow their innocence; he has sold a number of our slaves, and forced us to exchange among ourselves those who remained. Zachi and Zélis, in their own rooms during the darkness of night, have been subjected to infamous treatment; no fear has kept that sacrilegious person from laying his vile hands on them. He keeps each of us locked up in her apartment, and, although we are thus isolated, he insists that we be veiled. No longer are we permitted to talk to each other; writing would be considered a crime; we are free only to weep.

An army of new eunuchs has entered the seraglio to besiege us day and night; our sleep is constantly interrupted by their investigations based on suspicions, whether real or feigned. All that consoles me is the thought that all this cannot last long, and that these sufferings will end when does my life. That will not be long, cruel Usbek. I shall not grant you enough time to put an end to these outrages.

*From the seraglio at Ispahan, the 2nd of
the moon of Maharram, 1720*

Letter CLVIII

Zélis to Usbek at Paris

A thousand leagues from me, you judge me guilty; a thousand leagues away, you punish me.

When a barbarous eunuch laid his vile hands on me, he did so at your command. It is the tyrant who outrages me, not his instrument.

Whenever your caprice dictates, you may redouble your abuse of me. My heart is at peace, since it cannot love you any longer.

Your soul has been debased, and you have become cruel. You can be certain that this will bring you no happiness.

Farewell.

*From the seraglio at Ispahan, the 2nd of
the moon of Maharram, 1720*

Letter CLIX

Solim to Usbek at Paris

I pity myself, magnificent lord, and I pity you: never before has so faithful a servant fallen into such despair as mine. Here are your misfortunes and mine. I tremble as I write.

I swear by all the prophets in heaven that ever since you confided your wives to my care, I have watched over them night and day, that never for a moment have I suspended my anxieties. I began my ministry with punishments, which I have discontinued, without giving up the austerity natural to me.

But what am I saying to you? Why do I boast here of a fidelity that has been so useless to you? Forget all my past services; consider me a traitor; and punish me for all the crimes I have been unable to prevent.

Roxana, proud Roxana! O Heaven! From now on is there anyone we can trust? You suspected Zélis while feeling perfectly secure about Roxana. But her fierce virtue was a cruel deception veiling her treachery. I have surprised her in the arms of a young man, who attacked me when he saw that he had been discovered. Twice he stabbed me with his dagger. The eunuchs, brought running by the commotion, surrounded him. He defended himself for a long time, wounded several of them; and even tried to reenter Roxana's bedroom, so that he could die before her eyes, or so he said. But finally he succumbed to numbers, and fell at our feet.

I do not know, sublime lord, whether I can wait until your severe orders arrive. You have entrusted your vengeance to me; I ought not delay it.

*From the seraglio at Ispahan, the 8th of
the moon of Rebiab I, 1720*

Letter CLX

Solim to Usbek at Paris

I have made my decision. All your misfortunes are coming to an end; I am going to mete out punishment.

Already I feel a secret joy. My soul and your own shall be calm again. We shall exterminate all crime; even innocence will pale.

All you women seem to have been created only to ignore all your senses and to be unworthy even of your desires. Eternal victims of shame and modesty, how I should like to bring you in great multitudes into this unhappy seraglio and astound you by all the blood I am about to shed.

*From the seraglio at Ispahan, the 8th of
the moon of Rebiab I, 1720*

Letter CLXI

Roxana to Usbek at Paris

Yes, I have deceived you. I have corrupted your eunuchs, toyed with your jealousy, and known how to make a place of delights and pleasures out of your abominable seraglio.

I am about to die; poison will soon circulate through my veins. What keeps me here now that the one man who made me want to live is no more? I die, but my soul will be well accompanied. I have just sent off before me those sacrilegious guardians who have shed the most beautiful blood in the world.

How could you have believed me so credulous as to imagine that I had come into the world only to adore your every caprice? that while permitting yourself everything, you had the right to frustrate all my desires. No! I may have lived in slavery, but I have always been free: I have reformed your laws by those of nature, and my spirit has never lost its independence.

You ought to thank me for the sacrifice I have made to you. I have abased myself to the point of appearing faithful; I have, like a

coward, confined to my heart what I should have told all the world. Finally, I have profaned virtue by allowing that name to be applied to my submission to your whims.

You were astonished not to find in me the transports of love. Had you known me well, you would have discovered all the violence of hate.

But for a long time you enjoyed the pleasure of believing that a heart like mine had been subjugated by you. We were both happy: you believed me to be deceived; and I deceived you.

No doubt this language will appear novel to you. Is it yet possible after having filled you with sorrows, for me to compel you to admire my courage? But all is over. The poison is consuming me. My strength is ebbing. The pen falls from my hands. I feel even my hatred weakened; I die.

*From the seraglio at Ispahan, the 8th of
the moon of Rebiab I, 1720*

End of the *Persian Letters*

A Note on Chronology in the *Persian Letters*

Montesquieu's chronology in the *Persian Letters* has been studied by scholars (most notably Robert Shackleton, "The Moslem Calendar in *Lettres persanes*," *French Studies* VIII [1954] pp. 17-27). Their conclusion is that Montesquieu sought to find exotic-sounding equivalents in the Moslem calendar, which is lunar, for the Western calendar, which is solar. Montesquieu's resolution of the problem was to begin the year with March and to call it by the corresponding Moslem name (although the Moslem month in fact started in the middle of March). The principal sources of Montesquieu's knowledge were Chardin's *Voyages en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient*, and Tavernier's *Les Six Voyages en Turquie, en Perse et aux Indes*. Montesquieu took his Persian spelling from Chardin, except for two changes. He wrote Rebiab for Rebiah, and Chalval for Cheval. The following three columns give Montesquieu's

terms for the months, the usual Moslem spelling, and the Western calendar. All years given in the *Persian Letters* are in the solar years of the Christian era. Thus dates are composite: oriental months; Christian years.

<i>Montesquieu</i>	<i>Moslem</i>	<i>Western</i>
Maharram	Muharram	March
Saphar	Safar	April
Rebiab I	Rabia I	May
Rebiab II	Rabia II	June
Gemmadi I	Jumada I	July
Gemmadi II	Jumada II	August
Rhegeb	Rajab	September
Chahban	Shaban	October
Rahmazan	Ramadan	November
Chalval	Shawwal	December
Zilcade	Dhu-l-Kada	January
Zilhage	Dhu-l-Hijja	February