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MADAME de SEVIGNE

AND THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE OF HER TIMES.

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INTRODUCTION.

There should perhaps be some apology for adding yet another study of Madame de Sévigné to the exhaustive list already in existence. Over the last two centuries critics have gleaned from the Correspondance the material for many excellent biographies, not only of the Marquise but of the numerous interesting figures whose lives were interwoven with hers. Her letters have been sifted bare of all information on the men and manners of seventeenth-century France, while every student of classical literature has turned to her in his research for further evidence or for corroboration.

It is no accident that so important a position in the biography of the century should be occupied by a woman. The influence of women has been stronger on the literature of France than on that of any other nation in Europe. Particularly is this true of the seventeenth century, where feminine activity begins to pervade every branch of learning.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of the importance and influence of préciosité, the literature of the classical era would still owe to the salons of

the Grand Siècle a truly inestimable debt. The names of Madame de Rambouillet, Julie d'Angennes, Mademoiselle de Scudéry, the Comtesse de la Fayette are inseparable from the masterpieces of French classicism. If we add those of Ninon de l'Enclos and Madame de la Sablière, the field of their influence is broadened to include that of philosophical speculation, and extended to cover an entire century.

Among these brilliant and cultured women the position occupied by Madame de Sévigné is itself unique. In the first place, she was by birth the almost exact contemporary of the greatest figures, and by reason of her long life a witness of the glory and maturity of all but the very youngest authors of the Grand Siècle. One might indeed say that she is its exact contemporary, providentially placed in the best possible position to witness its development; old enough at its beginnings to evaluate its literary productions with an adult mind, and yet young enough and alert enough not to be left behind by the fast-developing national and literary consciousness nor ever to feel herself out of touch with the spirit of her times. She is also the only woman to have left to posterity a day-to-day record of her thoughts and activities, so personal and so complete that the reader, three centuries

later, is able to form of the Marquise an estimate as accurate as if he had been daily and hourly in her company.

It is to a wholly fortuitous circumstance, one sometimes feels, that we owe this revelation of Madame de Sévigné. Had there not been the accident of her daughter's absence in Provence, causing her to pour out her most intimate thoughts in a connected sequence of letters for nearly thirty years, not only should we have lost what is, with the *Mémoires* of Saint-Simon, the most comprehensive picture we possess of the life of the Grand Siècle. We should also have lost all access to a most interesting mind. For the Marquise's correspondence is not only a kaleidoscope of incident, bon mot and intrigue. It is also the record of an intelligent, well-educated woman living the intellectual experience of one of the most fertile periods of French literary history. Much of her youthful experience we can only conjecture, from hints gleaned here and there in the letters and contemporary documents. The Marquise presents herself to the reader with a mind already furnished, her taste already moulded by the training acquired in youth. For the student, indeed, a great deal of the interest lies in this exploration of a mind already formed, in an attempt to discover the influences which went to its shaping. For the

the Marquise is both the typical product of her age and its acutely critical observer, and one will understand nothing of her literary preferences without taking both these factors into consideration. Having then, as it were, reconstructed her mental outlook, one should be the better able to judge the impact made on her by the achievements of the century, and to determine how great a part she herself played therein.

Madame de Sévigné's letters have already been explored for the light they throw on contemporary movements of thought: on Cartesianism, Jansenism and the development of medical theory. She has been called as a witness to the seventeenth-century feeling for nature and as an example of its interest in music; and judgement had frequently been passed on her merits as a literary critic. In the present study the writer has sought to reverse the process, and from the many analyses which have been made to build up a new synthesis of the Marquise's intellectual experience. The extent of the culture of any individual is necessarily extremely difficult to assess, and much that is significant in Madame de Sévigné's letters may have been overlooked. Every fresh reading of them reveals some new facet of her mind, until one feels that to probe it to its depths would require a life-time of study and reading. One fact, however, emerges clearly from even

a brief study. It is that the Marquise, much more than has been generally supposed; was living at the very heart of the intellectual life of her period, and that however much her judgements on it might be coloured by her position in that period and the experiences undergone in youth, she was keenly alive to every smallest manifestation of that extraordinary current of mental energy which flowed with such power through seventeenth-century France.

The present study is in no sense intended as a new life of Madame de Sévigné. A great many of the biographical details contained in her letters have of set purpose been omitted. So, with great regret, have many of those vivid accounts of contemporary life which have rightly made the Marquise famous as the most entertaining of correspondents, but which have no place in an assessment of her intellectual experience. It is hoped, however, that this research may have contributed in some measure to the better understanding of her mind, and that the reader of it may be stimulated to take up and enjoy for himself the pages of the Marquise's correspondence; which is, after all, the aim towards which for which any biographer must work.

Editions.

1. Lettres de Madame de Sévigné, de sa famille et de ses amis, recueillies et annotées par M. Monmerqué. Nouvelle édition revue sur les autographes, les copies les plus authentiques et les plus anciennes impressions... Paris, Coll. Les Grands Ecrivains de la France, 1862 - 66. 14 volumes in -80.
2. Lettres inédites de Madame de Sévigné à Madame de Grignan sa fille, extraites d'un ancien manuscrit et publiées par Charles Capmas, Paris, Hachette, 1876, 2 volumes in -80.

Chapter I

THE EDUCATION OF MARIE de CHANTAL.

Marie de Rabutin Chantal, the future Marquise de Sévigné, was born on the 5th February, 1626, in a decade that witnessed also the birth of La Fontaine, Molière and Pascal, and the first comedy of Corneille. Her father was Celse-Bénigne de Rabutin, baron de Chantal, and her mother, Marie de Coulanges.

The family on her father's side was noble, and very old. The name of Rabutin appears on documents as far back as the twelfth century.¹ Her cousin, Bussy-Rabutin, was, as we know from his letters, very proud of his ancestry, and had spent the early years of his exile from court in writing a genealogical history of their family. Madame de Sévigné herself was not free from a certain nobiliar pride; on one occasion at least we find her scolding her daughter for an insufficient appreciation of the family name:

"... Savez-vous que si Jeanne Frémyot n'était dans le ciel, elle vous gronderoit? Elle étoit fille de deux ou trois présidents (oh! oh! pour qui nous prenez-vous?), et Berbisys par sa mère ...".²

1. CF. Lettres de Madame de Sévigné, de sa famille et de ses amis, edited by M. Monmerqué, in the series Les grands Ecrivains de la France, 1862. vol. I. contains a full genealogy of the Chantal and Rabutin families, p. 337. ff.

2. Lettres, VIII, 447; 2 Feb. 1689.

Probably the best-known of Madame de Sévigné's relatives is this grandmother, Jeanne-Françoise Frémyot, who in 1592 had married Christophe de Chantal, and in 1610, after ten years of widowhood, had left her home and children to found a new religious Order, under the direction of the Bishop of Geneva, St. Francis of Sales. The story of her departure is well-known, and also the dramatic gesture of her only son who prostrated himself across the threshold, in order to oblige his mother to step over his body. This boy, then about fourteen years old, was Celse-Bénigne Rabutin, the wildest and most turbulent of her children, destined one day to be the father of Madame de Sévigné. She, indeed, could scarcely have remembered him, but Bussy devotes an interesting paragraph to him in the Histoire Généalogique:

"Il devint un des cavaliers les plus accomplis de la France, soit pour le corps, soit pour l'esprit, soit pour le courage. Il dansait avec une grâce non-pareille, il faisoit très-bien des armes ... Il étoit extrêmement enjoué. Il y avoit un tour à tout ce qu'il disoit qui réjouissoit les gens; mais ce n'étoit pas seulement par là qu'il plaisoit: c'étoit encore par l'air et par la grâce dont il disoit les choses: tout jouoit en lui ..."1.

It is easy to pick out in this description certain characteristics which his daughter was to inherit in large measure.

1. Histoire généalogique de la maison de Rabutin, ed. H. Beaune
Dijon. 1866. p.53 - 54.

There was, unfortunately, another side to his nature: from his father's family the young Baron had drawn a touchy sense of honour and an inveterate habit of duelling. Christophe de Chantal had been engaged in single combat no less than eighteen times before his death on the field of battle at the age of 37. His son continued the tradition with scarcely greater prudence, despite the threat of banishment which lay over all duellists after the year 1611, and which was later increased to that of hanging.

One of Chantal's most famous duels, indeed, took place but a few months after his marriage in 1624 to Marie de Coulanges, future mother of Madame de Sévigné. The Coulanges family, of lesser rank than the Chantals, is passed over somewhat lightly in Bussy's Genealogy. It was, however, distinguished in merit if not in name, and particularly by the position on the King's Council of Philippe de Coulanges, Madame de Sévigné's grandfather. The young daughter whom he married to the Baron de Chantal in the Spring of 1624 was not destined to a peaceful family life. Within a few months of the marriage, on the morning of Easter Sunday, her husband was called out of the parish church where he was hearing Mass with his

family, to act as second to a friend in a duel at the Porte Saint-Antoine. Although uninjured he was at once obliged to fly the city, where his wife remained to hear him declared "ignoble, roturier et infâme", his goods confiscate and himself hanged in effigy in the Place de Grève. When the storm died down Chantal quietly returned to Paris, but within a few months was again involved in an affair in which only the King's intervention saved him from a tragic end. At last, in 1627, drawn, no doubt, by the fascination of danger and by disgust with the life of Paris where his close friend, Montmorency-Bouteville, hero of the 1624 episode, had just been executed for his part in yet another duel,¹ Chantal enlisted. He was to serve under a friend, the Governor of the Ile de Ré, and set out with the army against an English invasion force headed by Buckingham. Heavily outnumbered, the French were defeated in a six-hour battle, leaving many of their best officers on the field. The Baron de Chantal was among them. The date was 22nd July 1627. His only surviving child was eighteen months old.

1. He is famous as being the first victim of Richelieu's stringent edicts against duelling.

His wife, as was natural, returned to her own parents with the young baby, living with them now in Paris, now at their country home of Sucy-en-Brie. Various facts suggest that she considered the possibility of a second marriage, though such never in fact took place. In any case she was not long to survive her husband. The death register of the Church of Saint-Paul in Paris records her death on Aug. 21st 1633, and the fact that her body was buried in the chapel of the Visitation Convent of the Rue Saint-Antoine.

The latter fact suggests that, in spite of her early widowhood, the Baronne de Chantal had not lost contact with the family of her husband and notably with her mother-in-law. This is confirmed by frequent references in the letters of Sainte Chantal to her son's wife and little daughter. It is not easy to determine how great a part her paternal grandmother played in the early youth of Madame de Sévigné. There is no direct evidence that she ever saw her personally; though from the deep interest which emerges from Sainte Chantal's letters it seems unlikely that she should have confined herself to a merely distant care for the child. We know that Madame de Sévigné was not brought up by her father's family but by her maternal grandparents, Philippe and Marie de Coulanges. She refers to Madame de Chantal

however, with an affectionate respect, and had kept close links even in later life with several Visitation convents, where she was affectionately called "une relique vivante" of the Mother-Foundress;¹ one may note that in the first moments of her grief at her daughter's departure for Provence in 1671 it was with the Soeurs de Sainte-Marie, rather than with her friends, that she sought consolation. Sainte Chantal died in 1641. Other references of Madame de Sévigné - to her sanctity and her reputation for miracles, to familiar expressions and the style of her letters - may have been the result of a secondhand acquaintance, through the lives of Sainte Chantal and the publication of her works which appeared at intervals during the century.

Few details remain of Madame de Sévigné's very early childhood, where two further bereavements soon deprived her of her few close relatives. Her maternal grandmother died in 1634, her grandfather in 1636 at the age of 73. Thereafter the girl was most probably cared for by an aunt-by-marriage, Madame de Coulanges, mother of that Emmanuel de Coulanges who, with his wife, figures so often in the letters.

1. Lettres, IV, 462; 24 May 1676.

He was seven years her junior, and must therefore have been born at about the time that Marie de Chantal went to live with her aunt. He is also one of the few childhood companions of hers that we can certainly identify, and we know what close affection united them both throughout their lives :

"... J'attends avec patience le retour de votre souvenir(1) sans jamais douter de votre amitié; car le moyen que vous ne m'aimiez pas? c'est la première chose que vous avez faite quand vous avez commencé d'ouvrir les yeux, et c'est moi aussi qui ai commencé la mode de vous aimer et de vous trouver aimable..." 2.

His two sisters Anne-Marie and Marie-Madeleine may also have ~~seen~~ been the friends of her early youth, though they must have been considerably younger than Marie de Chantal, and are better known for their relationship with her in later life; the former as Comtesse de Sanzei is frequently mentioned in the letters, while the latter married that M. d'Harouys who kept up a close friendship with the Marquise long after the death of his wife in 1662. Madame de Sévigné in fact was not destined to spend many years of her childhood in this attractive family, for at the age of ten she was legally given over to the care of

-
1. He had not written to her for several months.
 2. Lettres, X, 260; 26 Apr. 1695.

Abbé de Coulanges, her uncle, who continued to care for and educate her until her marriage in 1644.

It is with this new guardianship of the Abbé de Coulanges, "le Bien Bon", as she was so often to call him in her letters, that Marie de Chantal's education may properly be said to begin. Little is known of her very early childhood, from the educational point of view.¹ One reference in a letter of Jeanne de Chantal suggests that as a child she learnt to read at her grandmother's knee:

"Mme de Coulanges m'a infiniment obligée pour l'amour maternel qu'elle porte à la pauvre petite orpheline; et encore sa bonté s'étend jusqu'à ^{servir} de maîtresse à la petite ...".²

But the correspondence of her grand mother gives little further information on the young girl, and the other known fact concerning her education - the tutorship of Ménage and Chapelain - cannot have come into operation until several years later.

The most frequent means of education for a girl of Marie de Chantal's rank and generation was that of a boarder in one of the enclosed convent ~~schools~~ of the period which consented to receive the daughters of the nobility for a

1. c.f. E.Malherbe: La jeunesse de Mme de Sévigné. Rouen, 1904.
2. Lettre de la Mère de Chantal à Mme de Toulangeon sa fille. apud P.Mesnard in the notice to the Lettres de Mme de Sévigné, I,18.

for a few years and give them a minimum of instruction before their entry into social life. The practice had grave disadvantages, and must be held responsible in part for the semi-literacy of most of Madame de Sévigné's contemporaries. Seldom in the seventeenth century did a family show a serious interest in the education of its daughters, and very rarely indeed would a girl have been fortunate enough to be instructed by such tutors as Menage and Chapelain, whom a critic has called: "les deux maîtres les plus en réputation à Paris pour la littérature française et étrangère"¹. The obstacles, it seems, were not so much of rank as of obstinate prejudice and lack of foresight in the education of women. Madelaine de Scudéry, whose family was not wealthy, had had in youth a remarkably wide intellectual and practical training.² Ninon de Lenclos, whose parentage ranked scarcely higher than "petite noblesse", was yet able to win for herself a reputation for the highest intellectual gifts, mainly on the basis of an advanced

1. F.Buisson, Nouveau Dictionnaire de pédagogie, Paris 1911 art. Sévigné by Paul Rousselot.

2. Mlle de Scudery lays claim to a variety of sciences: archeology, natural history and astronomy, heraldry, cookery and Jam-making are among her accomplishments, besides the accurate experience of military strategy displayed in the Grand Cyrus. Ninon had received a more severely classical education, with a bias towards experimentalism which made her salon one of the well-known centres of philosophical discussion in the second half of the century.

education. Marie de Chantal shared her tutor Ménage with Mlle de la Vergne, ~~the future Comtesse de la Vergne~~, the future Comtesse de la Fayette, a fact which was no doubt the starting-point of their long friendship. The salons of the period could each claim members of this feminine élite, who had received, and who were themselves to give to their children, an education above the average.

W The vast majority of women, however, even among the chosen society of the Court, were barely literate, and certainly incapable of enjoying or even desiring the constant mental activity which is a characteristic of the lives of Madame de Sévigné and her daughter.

It was no doubt to the "Bien Bon" that Marie de Chantal owed the immense advantages of her education. He may not himself have been a particularly well-educated man; Madame de Sévigné in later life laments his unintellectual interests, especially during the long tête à tête of their journeys together down the Loire. She even refers with a certain irony, in spite of her affection, to his primary interest in "les beaux yeux de sa cassette".¹ His gifts were no doubt mainly practical; the fact remains that the education

1. Lettres, III 234, IV 129: 6 oct.1673, 11 Sept.1675. The expression is used by Molière in L'Avare, Act V, sc.III.

of his ward was conducted with discernment and intelligence, and that for this alone the Abbé had well merited the gratitude and affection which she and her children showered on him to the end of his life.

To appreciate the worth of the opportunities she enjoyed, one must first consider briefly the position of her tutors, Chapelain and Ménage, in the academic world of the seventeenth century. The Chapelain who taught Marie de Chantal in the 1630's was not yet the indifferent poet whom Boileau attacked in his satires. Modern criticism has in part rehabilitated him, in recognising his major influence in the formation of classical taste.² It was an influence which left its mark also on his pupil, as is evident from her letters. At the time of Chapelain's first acquaintance with mademoiselle de Chantal, assuming this to have been in about 1638, when she was aged twelve, he had recently published the "Sentiments de l'Académie française sur le Cid", having already in 1623 attracted attention as a critic by his préface to Marino's Adonis. Both Madame de Sévigné and her daughter show a knowledge of this work:

2. C.f. Fidao-Justiniani, L'esprit classique et la préciosité au XVIIe siècle. Paris, 1914

"M. Chapelain a reçu votre souvenir avec enthousiasme. Il dit que l'Adone est délicieux en certains endroits; mais d'une longueur admirable; Il y a aussi un petit rossignol qui s'égosille pour surmonter un homme qui joue du luth. Il se vient pencher sur sa tête, et enfin il meurt; on l'enterre dans le corps du luth. cette peinture est charmante...". 1.

chant le chant de la
la comédie est -

/assommante.

Her comments are, of course, very much later than the original publication, and as such are worthy of note, since the length of Marino's Adonis was one of the features discussed and amply justified by Chapelain in the preface of 1623. One wonders at the apparent contradiction: had Chapelain altered his views over the years, or was Madame de Sévigné putting her own interpretation on them? Was he perhaps more sincere with his pupil than in the original critique? And yet, could the author of the courteous circumlocutions of the Préface ever have described a literary work as "d'une longueur assommante", and would it not be safer to ascribe the expression to the trenchant pen of his pupil!

Contemporary references to Chapelain's tutorship are unfortunately not available in the correspondence of the Marquise, since this begins at a much later date. We can

1. Lettres, II, 512; 24 Feb. 1672.

gauge the degree of her appreciation only by her references in later life to the "bons maîtres" of her youth.¹ The measure of Chapelain's influence on her is perhaps greater than has been understood in the past. Critics are accustomed to stress the contrast between Madame de Sévigné's lightness of style and innate good taste,² and the heaviness of Chapelain's Pucelle - a work, incidentally, which she never mentions, though she must have known of it, and certainly did know of Boileau's satires against her master.³ It remains true of Chapelain that though he may have lacked a critical judgement of his style he was by no means lacking in critical power in other respects. Much of his advice on epistolary style, for instance, a matter to which he gave considerable thought, is put into practice in the letters of Madame de Sevigne:

"J'ai été bien aise aussi d'apprendre par vous que je peignais assez naturellement mes pensées, et que vous y voyez mon âme à découvert. Si

1. Lettres II 251: 21 June 1671
2. C.f. Gaston's Boissier's biography in the series Les Grands Ecrivains Français, Paris 1887 in -80, p.71: "Chapelain est un mauvais poète, mais on ne peut pas dire, qu'il soit un bon prosateur ... sa plaisanterie surtout à des allures d'hippopotame ... ce n'est pas là le style de Mme de Sévigné. Evidemment Chapelain ne lui a pas enseigné l'art d'écrire".
3. Lettres, III 318; 15 Dec 1673. Mme de Sévigné refers to Boileau as being "tendre en prose et cruel en vers" towards her tutor. See also V, 229.XI, 16, for her knowledge of the Satire IX in which Chapelain had been attacked.

cela est, J'ai obtenu ce que je désirais et, avec votre permission, je m'estimerai à l'avenir un des bons écrivains du monde, tant pour ce que j'estime que le but le plus parfait de l'écriture est de représenter les mouvements intérieurs, que pour ce que je vois que mon écriture me sert à ce que je veux, qui est de vous pouvoir bien faire connaître qui je suis..."

"Si un homme doit faire effort, ce ne doit pas être dans le style épistolaire, qui demande la clarté, la chasteté, la naïveté et qui ne reçoit que rarement des sujets de la haute éloquence."

"Comme j'estime fort les (lettres) naïves, il n'y a rien qui me déplaît davantage que les ambitieuses, et celles de ce dernier genre tenant du déclamateur ne me dégoutent pas moins chez quelques anciens que chez quelques modernes, lorsque leur matière ne veut que le style familier, duquel ces formes affectées corrompent le caractère ...". 1.

It is significant that many of the letters in which these principles were expounded were written, mainly to Balzac, in the years 1638-40, when Chapelain's influence on her was at its height. It was he, no doubt, who gave Madame de Sévigné that mastery of the French language for which she is justly famed among the women of the seventeenth century. His critical writings lament the

1. Chapelain, à M. de Balzac, 28 Nov. 1637, 22 May 1638, à M. Carrel de Sainte-Garde, 27 July 1663: see Opuscules Critiques. Paris. S.T.F.M. 1936. p. 382, 388, 473.

contempt in which the vernacular is held by savants as a vehicle of thought. His pupil, who was to play an important part in bringing the modern French language into being, no doubt owed to her tutor her appreciation of her mother-tongue. Madame de Sévigné's style will be discussed again for the light it throws on her cultural background, but it is necessary even here to point out that such an accomplished command of language as she possessed must have taken its origins in very early training; one may conclude, too that she was herself introduced to the best French writers and her taste and judgement well formed.

The actual extent of Marie de Chantal's education is not easy to determine. Since she continued all her life to read widely, one can hardly differentiate between the learning of her youth and that of her womanhood, and the letters offer no satisfactory commentary on her formative years. No doubt Chapelain and Ménage had drawn up some form of curriculum for their pupil. We know that her study of languages with Ménage included Latin, which she mastered sufficiently to be able to read Virgil,

"non travesti mais dans toute la majesté du latin et de l'italien."¹ Greek does not seem to have formed part of her curriculum; though a good many of the erudite women of the time could read and write it fluently: Corbinelli, writing to Madame de Coligny, Bussy's daughter, says of the Abesse de Fontevrault and Madame de la Sabliere that "elles entendent Homère comme nous entendons Virgile",² and the same might have been said of such scholars as the Princesse de Guéméné and Mlle de Schurmann. Menage was probably responsible for the classical side of Marie de Chantal's education; either of her tutors would have been equally fitted to teach her Spanish and Italian, both of which she could speak and write with ease. Her knowledge of Italian must have been particularly excellent, if one may judge from her repeated quotations from Italian Renaissance literature, and from a letter written in Italian to the Marquise d'Uxelles, which is preserved in

1. Lettres, III,150; 16 July 1672. "Travesti" is a reference to Scarron's Virgile travesti, 1653; see p.68. The Italian translation to which Mme de Sévigné refers is probably that of Annibal Caro: Eneide di Virgilio, Venice, 1581, several times reprinted.

2. Lettres, V,250; 30 July 1677.

her collected correspondence.¹ An anecdote in a letter referring to one of her doctors reveals that she was equally fluent in conversation. Spanish, as Chapelain himself says, was the language of theology and politics in the seventeenth century rather than that of literature, while Italian was "la reine des modernes vulgaires". A knowledge of both was the mark of an educated woman, and was at the same time the most that could be required of her in experience of modern languages. The influence of England, Germany and the Scandinavian countries on the France of the Grand Siècle is virtually nil,² while the literature of these countries was to remain unknown to the majority for another half-century.

Chapelain himself, in the years before his tutorship of Marie de Chantal, had translated into French the Spanish picaresque novel, La Vida de Guzman de Alfarache, of Mateo Aleman. Madame de Sévigné makes no reference to it, though it seems likely that she would have known it. She is in any case at one with her tutor in her early years in

1. Lettres, I 375; 1653, Letter 22, undated.

2. c.f. Ascoli, La Grande-Bretagne devant l'opinion française au XVIIe siècle, Paris, 1930

her taste for novel-reading, which she never very convincingly repudiated. It is true that her preference goes to a different kind of novel, the heroic rather than the picaresque; but she had a thorough knowledge of Cervantes as well, as her frequent references show.¹ As a matter of fact it is unexpected to find Chapelain himself being interested in such a story as Guzman de Romans Alfarache. His Dialogue de la Pecture des vieux is posterior to his tutorship (1646-7) but it is clear that he must have played some part in the formation of her taste. His choice of texts is hers: L'Astrée, Cassandre, Cléopâtre, Faramond, le Grand Cyrus, Clélie; ² both have the same criticism of La Calprenède, though Madame de Sevigne distinguishes more strongly the weaknesses of his style. Both defend the novel on the grounds of its moral example, and both admit to a secret weakness for "les grands coups d'épée". Chapelain is one of the most assiduous defendants of the novel among seventeenth century critics, and it seems strange that so many writers should have commented on this aspect of

1. Lettres. II, 135,313; 1 Apr., 9 Aug.1671. V.227: 23 July 1677. etc.

2. See Chapelain's letter to M.Gruterus, 24 Dec.1667; Opuscules Critiques. p.487

Madame de Sévigné's literary preferences¹ without looking to Chapelain for an explanation of them.

In other respects also his influence is unmistakeable, for instance in her reading of history and historical biography. Chapelain's writings contain much sound advice on the writing of history, some of it incorporated into his commentary on the works of Cardinal Bentivoglio, the Histoire des guerres de Flandres, with which Madame de Sévigné was also familiar. This and several other historical works to which she refers could have been read during the years of her schooling, and made clear to her by the comments and criticisms of her tutor. Guichardini and Davila², for instance, two favourite authors whom she recommends as reading for her granddaughter Pauline, are discussed in the critical letters on the Guerre des Flandres, as also is Conestaggio³, although Madame de Sévigné's first acquaintance with this author was probably considerably later. If it was indeed to Chapelain that she owed this

1. A.Béziers in Les lectures de Mme de Sévigné. Paris 1863 devotes a whole chapter to her choice of novels without mention of Chapelain. c.f. also Aubenas. Histoire de Mme de Sévigné, 1842. p.208,326,432.

2. Guichardin: Historia della Italia. 1561. Davila: Historia delle guerre civili di Francia,1630. Lettres IX,409: 11 Jan.1690.

3. Translated as: Histoire de la réunion du royaume de Portugal à la couronne de Castille. Barbin: Paris 1680. Lettres. VI,387-8: 9 May 1680.

interest, his pupil turned it to good account for the development of her own intellect and judgement. Historians formed a large percentage of her reading throughout all her life, and not of her reading only, but of her discussions with friends and family, and of her deepening understanding of human experience. It is the human element which appeals to her most, as it did to Montaigne, in the reading of history; and it is hard not to see, in her preoccupation with this subject, the disciple of the Chapelain who could once write:

"... Il me semble, quand je rêve ou raisonne sur la conduite des états, que je fais la plus noble action qui tombe sous la capacité de l'homme..." 1.

The part played by Ménage in the education of Marie de Chantal was probably less important than that of Chapelain. He was only thirteen years older than his pupil, and would still have been a young man at the time when he first knew her, a fact which accounts for the very different footing on which he and Chapelain stood in her regard. At the time of his tutorship he had as yet no published work to his credit, though during that time, in 1636, he first came into the public eye with the composition of the Requête des dictionnaires, and in 1640

1. A M.de Balzac 25 Sept.1632;Opuscules Critiques.p.369

with the quarrel with the Abbé d'Aubignac over the unity of time in Terence's Heautontimoroumenos. These and later publications show the trend of his interests: in 1650 the Origines de la langue française, in 1672 the Remarques sur la langue française, in 1669 the Origines de la langue italienne. In 1687 there appeared an annotated edition of Lucian, a favourite author of Madame de Sévigné, whose preference may well have derived from Menage's lessons in her youth. This is an unexpected taste in the Marquise - Lucian's satires had enjoyed a vogue in the sixteenth century, and Fénelon was to base on them his Dialogues des Morts, but on the whole the Grand Siècle appreciated them less. Mme de Sévigné particularly praises the dialogues of Caron, l'Icaromenipee and les Sectes a l'encan. She had probably read them in the translation by Perrot d'Ablancourt 1654-60. Menage's 1666 edition of Malherbe is known to Madame de Sévigné¹, who in the correspondence acknowledges a copy sent her by the author; though this is, of course, later than the period of his tutorship. Marie de Chantal never seems to have shared her tutor's ardour in the discussion of

1. Letters, I, 399;+32,1655. Menage's Malherbe was first published 1666. This reference, however, appears in a letter which the editor of the Grands Ecrivains de la France places in 1655, quoting Menage's statement that the work had first appeared in print in 1654, in an edition which he, Menage, had immediately withdrawn, though Madame de Sévigné's acknowledgement might nevertheless apply to it.

philological questions, though one may, perhaps, attribute to his influence the interest which she often shows in the shades of meaning, the origin and correct use of language. They shared above all a common enthusiasm for the language and literature of Italy. Ménage's works contain several sets of verses to his pupil in Italian and Latin, from which also it is evident that seized with admiration he sought more than once to introduce into their relationship the note of gallantry that was usual between him and his pupils. Letters from Madame de Sévigné to Ménage during her early married life reveal amusing attempts on his part to provoke lover's quarrels and generally play the forsaken swain: attempts which Madame de Sévigné repulses with a characteristic blend of charm and good sense:

"C'est vous qui m'avez appris à parler de votre amitié comme d'une pauvre défunte, car pour moi, je ne m'en serois jamais avisée, en vous aimant comme je fais. Prenez-vous en donc à vous de cette vilaine parole qui vous a tant déplu, et croyez que je ne puis avoir plus de joie que de savoir que vous conservez pour moi l'amitié que vous m'avez promise, et qu'elle est ressuscitée glorieusement ..." 1.

The attachment, on her side at least, does not seem to have been more than friendship, in spite of the appearance of coquetry with which she could at times treat her admirers. Contemporary sources contain several anecdotes of Madame

1. Lettres, I, 347; +2, undated.

de Sévigné's relationship with Ménage, notably those of Tallemant des Réaux:

"Elle baisait un jour Ménage comme son frère; des galants s'en étonnaient. 'On baisait comme cela, leur dit-elle, dans la primitive Eglise.' Elle faisait confiance de tout à Ménage, et lui, qui en avait été amoureux autrefois, lui disait: 'J'ai été votre martyr, je suis à cette heure votre confesseur.- 'Et moi, répondit-elle, votre vierge.' ..." 1

If these stories were current in the Parisian society of the time, as they no doubt were, one is bound to admit some truth in Bussy's criticism of his cousin's language and demeanour.² Further reference, however, to the correspondence between Ménage and Madame de Sévigné confirms the fact that there was between them no relationship save that of friendship, albeit warm and generous on both sides: "Adieu, L'ami, de tous les amis le meilleur" writes Madame de Sévigné in one of her letters; while Ménage, for his part, did not wait for her request nor spare his energy to defend her against calumny at the time of the Foucquet trial.³ Other letters between them

1. Historiettes de Tallemant des Réaux, ed. Monmerqué et Paulin, Paris, Paris 1862, Vol. IV. p. 395.

2. See p. 48.

3. Lettres, I, 424; letter 46, 1658 undated. I, letters 50, 52, 53; 431 ff. 1661.

treat of literary matters. Although absent from Paris at the time ^{it} was the year 1656 - she was drawn by Ménage into a literary quarrel which divided the salon of Mlle de Scudéry, and was able to give a sound and accurate judgement. She acknowledges the gift of an Italian canzonetta sent her by her tutor, and in the same letter a copy of Pascal's XIe Provinciale which she had not yet read.¹ The study of Ménage's influence on Madame de Sévigné does in fact carry the reader beyond the period of her actual tuition, into that of her establishment as a woman of the world, where both her tutors continued to value her judgement and ask her opinion on matters of current intellectual interest.

The combination of two such instructors had undoubtedly been a rare advantage in the education of Marie de Chantal. Yet a critic might point out even here certain lacunae in her intellectual formation. The most notable is perhaps the absence of a genuine interest in scientific topics. True, the Marquise would later seek explanations of cartesian physics and

1. Lettres, I, 413; 12 Sept. 1656.

the doctrine of animal-soul.¹ She might even take an active part in debating these topics. One feels, however, that underlying all her enquiries is a vicarious sympathy with her daughter's interests rather than an urgent personal desire for knowledge; one might wonder, indeed, if scientific curiosity formed any part of her intellectual interest at all. One must, of course, remember that the education of Marie de Chantal, unlike that of her daughter, was contemporary not with the full flowering but with the very first beginnings of the scientific movement in seventeenth century France. The early writings of Descartes appeared when she was growing out of childhood; when their influence began to be felt by the scholars of Paris, she had already completed her apprenticeship and embarked on a full social life. By that time it was her daughter's generation which was to feel the strongest impact of the scientific spirit, while Madame de Sévigné's own must grow to it by reading or discussion later in life. Even so the Marquise did not, so far as one can tell, make very much use of the

1. See Chapter VII, p.270

opportunities offered. She does not seem, for instance, to have frequented the academies and scientific organisations open to women, though she had links with them among her acquaintances, even in youth¹. Men of letters played a considerable part in the movement, especially in its beginnings; one would have expected her to have been drawn into it by Chapelain, who was one of the most remarkable men of his age for his combination of literary and scientific pursuits. He was a close friend of Gassendi, with whom he discussed astronomical questions, and of Huyghens who confided to him his discoveries in hydrostatics. Neither of these well-known savants is mentioned in the Lettres. Chapelain had been consulted in 1665 by Louis de la Forge on his Traité de l'esprit de l'homme², a book which formed the subject of a discussion by correspondence between Corbinelli and Mme de Grignan in 1673, and may have been one of Madame de Sévigné's first cartesian readings. Chapelain had besides been a member of the Montmor Academy, and one of the first contributors to the Journal des Savants, though this was not until 1665,

1. c.f. Harcourt Brown: Scientific Organisations in Seventeenth Century France. Baltimore 1934.

2. See G. Collas: Un poète protecteur des lettres au XVIIe siècle, Jean Chapelain, Paris. 1912; p.323.

long after his tutorship of the Marquise. In 1666 he had persuaded Colbert to found the Académie des Sciences. It is true that Chapelain's interest in scientific matters dates mainly from the latter part of his life; nevertheless it seems curious that during the period of his influence over Marie de Chantal he did not succeed in drawing her more effectively into the nascent scientific movement, nor even in forming in her the mentality that would blossom later on into a genuine scientific curiosity.

Another major interest with Chapelain was geographical research, and this at least he did not fail to pass on to his pupil. Geography as a scientific study was of course unknown to the Grand Siècle. What interest there was was stimulated chiefly by memoirs and travellers' tales, such as those of Francois Bernier, a close friend of Chapelain. They carried on an active correspondence, of which Madame de Sévigné cannot have been unaware, though Bernier is not mentioned in the lettres, and one cannot tell how far in youth she kept abreast of the new interest in exploration. Chapelain for his part was in correspondence with numerous experts on this and kindred topics; it was no doubt to him that Madame de Sévigné owed the enjoyment she derived in later life from such works as "La découverte des Indes par Christophe Colomb, qui me divertit au dernier point", ¹ Her

1. Lettres, III, 4; 1 Apr. 1672. Perhaps the life of Columbus written by his son Ferdinand, translated into Italian by Alfonso de Ulloa and twice reprinted, 1571 and 1674.

daughter, living alternately in Provence and Marseilles, was well placed to meet returning travellers, and the Marquise envies her the opportunity to entertain them, and enliven her company with tales of foreign parts:

"Vous ne pouvez pas douter de la joie que j'aurois d'entretenir cet homme des Indes, quand vous vous souviendrez combien je vous ai importunée d'Herrera, que j'ai lu avec un plaisir extraordinaire." ¹

That avidity for intellectual experience, the quick enthusiasm for questions of so varied a range which is characteristic of the Marquise, is perhaps the final proof of the worth of her education. Her tutors might well have been proud of their pupil. Throughout a long life complicated by numerous social and family ties, she never ceased to display the same desire to learn, the same freshness of approach to every question which had marked her youth. Yet she bore her learning lightly, and in her complete lack of pedantry she was, again, Chapelain's pupil. One knows the charming comment made on her in later life by the critic Saint-Simon: "Elle savait extrêmement de toutes sortes de choses, sans jamais vouloir paraître savoirrien." ²

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1. Lettres. IV. 321: 5 Jan 1676. Herrera, author of a history of the West Indies translated 1671 as Histoire Générale des Indes.
 2. Saint-Simon, Mémoires, ed. A. de Boislisle, Paris 1881, Vol. LIII. p. 78.

A less-known description, which might be a portrait of Madame de Sévigné, is the praise given to Mme des Loges by the writer Guez de Balzac, friend of Chapelain and like him affected with a horror of pedantry in any woman:

"Il faut que les femmes soient tout a fait femmes.. je n'approuve pas davantage les femmes docteurs que les femmes cavaliers..Ni au ton de la voix ni en la manière de s'exprimer, on ne remarque rien en vous que de naturel et de français; et quoique votre esprit soit d'un ordre extrêmement relevé, vous l'accommodez de telle sorte à la portée de qui que ce soit, que les bourgeoises vous entendent lorsque les beaux esprits vous admirent. C'est beaucoup, Madame, d'avoir acquis les plus honnêtes connaissances qui se peuvent acquérir; mais c'est encore davantage de s'en cacher comme d'un larcin..."¹

In only one respect, that of her religious training, does Madame de Sévigné appear to owe little to either of her tutors. Her philosophical background has little in common with, for instance, the scepticism of Chapelain. Yet the sureness of her judgements and the quiet sanity of her attitude to life bear witness also to a sound moral training. Her religious education, conducted, no doubt, by her uncle the Abbé de Coulanges, had given her a clear, intelligent understanding of her faith and its obligations, offset by a moderation which enabled her, even in the period of her closest adherence to Jansenism, to steer clear of any danger of fanaticism. It was an outlook on life that was perhaps pessimistic in certain respects; in the first

1. c.f. Fidao - Justiniani: *op. cit.* P. 49-50n.

twenty-five years she had suffered many sobering experiences. But they seem to have left her essential serenity unaffected, and indeed gaiety and a carefree enjoyment of life are a feature of Madame de Sévigné's youth, at least as she remembers it from the viewpoint of old age:

"J'ai vu ici M. de Larrey, fils de notre pauvre ami Lenet avec qui nous avons tant ri; car jamais il ne fut une jeunesse si riante que la nôtre de toutes les façons." ¹

Even when, in later life, ill-health and anxiety overcloud the gaiety for a while, her sense of humour quickly restored the balance. Her joyful independence in youth might perhaps have gone against her in the judgement of her contemporaries. Bussy complains of having found in her a certain lack of that restraint and modesty befitting a young girl just out of her tutelage and not yet established in society.² Although Bussy is at best a carping critic, and here writing out of wounded vanity rather than justice, one must admit that it is hard to imagine Madame de Sévigné conducting herself at any time with any but the most complete assurance. It was, in a way, the corollary of the broad and unrestricted education she had received. The Abbé de Coulanges' methods had no doubt

1. Lettres, X, 33; 12 July 1691. The letter is to Bussy Rabutin.

2. In his portrait in the Histoire Amoureuse des Gaules.

been liberal enough. It is strange that critics have speculated so little on the possible effect on Madame de Sévigné of the early death of her close relations. Yet it may in part account for that self-reliance which seems to have been characteristic with her. It is not that she had in any sense had a neglected childhood, for she had certainly been guided with care, and must have felt in her grandparents and later in her uncle all the affection needed to give a child a sense of security. Nevertheless one cannot but remark on the lack of feminine influences in her early life. One remembers, in the Princesse de Clèves, the important part given by Madame de La Fayette to the heroine's mother in the crises which befall her. Even for such important events in the life of a young girl as her entry into society, Madame de Sévigné must have been thrown back entirely on herself, and her personality brought to early maturity thereby. One may add to the critics of the Marquise's demeanour that throughout all the hazards of an unhappy married life and an early widowhood she conducted herself with such perfect propriety as to avoid, even in the gossip of the times, the least breath of scandal. Madeleine de Scudéry does her full justice when she writes, in the

portrait contained in Clélie:

"Elle agit avec une telle conduite, que la médisance a toujours respecté sa vertu, et ne l'a pas fait soupçonner de la moindre galanterie, quoiqu'elle soit la plus galante personne du monde ..." 1.

One important circumstance of Madame de Sévigné's early life had, it is true, helped to counterbalance the lack of parental guidance. Paul Rousselot points out, in the article mentioned above,² that unlike most girls of the period the Marquise, in entering into social life in early womanhood, was not being exposed to an entirely new set of experiences. For the majority of young women of the time, educated in convents in almost complete ignorance of the duties and dangers the future would involve, emancipation from their schooling was a dazzling experience. As Fenelon expresses it:

"Si votre fille sort du couvent et passe à un certain âge, dans la maison paternelle où le monde abonde, rien n'est plus à craindre que cette surprise et ce grand ébranlement d'une imagination vive ... Elle sort du couvent comme une personne qu'on avait nourrie dans les ténèbres d'une profonde caverne, et qu'on ferait passer tout à coup au grand jour ..." 3.

It is little wonder that so sudden an intellectual and

1. Lettres, ed. M. Monmerqué, Notes sur Mme de Sévigné. Vol. I. p. 320.

2. See p. 9.

3. De l'éducation des filles, p. 143.

moral transition should have had serious consequences in the lives of many young women. For the Marquise, however, as the same critic has pointed out :

"Lorsqu'elle entra dans le monde après son mariage, elle ne changea pas de milieu, elle retrouva ses maîtres, les amis de ses maîtres et de son oncle, dans le salon bleu d'Arthénice, mêlés avec tout ce que la littérature, la cour et la ville avient de plus distingué et au premier rang, des femmes que le nom de précieuses n'a pas toutes ridiculisées, parce qu'elles n'étaient pas toutes ridicules" 1.

Madame de Sévigné's tutors were destined later to quarrel and spend many years in bitter separation. At this period of her youth, however, they were still to be seen together in the foremost literary circles of Paris, and it may have been with a certain pride that Chapelain first introduced his pupil to the select society of the Hotel de Rambouillet. He was to remind her later on of her debt to him in this respect. The date of this important step is, however, unknown; one of Chapelain's biographers puts it at 1641, when Marie de Chantal would have been only fifteen years of age.² Whatever the exact

1. F.Buisson, Nouveau Dictionnaire de pédagogie, art. Sévigné.

2. "Il vous peut souvenir que je suis votre père d'eslection et que je vous en ay rendu tous les devoirs, entre lesquels le moindre n'est pas d'avoir estreint la liaison que vous avez avec Mesdames de Rambouillet et de Montausier..." Chapelain to Mme de Sévigné, 16 Nov. 1661 - c.f. G.Collas: Un Poète protecteur des lettres au XVIIe siècle, Jean Chapelain Paris, 1912; p.175.

date it seems almost certain that she knew the Hôtel before her marriage in 1644, and therefore before that of Julie d'Angennes in 1645 had deprived the chambre bleue of some of its éclat in Parisian society. The importance, in the formation of Marie de Chantal, of her introduction to the Hôtel de Rambouillet can scarcely be overestimated. It was a unique experience in the life of a young girl thus to find herself at the very centre of the literary world of Paris, in a period fermenting with new productions of every kind. It is unfortunate that no letters of hers have survived from this period to transmit its first impact on her mind. The most one can do is to conjecture, from the known history of the Hôtel, who would have been the leading personalities and what the great literary events which she could have witnessed in the mid-1650's, before her marriage.

At the time of Marie de Chantal's entry into social life the great men who had formed the original cercle de Rambouillet were already beginning to pass. There were some of whom she could have known only by hearsay - for instance, Malherbe, once the leader of them all, who had died in 1628. Even so, she must have realised the importance of his influence, and grown familiar with his works, though the edition by Ménage was not to appear for another ten years. 1.

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1. See above p.21.

In the Hôtel de Rambouillet Mlle de Chantal could have met Malherbe's chief disciples, Maynard and Racan, with whose poems she was to show acquaintance in the Lettres. But the moving spirit of the chambre bleue this time was still Voiture, who had succeeded Malherbe as the leader of opinion, and who, in spite of his obscure birth, was in contact with the highest families of France. A prolific writer of fertile imagination, witty and full of verve, he must have been a fascinating figure to the young girl. The letters by which he continued, during his absences from Paris, to keep in contact with the Hôtel de Rambouillet, were passed from hand to hand and avidly sought after; to the extent that "une voiture" had become synonymous with "une lettre" in the language of the précieux. Madame de Sévigné uses the expression later in a letter to Bussy:

"Je me trouvai hier chez Mme de Montglas, qui avait reçu une de vos lettres, et Mme de Gouville une autre. Je croyois en trouver une chez moi; mais je fus trompée dans mon attente, et je jugeai que vous n'aviez pas voulu confondre tant de rares merveilles(1) J'en suis bien aise, et je prétends avoir un de ces jours ma voiture à part ." 2.

1. Both ladies had at some time been Bussy's mistresses.

2. Lettres, I, 395; 14 July 1655.

Voiture was, with Balzac, the first to make of letter-writing a literary genre. His own are as often as not an intellectual exercise, written to mark some occasion or accompany a present to a friend, as another man might write a complimentary ode. Madame de Sévigné, whose future fame would far outshine his, was yet to think herself unduly praised when their names were coupled together:

"Vous louez tellement mes lettres au-dessus de leur mérite, que si je n'étois fort assurée que vous ne les refeuilletterez ni ne les relirez jamais, je craindrois tout d'un coup de me voir imprimée par la trahison d'un de mes amis. Voiture et Nicole, bon Dieu, quels noms! et qu'est-ce que vous dites, ma chère enfant?" 1.

She is so compared several times by her friends, and there are indeed points of likeness to Voiture in her light, sparkling style; one must remember too that such comparison was high praise in the mouths of her contemporaries. For posterity it is Corbinelli who comes nearer the truth, were it not for his misplaced flattery of Bussy's style, when he writes to the latter :

"Le P. Bouhours auroit peut-être aussi bien fait de rapporter des fragments de vos lettres, et de celles de Mme de Sévigné, que celles de Balzac et de Voiture, pour donner des exemples de la justesse, de la délicatesse, ou de la noble simplicité des pensées ..." 2.

1. Lettres, IX, 458; 15 Feb. 1690

2. Lettres, VIII, 144; 2 Dec. 1687; to Bussy.

Both Voiture's letters and his poetry were sufficiently familiar for Madame de Sévigné to be able to quote from them by heart, and to know particularly those works which had caused some of the famous quarrels of the Hotel de Rambouillet: the sonnet of La Belle matineuse in 1645 and the rivalry with Malleville, and later, in 1648, the Sonnet d'Uranie, partner to Benserade's Sonnet de Job, which had divided all the literary society of Paris into Jobelins and Uranistes. If Mlle de Chantal had really been admitted to the chambre bleue as early as 1641, she would have witnessed the presentation of the Guirlande de Julie, and known the many poets who took part in that curious event. Of these again, Voiture was the leader; and when the Marquise in later years thought back on the days of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, they must have been largely dominated by his brilliant personality. In 1680 her granddaughter Pauline was reading his letters, and it may have been for this reason that the Marquise herself re-read them shortly afterwards. It was the occasion of her only serious literary judgement on Voiture;¹ while in many references she had shown pleasure at the lightness of his style or, more often, at the aptness of her quotations from

1. Lettres, IX, 413; 15 Jan. 1690.

from his works, here in writing for Pauline she was careful to redress the balance by classing him, along with Sarasin and the novelists, among the lesser authors, pleasant enough for recreational reading but insufficient of themselves to furnish a well-educated mind.

An important figure and occasional rival of Voiture in the Hôtel de Rambouillet was Godeau, bishop and historian, whose works find reference in Madame de Sévigné's correspondence. As "le nain de Julie" she must have heard him mentioned though he had by that time departed, somewhat reluctantly, to take up his episcopal residence at Grasse, and thereafter spent little time in Paris. Another rival of Voiture, the poet Benserade, seems to have appeared but seldom in the Hotel, though Madame de Sévigné knew him well in later life. A host of minor poets she may have met there, however; Gombauld, Malleville, Saint-Amant,¹ whose works she quotes with appreciation, and Saint-Pavin the hunchback and libertine, already known to her as neighbour to the Abbé de Coulanges at Livry. No doubt Mademoiselle de Chantal received her share of the admiring complimentary verses which

1. He was a friend of Chapelain, though Mme de Sévigné shows no personal acquaintance with him. He was said to be the only person to have read Marino's Adonis from end to end!

passed between the poets and the ladies of the chambre bleue d'Arthénice. Saint-Pavin, we know, had already celebrated his young neighbour, possibly even ^{before} her entry into Parisian society, but his cheerfully borne deformity was sufficient warrant against any scandal she might have given by so libertine an association - as the poet himself was the first to recognise:

"Ceux qui voudront malignement
 Traiter de trop d'emportement
 Ce commerce, pour en médire,
 Ne diront pas certainement:
 Telle maîtresse, tel amant
 Sont faits égaux comme de cire;
 Vous êtes belle, assurément,
 Et je tiens beaucoup du satyre." 1.

Saint-Pavin was later to become a member of Madame de Sévigné's own salon, as were many of the literary figures whom she first met during these years. Alongside the poets came the dramatists: Mairet, who was to retire from the theatre in 1643, leaving Corneille and Rotrou in possession of the Paris stage. Corneille is known to have been in the habit of bringing his plays to the Hotel de Ramouillet for criticism before their presentation, and in 1643 to have read Polyeucte to the assembled company. One cannot believe that Mlle de Chantal would have been allowed to

1. Lettres, I, 28, notice.

miss such an important occasion. Polyeucte was followed in the years 1643-44 by Pompée, le menteur and la Suite du menteur, so that in quoting from Corneille's plays, as she so often does in her letters, Madame de Sévigné may, in some cases, be quoting from her memories of actual readings and performances in the years before her marriage. Rotrou, the second major dramatist of the 1640's, is less familiar to her, though he also frequented the Hôtel de Rambouillet. In 1643 he had produced a comedy, la Soeur; but his two best plays, the tragedies Saint-Genest and Wenceslas (from which the Marquise draws a quotation on one occasion) were running in 1645 and 1647, at a time when she was probably out of town. In the same season a minor dramatist, du Ryer, had scored a notable success with Parisian audiences. The fact that Madame de Sévigné does not mention him in her correspondence does not, of course, prove her unawareness: It is unlikely that a member of the chambre bleue should not have kept up with current theatrical productions, and there were many lesser authors whose names are scarcely known beyond the seventeenth century. This particular dramatist, however, is interesting in having been the first to make dramatic material of the ~~story~~ story of Esther, some forty years before the masterpiece of Racine.

Both Chapelain and Ménage were, of course, habitués

of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, though Chapelain does not seem to have been unfailingly popular with Voiture. He had, nevertheless, a host of literary friends in the salon, to whom no doubt he would have introduced his pupil. Through her tutors especially she might have known Conrart, Vaugelas and Perrot d'Ablancourt, all of whom, as refined stylists and members of the Académie - Conrart was its secretary since the foundation - were directly responsible for the formation of the classical French language. Mlle de Chantal may have known these men only in passing; at any rate she shared the general enthusiasm for d'Ablancourt's translations of Tacitus and Lucian¹, which a wit of the Hotel de Rambouillet had nicknamed "les belles infidèles".² She must also have met here the Abbé Cottin whom Molière was to satirize together with Ménage in the Femmes Savantes. Yet another literary giant of the time was Balzac who, in spite of his infrequent appearances in Paris and the Hotel, knew how to make his influence equally weighty, taking part by correspondence, in all the literary discussions of the salon. It was here, too, that Mlle de Chantal would first have known

1. Lettres, II, 274, 349; 8 July & 6 Sept. 1671.

2. The saying is well-known. E.Magne attributes it to Ménage. c.f. Le coeur et l'esprit de Mme de la Fayette, Paris, 1927, p.101.

Arnauld d'Andilly and his son Pompone, so establishing a link with Jansenism which was to have far-reaching effects in her life.

But there was too, in the Hôtel de Rambouillet, a generation nearer her own, making its debut like herself in the social life of Paris. Such for instance was the young Abbé Bossuet, whose introduction to the Chambre bleue coincides almost exactly with Madame de Sévigné's own. There is a well-known anecdote concerning his first sermon at the age of eighteen, preached late at night to the company of the Hôtel, and the comment of Voiture: "Je n'avais jamais entendu prêcher si tôt ni si tard." The meeting may well have been the beginning of the friendship with Bossuet to which the Marquise refers in her letters, and which grew closer when she met him again in the Hôtel de Nevers. Mlle de la Vergne, though younger than Mlle de Chantal, would soon join this latter group of adherents of the Hotel, and there make the acquaintance of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld.

The salon de Rambouillet had, however, more to offer Mlle de Chantal than the meeting with so many celebrities; of even greater value was its atmosphere of flourishing literary life. The Hôtel was not, in itself, one of the most intellectual circles of Paris: for discussion of Philosophical and scientific topics savants like Chapelain

would probably have gone elsewhere - to the circle of humanists at the Hôtel de Mesmes, or the library of the brothers Dupuy, to meet Gassendi, Peiresc and la Mothe le Vayer. Philosophical speculation was in general outside the scope of the chambre bleue. Its merit, nevertheless, and its great value in the education of a young woman like Marie de Chantal, lay in its encouragement of free discussion, and in the constant stimulus given to literary productions of every kind. It cannot have been very often that the criticisms of the company were brought to bear on such a masterpiece as Polyeucte. A good many of the productions sponsored by the Hotel are admittedly second-rate, infected with préciosité and destined to survive only as the curio pieces of french literature. Yet even the contact with such inferior work, when discussed by the alert, critical men and women whom she met daily in the drawing-room of the Marquise de Rambouillet, added to the charming personality of the Marquise herself, whose influence must not be overlooked, must have been an exhilarating experience in the life of Marie de Chantal. The atmosphere of the Hôtel de Rambouillet was in itself cultural; on a girl intelligent and impressionable as she was, its influence must have been very great.

Even had there not been the brilliant figures, the countless discussions, the madrigals and sonnets of the chambre bleue, the birth of the classical era could not but have made its impact on her mind. The years between the adoption of Marie de Chantal by the Abbé de Coulanges and her leaving him by reason of her marriage are years crowded with some of the major literary events of the century. In 1635 Richelieu had given letters patent to the Académie Française. In 1636 and again in 1640 the new dramatist Corneille had produced three major successes: le Cid, Horace, Cinna. Madame de Sévigné could have remembered the reaction provoked by le Cid in the adult world around her; later on, as the pupil of Chapelain, she would have come to realise the significance of the argument. In 1637 appeared the first manifesto of rationalism: the Discours de la Méthode. Its influence, no doubt, was at first very restricted; nevertheless it was a milestone in the history of thought, and was, moreover, the first work of its kind to be written in French. The years 1640 and 1643, again, were marked by two theological publications of highly inflammable nature: the publications of Jansen's Augustinus by Saint-Cyran and Arnauld's Traité de la fréquente communion. The latter author may have been known to Marie de Chantal: his

brother and nephew were constant visitors to the Hotel de Rambouillet. His works in any case had raised such a storm among the Jesuits and the Sorbonne theologians that not even the most frivolous and unintellectual Parisian salon could have ignored their importance. Even with such relatively minor events as the publication of a new novel or the fashioning of a Guirlande de Julie, Madame de Sévigné had been closely connected. From the point of view of both literature and religion the characteristic notes of the century had been struck, and she was fortunate indeed to find herself so placed, even in youth, as to be able to follow closely every new development of thought and learning.

Her introduction to the salon de Rambouillet was moreover for Madame de Sévigné the beginning of an active social life. Of the innumerable friendships revealed to us by the pages of her correspondence, a great number may be traced back to the meetings of these years in Rambouillet and the other fashionable salons of the seventeenth century. Her greatest friend, Madame de la Fayette, she knew already from their sharing the lessons of Ménage, but she could here widen her acquaintance with the many intelligent, cultured men and women whose appreciation was so important a factor

in the formation of classical literature. Some, like Mlle de Scudéry, Mme du Plessis-Guénégaud, Mme Cornuel, she was later to meet and know better in her own salons or in theirs. Others, scions of the noblest families of France, afforded her her first connection with the life of the Court: the Duc de Montausier and Julie d'Angennes, the Duc d'Enghien, well-known later on as the Grand Condé, and the Duchesses of Bourbon and Longueville. Her relations with them at this period may have been distant enough: her family though good was never in the closest connection with the throne and preferred, indeed, to keep a certain independence of royal favour. Nevertheless, with the natural charm of a well-bred woman, she could find herself at ease in any company, and the highest in the land, in later years, did not fail to respond to the attraction of her gracious personality.

Chapter II

MADAME de SEVIGNE AND THE WORLD OF LETTERS.1644 - 1669

Once her entry into social life was an accomplished fact the Abbé de Coulanges began to concern himself with finding a good match for his young ward. Among those mentioned as possible suitors is her cousin, Bussy Rabutin; her senior by eight years, related to Marie de Chantal on her father's side, Bussy does not, in spite of these links, seem to have had much contact with her in early youth. As the son of a military family he had himself followed the profession from an early age, and various campaigns had for the greater part of his youth kept him away from his Burgundian home. He had once it is true, at the age of eighteen, been called upon to represent his father at the family council in which Marie de Chantal was definitely given over to the care of the Abbé de Coulanges. But it was only when his father, to repair the bad state of the family fortunes, began to urge on his eldest son the advantages of a wealthy marriage that Bussy began seriously to consider his cousin as a possible match. Marie de Chantal was a good match, endowed at her marriage with a very considerable fortune, and with

such qualities of mind and heart as could not fail to charm all those who came in contact with her. Bussy, no doubt, was captivated as others were, to the point where mercenary considerations began to seem unimportant: As he himself said of her in later life:

"Ce fut un grand parti pour le bien, mais pour le mérite elle ne se pouvait dignement assortir." 1.

It seems all the more strange, then, when one considers Madame de Sévigné's great affection for her cousin, that the match did not materialise. Bussy himself pretends that he found in his young cousin something too free and bold in manner, and that he judged her "la plus jolie fille du monde, pour être la femme d'un autre." The quip sounds rather like the wounded vanity of a rejected suitor. Whether the Abbé thought him an unsuitable partner, or whether the young girl herself was sufficiently clear-sighted to realise the disadvantages of such a union, is not possible to say. Whatever the cause it was to her advantage not to have been tied to such a figure, whose bravery in the field could only in part compensate for

1. Histoire généalogique de la maison de Rabutin, p.58.

his selfishness and inordinate vanity. Madame de Sévigné's lifelong friendship with him is, indeed, one of the mysteries of her character; one is hard put to understand what a woman of such delicate good taste could find attractive in Bussy's pompousness.

The Abbé de Coulanges' final choice fell on a young Marquis, Henri de Sévigné, whom Marie de Chantal married on 4th August 1644. The Marquis was related to Gondi, Archbishop of Paris, later to become the Cardinal de Retz, who may have had some part in arranging the match. It was hardly to the advantage of Mlle de Chantal. The Sévigné family was noble; it could reckon, as the Marquise herself claims, "trois cent cinquante ans de chevalerie"¹ besides an old-established reputation for prowess in the Breton wars. The Marquis, however, was dissolute and spendthrift. Tallemant des Réaux supposes the Sévigné family to have been a poor one in the seventeenth century,² but it seems more likely that their fortunes were impaired by careless administration. One wonders at the prudent Abbé de Coulanges having given his consent to the marriage, which was certainly not a brilliant one from the worldly point of view; the Marquise was to suffer

1. Lettres, I, 531: 4 Dec.1668

2. Historiettes, IV, 394.

all her life from the financial cares which she inherited with the Sévigné estates in Brittany. Nor was it enhanced by the moral qualities of Henri de Sévigné, who even before the marriage had shown symptoms of that predilection for duelling which had already wrought havoc in the Chantal family. Thus the wedding which should have taken place in May of the year 1644, had had to be postponed for several months, so that the Marquis might recover from injuries sustained during an encounter with another Breton gentleman in the Pré aux Clercs. The ceremony was finally performed on the 4th August, by the Bishop of Châlons, uncle to the Marquise, at 2 o'clock in the morning, in the church of St. Gervais and St. Protais.

Very shortly afterwards the Marquis and his wife left Paris for Brittany. Here Henri de Sévigné must for the first time have introduced the Marquise to his estates: le Baron, Bodégat, Sévigné and especially Les Rochers, where she was to spend so much of her life reading and discussing literature with her friends, and whence so many of her letters were to proceed. Meantime it might have seemed a rather severe retreat for a young Parisian couple. Friends began to tax them with their unsociable behaviour, notably Bussy in the verses which, together with another friend, Pierre Lenet, he addressed to the pair in the Spring of 1646:

"Salut à vous, gens de campagne,
 A vous, immeubles de Bretagne,
 Attachés à votre maison,
 Au delà de toute raison:
 Salut à tous deux, quoique indignes
 De nos saluts et de ces lignes;
 Mais un vieux reste d'amitié
 Nous fait avoir de vous pitié,
 Voyant le plus beau de votre âge
 Se passer en votre village ... " 1.

The epistle goes on to describe, with a certain irony, their role as lords of the manor, surrounded by the flattering attentions of their rustic tenants:

"Certes ce sont là des honneurs
 Qu'on ne reçoit point ailleurs ..."

But for all Bussy's good-humoured raillery Madame de Sévigné may have found Brittany, at least at a first acquaintance, a sombre contrast to the beauties of Livry, where she had spent her youth. The country around Les Rochers was arid and unproductive, the people living most often on the borderline of starvation, and the estate itself not yet embellished by the improvements which she herself was to plan in later years. No doubt, however, the young Marquise, with her great love of nature and naturally reflective temperament, had soon grown to appreciate the silent peace of the countryside, soon to be made gay with the laughter of her children. Françoise-Marguerite de Sévigné was born in October 1646, her brother Charles some

1. Lettres I. 348: March 1646, undated.

eighteen months later. Most of Madame de Sévigné's early memories of her children seem to be connected with Brittany rather than Paris, and it seems probable that they spent there the greater part of their infancy.

Their parents, however, divided their time between their country estates and their Parisian home in the Quartier du Temple, where Madame de Sévigné renewed her acquaintance with the friends and literary personalities of her youth. The Hôtel de Rambouillet was still at the peak of its influence. The Marquise herself says of it in later years that it was "le Louvre, avant que Madame Montausier fût au Louvre." 1. The marriage of Julie d'Angennes had taken place in 1645, but her mother's salon continued none the less to group together for many years the élite of the intellectual life of Paris. Madame de Sévigné, in her new status as a married woman was more sought after than ever in the social life of the capital. Many who before had been mere acquaintances, like the Marquise d'Uxelles and Madame du Plessis-Guénégaud, were destined to become close friends, linked to her all their lives by the bonds of sympathy as well as those of a common intellectual interest, and eager, after the decline of the

1. Lettres, VI 188: 12 Jan. 1680.

Hôtel de Rambouillet, to receive the Marquise into their own flourishing salons.

The intellectual pleasures of this life, however, were not long suffered to continue. In 1648 Voiture died, and with his passing the Chambre bleue lost a good deal of its original verve. Younger and newer salons were already beginning to draw off the pick of the Parisian literary world, when there occurred the first outbreak of civil disturbances which were to put an end, for a time, to the brilliant social life of the city.

The beginning of the Fronde found Sévigné and his wife, with their cousin Bussy, in Montargis with the Bishop of Châlons, that relative of Sainte Chantal who had married them five years before. Events soon separated them, placing them in fact in opposite camps. Sévigné linked with the parti frondeur through his relationship with Retz, joined the army of the Duc de Longueville in Normandy, while Bussy followed that of Condé, to which he was attached, as officer-in-command of a light-horse cavalry regiment encamped outside Saint Denis. The Marquise remained in the city, an ardent supporter of Retz, associating daily with the most insubordinate elements in Parisian society.

Madame de Sévigné's political opinions at this period of her life are well known: all the evidence suggests that she was, both by family and by sympathies, an ardent

frondeuse. By family first of all: the Marquis' uncle Renaud de Sévigné is known to have been the chief agent of the rebel Archbishop of Paris, and to have received from him the command of a cavalry regiment in the first days of the Fronde. Since the prelate's official title in the Church was that of titular Archbishop of Corinth, the regiment was named after him the régiment de Corinthe. Unfortunately for its commander, ~~his~~ its first experience of battle was a crushing defeat at Longjumeau, its first which the royalists turned to ridicule by immediately naming it la première aux Corinthiens. The remark sets the tone of the whole of this period of civil war, where political sympathies were seldom very deeply engaged on either side. Neither the Marquise nor her husband could have had serious grievances against the Regency government. Most of the noble ladies of Paris were frondeuses, and contemporary accounts have shown how active a share was taken by them in, for instance, the battle of the Porte Saint-Antoine. Madame de Sévigné, brought up as they were on the chivalry of L'Astrée and the passionate heroines of Cornelian tragedy, was not too old to play her part in these romanesque encounters. To the end of her life she confesses to a weakness for "les grands coups

d'épée". She might not, perhaps, have had a rôle comparable to that of the romantic Duchesse de Longueville; nevertheless Retz's account of the latter gives a vivid picture of the activities of a great lady in this somewhat burlesque war:

"La petite vérole avait laissé à Mme de Longueville tout l'éclat de sa beauté,.. et celle de Mme de Bouillon, bien qu'un peu effacée, était toujours très brillante. Imaginez vous, je vous supplie, ces deux personnes sur le perron de l'Hôtel de Ville, plus belles en ce qu'elles paraissaient négligées, quoiqu'elles ne le fussent pas. Elles tenaient chacune un de leurs enfants entre leurs bras, qui étaient beaux comme leurs mères. La place de Grève était pleine de peuple jusque au-dessus des toits; tous les hommes jetaient des cris de joie, toutes les femmes pleuraient de tendresse!.." 1.

Both the duchesses were friends of Madame de Sévigné, as were also those of Châtillon and Chevreuse, Madame de Montbazon and, of course, la Grande Mademoiselle, with all of whom she remained on friendly terms later in life. The Breton nobility were very predominantly rebellious to Mazarin: the Montmorency, Rohan, & Tonquedec families were all involved in the troubles and took their share of punishment and exile after the peace of 1652.

1. Memoires du Cardinal de Retz, ed. G. Mongrédien, Paris Garnier, 1936. Vol. I p.192-3.

Perhaps it was her Breton connections which make her biographers speak of Madame de Sévigné as by temperament a frondeuse; for though she undoubtedly had in her nature a strong streak of independence, she was too sane to allow herself to be deeply committed to either side, she may, for a time, have lost her head, like many another Parisian grande dame, in the intoxicating whirlwind of chivalry that swept the city. Loret's Muse Historique records what must have been a very noisy party given by the Marquise to the duchesse de Chevreuse in July of the year 1650, when the first hostilities of the Fronde had died down to an uneasy truce:

"On fait ici grand'mention
 D'une belle collation
 Qu'à la duchesse de Chevreuse
 Sévigné, de bande frondeuse,
 Donna depuis quatre ou cinq jours,
 Quand on fut revenu du Cours.
 On y vit briller aux chandelles
 Des gorges passablement belles;...
 On chanta des chansons à boire;
 On dit cent fois oui, non et voire.
 La Fronde, dit-on, y claqua;
 Un plat d'argent on escroqua;
 On répandit quelque potage,
 Et je n'en sais pas davantage." 1.

1. Muse Historique. ed. M. Ravenel, Paris, 1857; vol. I. 27, 16 July 1650.

At the very time, however, that the Marquise is giving this display of political feeling, she continues to correspond with Bussy, and to receive from him the same gallant and highly-coloured accounts of his military exploits: "Au reste", says he

"Ecrivons-nous souvent; le Cardinal n'en saura rien; et au pis aller, si on vous envoie une lettre de cachet, il est beau à une femme de vingt ans d'être mêlée dans les affaires d'Etat. La célèbre Mme de Chevreuse n'a pas commencé de meilleure heure". 1.

Bussy, returned to Paris soon after the Paix de Rueil in April, 1649, and made use of the continued absence of the Marquis de Sévigné to further his suit with the young Marquise, and persuade her, if he could, to regard his attentions with a less unfavourable eye. Bussy had long ago reversed his estimate of his cousin's merits, if indeed his early criticism had ever been sincere. Madame de Sévigné had to defend herself no longer against his disdain, but against the libertine note which Bussy's easy morality would have wished, at this period, to introduce into their relationship.

1. Lettres, 1, 369; 2 July 1650, Bussy to Mme de Sévigné

Unfortunately for her, the way lay open as far as her husband was concerned. Very soon after her marriage, indeed, it must have become apparent to her that the Marquis de Sévigné had not shed his dissolute ways nor the gallantries of his youth. His liaison with Ninon de Lenclos is well known, and his bad taste in recounting his adventures to Bussy-Rabutin. "Il aima partout," says the latter in his Histoire généalogique, "et n'aima jamais rien de si aimable que sa femme."¹ Tallemant treats him with like severity in his Historiettes, adding - supreme insult to a man of the Grand Siècle - that "ce Sévigné n'étoit pas un honnête homme".² The Marquise, understandably, speaks little of him in her later life; only once, in a letter to Ménage, does she recall her husband's affinity with one of her Rabutin relations, Prior of the Order of Knights of Malta, a man not remarkable for his civility of manner: "Bon Dieu," writes Madame de Sévigné,

"Ou avez-vous été pêcher ce M. le grand prieur, que M. de Sévigné appeloit toujours mon oncle le pirate? Il s'étoit mis dans la fantaisie que c'étoit sa bête de ressemblance, et je trouve qu'il avoit assez de raison ..." ³.

Bussy for his part describes the Prior in the Mémoires as

1. Histoire généalogique, p.58.
2. Historiettes, IV. p.394.
3. Lettres, I, 389; to Ménage 1 Oct. 1654.

"un brave gentilhomme, et qui ne manquait pas de sens, mais il étoit brusque, et d'une politesse telle qu'une espèce de corsaire la peut avoir." 1.

Sévigné seems to have treated his wife with a certain amount of brutality, and no doubt there were others, besides Ninon, in these years, to add to her disillusionment. She may have confided to Bussy, her only close relative then living in Paris, her sorrow at her husband's infidelities; but she firmly refused to revenge herself in kind, as her cousin was only too ready to suggest. The most slanderous tongues of the period, including that of Bussy himself in the Histoire Amoureuse des Gaules, could cast no shadow over her reputation, even in these difficult years. Much of her time the Marquise was spending in Brittany, where her retirement left her husband to his own devices. It was there that in February 1651, she received the news that he had been grievously wounded in a duel, and was at the point of death.

Unfortunately the Marquise must also have learned the cause. In the previous year, having long ago been abandoned by Ninon, M. de Sévigné had contracted a liaison with the wife of a parvenu nobleman, M. de Gondran, famed for his extravagance and the profligate company which assembled at his house. It was a rival suitor of Mme de Gondran, the chevalier d'Albret who had challenged Sévigné

1. Bussy-Rabutin, Mémoires, 11, 7.

and joined arms with him at Picpus, on the 4th February 1651. After only a brief skirmish, having failed to wound his adversary, the Marquis was himself run through; and having been brought back to Paris, was given up for lost by the surgeons who were called to his side. He died two days later, The Marquise, who had immediately returned to Paris, was unable to arrive in time for his burial, which took place in the chapel of the Filles de la Visitation in the Rue Saint-Antoine. The age inscribed on his coffin, over which there has been some controversy, has been variously reported as 27, 32 and 34 years; but the manner and date of his death are indisputable.

Madame de Sévigné, herself aged only twenty-five, with two young children, was greatly grieved by this sudden bereavement. For all her husband's infidelity she appears to have been genuinely attached to him; we know the words ascribed to her by Tallemant des Réaux: "M. de Sévigny m'estime et ne m'aime point; moi je l'aime et ne l'estime point." He had never been her equal in intellect or feeling, nor even in common decency. Nevertheless her affection long outlived him, as witness the account, again to be found in Tallemant des Réaux, of her extreme agitation when one day, in the course of a ball, she was unexpectedly brought face to face with one of the seconds who had opposed her husband in the duel.¹

1. Tallemant des Réaux, Historiettes, IV. 394. 398 n.

Immediately after the death of the Marquis, his wife retired to Brittany, there to spend the early days of her widowhood in the quiet of Les Rochers. She showed no intention, however, of estranging her-self permanently from public life; in the autumn of 1651 she returned to Paris, where her reappearance caused great joy to her friends, and was recorded in his verses by the gazetteer Loret:

"Sévigné, veuve jeune et belle,
Comme une chaste tourterelle,
Ayant, d'un coeur triste et marri,
Lamenté monsieur son mari,
Est de retour de la campagne,
C'est à dire de la Bretagne,
Et, malgré ses sombres atours
Qui semblent ternir ses beaux jours,
Vient augmenter, dans nos ruelles,
L'agréable nombre des belles." 1.

Widowed thus early, Madame de Sévigné, might well have profited by her liberty in the way that Bussy had never ceased to suggest. She might otherwise have remarried, and found in a second union the happiness that had been missing from the first; she was young and still very attractive. Her decision to remain a widow seems to have been quite deliberately taken. Once back in Paris, her first step was to take into her home the Abbé de Coulanges, the "Bien Bon", to whom she was to devote herself to the end of his life. He in return at once set his practical gifts to the task of putting some order into the Sévigné

1. Muse historique, I, 179; 19 Nov. 1651.

financial affairs, which were in a chaotic condition. It is one of the things for which, at his death, she remembers him with most gratitude: "Il m'a tirée de l'abîme ou j'étois à la mort de M. de Sévigné."¹ One can understand that to the Marquise, herself, as her friends have noted, an extremely capable woman, it must have been galling throughout the years to watch her estates falling so unnecessarily to rack and ruin. Her first care was to redress them, and to devote herself at the same time to the education of her children. Nor did she by any means neglect the pleasures of Parisian society. The first few weeks, indeed, were spent in picking up the threads of the life she had forsaken some nine months before, and in renewing her acquaintance with her tutors and her friends.

The literary world into which Madame de Sévigné returned had changed considerably. During all her married life she had lived in Paris only at intermittent moments, and had so lost contact a little with the cultural life of the city. On the face of it, it might now have seemed different from the world of her youth. The Hôtel de Rambouillet, though still in existence, had lost part of its prestige and a great deal of its restraining influence.

1. Lettres, VIII, 88-89; 13 Aug. 1687.

It is at this period that préciosité first becomes excessive, and that mainly in the salon of Mlle de Scudéry, which was rapidly becoming one of the most influential in Paris. Instead of the chambre bleue, it was now her "samedis" which gathered together the literati of Paris and, besides them, the crowd of fashionable women who aspired to a more subtle and refined form of intellectual activity. From this circle came the Carte du Tendre and the heroic novels of the time. Madame de Sévigné herself finds place in 1660 in Somaize's Grand dictionnaire des précieuses, though the charming portrait there proves her to have been anything but a précieuse ridicule:

"Sophronie est une jeune veuve de qualité. Le mérite de cette précieuse est égalé à sa grande naissance. Son esprit est vif et enjoué, et elle est plus propre à la joye qu'au chagrin; cependant il est aisé de juger par sa conduite que la joye, chez elle, ne produit pas l'amour: car elle n'en a que pour celles de son sexe, et se contente de donner son estime aux hommes, encore ne la donne-t-elle pas aisément. Elle a une promptitude d'esprit la plus grande du monde à connoître les choses et à en juger. Elle est blonde, et a une blancheur qui répond admirablement à la beauté de ses cheveux. Les traits de son visage sont deliez, son teint est uni, et tout cela ensemble compose une des plus agréables femmes d'Athènes (Paris); mais si son visage attire les regards, son esprit charme les oreilles, et engage tous ceux qui l'entendent ou qui lisent ce qu'elle écrit. Les plus habiles

"font vanité d'avoir son approbation. Menandre (Ménage) a chanté dans ses vers les louanges de cette illustre personne; Crisante (Chapelain) est aussi un de ceux qui la visitent souvent. Elle aime la musique et hait mortellement la satire; elle loge au quartier de l'Eolie (le marais du Temple)."¹

Mlle de Scudéry has also included a portrait of the Marquise in her novel Clélie, published 1657; it is too long for complete quotation, but it is interesting to find the same characteristics being again described - her attractive physical appearance, the distinction of her bearing, her intelligence and culture, her love of music and dancing, her stainless reputation even in the gossip of Paris. Most of the company in Mlle de Scudéry's salon would already have been known to Madame de Sévigné, though she may have made some new friends from among those of her hostess. Pellisson, a close friend of Sapho and of Foucquet, might have been known to her at this time. He was to Mlle de Scudéry's salon what Voiture had been to the Hôtel de Rambouillet, and is said to have been instrumental in the composition of the Carte du Tendre Pellisson having tried unsuccessfully to win the favour of "l'illustre Sapho", had been placed on probation for six months, which period he spent in bitter complaint at the length of the delay. One day when his hostess had

1. Bardeau de Somaize. Grand dictionnaire des Pretieuses. ed. Ch. L. Livet. Bibliothèque elzévirienne. Paris 1856, in -160. Vol.I. p.221.

been explaining the distinction between her various friendships, classing them as "nouveaux, particuliers et tendres amis", she was unkind enough to relegate him to the second category. Pellisson, aghast, demanded to know "quelle étoit la distance entrex Particulier et Tendre, et si un homme qui iroit en diligence pourrait y arriver en février",¹ that being the final month of the exile imposed on him. The result was the Carte de Tendre, later incorporated into Clélie, and which has become almost a symbol of seventeenth century préciosité. Pellisson himself had a cultured, charming and witty personality despite an attack of smallpox which had deeply disfigured him. Madame de Sévigné quotes, but without malice, that "Guilleragues disoit hier que Pellisson abusoit de la permission qu'ont les hommes d'être laids."² The Marquise speaks of him as a friend, but nothing indicates a very close relationship. She seems not to have read his Histoire de L'Académie published in 1652, a work in the tradition of Chapelain and the first members of the Académie Française. Pellisson had been introduced to Mlle de Scudéry by Conrart. Corbinelli had also been a member of the company; it may be here that

1. Tallemant des Réaux, Historiettes.

2. Lettres, III 353; 5 Jan. 1674.

the Marquise first knew him, since Somaize, in his Dictionnaire des Précieuses cites as a distinguishing feature of Corbinelli that he had written a portrait of Madame de Sévigné, "où il a parfaitement bien réussi."¹ The portrait is unfortunately lost to us, but in any case the Marquise's closer acquaintance with Corbinelli must certainly have been brought about by Retz, whose secretary he was.

Retz himself, in these years before his retirement, was the host of a flourishing salon in Paris, to which Madame de Sévigné must certainly have been invited. She had become related to him by her marriage, but this was probably her first opportunity for deepening the acquaintance, one which was to become a close sympathy between them. Moreover, since Retz was an ardent promoter of the new philosophy, it is here that she would first have come into contact with cartesian thought.²

Another interesting friendship made in these years is that of Scarron. The Marquise's letters show her to have had a long acquaintance with Madame de Maintenon. As the hostess of Scarron's salon, the latter had as yet no inkling of the extraordinary destiny that was to be hers;

1. Somaize. op. cit. I. p.60.

2. See chapter on Cartesianism in the life of Madame Sévigné. p.272.

but the meeting with her is, for Madame de Sévigné, one of a series of links with the life of the Court. In these years , however, her friendship was rather with the poet than with his young, newly-married wife. Scarron also was a close friend of Pellisson. A letter written to Madame de Sévigné shortly after her return to Paris shows the friendly relations between them:

"Madame, j'ai vécu de régime le mieux que j'ai pu, pour obéir au commandement que vous m'aviez fait, de ne mourir point que vous ne m'eussiez vu; mais, Madame, avec tout mon régime, je me sens tous les jours mourir d'impatience de vous voir. Si vous eussiez mieux mesuré vos forces et les miennes, cela ne seroit pas arrivé. Vous autres dames de prodigieux mérite, vous vous imaginez qu'il n'y a qu'à commander: nous autres malades, nous ne disposons pas ainsi de notre vie... On dit que vous êtes une dangereuse dame, et que ceux qui ne vous regardent pas assez sobrement en sont bien malades, et ne la font guère longue. Je me tiens donc à la mort qu'il vous a plu de me donner, et je vous la pardonne de bon coeur. Adieu, Madame; je meurs votre très-humble serviteur, et je prie Dieu que les divertissements que vous aurez en Bretagne ne soient point troublés par le remords d'avoir fait mourir un homme qui ne vous avoit jamais rien fait;

Et du moins souviens-toi, cruelle,

Si je meurs sans te voir

Que ce n'est pas ma faute.

La rime n'est pas trop bonne; mais à l'heure de la mort on songe à bien mourir plutôt qu'à bien rimer. 1.

At the time of writing Scarron was already a victim to the arthritis which made such torment of his last years; his

1. Dernières oeuvres de Scarron, I, 14. Lettres de Mme de

Sévigné, I, 371. Walckenaer suggests that MME de Sévigné, before leaving for Brittany after her husband's death, had laid on Scarron the injunction that he was not to die during her absence. Scarron speaks of "le premier commandement que vous m'avez jamais fait"; nevertheless the letter suggests some previous acquaintance.

fortunes too were on the decline. Beneath the gallant phrasing and the affectation of style one must detect the courage which, no doubt, drew the sympathy of the Marquise. She was probably one of those who first attracted the attention of Foucquet to the plight of the poet, causing him to receive in 1659, a generous pension from the surintendant. He was not long to enjoy it, for he died less than two years later. Madame de Sévigné does not record his death, though she quotes a saying of his which might well have come from these last years of his disillusionment: "Et qu'est-il que le temps ne dissoude? comme disoit Scarron." ¹. Of his works she mentions the better known, the Virgile travesti and the Roman comique, but not the comedies which he was actually producing at the time that she knew him best. Her references, too, are quotations, not critical judgments, though sufficient to show a thorough knowledge of the works.

Scarron's home at the time of the Fronde was well-known as a royalist centre. Yet the Marquise was equally well able to associate with the Frondist rebels in Paris, and indeed her sympathies lay mainly in that direction. We have already noted how in the early days of the Fronde she had contrived to keep up

1. Lettres, IV, 501 : 24 June 1676.

a correspondence with Bussy in the armies of the King, without any accusation of treachery from her own political allies. The Hôtel de Nevers, with which at this time she became most closely connected, was also a centre of ardent Frondist activities. Mme du Plessis-Guénégaud, whose hatred of Mazarin was notorious, had deliberately set out to give her salon this intensely political character; its doors stood wide to all enemies of the Cardinal, and its hostess thus became in due course the natural protectress of the persecuted solitaries of Port-Royal. Their most powerful ally had not yet appeared on the scene, but when he did so, it was from the Hôtel de Nevers that his voice would be heard. Madame de Sévigné, if she had read Loret's Gazette in April 1652, might have given a moment's interest to the account of a party held by the duchesse d'Aiguillon, in which a young scientist, Blaise Pascal, recently come to Paris, had particularly distinguished himself by his brilliant conversation:

"Il fit encore sur des fontaines
 Des démonstrations si pleines
 D'esprit et de subtilité,
 Que l'on vit bien, en vérité,
 Qu'un très-beau génie il possède;
 Et l'on le traita d'Archimède." 1.

The Marquise herself may have been one of the company; the Hôtel de Rambouillet had been closed for part of this year, owing to the death of its host, and most of its members drawn off by the duchess to the Petit Luxembourg. Madame de Sévigné, in any case, was almost certainly present five years later, when Pascal read the first of his Lettres Provinciales to the guests of the Hôtel de Nevers, and we know with what eagerness she greeted the rest of the series, and what pleasure she took in reading each new pamphlet as it appeared.² The link with Pascal and the Jansenist sympathies of the Plessis-Guénégaud household can only have served to strengthen the connection established long ago with the Arnauld family, in the Hôtel de Rambouillet, and to point to the day when she would become wholly conscious, in mind and heart, of her allegiance with Port-Royal.

1. Loret, Muse historique, 14 April 1652, I, 232.

2. See ch. VI, p. 230.

The Hôtel de Nevers, however, had its literary interests as well as its controversial ones. It was soon to welcome the rising genius of Racine and Boileau-Despréaux, the first of the new generation of classical authors under the Roi-Soleil. Meanwhile, in 1653, it opened its doors to Mlle de Scudéry, whose salon had been much depleted by the departure of Condé for the wars. The Hôtel de Nevers had, however, a distinctly worldly character by comparison with the intellectual society gathered round Sapho. Other friends of Madame de Sévigné would come under the same category - Madame de Chavigny, Madame de Coulanges, the rich and witty Mme Cornuel, none of whom would have sought a specifically literary note in their assemblies; the duchesse de Richelieu, hostess of Mme Scarron and of various well-known diplomats: the Cardinal d'Estrées, Barillon and Guilleragues; the comtesse de Fiesque, a particularly close friend of the Marquise, and lady-in-waiting to Mademoiselle. Mademoiselle herself is at the centre of Paris society at this time, reigning in the Tuileries in the minority of the King and the absence of her stepmother who steadily refused the burdensome role of a society hostess. The reign of her eccentric step-daughter, it is true, was somewhat intermittent, broken alternately by the heroic escapades of the Fronde and by

her periods of sulking at the château of Saint-Fargeau; but the society which gathered round her in the Tuileries must have been an interesting one for the Marquise de Sévigné who never ceased, through all the ups and downs of fortune, to be a staunch friend of this unpredictable woman. Savants like Huet and Segrais did not disdain to be of her entourage, the former soon to distinguish himself by his censorship of the works of Descartes¹. In 1657 Mademoiselle had been the first to receive the princesse de Tarente and her daughter Mlle de Trémouille, newly arrived from Holland. The princess was later to be a neighbour of the Marquise at Vitré, and a close friend. It was probably as a member of this company that Legrais wrote his impromptu for Madame de Sévigné; a second-rate poet of unremarkable personality, he is yet one of the frequently mentioned figures of the seventeenth-century salons, and a connection with the intellectual life of the period. In later years he fell out of favour with the Grande Mademoiselle by speaking his mind too freely on the subject of the Lauzun match. We find Madame de Sévigné

1. See Lettres IX, 82. 83; 15th June 1689 for Mme de Sévigné's reference to Huet's Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae.

in her letters trying repeatedly to intercede for him with the princess - unsuccessfully, however, for on this one point the noble lady is intractable, and Segrais finds himself abandoned at last. The comtesse de la Fayette accepted him then as her secretary, at the very time that the first of her novels were beginning to appear. The Marquise speaks of Segrais with affectionate regard; she must have known him well later on in the house of the Faubourg St. Germain where the comtesse and she, with La Rochefoucauld newly returned from the wars of the Fronde, would sit and discuss literary questions in the cool of a summer evening. Segrais won her heart most of all, perhaps, by his regard for Mme de Grignan, to whom through the Marquise he always sends some special message of esteem. His poetry is not of the best; though from the biographical point of view it provides, in at least one instance, a valuable comment on the Marquise's reputation in contemporary society:

"Vous m'avez fait supercherie,
Faites-moi raison, je vous prie,
D'une si blâmable action;
En jouant avec vous, jeune et belle marquise
Je n'ai cru hasarder qu'une discrétion,
Et m'y voila pour toute ma franchise;
Mais qu'ai-je fait aussi, ne savois-je pas bien
Qu'on perd tout avec vous, et qu'on n'y gane rien"¹

Segrais had evidently been as unsuccessful as Ménage in the role of "soupirant". Madame de Sévigné makes little

1. Segrais, Oeuvres, apud Aubenas: Histoire de Mme de Sévigné

reference to his works, except to remark on a collection of songs which he is editing from the poems of the baron de Blot, a contemporary lampoonist famed for his licentious verse. The writer had been a member of the suite of Mademoiselle's father, Gaston d'Orleans, whose salon and whose company were noted for their freedom of speech; but the Marquise regards him with half-reluctant amusement:

"Segrais nous montra un recueil qu'il a fait des chansons de Blot; elles ont le diable au corps, et c'est dommage qu'il y ait tant d'esprit"¹

Another savant with whom she was in fairly frequent contact is Costar, and that through the Marquise de Lavardin, who is several times mentioned in the letters as an intimate friend of Madame de Sévigné. Costar, as a fellow critic of Balzac, Ménage and Chapelain, was like them an expert on the multiple problems of form and language presented by the new growth of classical literature. Erudite and multi-lingual, he had at first been attached to Madame de Sablé's salon, until he was engaged by Madame de Lavardin as tutor to her son. In 1648 he followed his former pupil, now a high-ranking ecclesiastic, to the see of Le Mans, there to act as his secretary until his death. His connection with the literary life of Paris is therefore mainly in his correspondence. Costar had attacked

1. Lettres, 11, 199; 1 May 1671

Chapelain's doctrines earlier in his life, and the two had been enemies for several years. The quarrel came to an end in 1638 - imperfectly, however, for Chapelain continued to wield his influence to curb that of his rival, with the result that Costar, for all his talents, was never at any time a member of the salon de Rambouillet. This, and his long absence from Paris, may account for the fact that Madame de Sévigné never mentions him by name in the letters. His role in her life is something of a mystery, for in spite of this silence on her part, Costar's letters to the Marquise are written in a tone of such gallantry as to suggest a more than passing acquaintance:

"Que j'aimerai ^{toute} ma vie mon sac de poil d'ours de vous avoir rendu tant de bons services durant la gelée! Mais, d'autre côté, j'appréhende dorénavant de le respecter un peu plus qu'il ne me seroit commode, et de n'avoir pas le coeur de mettre les pieds dedans, tant que je m'imaginerai d'y apercevoir les traces des vôtres, si bien faits, si adroits et si savants. Je pense, Madame, que tout ce que je pourrais obtenir sur moi, ce sera d'en faire faire des manchons, et encore je doute fort que j'ose y mettre les mains, quand elles seront crasseuses, et que la goutte m'empêchera d'y passer l'éponge. Quoi qu'il en soit, Madame, quand mon sac me seroit devenu absolument inutile, et ne me tien~~dr~~oit plus lieu que d'un ornement superflu, tant que je me souviendrai de l'aimable cause de ce changement, je n'aurai ¹ garde d'avoir regret à une perte si légère .."

Costar in 1658 had dedicated to the Marquise the newly-published second volume of his letters. From them we learn

1. Lettres, 1, 427; 47, undated 1659; Costar à Mme de Sévigné

the interesting fact that Madame de Sévigné had for a short time been in contact with one of the most famous "femmes savantes" of the century, the former Queen Christina of Sweden. This highly intelligent and cultured woman, famed in every European country for her erudition, had established a network of correspondence with specialists in all branches of learning. In 1654 she had abdicated her throne and her Protestant religion, and left Sweden for Rome, where she wished to devote herself to a life of study. She was a fluent speaker in seven or eight languages. In 1657 she visited France, with which she already had numerous connections notably with Descartes and his followers; a magnificent reception was prepared for her. The Marquise cannot have met her long or often - probably at one or other of the festivities in her honour; but the meeting had evidently left the Queen with a most favourable impression. Even after her return to Rome, she remembered and recorded the pleasant evening spent in her company; Costar writes:

"Il y a quelques mois que Mme la Marquise de Lavardin me confia une belle lettre de la reine Christine, où sa Majesté témoignoit qu'elle étoit éblouie comme les autres des lumières de votre esprit, et enchantée des charmes secrets qui sont en votre aimable personne."¹

1. Lettres, 1, 425; 48. Costar à Mme de Sévigné. 1659

Costar, obviously delighted, had made no secret of the compliment, and the Marquise had scolded him for making known to her friends the praise she had received; his indiscretion, however, is fortunate for her biographers, for without it one would never have known of the meeting between these two most talented and cultured women.

In tracing these cultural friendships of the Marquise one must not, finally, overlook the reunions which took place in her own house in the quartier du Temple. In one of his letters Scarron refers to:

"la Quantité de beaux esprits et de beaux hommes qui font si souvent chez vous de grosses assemblées .."¹

and proceeds to mention some of them - the duchesse de Montpensier, the comtesse de la Fayette, then still Mlle de la Vergne, Barillon, etc. As Mlle de Scudéry had her "samedis" so Madame de Sévigné had her "vendredis", and the reunions were gay and much sought after, if one may believe the verdict of Saint-Pavin's somewhat irreverent verse:

"Seigneur, que vos bontés sont grandes
De nous écouter de si haut!...
Car vous savez ce qu'il nous faut.
Je suis honteux de mes faiblesses:
Pour les honneurs, pour les richesses,
Je vous importunai jadis,
J'y renonce, je le proteste;
Multipliez les vendredis,
Je vous quitte de tout le reste." ²

¹. Dernieres oeuvres de Scarron 1, 18

². Saint-Pavin, Oeuvres, apud Aubenas, Histoire de Mme de Sévigné, p.88

Saint-Pavin himself was one of her devotees, together with his fellow-poets Montreuil and Marigny, and her tutors Chapelain and Ménage. So also were undoubtedly the company of the Faubourg Saint-^{Germain}~~Jacques~~, the comtesse de la Fayette, Segrais and la Rochefoucauld. Besides these literary figures references suggest Pomponne and his sister Mme de Vins, and Arnauld d'Andilly. The "Barillon" mentioned by Scarron had made a name for himself in diplomatic service during the Régence, and was now ambassador to England. Mme de Villars, wife of the ambassador to Spain, was also among Madame de Sévigné's closest friends, with her cousin Coulanges who represented the embassy at Rome, and Guilleragues, another of the company who was secrétaire des finances. It is interesting to note how the Marquise's salon, without being in the least sense political had come to include such a number of prominent diplomats and politicians. Several Breton gentlemen had also joined it, now that the Marquise had adopted Brittany as a second home by her marriage. Among these two, the duc de Rohan and the marquis de Tonquedec, are remarkable for an incident which occurred soon after her widowhood, and which caused the Marquise a good deal of distress. Tonquedec had formerly been a member of Rohan's suite, until a personal

disagreement soon before the civil war had sent them into opposing camps. It is related in the memoirs of Conrart that the duke, coming one day to visit Madame de Sévigné, had discovered Tonquedec already engaged in conversation with her, and having detected some supposed incivility in his behaviour, - he was, of course, far superior to the marquis in name and rank - had had him forcibly ejected from the house. A duel was only barely averted by the mediation of friends, notably the marquise de la Trousse, Madame de Sévigné's aunt who was living near her in Paris at the time, and seems to have been called upon more than once to help her in a situation of this kind. The story was bruited abroad and caused a certain sensation in the city;¹ the Marquise does not appear to have been in any way responsible for the incident, and Rohan was much blamed for allowing such a situation to develop in her house, but Conrart does not hesitate to add, what was no doubt generally believed, that "la véritable cause du malentendu du duc de Rohan et de Tonquedec est qu'ils étoient tous deux amoureux de la marquise de Sévigné."²

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1. Loret records it in the Muse Historique, I, 257;
23 June 1652
 2. Memoires relatifs a l'histoire de France, coll.
Petitot 1820-49 vol. XLVIII, p.93

Others besides these two were credited with the rôle of the marquise's suitors during this time, with varying degrees of accuracy. It was inevitable that a woman in her position, young, widowed and still very attractive, should have drawn a certain amount of attention in contemporary society. Bussy's letters connect her name with those of Foucquet, the prince de Conti and even Turenne. Mme de Sévigné herself humorously refers to the duc du Lude as an old admirer. As regards the prince de Conti and Turenne, Bussy's letters redound only to the Marquise's greater honour, since it is obvious that the pretensions of both were quickly disappointed; if indeed they had ever existed: her record of Turenne's death contains no suggestion of such a relationship between them, though we may well believe that he had held her in esteem, as did all her acquaintance. The Marquise's relations with the duc du Lude appear to have been something of a family joke. In 1676 she refers in a light-hearted vein to her supposed attachment:

"Vous trouvez que ma plume est toujours taillée pour dire des merveilles du grand maître; je ne le nie pas absolument; ... Vous m'en voulez sur ce sujet: le monde est bien injuste." ¹

1. Lettres, IV, 551; 29 July 1676

A more serious reference in a later letter suggests that there might, originally, have been some truth in the rumour:

"Le grand maître se rétablit doucement à Saint-Germain; nos inquiétudes pour son mal ont été selon nos dates: moi beaucoup, Mme de Coulanges un peu plus, et d'autres mille fois davantage ... Nous y avons été trois fois; je ne veux point vous cacher deux visites; il suffit que j'aie perdu la mémoire entière du passé .."¹

The Marquise, however, had always remained on excellent terms with both the first and the second wives of the duc du Lude, and her references to him do not generally suggest a very serious attachment. The question of a possible remarriage, of course, remained open; she had made no formal declaration on the subject, and it continued for many years to be a source of amusement to her family, particularly with her son-in-law the comte de Grignan:

"Je m'accom^mode assez mal de la contrainte que me donne M. de Grignan: il a une attention perpétuelle sur mes actions; il craint que je ne lui donne un beau-père: cette captivité me fera faire une escapade, ^{l'épouser} mais ce ne sera pas pour M. de Revel: je ne veux pas ^{l'épouser,} soyez en repos: il est trop galant."²

One of the early attachments of the Marquise, however,

1. Lettres, VI, 291; 1 Mar 1680.

2. Lettres, IX, 222; 25 Sept. 1689.

cannot be so lightly dismissed; that is her friendship with Foucquet, comptroller of taxes for Mazarin during the Regence, whose arrest at Vaux had caused such a sensation in the early days of the reign of Louis XIV. Madame de Sévigné had certainly had with Foucquet a more than passing acquaintance. As early as 1654 Bussy in his letters links their names together, and at intervals asks news of the "affaire du surintendant"; an impertinent question which the Marquise at first ignores, then answers with an unequivocal denial. Even Bussy can only speak of "l'amour du surintendant pour vous", without any suggestion of its being reciprocated; rather the reverse, as the letters show:

"Je suis bien aise que vous soyez satisfaite du surintendant, c'est une marque qu'il se met à la raison, et qu'il ne prend pas tant les choses à coeur qu'il faisoit. Quand vous ne voulez pas ce qu'on veut, Madame, il faut bien vouloir ce que vous voulez; on est encore trop heureux de demeurer de vos amis. Il n'y a guère que vous dans le royaume qui puisse réduire ses amants à se contenter d'amitié ..."¹

By personal experience Bussy knew that any friendship with the Marquise must perforce remain exactly within the bounds dictated by herself; the letters of this would-be lover, who had every reason to be jealous of others' success, are the best testimony to Madame de Sevigne's

1. Lettres, 1, 383; 17 Aug. 1654

conduct in the Foucquet affair, (though at the same time one cannot doubt that her affections had been drawn, perhaps even deeply, to the surintendant's gay and charming personality).

Madame de Sévigné's friendship with Foucquet, however, is interesting from other points of view. She must often, during the course of their acquaintance, have been present at the ballets and entertainments given by the financier at his sumptuous house at Vaux, one of the finest examples of seventeenth-century architecture in France. Foucquet had put his immense fortunes to good use; a man of fastidious tastes, he had shown a discernment and appreciation of culture unusual in one of his rank and profession, and had rapidly become the most influential patron of contemporary literature and art. Brilliant reunions were held at his home, where Madame de Sévigné could have met a company as select as any in her own drawing-room, and from the literary point of view equally interesting. Foucquet's particular protégé was La Fontaine, who had once met the Marquise in the château de Vaux, and had recited in her presence his newly-composed Epître à une abbesse. The incident is recorded in some not-too-modest verses which La Fontaine presented to his patron shortly afterwards:

"De Sévigné, depuis deux jours en ça,
 Ma lettre tient les trois quarts de sa gloire.
 Elle lui plut, et cela se passa,
 Phebus tenant chez vous son consistoire.
 Entre les dieux, et c'est chose notoire,
 En me louant, Sévigné me plaça.
 J'étois alors deux cent mille au deçà,
 Voire encore plus, du Temple de Mémoire.
 Ingrat ne suis: son nom sera pièce
 Delà le ciel, si l'on m'en vouloit croire."¹

Her relationship with the surintendant was to have dramatic repercussions in the Marquise's later life. For the present, however, no presage of his downfall cast its shadow over the magnificent castle of Vaux. The years 1654 to 1660 were marked by the end of the troubles of the Fronde, the crowning of the King, and the growing influence of the Court on the life of Parisian society. For the young men and women of the King's entourage they were years of frantic search for pleasure and endless intrigue. The Court hummed with excitement over the coming royal marriage, complicated by the plotting of Mazarin and Louis' attachment to Marie Mancini. Few of Madame de Sévigné's letters remain from this period; living alternately in Paris and Brittany, she devoted most of it to the education of her children, in the company of those cultured men and women whose friendship with her had already been discussed. The end of the civil wars had thinned their ranks of some

1. La Fontaine. Oeuvres. ed. H. Régnier. Les Grands Ecrivains de la France. Paris. 1892, vol. IX, p. 63-64

illustrious names. Retz had at once been sent into exile for his part in hostilities, followed soon after by la Grande Mademoiselle, to whom, the Marquise paid several visits in her chateau at Saint-Fargeau. It was, indeed, Madame de Sévigné's particular genius thus to reconcile political enmities. Both Retz and Mademoiselle had cause to know her loyalty to friends in disgrace; the latter often refers in her Mémoires to the Marquise's kindness, adding that she liked to ride with her, as being the only one of her friends who was also an accomplished horsewoman.¹

Madame de Sévigné's letters at this period are too few to give a very exact picture of her life, for the reason that her chief correspondent is no longer available. It is from this time that Bussy, in his memoirs, dates his famous quarrel with the Marquise, a quarrel which was to separate them altogether for four years and embitter their relationship for many more. The trouble had begun in 1658 when Bussy, called in haste to join the armies of the King for the first Flanders campaign, had asked his cousin to lend him the necessary money. She had at first agreed but later withdrawn the offer, probably on the advice of her uncle the Abbé de Coulanges, who urged her

1. Mémoires de Mlle de Montpensier, coll. Petitot, vol XLIII, p. 308

to allow him to make some preliminary enquiries into the state of her cousin's fortunes. Goaded by the delay and no longer able to postpone his departure, Bussy appealed again, this time to his mistress Madame de Montglas, who promptly pawned her jewels to bring him in 2,000 crowns. Bussy then set off, bearing with him a bitter grudge against his cousin, and for some time all correspondence between them came to an end.

Meanwhile, and during all the time of Bussy's estrangement from his cousin, society life in Paris had continued to acquire more and more brilliance from the influence of the young Court. In 1660 the King's marriage brought a renewal of festivities. Madame de Sévigné was probably in Paris at the time, though no letters remain to give us her impressions of the event. She was in Brittany the following year when the Court left Paris for Fontainebleau, and was probably there still for the fetes at Vaux which preceded Fouquet's arrest.

It is here that for the first time in her life the Marquise found herself suddenly and most unpleasantly implicated in public affairs. Her friendship with Fouquet was long-standing, yet her critics are agreed that it had never been more than a friendship, however much he himself may have wished it otherwise.

The finding and publication of her notes among the love-letters of the surintendant was therefore a very painful surprise, although from the beginning there had been ample evidence of her innocence:

"Mais que dites-vous de ce qu'on a trouvé dans ces cassettes? Eussiez-vous jamais cru que mes pauvres lettres, pleines du mariage de M. de la Trousse, et de toutes les affaires de sa maison, se trouvassent placées si mystérieusement? Je vous s'avoue que quelque gloire que je puisse tirer, par ceux qui me feront justice, de n'avoir jamais eu avec lui d'autre commerce que celui-là, je ne laisse pas d'être sensiblement touchée de me voir obligée à me justifier, et peut-être fort inutilement à l'égard de mille personnes, qui ne comprendront jamais cette vérité." 1.

But Pompone, to whom she was writing, was already convinced of her innocence, as were the many friends - Chapelain, Mlle de Scudéry, Bussy even - who hastened to defend her. Ménage to whom she wrote asking him to protect her against the possible slander of Parisian society replied that he had already done so, and though there may have been a certain amount of gossip in the salons, few people seem to have seriously believed her guilty. The King himself, to whom Foucquet's correspondence was brought for examination, is reported to have said that there was nothing in the least incriminating in the letters of Madame de Sévigné.

1. Lettres, I, 433; 11 Oct. 1661, to Pompone.

Meantime, however, she had other cause for sorrow in the trial and disgrace of the surintendant, involving as it did so many of her closest friends. The collecting of evidence preparatory to the trial lasted for three years, so that it was not until 1664 that the case came on in the *Chambre de justice de l'Arsenal*. Madame de Sévigné's letters are an invaluable record of this case, which she reported in the greatest detail to Pomponne, who had been Foucquet's friend and had therefore been himself exiled and imprisoned at Verdun. The Marquise's accounts reflect the anxiety felt in Paris over the prisoner's fate, no less than her own sincere and loyal affection.. They are among her best-known letters, and show already that vividness and variety of description which is characteristic of her writing:

"Tout le monde s'intéresse dans cette grande affaire. On ne parle d'autre chose; on raisonne, on tire des conséquences, on compte sur ses doigts; on s'attendrit, on espère, on craint, on peste, on souhaite, on hait, on admire, on est triste, on est accablé; enfin, mon pauvre Monsieur, c'est une chose extraordinaire que l'état où l'on est présentement; mais c'est une chose divine que la résignation et la fermeté de notre cher malheureux. Il sait tous les jours ce qui se passe, et tous les jours il faudroit faire des volumes à sa louange..." 1.

1. Lettres, 1, 472-3; 17 Dec. 1664

"Je vous assure que ces jours-ci sont biens longs à passer, et que l'incertitude est une épouvantable chose... Cependant, au fond de mon coeur, j'ai un petit brin de confiance. Je ne sais d'où il vient ni où il va, et même il n'est pas assez grand pour faire que je puisse dormir en repos. Je causois hier de toute cette affaire avec Mme. du Plessis; je ne puis voir ni souffrir que les gens avec qui j'en puis parler, et qui sont dans les mêmes sentiments que moi. Elle espère comme je fais, sans en savoir la raison. "Mais pourquoi espérez-vous? - Parce que j'espère." Voilà nos réponses: ne sont-elles pas bien raisonnables?..." 1.

There is finally her exclamation of joy at his escape:

"Louez Dieu, Monsieur, et le remerciez: notre pauvre ami est sauvé. Il a passé de treize à l'avis de M. d'Ormesson, et neuf à celui de Sainte-Hélène. Je suis si aise que je suis hors de moi." 2.

When one reads these letters it is easy to see that the Marquis's resistance to Foucquet had never been indifference. Though her reputation had been cleared beyond question, there is little doubt that his passage through her life had not been without trace, and that this was the deepest and most lasting of any friendship she had made. In later years a trifling incident was to draw from her a profound psychological reflection, wherein it is impossible not to see the fruit of personal experience:

1. Lettres, I, 463; 6 Dec. 1664

2. Lettres, I, 474; 20 Dec

"Mme de la Fayette prend des bouillons de vipères, qui lui redonnent une âme et lui donnent des forces à vue d'oeil; elle croit que cela vous seroit admirable. On prend cette vipère, on lui coupe la tête, la queue, on l'ouvre, on l'écorche, et toujours elle remue; une heure, deux heures, on la voit toujours remuer. Nous comparâmes cette quantité d'esprits si difficiles à apaiser, à de vieilles passions,..." 1.

In this, however, as in all things, it was love of her daughter that was the measure and guide of all her actions; one need seek no further for an explanation of her conduct:

"Il faudroit plus d'un coeur pour aimer tant de choses à la fois; pour moi, je m'aperçois tous les jours que les gros poissons mangent les petits. Si vous êtes mon préservatif, comme vous le dites, je vous suis obligée, et je ne puis trop aimer l'amitié que j'ai pour vous: je ne sais de quoi elle m'a gardée; mais quand ce seroit de feu et d'eau, elle ne me seroit pas plus chère. Il y a des temps où j'admire qu'on veuille seulement laisser entrevoir qu'on ait été capable d'approcher à neuf cents lieues du Cap..." 2.

Even during this time of trial the Marquise had other things to occupy her mind. Her daughter was presented at court in the year 1662, and in the absence of letters it seems reasonable to presume that most of their life at this time was being spent in Paris. Madame de Sévigné, for her daughter's sake, would have wanted to take as active part as possible in the social life of the city.

1. Lettres, VI, 59; 20 Oct. 1679.

2. Lettres (ap. Aubenas, op.cit.)

Francoise de Sévigné, however, in spite of her mother's care, had not made a very favourable entry into society. At her first appearance, her grace and remarkable good looks had attracted attention, so that the Marquis de Tréville, one of the foremost noblemen of the Court, the great admirer of Madame Henriette, was reported to have said: "Cette beauté brûlera le monde."¹ His prediction, however, had early been falsified by the young girl's temperament, which was too cold and unspontaneous to make of her a great social success. Madame de Sévigné could procure for her daughter an education as good as her own, she could pass on her breeding and physical attractiveness, but ~~not~~ that charm of personality which bound up all these qualities into one harmonious whole. Mlle. de Sévigné moreover never acquired that wholesome terror of affectation, which enabled her mother to combine simplicity with erudition, and to walk freely and successfully in all types of society. La Fontaine's dedicatory verses in the fable du Lion amoureux, composed in 1666, give a just idea of the impact she made on her contemporaries:

"Sévigné, de qui les attraits
 Servent aux grâces de modèle,
 Et qui naquîtes toute belle
 A votre indifférence près...." 2.

1. Lettres, IX, 124; 20 July 1689.

2. La Fontaine, Fables, IV, 1; Oeuvres I, 262-64

It is remarkable that all the poets - Benserade, Saint-Pavin, Ménage, - who praise her in the conventional verses of the times, bring in some illusion to her mother, usually to the latter's greater honour:

"Vous travestir ainsi, c'est bien être ingénu,
Amour! c'est comme si, pour n'être pas connu,
Avec une innocence extrême,
Vous vous déguisiez en vous-même.
Elle a vos traits, vos feux, et votre air engageant;
Enfin, qui fit l'une a fait l'autre,
Et jusques à sa mere, elle est comme la vôtre." 1.

The lines are drawn from a ballet, Les Amours déguisés, 1664, in which Mlle de Sévigné had acted a Cupid disguised as a sea-nymph. She had already taken part, in the previous year, in the Ballet royal des Arts given at Versailles, for in spite of her shortcomings she took an active share in the social life of the time. She was an attractive dancer: Madame de Sévigné in later years could not recall her dancing or hear her favourite airs without being moved to tears, and others besides her mother bear witness to her grace:

"Je vis hier danser des hommes et des femmes fort bien; on ne danse pas mieux les menuets et les passe-pieds: justement comme je pensois à vous, j'entends un homme derrière moi qui dit assez haut: "Je n'ai jamais vu si bien danser que Mme la Comtesse de Grignan."

1. Benserade, Oeuvres, Paris, 1698, vol II, 280.

"Je me tourne, je trouve un visage inconnu; je lui demande ou il avoit vu cette Mme de Grignan? C'est un chevalier de Cissé, frère de Mme Martel, qui vous a vue à Toulon avec Mme de Sinturion. M. Martel vous donna une fête dans son vaisseau, vous dansâtes, vous étiez belle comme un ange. Me voilà ravie de trouver cet homme; mais, ma pauvre bonne, je voudrois que vous puissiez comprendre l'émotion que me donna votre nom, qu'on me venoit découvrir dans le secret de mon coeur, lorsque je m'y attendois le moins." 1.

The Ballet des Arts had been twice performed, followed in 1664 by the Plaisirs de l'Île enchantée, for which Molière wrote Le Mariage forcé and La princesse d'Elide, and in 1665 by the Naissance de Vénus, in which she again took part. For the Marquise and her daughter they were happy years in that most of their friends, sent into exile by the troubles of the Fronde, were beginning to return to Paris and take up once again their part in social life. From the literary point of view, too, there was much in the city to interest the Marquise. The early years of the new reign are contemporary with the rise to fame of the great quartet of classical authors: Molière, La Fontaine, Racine, Boileau. The theatre was a growing taste in the city; theatrical productions from this time forth occupy an increasingly important place in social life.

Madame de Sévigné's literary experience in these years had been broadened and deepened. In 1662 Corneille had

1. Lettres, VII, 14; 6 Aug. 1680.

produced his last chef-d'oeuvre, Sertorius, of which one line in particular had caught her attention:

"Qu'importe de mon coeur, si je fais mon devoir?"¹

The quotation is interesting, being as it is both a typically Cornelian line and one which Madame de Sévigné, conscious as she was of emotions difficult to control, must often have applied to herself. The years 1660-1669 had also witnessed Molière's best plays: Les Précieuses Ridicules, l'Ecole des Maris, l'Ecole des Femmes and la Critique, Tartufe, Don Juan, le Misanthrope, le Médecin malgré lui, Amphitryon, George Dandin, l'Avare. From all these she quotes from memory in the letters. The quarrels aroused by Molière's plays are mentioned little, though in later years she recalls the divergence of opinion over Tartufe, which had been banned from the theatre during this very period, 1664-69:

"Vous souvient-il quand on défendoit Tartufe et qu'on jouoit publiquement le Festin de Pierre, et de ce que dit M. le Prince? c'est que l'une ne vouloit renverser que la religion, mais l'autre offensoit les dévots ..." 2.

Her own opinion, one may divine, was that of M. le Prince; to have thought otherwise would have classed her with those bigots at whom the satire was aimed. Of all the classical authors of the younger generation, her favourite was Molière, though personally they had had little acquaintance. His death in

1. Lettres, VII, 61; 8 Sept. 1680. From Sertorius, Act I, sc.iii
The original has sais instead of fais.

2. Lettres, VII, 8-9; 6 Aug. 1680.

1673 is not recorded in the letters. She was out of Paris at the time, visiting her daughter in Provence, but she regrets his premature end, particularly when some amusing incident seems to call for his satiric pen:

"C'est dommage que Molière soit mort. Il feroit une très-belle farce de ce qui se passe à l'hôtel de Bellièvre. Ils ont refusé quatre cent mille francs de cette charmante maison, que vingt marchands vouloient acheter, parce qu'elle donne dans quatre rues, et qu'on y auroit fait vingt maisons: mais ils n'ont jamais voulu la vendre, parce que c'est la maison paternelle, et que les souliers du vieux chancelier en ont touché le pavé, et qu'ils sont accoutumés à la paroisse de Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois: et sur cette vieille radoterie, ils sont logés pour vingt mille livres de rente ..." 1.

The types that Moliere satirized in these years were those she would herself have mocked at: the précieuses, of whom she was not one: doctors and bourgeois, bigots, provincials and hypocrites. She quotes aptly, finding comparisons to his plays in the society around her:

"Notre essieu rompit hier dans un lieu merveilleux; nous fûmes secourus par le véritable portrait de M. Sottenville; c'est un homme quo feroit les Géorgiques de Virgile, si elles n'étoient déjà faites, tant il sait profondément le ménage de la campagne; il nous fit venir Madame sa femme, qui est assurément de la maison de la Prudoterie, ou le ventre annoblit. Nous fûmes deux heures en cette compagnie, sans nous ennuyer, par la nouveauté d'une conversation et d'une langue entièrement nouvelle pour nous ..." 2.

The Marquise, indeed, had only to look around her a little

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1. Lettres, III, 511: 10 July 1675. There is added point to her sarcasm when one knows that the Bellièvre family were deep in debt, and had shown no such sensitive regard for the feelings of their numerous creditors.
 2. Lettres, VI. 383; 8 May 1680. C.f. George Dandin, I, iv.

to find the originals of Molière's dramatis personae: Gabriel de Roquette, Bishop of Autun, the original Tartufe and a great admirer of the Sévigné family; the comte de Soissons, the first Bourgeois Gentilhomme, of whom she recalls that he had been surprised to learn that he was speaking in prose;¹ Cottin and Ménage, who had been satirized in the Femmes Savantes, though Molière's treatment of the latter had been sufficiently restrained to allow her to enjoy it without any feeling of disloyalty to her tutor. Her relationship with Roquette is worth a close examination. He was a friend of Bussy-Rabutin, and it was widely known in Paris, says Saint-Simon, that he had sat for his portrait in Tartufe. A letter of Madame de Sévigné to her cousin in 1672 has a variant form, not published in Bussy's Mémoires, which contains an amusing anecdote:

"M. l'évêque d'Autun ayant fait le panégyrique de M--- aux Jésuites, qui avoient donné toute la musique de l'Opéra, on dit à Paris que les jésuites avoient donné deux comédies en un jour: l'Opéra et le Tartufe." 2.

Madame de Sévigné, in her property of Bourbilly in Burgundy, was in the diocese of M. de Roquette. Bussy's letters show the Bishop in great admiration of the Marquise:

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1. Lettres, VI. 449: 12 June 1680.
 2. Lettres, III, 30; 24 Apr. 1672. n. To Bussy.

"Mais pour revenir à M. d'Autun, il est aussi entêté de vous et de Mme de Grignan que vous de lui ...Après m'avoir dit mille choses sur le commerce qu'il avoit eu l'année passée avec vous, il me conta qu'il vous avoit dit qu'il aimerait mieux avoir à faire une oraison funebre, qu'à vous écrire ..." 1.

Bussy, in spite of being his friend, had little of good to say of him: "il est faux presque partout."² The picture which the Marquise draws of him, however, is less severe than that of Moliere, though in some respects not unlike:

"J'ai vu deux ou trois fois ici M. d'Autun. Il me paroît fort de vos amis; je le trouve très-agréable, et son esprit d'une douceur et d'une facilité qui me fait comprendre l'attachement qu'on a pour lui quand on est dans son commerce. Il a eu des amis d'une si grande conséquence, et qui l'ont si longtemps et si chèrement aimé, que c'est un titre pour l'estimer, quand on ne le connoitroit pas par lui-même." 3.

There are unfortunately in her letters few details of actual performances of Molière's plays, or indeed of any plays at this time other than Racine's. One would like to know the facts behind a reference of December 1664:

"Je viens d'un lieu, où j'ai renouvelé votre amitié en parlant de vous à cinq ou six personnes qui se mêlent comme moi d'être de vos amis et amies. C'est à l'hôtel de Nevers, en un mot. Madame votre femme y étoit: elle vous mandera les admirables petits comédiens que nous y avons vus." 4.

There are other references to this private theatre which Madame du Plessis-Guénégaud had set up in her home; not

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1. Lettres, VIII, 38: 9 Apr. 1687.
 2. Lettres, IX, 50: 13 May 1689.
 3. Lettres, VIII, 32; 10 Mar. 1687; c.f. V 550, where the same words occur: "douceur et facilité".
 4. Lettres, I, 482; 30 Dec. 1664, to Pomponne.

without precedent - the Prince de Conti and other noblemen possessed a private stage and engaged actors to perform for them there. There was one also at Fresnes,¹ upon which the guests themselves performed; Madame de Sévigné was a particularly keen actress, as her letters show.² But we do not know whether plays were given by outside companies at the Hôtel de Nevers, and the break in her correspondence unfortunately prevents us from knowing her first reactions to current theatrical productions. The first tragedies of Racine were at this time beginning to appear. Madame de Sévigné already had a link with Racine, in that it was through her tutor Chapelain that he had, in 1664, received his first gratuity from the King, a present of 600 livres for the Ode sur la convalescence du Roi. Racine had already consulted Chapelain in 1660 on the better-known ode: La Nympe de la Seine, and it is probable that the Marquise's attention had already been drawn to the young poet before the appearance of his first dramatic works. There is no mention in the Lettres of la Thébaïde, 1664; but on Alexandre there is some most interesting information, in the shape of a letter

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1. Lettres, I. 494; 1 Aug. 1667. See p. 399 for further reference to this château.
 2. Lettres, II. 469: 15 Jan. 1672 where she compares herself to la Champmeslé: "moi, qu'on croit assez bonne pour le théâtre, je ne suis pas digne d'allumer les chandelles quand elle paroît."

addressed by Pomponne to his father, Arnauld d'Andilly, from the hôtel de Nevers in 1665. Pomponne as a friend of Fouquet had been imprisoned since his arrest in 1661. In this year he was allowed to return to Paris, and the letter describes the enthusiastic welcome given to him by his friends assembled at the home of Mme du Plessis-Guénégaud:

"Monsieur de L'Advocat me descendit à l'hôtel de Nevers, où le grand monde que j'appris qui étoit en haut ne m'empêcha point de paraître en habit gris. J'y trouvai seulement Mme et Mlle de Sévigné, Mme de Feuquières et Mme de la Fayette, M. de la Rochefoucauld, MM. de Sens, de Saintes, de Léon, MM. d'Avaux, de Barillon, de Chatillon, de Caumartin, et quelques autres: et sur le tout Boileau que vous connaissez, qui y étoit venu réciter de ses satires, qui me parurent admirables; et Racine qui y récita aussi trois actes et demi d'une comédie de Porus, si célèbre contre Alexandre, qui est assurément d'une fort grande beauté." 1.

Aléxandre was followed in 1667 by Andromaque, which the Marquise probably saw, though she does not mention any performance until 1671, when she saw it acted by a provincial company at Vitré: a performance "qui me fit pleurer plus de six larmes; c'est assez pour une troupe de campagne." 2.

Critics have blamed the Marquise severely for this easy dismissal of one of Racine's greatest plays: the context, however, suggests very strongly that the remark applies to the performers rather than to the play. Certainly she did

1. C.F. Walckenaer, op. cit. vol. III. p.14.

2. Lettres, II. 318: 12 Aug. 1671.

not appreciate Racine as she did Corneille, or even Molière in his own sphere. Her early opinion of him had been lukewarm; and though she continued to patronise his productions: Les Plaideurs in 1668, Bérénice in 1670, Britannicus possibly, (though she never quotes from this play, as she does from the others), her judgments are unfavourable and on occasion harsh, as in the letters in 1672 following on the appearance of Bajazet:

"Je suis au désespoir que vous ayez eu Bajazet par d'autres que par moi....Je voudrais vous envoyer la Champmeslé pour vous réchauffer la piece. Le personnage de Bajazet est glacé: les moeurs des Turcs y sont mal observées: il ne font point tant de façons pour se marier; le dénouement n'est point bien préparé: on n'entre point dans les raisons de cette grand tuerie. Il y a pourtant des choses agréables, et rien de parfaitement beau, rien qui élève, point de ces tirades de Corneille qui font frissonner. Ma fille, gardons-nous bien de lui comparer Racine, sentons-en la différence. Il y a des endroits froids et faibles, et jamais il n'ira plus loin qu'Aléxandre et qu'Andromaque. Bajazet est au-dessous au sentiment de bien des gens, et au mien, si j'ose me citer...Vive donc notre vieil ami Corneille! Pardonnons-lui de méchants vers, en faveur des divines et sublimes beautés qui nous transportent; ce sont des traits de maître qui sont inimitables. Despréaux en dit encote plus que moi; et en un mot, c'est le bon goût: tenez vous-y." 1.

The opinion is, of course, typical of a pupil of Chapelain and a woman of her age, whose first theatrical experience, perhaps, had been a performance of Polyeucte or le Cid. Corneille had dominated the tastes of a whole generation of the theatre-going public. It was not to be expected that

1. Lettres, II, 535-36: 16 Mar. 1672.

the Marquise should so easily forswear the allegiance of thirty years. Moreover, according to the Segraisiana, it was Corneille himself who had first suggested the criticism that "les mœurs des Turcs y sont mal observées," It is one of the points answered by Racine in his preface to the printed version of the play, and was the subject of several of the satires which his success provoked in Paris. For the play was undoubtedly, in spite of Madame de Sévigné's opinion, a great box-office success, followed shortly afterwards by the author's reception at the Académie Française. Nevertheless when the Marquise urges her daughter to keep her admiration for Corneille, "c'est le bon goût: tenez vous-y", she is only echoing the views of the critics whose authority she had learned to revere the youth. She was not yet ready for a complete acceptance of the restrained classical ideal.

One can indeed reproach the Marquise for passing a sweeping judgement so early in Racine's career: she was too close to judge as yet whether -

"Racine fait des comédies pour la Champeslé, ce n'est pas pour les siècles à venir. Si jamais il n'est plus jeune et qu'il cesse d'être amoureux, ce ne sera plus la même chose." 1.

She was to modify her opinion later on; on the memorable occasion of her visit to Esther, her praise becomes almost as lavish as her former criticism. Meanwhile one can more easily forgive her a misjudgement of Bajazet than of Andromaque, Athalie or Phèdre. The two latter plays are seldom mentioned by the Marquise, but she was closely connected with the quarrel over another of Racine's plays, that of Bérénice. (The Marquise, incidentally, never seems to have heard of the supposed rivalry between Racine and Corneille in the writing of this tragedy.) In 1671 she discusses with her daughter the critique of the abbé de Villars against Bérénice which has so angered the dramatist:

"Je voulus hier prendre une petite dose de Morale; je m'en trouvais assez bien; mais je me trouve encore mieux d'une petite critique contre la Bérénice de Racine qui me parut fort plaisante et fort spirituelle. C'est de l'auteur des Sylphides, des Gnomes et des Salamandres: il y a cinq ou six petits mots qui ne valent rien du tout, et même qui sont d'un homme qui ne sait pas le monde; cela donne de la peine: mais comme ce ne sont que des mots en passant, il ne faut point s'en offenser, et regarder le reste et le tour qu'il donne à sa critique: je vous assure que cela est joli." 2.

1. Lettres, 11, 535-36: 16 Mar. 1672.

2. Lettres, 11, 361: 16 Sept. 1671. Morale refers to Nicole's Essais which had recently appeared. For the other work of the abbé Villars, usually known as the Comte de Gabalis, see bibliog.

In spite of its clever irony there is nothing very remarkable in the abbe de Villars' critique, and there are faults in it more serious than those of style; though the Marquise would have overlooked them on the strength of his support of Corneille. She might have been less indulgent had she known of the equally severe judgement on Tite et Bérénice which was shortly to appear from the pen of the same critic. In her support of Corneille, however, she was not alone, and Villars was not Racine's only opponent. There is the well-known saying of the poet Chapelle, of whom Racine asked his opinion of the play:

"Marion pleure, Marion crie
Marion veut qu'on la marie".¹

The passage of time has reduced such criticism to its true worth; it is, however, evidence that there was among the contemporary public a faction that still clung to Corneille as its representative dramatist, and had not grasped Racine's theory of simplicity of action.

But however much Corneille might continue to hold the primacy, in the Marquise's estimation, the works of Racine did not fail to become part of her mental background. Quotations from them are frequent and sometimes striking: her meeting with the widowed

1. Cf. Michaut, M. La Bérénice de Racine.

comtesse de Guiche at Saint-Germain, for instance, suggests a neat metaphor:

"La comtesse de Guiche...est au dîner, quoique Andromaque; la Reine l'a voulu." 1.

More than twenty years after its first performance, she applies to the young marquis, only son of the comte de Grignan, the words of the same play:

"Il est du sang d'Hector, mais il en est le reste." 2.

The young marquis himself had been sent by his grandmother to see the play in Paris two years before, as part of his general education. The Marquise on another occasion draws a parallel between the situation of Hermione and that of Mme de Soubise, one-time favourite, now abruptly neglected by the King:

"Vous avez raison d'être étonnée de Mme de S... personne ne sait le vrai de cette disgrâce... Quand elle a vu que toute cette distinction étoit réduite à une augmentation de pension, elle a parlé, elle s'est plainte; elle est venue à Paris: j'y vins, j'y suis encore, etc: il ne seroit pas impossible de tourner la suite de ces vers..." 3.

1. Lettres, lll, 386: 22 Jan.1674

2. Lettres, lX, 486: letter 1270, March 1690. Cf. Andromaque, Act IV. sc 1.

3. Lettres, VI, 194; 17 Jan.1680. The reference is to Andromaque, IV, vi:

Je ne t'ai point aimé, cruel! qu'ai-je donc fait?
 J'ai dédaigné pour toi les vœux de tous nos princes;
 Je t'ai cherché moi-même au fond de tes provinces;
 J'y suis encore, malgré tes infidélités..."etc.

Madame de Grignan's protracted litigation in Provence recalls the comtesse de Pimbêche in les Plaideurs; ^{1.} while the marquis de Sévigné's quarrels with his uncle will drive him to despair, like Orestes: "Qui te l'a dit?" ^{2.} Her son is, in any case, an enthusiast who will not underestimate the merits of Racine and who, should she miss a performance at the hotel de Bourgoigne, will reproduce it in full under the most incongruous circumstances; remembering Livry, the abbey whose possession she had lost at the death of the "Bien Bon," the Marquise writes:

"J'ai pleuré amèrement ;; cette jolie abbaye, où je vous ai memé, qui vous fit faire un joli couplet sur les chemins, et où mon fils, par un enthousiasme qui nous réjouit, assis sur un trône de gazon, dans un petit bois, nous dit toute une scène de Mithridate, avec les tons et les gestes, et surprit tellement notre modestie chrétienne, que vous crûtes être à la comédie, alors que vous y pensiez le moins." ^{3.}

Madame de Sévigné's judgement of Esther and Athalie belongs to a later period of her life, and will be discussed in chronological sequence. At this time, however, in the years 1660-69, her attention was also being drawn to the works of Boileau, or Despréaux, as she more often calls him, who had come to public notice by the publication of his first book of satires in 1666, the same, no doubt, that she had heard read in the reunion mentioned above. ^{4.}

1. Lettres, VII, 228; 9 Apr. 1683; VIII, 56, 157, etc.

2. Lettres, VII, 42; 28 Aug. 1680

3. Lettres, VIII, 124; 24 Oct. 1687 to President Moulceau.

4. See Pomponne's letter, p. 99 above.

The volume contained Boileau's first seven satires; the VIIIth and IXth appeared in 1667, and in 1669 the first Epître au Roi. Manuscript copies of the satires were already in circulation, however, and long before their publication the Marquise must have known the poet's criticisms of contemporary literary figures. Most of his victims she had known and admired: Some of them personally Scudery, Ménage, Saint-Pavin, to name only a few. From the very first his attacks against Chapelain had been sharp:

~~"La Pucelle est encore une oeuvre bien galante
Et je ne sais pourquoi je baille en la lisant..."~~ 1

and when Madame de Sévigné could say of Boileau that towards Chapelain he was "cruel en vers" but "tendre en prose," she certainly had not read the Dialogue des Héros De Romans. She knows his works well enough, however, to parody them for her own purposes:

"Qui nomme un chat un chat et la Grèle un fripon." 2.

She quotes, or rather parodies, several times the well-known lines:

"La raison dit Virgile et la rime Quinault",

lines which Boileau in the first version of the satire had preceded with an attack against her other tutor:

"Si je pense parler d'un galant de notre age,
Ma plume pour rimer rencontrera Ménage." 3.

1. Satire III, 178-9

2. Lettres, III, 354; 8 Jan. 1674. C.f. Boileau, Ie Satire, 52: "J'appelle un chat un chat et Rollet un fripon", La Grèle is Mme de Sévigné's pseudonym for the Bishop of Marseilles, her daughter's deadly enemy, and therefore hers,

3. Satire II.

She invokes Despréaux' support for her opinion of Corneille ^{1.} and Racine ~~and~~, thinking no doubt of his defence of le Cid in the IXe satire, though Boileau certainly would not have followed her all the way in her comparison of the two poets. Only once in these early works of Boileau, does she seriously consider him as a literary critic:

"Je crois, ma fille, que je serois fort de votre avis sur le poème épique: le clinquant du Tasse m'a charmée. Je m'assure pourtant que vous ^{vous} accommoderez de Virgile; Corbinelli me l'a fait admirer." 2.

Her appreciation of him was to increase later, with the appearance of the Arrêt Burlesque against the University, and particularly with his defence of Pascal against the Jesuits. 3. Nevertheless her approval is of the neatness of his expression rather than for the doctrine itself: to the Art Poétique which she had once called a chef-d'oeuvre 4. she would later compare a far inferior work which has scarcely survived - that of René le Boseu, professor of classics and librarian of Sainte-Geneviève. But then he was, as she says "Janséniste, c'est-à-dire cartésien en perfection," of the same persuasion as her daughter and therefore predisposed to a favourable hearing.

1. See p. 100

2. Lettres, V, 229; 23 July 1677.

3. Lettres, IX, 415-17: 15 Jan. 1690. See p. 223 of this study.

4. Lettres, III, 316: 15 Dec. 1673.

Yet with Boileau, as with Molière, Madame de Sévigné was being confronted with types of which she could easily find the originals in the society around her: not only those authors to whom the critic alluded openly or under thin disguise, but the noblemen of the Ve satire, the bourgeois of the IIIe and VIe, the "Folies humaines" of the IVe. The gibes against the Faculté de Médecine which she so enjoyed in Molière could have been found also in Boileau, even in his earlier works, and on occasion just as pungently expressed:

"Enfin un médecin, fort expert en son art
Le guérit par adresse, ou plutôt par hasard." 1.

This part of Boileau's work, however, seems to have held less appeal for the Marquise. It was not that his satires attacked men whom she knew and esteemed, for the same is true of Molière, and Madame de Sévigné seldom objected to a critique on the grounds of her sympathy with the victim. The IXe satire, from which she quotes "le clinquant du Tasse" contains some of Boileau's bitterest lines against Chapelain, which she neither rejects nor defends. The form itself perhaps made little appeal to her; there may be a clue in the unexplained words of Somaize's portrait of the Marquise:

1. Satire IV, 105-6

"Elle aime la musique et hait mortellement la satire." 1
 Her early coolness towards him seems also to have been to a certain extent personal: she suspected him and Racine of being in part responsible for the debauchery in which her son had dissipated his money and talents in his early life in Paris. Later on she begrudges the honour which Boileau and Racine - mere bourgeois, both of them - have received from the King in the commission to write the history of his campaigns, a task for which her exiled cousin Bussy-Rabutin would have been far better suited:

"Ces deux poètes historiens suivent donc la cour, plus ébaubis que vous ne le sauriez penser, à pied, à cheval, dans la boue jusqu'aux oreilles, couchant poétiquement aux rayons de la belle maîtresse d'Endymion. Il faut cependant qu'ils aient de bons yeux pour remarquer exactement toutes les actions du prince qu'ils veulent peindre. Ils font leur cour par l'étonnement qu'ils témoignent de ses légions si nombreuses, et des fatigues qui ne sont que trop vraies; il me semble qu'ils ont assez de l'air des deux Jean Doucet. (2) Ils disoient l'autre jour au Roi qu'ils n'étoient plus étonnés de la valeur extraordinaire des soldats, qu'ils avoient raison de souhaiter d'être tués, pour finir une vie si épouvantable: Cela fait rire, et ils font leur cour." 3.

The anecdote is an interesting sidelight on her attitude to the bourgeois. Madame de Sévigné is more sympathetic, however, towards a very bourgeois author, La Fontaine, who is, together with Corneille and Molière, the writer most often quoted in the letters of Madame de Sévigné.

1. See above p. 64.

2. i.e. a simpleton. Jean Doucet was a famous tumbler who specialized in this kind of part.

3. Lettres, V, 423; 18 Mar. 1678.

Since her introduction to him at the home of Foucquet the poet had published two volumes of Contes and the first collection of his fables. The Contes had appeared in 1664 and 1666, and the Marquise had probably read them soon after publication; Bussy in 1668 mentions a story from the first volume, on the assumption that his cousin will recognise the allusion. 1. The Marquise a little later draws a personal comparison (from another tale) ^{and} to the situation of her daughter, who in 1670 had given birth to her first child, Marie-Blanche:

"Nous en sommes un peu honteuses, quand nous songeons que tout l'été nous avons fait des béguins au saint père, et qu'après de si belles espérances,
la signora mit au monde une fille.
Je vous assure que cela rabaisse le caquet." 2.

The quotation is drawn from a conte entitled l'Ermite, which had appeared only in the second edition of Vol. II in 1669, and was therefore a very recent work. Most of the stories were extremely licentious in tone, and the edition was suppressed by the King a few years later; the Marquise, however, made no apologies for her enjoyment, nor any reference to the cause of their suppression, of which she must have known.

1. Lettres, I, 504: 9 June, 1668.

2. Lettres, II, 15; 19 Jan. 1670. La Fontaine's story has the similar situation of a woman hoping for the birth of a son, who was to become Pope:

"La Signora, de retour chez sa mère,
S'entretenoit jour et nuit du Saint-Père,
Préparoit tout, lui, faisoit des béguins...
Mais ce qui vint détruisit les châteaux,
Fit avorter les mîtres, les chapeaux,
Et les grandeurs de toute la famille;
La signora mit au monde une fille." Oeuvres IV, 482-3.

Some of the Fables Madame de Sévigné may possibly have read before their publication, for example that of Le Lion Amoureux, dedicated to her daughter in 1665. They were circulated in manuscript, or possibly printed in twos and threes.

Before the second volume appeared in 1678 she had been able to send individual fables to the comtesse de Grignan in Provence, notably that of le Curé et le Mort. She had already recounted the incident of the burial of M. de Boufflers and the accident to his hearse, when a few days later a copy of the fable came into her hands:

"Voilà une petite fable de la Fontaine, qu'il a faite sur l'aventure du curé de M. Boufflers, qui fut tué tout roide en carrosse auprès de lui; cette aventure est bizarre. La fable est jolie, mais ce n'est rien au prix de celles qui suivront. Je ne sais ce que c'est que ce Pot au Lait." 1

The remark about "celles qui suivront" suggests that the Marquise had seen other copies of fables destined for the volume of 1678, but evidently not La Laitière et le Pot au Lait, La Fontaine's preceding fable, to which he alludes in the last lines of le Cure et le Mort:

"Proprement toute notre vie
Est le curé Chouart qui sure son mort comptoit
Et la fable du Pot au Lait." 2.

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1. Lettres, II 529; 9 Mar.1672 C.f. Fables VII, X and XI
 2. Fables, VII, x, xi.

Other letters show her sending Mme de Grignan individual fables several years before their publication, and the same is true of her son, Charles. 1. The Marquise appreciates particularly the narrative style of la Fontaine and the realism of scenes for which she can every day find a parallel in the life around her, as her many quotations show. The first edition of the Fables had appeared while Mme de Grignan was still in Paris, before the beginning of her correspondence with her mother. The second volume, the Fables nouvelles et autres poesies, was sent to Provence by Madame de Sévigné herself:

"Si est-ce que je vous donnerai ces deux livres de la Fontaine, quand vous devriez être en colère. Il y a des endroits jolis et très-jolis, et d'autres ennuyeux: on ne veut jamais se contenter d'avoir bien fait; en croyant mieux faire, on fait mal." 2.

The collection here in question contained divers kinds of poetry; the Adonis, the unfinished Songe de Vaux and various short poems to which perhaps the Marquise is applying the words "plat" and "ennuyeux". 3. La Fontaine is at his best in the vein of the Fables, and even the Songe, written in surroundings which she herself knew and loved, wakes no response in Madame de Sévigné; though after her meetings

1. Lettres, III, 408; 22 May 1674; IV, 365: 23 Feb. 1676.

2. Lettres, II, 109: 13 Mar. 1671.

3. Lettres, II, 207: 6 May 1671. "il n'y a que ce qui n'est point de ce style qui est plat."

with the writer one might expect her to appreciate the Epitaphe d'un paresseux, which appeared in the same volume:

"Jean s'en alla comme il étoit venu,
Mangea le fond avec le revenu,
Tint les trésors chose peu nécessaire.
Quant à son temps, bien le sut dispenser:
Deux parts en fit, dont il souloit passer
L'une à dormir, et l'autre à ne rien faire." 1.

Madame de Grignan's estimate of the fables was far from being favourable: the Marquise, however, could point to other people who had enjoyed them as she had:

"N'avez-vous point trouvé jolies les cinq ou six fables de la Fontaine, qui sont dans un des tomes que je vous ai envoyés? Nous en étions l'autre jour ravis chez M. de la Rochefoucauld. Nous apprîmes par coeur celle du Singe et du Chat:
D'animaux malfaisants c'étoit un très-bon plat;
Ils n'y craignoient tous deux aucun, tel qu'il put être,
Trouvoit-on quelque chose au logis de gaté,
On ne s'en prenoit point à ceux du voisinage:
Bertrand déroboit tout; Raton de son côté
Etoit moins attentif aux souris qu'au fromage."

Et le reste. Cela est peint; et la Citrouille, et le Rossignol, cela est digne du premier tome." 2.

The mention of la Rochefoucauld is a reminder that some of the new literary productions were even closer to Madame de Sévigné than the works of Boileau and la Fontaine. As a close friend of Madame de la Fayette, the Marquisè had been brought into frequent contact with the duc de la Rouchefoucauld, now retired from his military career and

1. La Fontaine, Oeuvres, IX, 80

2. Lettres, II, 195: 27 Apr. 1671. Le Gland et la Citrouille, le Milan et le rossignol, are fables vi and vii of this vol.

living in seclusion in his house in the faubourg Saint-Germain. Visits to the "faubourg" recur frequently in the letters of Madame de Sévigné, particularly since Mme de la Fayette's home is in the vicinity. When in 1665 the first volume of la Rochefoucauld's Maximes was anonymously published, the Marquise was not unaware of the author. She and her daughter might indeed have been present at some of the conversations where the maxims were first discussed; in later years they would often discuss them by correspondence between themselves, before the second volume appeared. In la Rochefoucauld's house they would have met most of the company that frequented their own salon,¹ with the addition of Bourville, Jaques Esprit, future author of la Fausseté des vertus humaines² and an habitue of the Jansenist hotel de Liancourt, the Abbé Testu, academician and précieux poet, and others. In the days before he became crippled by gout, la Rochefoucauld's salon was still a lively literary centre; Madame de Sévigné records a reading of Corneille's Pulchérie,³ another of Molière's Femmes Savantes⁴ which she was not able to attend;

1. See p. 77-79.

2. Lettres, IX, 441-42: 5 Feb. 1690.

3. Lettres, II, 470: 15 Jan. 1672.

4. Lettres, II, 515: 1 Mar. 1672.

perhaps it was here that she could obtain copies of la Fontaine's fables, to send to her daughter in Provence. His later years la Rochefoucauld would devote to the revision and republication of the Maximes, to his Mémoires, a bitter account of the campaigns of the Fronde, which were not fully published until long after his death. He and the Marquise could share many memories of those heroic times.

Meanwhile the comtesse de la Fayette had herself entered the world of literature. La Princesse de Montpensier, her first novel, had appeared in 1662 as an anonymous publication, but the Marquise must have known the author. Mme de la Fayette had distributed copies ~~secretly~~ to several of her friends, 1. and it seems most improbable that she should have omitted one so close as Madame de Sévigné. A letter of the Marquise in 1667 shows them at work in the salon at Fresnes, the comtesse perhaps preparing her second novel, Zaïde, which appeared in 1670:

"Il faut que je vous dise comme je suis présentement. J'ai M. d'Andilly à ma main gauche, c'est à dire du coté de mon coeur; j'ai Mme de la Fayette à ma droite: Mme du Plessis devant moi, qui s'amuse à barbouiller de petites images; Mme de Motteville un peu plus loin, qui rêve profondément: notre oncle de Cessac, que je crains parce que je ne le connois guère, Mme de Caderousse; sa soeur, qui est un fruit nouveau que vous ne connoissez pas, et Mlle de Sévigné sur le tout, allant et venant par le cabinet comme de petits frelons.." (2)

1. C.f. Magne, E.: Le Coeur et l'esprit de Mme de la Fayette, Paris, 1927, p.51.

2. Lettres, I, 493: 1Aug. 1667; to Pomponne.

The comtesse's second work was published under the name of Segrais, though here again the Marquise was probably not taken in. Her letters are in fact a constant commentary on these activities of the "faubourg", which became to her a second home, particularly after the departure of her daughter.

The Marquise, however, had not neglected the hotel de Nevers, now by the death of Mme de Rambouillet placed more than ever in a central position in Parisian social life. As at Rambouillet, so at Nevers and Fresnes the guests had adopted mythological names, which occur here and there in the Marquise's letters:¹ their hostess is Amalthée, Pomponne Clidamant, la Rochefoucauld Timanes, etc. Her much-loved cousin, Emmanuel de Coulanges, had joined the group with his young wife, Marie du Gué, a gay and lovable addition to the circle of Madame de Sévigné's friends. Their host had been exiled after the Foucquet trial, and the family thrown into serious financial difficulties, and the Marquise is a particularly frequent visitor at this time to the hotel de Nevers. It was a good opportunity to show her loyalty to friends in distress. In 1665 she shares the joy of the return of M. du Plessis-Guénégaud and the marriage of his eldest daughter.

1. Lettres, I, 442, 494: 18 Nov. 1664, 1 Aug. 1667.

In autumn of the following year the Marquise went to Brittany with her daughter. Here for the ~~first~~ time we find mention of the improvements she is carrying out in her estates:

"Pour moi, j'ai passé l'hiver en Bretagne, où j'ai fait planter une infinité de petits arbres, et un labyrinthe, d'où l'on ne sortira pas sans le fil d'~~Ariane~~. J'ai encore acheté plusieurs terres, à qui j'ai dit à la manière accoutumée: "Je vous fait parc;" de sorte que j'ai étendu mes promenoirs, sans qu'il m'en ait coûté beaucoup." 1.

Once again the verses of Saint-Pavin appeal for her return; for this libertine and rather impious poet had never ceased, in spite of his vices, to be her true friend, and the words in which he calls her are not wanting in charm:

"Tel est vieux et n'ose paraître,
Qui, vous voyant, ne croit plus l'être." 2.

Once back in Paris, the Marquise set about the task of finding a suitable settlement for her daughter, who was as yet unmarried. Her letters show a certain anxiety on the subject of her whom Bussy had once described "la plus jolie fille de France". Negotiations had already taken place with several aristocratic families, but for various reasons her plans had all fallen through; in 1668 she

1. Lettres, I 489: 20 May 1667.

2. Saint-Pavin, Oeuvres, op. Walckenaer, op.cit, vol III p.41.

could still write:

"La plus jolie fille de France vous fait des compliments. Ce nom me paroît assez agréable; je suis pourtant lasse d'en faire les honneurs." 1.

Mlle de Sévigné was in her twenty-fourth year, but had not, perhaps, a very attractive personality. Moreover her family, though financially secure at this time, had meddled too deeply in the troubles of the Fronde to ensure the King's blessing on such a match, a factor which must weigh heavily with any young nobleman in search of advancement at Court. The Marquise's final choice fell on the comte de Grignan, eldest son of an old and illustrious Provençal family; her letters to Bussy express her satisfaction:

"Il faut que je vous apprenne une nouvelle qui sans doute vous donnera de la joie; c'est qu'enfin la plus jolie fille de France épouse, non pas le plus joli garçon, mais un des plus honnêtes hommes du royaume: c'est M. de Grignan, que vous connoissez il y a longtemps. Toutes ses femmes sont mortes pour faire place à votre cousine, et même son père et son fils, par une bonté extraordinaire, de sorte qu'étant plus riche qu'il n'a jamais été, et se trouvant d'ailleurs, et par sa naissance, et par ses établissements, et par ses bonnes qualités, tel que nous le pouvons souhaiter, nous ne le marchandons point, comme on a accoutumé de faire: nous nous en fions bien aux deux familles qui ont passé devant nous"...2.

The comte de Grignan had been twice widowed. His first wife had been the youngest sister of Julie d'Angennes, and had probably been known to Madame de Sévigné at the hotel de Rambouillet. There had been two daughters of the marriage,

2. Lettres, I, 530: 4 Dec, 1668.

1. Lettres, I, 512: 29 July 1668.

which renewed the already existing link between the Marquise and M. and Mme de Montausier. The Marquise's estimate of the Grignan fortunes proved to be over-generous; even at this time the match was opposed by Retz, who urged a closer inquiry into the situation. His interference perhaps explains the comtesse's scant affection for him in later years; it remained unheeded, however, and Mlle de Sévigné was married to the comte de Grignan in the early days of the year 1669.

The marriage did not at once entail separation of mother and daughter; the count, although the titular holder of a post in the administration of Languedoc, was not obliged to reside there, the pair continued to live with Madame de Sévigné, her daughter moving with her in the autumn from Paris to Livry, where their stay was saddened by the death of Saint-Pavin, whom the Marquise had known since early youth. Her letters at this time are few, mostly taken up with wrangles with Bussy. In the spring of 1670 her son-in-law departed to take up his duties in Provence, where he had just been named lieutenant-general of the province. Mme de Grignan stayed with her mother in Paris, there to await the birth of her first child.

Madame de Sévigné
and the World of Letters.

1670 - 1690.

In the years between her widowhood in 1651 and her daughter's marriage 1669 there had been little change in the life of Madame de Sévigné. The departure of Madame de Grignan is a turning-point in her history. Not that her interests had changed: now as always they were wholly bound up with the welfare of her daughter, in Paris or Provence. But the need to spend herself in a round of social duties had diminished with that daughter's going; for the first time in her adult life the Marquise was free to consult her own tastes, to dispose of her days as she pleased. Almost at once the tempo of her life begins to change.

After the marriage in 1669, however, she had still a few months grace. Her first grandchild was not born until November 1670, and even then the comtesse de Grignan did not immediately set out for Provence. In the meantime the

Marquise had set up an active correspondence with her son-in-law; It is in fact from the time of his departure that Madame de Sévigné's letters actually begin, in a connected sequence, to give a detailed day-to-day picture of her mental and spiritual development.

These few months of letters to the comte de Grignan are themselves not without interest.

The comtesse de Grignan had had an exceptional education and had already gained a certain reputation for erudition in the Paris salons. Her husband, though perhaps not her equal in philosophical study, was yet not far behind in his experience of the cultural life of the city. His first marriage had put him in contact with the hôtel de Rambouillet, and so within reach of all the experiences which the Marquise herself had enjoyed there in youth. (He was her junior by only three years.) She writes to him of the stories of la Fontaine and the first sermons of Bourdaloue, and sends him Nicole's: Traité de l'Education d'un Prince in August 1670 the very month of its publication. She also takes an active interest in his affairs in Provence, and assures him of the loyalty and affection of his wife

in letters made more poignant by the undercurrent of fear at the coming, inevitable separation.

At this period her correspondence also shows a renewed interest in the doings of the Court. An interlude in the form of four letters to her cousin Emmanuel de Coulanges recounts the extraordinary affair of Mademoiselle's match with Lauzun:

"Je m'en vais vous ^{mander} ~~mener~~ la chose la plus étonnante, la plus surprenante, la plus merveilleuse, la plus miraculeuse, la plus triomphante, la plus étourdissante, la plus inouïe, la plus singulière, la plus extraordinaire, la plus incroyable, la plus imprévue, la plus grande, la plus petite, la plus rare, la plus commune, la plus éclatante, la plus secrète, jusqu'aujourd'hui, la plus brillante, la plus digne d'envie: enfin une chose dont on ne trouve qu'un exemple dans les siècles passés, encore cet exemple n'est-il pas juste; une chose que l'on ne peut pas croire à Paris (comment la pourroit-on croire à Lyon?) une chose qui fait crier miséricorde à tout le monde,....."etc.

The account is one of the best in her letters, for to the power of her language is added that vivid dramatisation which brings life into all the Marquise's writing:

"....M. de Lauzun épouse dimanche au Louvre, devinez qui? Je vous le donne en quatre, je vous le donne en dix, je vous le donne en cent. Mme de Coulanges dit: Voilà qui est bien difficile à deviner; c'est Mme de la Vallière. --Point du tout, Madame. -- C'est donc Mlle de Retz? - Point du tout, vous êtes bien provinciale. --Vraiment nous sommes bien bêtes, dites-vous, c'est Mlle Colbert. - Encore moins. --C'est assurément Mlle Créquy. --Vous n'y êtes pas, il faut donc à la fin vous le dire: il épouse, dimanche, au Louvre, avec la permission du Roi, Mademoiselle de....

Mademoiselle....devinez le nom: il épouse
 Mademoiselle. ma foi! ma foi jurée! Mademoiselle,
 la grande Mademoiselle....Si vous criez, si vous
 êtes hors de vous-même, si vous dites que nous
 avons menti, que cela est faux, qu'on se moque
 de vous, que voila une belle raillerie, que cela
 est bien fade à imaginer; si enfin vous nous
 dites des injures; nous trouverons que vous avez
 raison; nous en avons fait autant que vous." 1.

The accounts that follow - of the breaking-off of the
 marriage and the despair of the heroine - are at first
 hand. The Marquise at this time was in close contact
 with Mademoiselle; her letters to her friends and her
 daughter in the year 1670 and 1671 are fertile in details
 of Court life: of the growing favour of the de Mazarin
 and the rehabilitation of the abandoned duchesse de la
 Vallière to cover this new liason: (2) of the fete of
 the duchesse d'Orleans; (3) of the latest fashions in
 dress and coiffure which are described in detail lest
 her daughter should become too provincial. (4)

Madame de Grignon had left Paris in February 1670,
 leaving her daughter Marie-Blanche in the care of Madame
 de Sévigné. In the Spring the latter went to Lully,
 returning to the city in time for the liturgical
 ceremonies of Holy Week, to hear the sermons which were
 an important feature of Lentan devotions in Paris. The

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1. Lettres, 11, 25: 15 Dec. 1670
 2. Lettres, 11, 70: 18 Feb. 1671
 3. Lettres, 11, 5: 6 July, 1670
 4. Lettres, 11, 117, 143, etc. 18 March.. 4 April 1671.

art of preaching was at its height in seventeenth-century France. The task of selecting preachers for the Court in the seasons of Lent and Advent fell to the King himself, and the candidate thus chosen had the official title of "prédicateur du Roi." When necessary he followed the Royal suite from place to place: the famous sermons of the century were variously preached at the Tuileries, Saint-Germain or Versailles. In the years 1659 -69, when the Marquise and her daughter were together in Paris, the accredited preacher had been Bossuet. Madame de Sévigné had already met him in the Hôtel de Rambouillet,¹ and he had since become a close friend to all the family. "M.de Condom vous aime fort" is a phrase which recurs often in the letters to Provence, where they tell of her meetings with Bossuet in the Hôtel de Nevers, of his assisting the last moments of Madame or in later years of La Rochefoucauld. There are few references to his sermons; within the period of the Lettres Bossuet had preached only one in Paris, that for the profession as a Carmelite of the duchesse de la Vallière, which the Marguise, owing to a misunderstanding, was not able to hear. Even the Oraisons Funèbres came to

1. See p. 42.

her only in their printed versions, and are discussed from the standpoint of a reader, not an auditor.

The sermon must not of course be considered primarily as a literary *genre*. In Bossuet's lifetime few of his sermons were printed, and those either without his knowledge or by express command of the King. But for Madame de Sévigné, reading them several months old, Bossuet's sermons are necessarily considered more as a literary work, and on the whole unfavourably. The lack of personal contact with the speaker may account for this coolness; when she reports the opinions of others there is greater interest:

"Je viens de voir un prélat qui étoit à l'oraison funèbre. Il nous a dit que M. de Meaux s'étoit surpassé lui-même, et que jamais on n'a fait valoir ni mis en oeuvre si noblement une si belle matière."¹

The matter in this instance is the life of Condé, whose oration had been preached by both Bossuet and Bourdaloue. The Marquise in her next letter voices a definite preference for Bourdaloue, whose sermon she describes and analyses in great detail. Bourdaloue had taken Bossuet's place in 1669, when the latter had been named to the bishopric of Condom. He had soon outstripped him

1. Lettres, VIII, 32: 10 Mar 1687.

in popularity. Madame de Sévigné's reception progresses rapidly from indifference to extreme enthusiasm, and in the Spring of 1671, when Bourdaloue filled the office of Lenten preacher to the Court, her letters mention him almost every day: (1)

"Le P. Bourdaloue a prêché ce matin au-delà de tous les plus beaux sermons qu'il ait jamais faits..."

"Le P. Bourdaloue prêche: bon Dieu! tout est au-dessous des louanges qu'il mérite...."

"Ah! Bourdaloue, quelles divines vérités nous avez vous dites aujourd'hui sur la mort! Mme de la Fayette y étoit pour la première fois de sa vie, elle étoit transportée d'admiration." (2)

This preference for Bourdaloue over Bossuet had not been borne out by posterity; yet Madame de Sévigné's letters show that it was not merely her personal caprice. Parisian congregations flocked to hear him, sending their servants ahead to retain a place in the church. On Good Friday she records disappointment at not being able to get into the church where he was speaking:

"J'ai entendu la Passion du Mascaron, qui en vérité a été très belle et très-touchante. J'avois grand envie de me jeter dans le Bourdaloue; mais l'impossibilité m'en a ôté le gout: les laquais y étoient dès mercredi, et la presse étoit à mourir." (3)

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1. Lettres, 11, 67, 88, 98, 100, 102, 103, 107, 130, 132 etc. 18th Feb. - 1st April 1671.
 2. Lettres, 11, 97, 102, 107; 6th, 11th, 13th March, 1671.
 3. Lettres. 11, 132: 27th March, 1671.

There is no question now of being satisfied with a printed copy, or at least not while the smallest chance remains of attending in person. As late as 1692, a few years before her death, the Marquise gives an account of Bourdaloue's preaching:

"Le P. Bourdaloue a fait des merveilles cet Avent. Ceux qui ont de la mémoire disent qu'ils connoissent ses sermons; pour moi, qui n'en ai point, ils me sont nouveaux. Rien ne vous doit consoler de les avoir perdus....."¹.

Her letters reveal the twofold reason for the extraordinary influence of Bourdaloue on his generation: first, the magnetic power of his speech. "Il m'a souvent ôté la respiration," says Madame de Sévigné,

"par l'extrême attention avec laquelle on est pendu à la force et à la justesse de ses discours, et je ne respitoit que quand il lui plaisoit de les finir..."².

But the presentation is not only skillful but bold. His courage is such that he does not hesitate to speak out before the Court on the vices rampant within it; Madame de Sévigné recalls a sermon on adultery preached in 1680 in presence of the King and Mme de Montespan: "Il frappe comme un sourd....Sauve qui peut!"³. An anecdote reveals his power of dramatisation which could move men in the very midst of luxury and vice:

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1. Lettres, IX, 97; 28 Dec 1692.
 2. Lettres, VII, 429; 3 Apr. 1686.
 3. Lettres, VI, 332; 29 Mar. 1680.

"Le maréchal de Gramont étoit l'autre jour si transporté de la beauté d'un sermon de Bourdaloue qu'il s'écria tout haut en un endroit: Mordieu, il a raison!....."1.

What appealed to them most in his sermons, particularly perhaps, to Mme de Sévigné, was his analysis of human nature. She speaks, for instance, of his portrait of a courtier in the Christmas sermon for 1671, in which most of the audience recognised an allusion to Tréville. This searching for allusions in the sermons of Bourdaloue spoilt the fruits of them for many of his hearers for whom they became yet another exercise of wit, like the epigrams and "jeux d'esprit" of the salons. For the Marquise, however, they were of the type of spirituality that appealed to her most.

"Ce qui s'appelle chercher dans le fond du coeur avec une lanterne, c'est ce qu'il fait. Il nous découvre ce que nous sentons tous les jours, et que nous avons pas l'esprit de démêler ou la sincérité d'avouer."2.

Mme de Sévigné's personal relationship with Bourdaloue was very slight; he may have known her by name, and no more, for as a man he was a member of the hated Society of Jesus, though as a preacher she could overlook the fact. Another well-known orator is Mascaron, who in 1671 was preaching in her own parish church of Saint-Gervais. She had once entertained him to dinner on the

1. Lettres, lll, 18: 13 Apr. 1672.

2. Lettres, ll, 377: 30 Sept. 1671. The words were written of Nicole, but they apply equally well to Bourdaloue and his appeal for the Marquise.

strength of his Provençal origins, which were a link with her daughter.¹ His sermons are unfortunately not extant, but the Marquise refers to his Oraison funèbre for Turenne, to which she preferred that of Fléchier, another great contemporary preacher. The letters in 1690 show her re-reading all the sermons and panegyrics which had moved her in youth:

"Nous repleurons M. de Turenne, Mme de Montausier, M. le Prince, feu Madame, la reine d'Angleterre; nous admirons ce portrait de Cromwell; ce sont des chef-d'oeuvres d'éloquence qui charment l'esprit. Il ne faut point dire: "Oh! cela est vieux;" non, cela n'est point vieux, cela est divin."²

The quotation is an anthology of the best sermons of the century; her letters show the importance attached to the art at the time. The Marquise is no lenient critic for, as she says: "Peut-on aimer Dieu, quand on n'en entend jamais bien parler?"³ By 1690 she complains of political issues finding their way into the Lenten sermons of preachers in Brittany, and prefers those of St. John Chrysostom and M. le Tourneux, which she can read for herself at les Rochers.⁴ Yet her letters give interesting information on many of the minor preachers

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1. Lettres, 11, 98-9: 11 Mar. 1671.
 2. Lettres, 1X, 409: 11 Jan. 1690.
 3. Lettres, 11, 138: 1 Apr. 1671.
 4. Lettres, 1X, 475: 26, Feb. 1690.

of the century also: on the P. Senault, Superior General of the Oratorians, a favourite with her daughter:

"Après cette fête, je m'en vais prendre quelque livre pour essayer de faire quelque usage de ma raison: je ne prendrai pas votre P. Senault; où allez-vous chercher cet obscur galimatias? Que ne demeurez-vous dans les droites simplicités de votre père?"¹.

In spite of her judgement the P. Senault had drawn great crowds in Paris, where she could have heard him earlier in the century. The Oratorians had done much to restore the rhetorical art before the advent of the great preachers of the Grand Siècle. The Marquise is more favourable to another of them, the P. de la Tours. But of all these minor figures the Jansenists are her natural favourites, particularly the M. le Tourneux mentioned above. Most of his sermons had come to her in print, though she had probably had opportunities of hearing him too during her stay in Paris. An amusing anecdote is related of him by Louis Racine:

"Le Roi lui disoit un jour (à Boileau):- "Quel est un prédicateur qu'on nomme le Tourneux? On dit que tout le monde y court: est-il si habile? - Sire, reprit Boileau, Votre Majesté sait qu'on court toujours à la nouveauté: c'est un prédicateur qui prêche l'Évangile."².

1. Lettres, VI, 447; 9 June 1680. Votre Père, i.e. Descartes; see ch.VII.

2. Racine, Oeuvres Mesnard, Les Grands Ecrivains de la France, vol.1.p.338.

The Marquise herself refers to this "simplicité apostolique" which attracted her in his work.¹

Massillon and Fénelon had begun their career too late in the century to be heard by the Marquise. She cites other favourites: Gabriel de la Roquette, particularly in his panegyric of Mme de Longueville, a task which might have strained any preacher's tact:

"(11) parcourait toute la vie de cette princesse avec une adresse incroyable, passant tous les endroits délicats, disant et ne disant pas tout ce qu'il falloit dire ou taire....."².

the Abbé Anselme is mentioned and the Oratorian Soanen,³ better known for his defence of the Jansenists than for his preaching. The Marquise in her preferences is no slave to fashion; she acclaims a new, obscure orator as willingly as an old-established one. She has her own protégé, a canon from Epoisse for whom she seeks to obtain a post in Paris, and whose progress in preaching she follows up with interest: "Il n'a qu'à monter en chaire pour me voir tout à l'heure au premier rang de ses dévotes."⁴ He is one of many seventeenth-century orators who, but for the Marquise's letters, would have been consigned to complete oblivion.

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1. Lettres, V11, 230: 20 Apr. 1683.
 2. Lettres, V1, 353: 12 Apr. 1680.
 3. Lettres, V111, 9514: 9 Mar. 1689.
 4. Lettres, V11, v 3 May 1683.

The influence of the spoken word on Madame de Sévigné in the period following on her daughter's departure is unmistakable. Almost immediately after this Lent in which she had been so moved by Bourdaloue, she left Paris for Brittany, there to spend the rest of the year in the peace of her home at les Rochers. From this time forward the Marquise was to spend long periods there almost every year. This annual retirement gave her that opportunity for reading and reflection which, as time went on, she came increasingly to need. Each visit to Brittany marks another stage in the deepening process of her mind. She had never allowed her intellect to lie fallow, or wasted her powers on trivialities: serious reflection was no novelty to the Marquise. But whereas in her early life circumstances had tended rather to widen her culture, bringing her into contact with more and more of the influential figures of the world of letters, this second and quieter phase gave time for her experience to mature. The tempo of her life had been slowed down - by her age, by exterior circumstances, by the increasing physical need for rest and quiet. Her social contacts might diminish a little thereby, but the change would be of inestimable value for the development of her mind.

It was not that the Marquise became a hermit, for she was and ever would remain, as she herself said, " Bête de

compagnie." The loneliness of Brittany was tempered by the presence of many friends, and in this year, 1671 by that of her son, who had so far had little opportunity to share her life. The first mention of him in the letters of Mme de Sévigné¹ comes in the year 1668, where she relates his departure with the army on an expedition to Candia:

"Je crois que vous ne savez pas que mon fils est allé en Candie avec M. de Roannès et le comte de Saint-Paul. Cette fantaisie lui est entrée fortement dans la tête....J'en ai pleuré amèrement j'en suis sensiblement affligée; je n'aurai pas un moment de repos pendant ce voyage. J'en vois tous les périls, j'en suis morte: mais enfin je n'en ai pas été la maîtresse; et dans ces occasions - là, les mères n'ont pas beaucoup de voix au chapitre."².

Charles de Sévigné was then twenty years old. Very few details are known about his youth, but this was probably not his first taste of military life, though perhaps his first campaign. The constant presence of his sister had somewhat crowded him out of his mother's affections until this year; but on his return from the army he joined her in Brittany, where she seems rather surprised to find him such very good company. The Marquise was glad of his presence, first of all that she might lure him back from the dissipated life into which his weak character was

1. With the exception of the letters to Bussy announcing his birth.
 2. Lettres, 1, 525; 28 June 1668.

constantly leading him. There was much in Charles to remind her of her dead husband, even to his liaison with Mlle de Lenclos: "Votre frère entre sous les lois de Ninon, " writes the Marg'quise to Madame de Grignan; je doute qu'elles lui soient bonnes..... Elle avait gâté son père...¹:" Against this nefarious influence she had already determined to pit the full weight of religious and personal influence:

"Nous ménageons, la Mousse et moi, de lui faire faire une bonne confession."².

She found his company pleasant for her own sake also, however, and was able to share with him all her literary tastes. Charles de Sévigné had been brought up with a well-furnished mind and perhaps a more balanced judgment even than his sister. His gift for reading aloud was a particular delight to his mother, now and on all their other trips to Brittany. He was of a gay disposition, with a quick sense of humour that could charm away the melancholy of her daughter's absence, and never once do the letters record any friction between mother and son.

Their usual companion in these journeys was the abbé de Coulanges. Letters also mention the abbé de

1. Lettres, 11 106: 13 Mar.1671.
2. Lettres, 11 191: 27 Apr.1671.

la Mousse, tutor to Mlle de Sévigné, who continued to live in the family for some time after her marriage. The former kept accounts for the Marquise, and busied himself with the practical affairs of the household, but the latter was better able to appreciate and share her literary interests, and make a welcome third to her discussions with Charles.

A new and important feature of the letters from Brittany is the appearance, for the first time in the Marquise's correspondence, of a day-to-day record of her intellectual pursuits. The accounts of her reading are, above all, an invaluable asset in tracing the progress of her mind. Madame de Sévigné was a constant and voracious reader. A letter written at the beginning of one of her Breton visits gives a sample of her library:

"J'ai apporté ici une grande quantité de livres choisis: je les ai rangés tantôt; on ne met pas la main sur un, tel qu'il soit, qu'on n'ait envie de le lire tout entier; toute une tablette de dévotion, et quelle dévotion! bon Dieu, quel point de vue pour honorer notre religion! l'autre est toute d'histoires admirables; l'autre de morale, l'autre de poésies et de nouvelles, et de mémoires. Les romans sont méprisés, et ont gagné les petites armoires."¹

1. Lettres, VI, 436; 5 June 1680.

Not only in Brittany but in Paris and at Livry, her letters reveal an equally wide selection of books. Circumstances provided her with extra opportunities for reading them: none knew better than she how to cheat the tedium and discomfort of seventeenth-century travel, and on every journey the Marquise sets out with an ample supply of reading matter. Nevertheless it was in Brittany that she had most leisure and from there that her comments are most valuable to an assessment of her intellectual tastes.

An analysis of the Marquise's reading in this middle period of her life reveals several trends. There is first of all the natural desire to re-read books which had given her pleasure in the past: the plays of Corneille in her carriage on the way to Les Rochers;¹. Tasso, with la Mousse who wanted practice in Italian;². the novels of la Calprenède to amuse her son. A quotation in 1671 gives a sample of their recreational reading:

"Mon fils nous lit des bagatelles, des comédies, qu'il joue comme Molière; des vers, des romans, des histoires; il est fort amusant, il a de l'esprit, il entend bien, il nous entraîne, et nous a empêchés de prendre aucune lecture sérieuse, comme nous en avions le dessein."³.

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1. Lettres, 11, 213: 13 May 1671.
 2. Lettres, 11, 251: 21 June 1671.
 3. Lettres, 11, 251: 21 June 1671.

Almost every year in Brittany Madame de Sévigné re-read Pascal's Lettres Provinciales, a favourite with her and Charles, and thanked Providence for the bad memory which enabled her to enjoy them once more in all their freshness. This question of the Marquise's bad memory is one which often recurs;¹ it seems a debatable point. She could quote by memory with equal ease from an opera seen last week or a play of Molière five years old; she could allude to incidents from books which she had not, apparently read since childhood; and the quotations are accurate in the main. What the Marquise calls her bad memory is mainly her capacity to enjoy books twice, and one suspects an excuse to pacify her daughter who, for some reason, disapproved of her returning to the favourite works, and particularly the frivolous novels of her youth:

"Vous dites que j'ai relu trois fois les mêmes romans, cela est offensant; ce sont de vieux péchés qui doivent être pardonnés, en considération du profit qui me revient de pouvoir relire aussi plusieurs fois les plus beaux livres du monde, les Abbadies, Pascal, Nicole, Arnauld, les plus belles histoires, etc. Il y a plus de bien que de mal à cette qualité docile qui fait honneur à ce qui est bon, et qui est si propre à occuper agréablement certains temps de la vie."²

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1. Lettres, 11, 267; VII, 75, 88; IX, 450; 5 July 1671, 15 and 25 Sept. 1680, 8 Feb. 1690 etc.
 2. Lettres, IX, 450: 8 Feb. 1690.

In spite of her protestations, it would be some time before she could say with truth:

"Les romans sont méprisés, et ont gagné les petites armoires....."¹.

Not all her reading, however, was purely recreational. In other branches of learning the Marquise used her leisure to widen and consolidate the knowledge acquired in youth. She had for instance had a good grounding in Latin, and had studied the classics in some detail.² She continued to do so now, reading Virgil in her carriage on the journey to Provence;³ dipping into Plutarch,⁴ perhaps in Amyot's very popular translation. Ovid⁵ and Terence,⁶ Quintilian⁷ and Lucian⁸ are mentioned among her readings, the latter with particular appreciation. Not all these works were new to her; not all were read in the original, for there had been many translators of Latin works in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She mentions Benserade's translation into rondeaux of the Metamorphoses of Ovid⁹ and Annibal Caro's Italian translation of the Aeneid¹⁰. Her

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1. Lettres, VI, 436: 5 June 1680.
 2. Lettres, See ch. 1.
 3. Lettres, III, 150: 16 July 1672.
 4. Lettres, VII, 89: 25 Sept. 1680.
 5. Lettres, VI, 468-9: 19 June 1680.
 6. Lettres, VII, 85: 22 Sept. 1680.
 7. Lettres, III, 242: 13 Oct 1673.
 8. Lettres, V, 227, 278: 23 July, 18 Aug. 1677.
 9. Lettres, V, 111-12: 21 Oct 1676.
 10. Lettres, III, 150: 16 July 1672.

knowledge of Latin had never been as competent as that of Italian, and the reference to Terence seems to suggest that her son was the better classical scholar:

"J'ai envie de lire Térence; j'aimerais à voir les originaux dont les copies m'ont fait tant de plaisir. Mon fils me traduira la satire contre les folles amours; il devrait la faire lui-même, ou du moins en profiter...."¹.

A source of pleasure almost as great was in the latest books from Paris, which seem to have reached her almost on publication. She had evidently a standing arrangement with Barbin, the famous Parisian bookseller, who sent books on to her in Brittany during her absences from the city. In the matter of promptitude the Marquise was an exacting client:

"Je suis désolée que vous ayez eu Bajazet par d'autres que par moi. C'est ce chien de Barbin qui me hait, parce que je ne fais pas des Princesses de Clèves et de Montpensier....."²

On that occasion there had indeed been a lapse of some three weeks. When la Princesse de Clèves itself came out,

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1. Lettres, VII, 85: 22 Sept. 1680. Cf Terence, Eunuch 1, i.
 2. Lettres, II 534-5: 16 Mar. 1672. There is a difference of opinion here. La Princesse de Clèves was not published until 1678, and Barbin could have known nothing of it in 1672. Monmerqué suggests that the original m.s. has "des Princesses de Montpensier et des Zaïdes" (1670) for which the first editor has substituted the better known novel. E. Magne, however, supposes that Mme de la Fayette had begun to compose the Princesse de Clèves many years before its publication, and that the Marquise may have known of it even in 1672. Cf. Le Coeur et l'Esprit de Mme de la Fayette, p. 195-6.

however, the Marquise received it on the eighth day of publication,¹ and in Brittany the works of Nicole reached her with scarcely less speed. By this means she was able to keep up with contemporary events, and make up for anything she might have lost in social life by her frequent absence from the capital. The critique on Bérénice is discussed in her letters at the very time that it was the talk of the literary world in Paris;² so also is Boileau's Arrêt Burlesque³. Authors are themselves anxious to send the Marquise their newest publications. An interchange of correspondence with Mlle de Scudéry shows her in 1680 sending the first volume of Conversations sur divers sujets⁴ which had just appeared. The second volume she procured for herself, but the third, Nouvelles conversations de Morale, was given to her by the author.⁵ The duc de Nevers sent her his verses;⁶ so did the abbé Bourdelot, with less success:

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1. Lettres, V, 424: 18 Mar. 1678.
 2. Lettres, II, 361: 13 Sept. 1671. See p. 119.
 3. Lettres, II, 349: 6 Sept. 1671. See p. 362.
 4. Lettres, VII, 89: 25th Sept. 1680.
 5. Lettres, VIII, 371: 1688, letter 1115, undated.
 6. Lettres, X, 12-13: 10 Apr. 1691.

"Bourdelot m'a envoyé des vers qu'il faits à la louange ~~le Duc et~~ ^{le Duc et} de Monsieur de Monsieur le Prince; il vous les envoie aussi. Il m'écrit qu'il n'est point du tout poète; je suis bien tentée de lui répondre: "et pourquoi donc faites-vous des vers? Qui vous y oblige?" Il m'appelle la mere des Amours: mais il a beau dire, je trouve ses vers méchants..."¹

The funeral orations and panegyrics which she might have missed were sent on to her in print. In Brittany too the Marquise was often able to enjoy the later works of literary figures, whom she had known in youth in the hôtel de Rambouillet and elsewhere. Godeau's Histoire de l'Eglise² is mentioned with great admiration, and also in 1689 the Histoire des Variations des églises protestantes, which Bossuet had published the year before.³ By the end of the century many of the major authors of the Grand Siècle had published revised and more or less complete editions of their works. The Marquise was thus able to re-read in sequence what had before come to her piecemeal. She mentions several such readings: the Provinciales of Pascal, the works of Boileau, Voiture, Sarasin, Balzac, etc., not counting the numerous poets and playwrights whom she was constantly quoting. Few people at the end of their lives can have had as clear and as broad a picture of their century as did the Marquise, from the literary point

1. Lettres, IV, 262, 291: 4 & 22 Dec. 1675. For the Abbé Bourdelot. see below p. 323.

2. Lettres, IX, 316: 16 Nov 1689.

3. Lettres, IX, 65: 1 June 1689.

of view. The only major authors of the period with whom she failed to come in contact are la Bruyère and Fénelon, whose first publications are dated respectively 1688 and 1689, a few years before her death. Even Fénelon she knew as tutor to the King's son and a talented young ecclesiastic, though not yet as an author.¹

Her returns to Paris after these country visits gave Madame de Sévigné the chance to participate once more in the literary controversy which she had enjoyed in youth, and which had not ceased to be an important part of the city's intellectual life. The Marquise was in Paris for the publication, in 1678, of la Princesse de Clèves². From her letters it would seem that like everyone else she was kept in ignorance of its authorship, until informed by Bussy who took occasion to pronounce a severe judgement on the work. Bussy had been in correspondence with Bouhours, whose critique on the Princesse de Clèves appeared six months later, and was read by Madame de Sévigné with Corbinelli.³ Bussy as a member of the Académie française had frequently adopted the role of commentator on newly-published works. Through him the

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1. Lettres, IX, 170, 201: 21 Aug, 11 Sept. 1689.
 2. Lettres, V, 424: 18 Mar. 1678.
 3. Lettres, V, 480: 18 Sept. 1678.

Marquise is linked with the quarrel in the Académie between Furetière, la Fontaine and Benserade. Bussy took the part of the two poets in this affair by writing a letter in their defence which he had first sent to his cousin for her approval.¹

An important literary event with which Madame de Sévigné is connected towards the end of her life is the presentation of Esther. The play was performed for the first time on 26 January 1689. Madame de Sévigné's first expressions of praise are at second-hand, for she did not see it herself until over a month later. It was still on the opinion of others that she wrote the words which are a reversal of her former judgement of the poet: no longer did she believe that "si jamais il n'est plus jeune et qu'il cesse d'être amoureux" his dramatic talent would be impaired: but

"Racine s'est surpassé: il aime Dieu comme il aimoit ses maîtresses; il est pour les choses saintes comme il étoit pour les profanes."²

When she finally saw the play at the invitation of Madame de Maintenon it did not fall short of her expectations; even later when she read the printed version, dissociated from the intoxicating glow which the King's presence had

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1. Lettres, VII, 507: 14 May 1686.
 2. Lettres, VIII, 458:7 Feb. 1689.

cast over it that evening, the Marquise could still appreciate the "vérités solides" as well as the exterior beauties of the play.¹

Back in Brittany between these episodes of Parisian life, Madame de Sévigné would devote herself once more to serious reading. In her second long visit, from 1675-6 her selection of books is slightly modified. Historical works become prominent, particularly those studies of Church history to which she had first been attracted by the writings of Jesuit Maimbourg.²

Her interest was equally active in the history of Europe and the seventeenth century. We have already noted her probable indebtedness to Chapelain for this taste, and the number of historians whom she may have read at his recommendation.³ Her motive for reading historical works is clearly set forth in a letter to her daughter towards the end of her life:

"Je vous plains de ne point aimer les histoires.... C'est un grand asile contre l'ennui; il y en de si belles; on est si aise de se transporter un peu en d'autres siècles! cette diversité donne des connoissances et des lumières."⁴

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1. Lettres, VIII, 542, 23 Mar. 1689.
 2. For further discussion of Mme de Sévigné's reading in Church history see below p. 217 ff.
 3. See p. 19-20.
 4. Lettres, IX, 403: 8 Jan. 1690.

Her own choice included histories of France by Mézerai¹ and Davila², of the Medici family by Varillas and of Italy by Guiccardini.³ Two favourites were lives of Saint Louis, written the one by la Chaise, the other by the abbé Choisy. La Rochefoucauld in 1680 had made her buy a translation of la Réunion du Portugal by Conestaggio:⁴ she herself had added Vertot's Conjuration du Portugal⁵ in 1689. Her allusions to these works are seldom detailed; they occur in the letters in which she keeps her daughter informed of her daily occupations and reading in Brittany. Her choice in this category falls mainly on histories of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and on the countries whose literature she already knew: France and Italy. Biography and memoirs also form a large part of her reading and here she (is) particularly appreciates works that treat of her youth and early womanhood, the reign of Louis XIII and the Regency. A life of Condé in 1675 gives particular pleasure:

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1. Lettres, VIII, 383: 5 Jan. 1689.
 2. Lettres, IX, 353: 14 Dec. 1689.
 3. Lettres, IX, 409: 11 Jan. 1689~~90~~
 4. Lettres, VI, 387: 9 May 1680.
 5. Lettres, IX, 325: 23 Nov. 1689.

"Je me'amuse les soirs à lire l'histoire de la prison et de la liberté de M. le Prince; on y parle sans cesse de notre Cardinal. Il me semble que je n'ai que dix-huit ans: je me souviens de tout; cela me divertit fort."¹

The same factor draws her to a biography of Madame de Montmorency, superior of the Filles de Saint-Marie at Moulins, the house where her grandmother had died; also to the memoirs of M. de Pontis, a Provençal gentleman connected with Port Royal. The memoirs of her cousin Bussy with whom she had shared so much of her youth were included in them. They were not published until the year of her death, but Bussy himself had read her fragments of the manuscript many years before.² He had also published a genealogical history of their family for which she admits a weakness: the Marquise is not above being flattered by this evidence of an ancient name.³ In reading the memoirs, however, other thoughts come to the fore, as she herself in advancing age finds more and more reminders of the transience of life:

"La vie d'un homme est peu de chose; cela est bientôt fait; dans toutes ces histoires cela va si vite, et tous plus jeunes que moi; ne parlons point de cela, ma chère enfant, il ne faut qu'y penser."⁴

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1. Lettres, IV, 252: 27 Nov. 1675, by Claude Joly.
 2. Lettres, V, 94: 7 Oct. 1676.
 3. Lettres, VII, 428: 22 July, 1675.
 4. Lettres, IX, 326-7: 23 Nov. 1689.

When one considers Madame de Sévigné's reading in these years one is struck also by the great number of books dealing with the East. The middle period of the seventeenth century in France had witnessed a sudden growth of interest in Oriental history and customs.¹ The reasons for this revival are various, among them the spread of the French foreign missions at this time, and the numerous memoirs written by travellers and explorers who in the middle of the century had ventured unto the unknown regions of the Middle East and India.² Some of the latter had been in correspondence with Chapelain, the Marquise's tutor.³ From the economical point of view the frequent and unsuccessful attempts to establish trade relations with the East, and the founding, under Louis XIV, of the first solidly established companies for this purpose,⁴ had turned men's attention increasingly to the Oriental civilisations and culture.

1. C.f. Martino, p. L'Orient dans la littérature française au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle. Paris, 1906

2. Thévenot, Récit d'un voyage fait au Levant, 1665.
Tavernier, Voyages en Turquie, en Perse et aux Indes 1676.

Relation d'un voyage fait aux Indes Orientales, 1677.

Bernier, Voyages (Inde) 1699, P. Lucas, Voyages (Levant) 1704; etc.

3. See Ch.1, p. 27.

4. Compagnie de la Chine, 1660; Cie des Indes Orientales, 1665; Cie du Levant, 1670.

The growing public interest is reflected in literature and art, not only by appreciation for travellers' tales but by a widespread vogue for all things Eastern. At the Carrousel in 1662, which Madame de Sévigné probably attended, the King had adopted a Roman costume, but his attendant courtiers appeared in Persian, Indian and Turkish disguise.¹ There was fashion for novels in an Oriental setting.² Madame de Sévigné herself testifies to the prevailing taste:

"Je lis dans ^{le} carrosse une petite histoire des vizirs et des intrigues des sultanes et des sérails qui se laisse lire assez agréablement; c'est une mode que ce livre....."³

Some of the great classical authors remained outside this influence. Neither Bossuet in the Histoire des Variations nor Pascal in the notes for his apology of christianity touch on the question of Eastern religion, in spite of polemical reasons for doing so. Corneille never ventured to build one of his tragedies round an Eastern theme. Yet the Turkish characters of Molière's Bourgeois Gentilhomme and still more the story of Bajazet are powerful indications of popular taste;

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1. Voltaire, Siècle de Louis XIV, ed. Bourgeois Paris 1919, p.467-8.
Lemonnier, L'Art français au temps de Louis XIV, Paris 1911, p. 206-11.
 2. Du Bail, Le Fameux Chinois, 1642; Mlle de Scudéry: Ibrahim ou l'illustre Bassa, 1641; Gomèrville, la jeune Alcidiane, 1651; Segrais, Horidon, 1656.etc.
 3. Lettres, V, 449; 15 May 1676.

and even Corneille could imagine himself a sufficient connoisseur of Eastern custom to criticise the manners of Racine's Turks. Madame de Sévigné herself, though she is but echoing this opinion, does so in a most authoritative tone.¹ She did in fact read a number of studies of the East. The "petite histoire des vizirs" mentioned above is that published in 1675 by Guillet;² it was followed in 1681 by the Histoire du règne de Mahomet II which she also read.³ The story of the Indies by Herrera⁴ had claimed her attention, as had the translation of a twelfth-century work, the life of the Emperor Alexius I by his daughter, the Byzantine princess Anne Comnène.⁵ The Marquise had even read parts of the Koran translated by du Ryer in 1647⁶, at the beginning of the fashion for Eastern studies. The latter had their interest from the political angle also, though this was more fully explored by the embassies of the eighteenth

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1. See p. 100.
 2. Lettres, V, 449: 15 May, 1676.
 3. Lettres, IX, 324: 23 Nov, 1689.
 4. Lettres, IV, 321-22: 5 Jan. 1676. Published 1601-15, transl. by Nicolas de la Coste 1660-71.
 5. Lettres, V 278: 18 Aug. 1677. L'Alexiade, by Anne Comnène. Translated from the Greek and publ. in abridged form 1672 as: Histoire de Constantinople.
 6. Lettres, VII, 89: 25 Sept. 1680.

century; Madame de Sévigné's chief interest is social rather than political.

Of all the books in the Marquise's library, however, most profitable in her eyes were the religious works of her "tablette de dévotion".¹ In this respect her selection shows an important development. It was only in 1671, after the departure of her daughter, that she came into contact to a considerable extent with the doctrines as well as the personalities of Jansenism.² The first volume of Nicole's essais made a profound impression on her; so also did the letters of Saint-Cyran, sent to her about this time by Arnauld d'Andilly. The impression was strengthened by her visit to Port-Royal-des-Champs in 1674. She returned to Brittany a convinced Jansenist. From this time forward, every reading list of the Marquise includes expositions of Port-Royal teaching until in 1680, she is reading the works which are the very basis of Augustinian doctrine.³ To the end of her life this interest persists, though with the accent in her last years on works of devotion rather than controversy: such books as le

1. Lettres, VI, 436: 5 June 1680.

2. See Ch. VI.

3. See Ch. VI.

Tourneux's Carême chrétien, Hamon's Traité de la Prière continuelle,¹ etc. The Marquise was too removed from public life by 1695 to express any opinion on the condemnation of the doctrines of Madame Guyon ; it was her daughter who would later be the disciple of Fénelon's quietism.² Corbinelli, who dabbled in this as in other esoteric theories, had once tried to draw the Marquise with a treatise on contemplation by a Spanish author, Malaval; but her only comment is that "mon fils ni moi n'entendons pas un mot"³ before they return gratefully to the writings of M. Arnauld.

One other influence to which the Marquise was subjected through her wide reading is that of cartesian philosophy.⁴ In this the guidance of Corbinelli was to be more profitable, for it was he who, together with la Mousse, undertook to educate her, as they had educated her daughter, in the principles of Descartes' metaphysics. The tuition, begun at Livry where, as in Brittany, the Marquise had more time for reading and study, is continued by correspondence with Madame de Grignan. Her son Charles was also a competent cartesian student and she

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1. Lettres, IX 281: 26 Oct. 1689.
 2. Lettres, X, 508 - 9. 1704, letter 1502.
 3. Lettres, IX, 404: 8 Jan. 1690.
 4. Lettres, See ch. VII.

is quick to seize any opportunity of conversing with specialists in the matter, and reporting the conversation afterwards to Provence.

Conversation on any topic, indeed, had not ceased to be an important part of her contact with the world of letters. At each return to Paris the Marquise renews her old friendships; there were few associations of youth with whom she lost contact, even at the end of her long life. Madame de Maintenon, called by her destiny to the highest spheres of society in Paris, moved out of Madame de Sévigné's orbit a little after 1680; several old friends died, particularly about the year 1680 notably La Rochefoucauld and Foucquet, Madame de la Sablière had retired from public life in November 1679;¹ Madame de la Fayette was often ailing. Otherwise the groups of friends that pass through her letters are almost identical with those of her earliest youth. Every departure and arrival of the Marquise draws a crowd of visitors to testify to her undiminished popularity.

1. Lettres, VI, 79: 8 Nov. 1679. See p. 244 -45.

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"Quand je partis, M. de Lamoignon étoit à Baviile avec Coulanges. Mme du Lude, Mme de Verneuil et Mme de Coulanges sortirent de leurs couvents pour venir me dire adieu; tout cela se trouva chez moi avec Mme de Vins, qui revenoit de Savigny. Mme de Lavardin vint aussi avec la marquise d'Uxelles, Mme de Mouci, Mme de la Rochefoucauld et M. du Bois: j'avois le coeur assez triste de tous ces adieux. J'avois embrassé la veille Mme de la Fayette....."¹

Even in Brittany the Marquise was not wanting in friends to share her intellectual interests, though she had an amusing fear of becoming provincial. After her return to Paris in 1692, when she had been absent for only a year, she writes:

"Nous trouvions, ma fille et moi, que nous étions un peu gâtées; mais nous commençons à nous remettre, et nos amis nous veulent bien reconnaître."²

The province of Brittany, however, had a flourishing intellectual life of its own, especially in the domain of experimental philosophy. Descartes was by origin a Breton; several of his relatives still lived in the neighbourhood of Rennes, and the Marquise reports her meetings and conversations with them to her daughter.³ It was no doubt their presence which had stimulated among Breton intellectuals the interest in Cartesianism upon which she often remarks in her letters. There is, for instance, among her Sévigné relations, a M. de Montmor,

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1. Lettres, IX, 39: 2 May 1689.
 2. Lettres, X, 70: 27 Jan. 1692.
 3. Lettres, VII, 23, 54: 14 Aug. 4 Sept, 1680; IX, 132: 24 July 1689.

member of the Rennes parliament, who comes to discuss Physics with her son Charles. He is an intelligent and well-informed man: "Vous savez comme il a l'esprit."¹ A much appreciated guest was the abbé Guébriac, one-time tutor to Mlle Descartes, and a great Cartesian. He had met Madame de Grignan in Paris, and professes such admiration for her mental qualities that he goes out of his way to make the acquaintance of her mother at Les Rochers; a meeting which of course is faithfully reported to Provence.² The former Prior of Livry who had come to live in Brittany close to les Rochers is often a party to these discussions.³ Other friends whom she had known in Paris came to see her; she mentions the comte d'Estrées, for instance, younger son of a family she had known for many years, who came to spend a short time with her on his way back to the city:

"Je l'ai trouvé fort joli, fort vif; son esprit est tout noble, et si fort tourné sur les sciences, et sur ce qui s'appelle les belles-lettres, que s'il n'avoit une fort bonne réputation, et sur mer, et sur terre,.....je croirois qu'il seroit du nombre de ceux que le bel esprit empêche de faire leur fortune; mais il sait fort bien ajuster l'un et l'autre au dépens de ses nuits; car il les passe à

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1. Lettres, 11, 23: 2 Dec. 1671: V11, 73: 15 Sept. 1680.
 2. Lettres, 1X, 233-34: 28 Sept. 1689.
 3. Lettres, V11, 73-4: 15 Sept. 1680. See p. 276.

lire.... C'étoit un plaisir de l'entendre causer avec mon fils, et sur les poètes anciens et modernes, l'histoire, la philosophie, la morale: il sait tout....."¹

Not only the men but the women of their acquaintance were well-educated and shared the Marquise's tastes: Madame de Chaulnes, wife of the governor of Brittany, with whom she spent several weeks travelling round the province in 1689 was as willing as she to beguile the journey with books.² Another friend, Madame de Kerman, gave her particular satisfaction as a travelling companion:

"C'est une liseuse que cette dernière: elle sait un peu de tout; j'ai aussi une petite teinture: de sorte que nos superficiels s'accommodent fort bien ensemble."³

The young wife of Charles de Sévigné, without being so widely experienced as the Marquise, had a similar taste for reading and solitude, and would often prefer to remain with her in the quiet of les Rochers rather than join her husband in the social life of Rennes.⁴ In Paris Madame de Sévigné mentions another Breton lady, Mlle de Goileau, hostess of an exclusive group of savants, who also engaged in Cartesian discussions.⁵ The Marquise's greatest friend in Brittany is the princesse de Tarente who, although certainly not a woman of scholarly interests, had made a

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1. Lettres, IX, 319: 20 Nov. 1689.
 2. Lettres, IX, 34: 27 Apr. 1689.
 3. Lettres, IX, 34: 27 Apr. 1689.
 4. Lettres, IX, 278: 26 Oct. 1689. IX, 47: 11 May 1689.
 5. Lettres, VIII, 469: 14 Feb. 1689.

speciality of medical treatments and prepared her own herbal remedies. Madame de Sévigné had twice been ill in Brittany, in 1676 and 1685, and had several times been for treatment to the fashionable watering-places of the day: Vichy and Bourbon-l'Archambault. Her account of the strange remedies prescribed and distilled by the princess throws revealing light on current medical practice.¹

An added stimulus to the Marquise's intellectual life towards the end of this period is the education of her grand children, in which she took a considerable share both by interest and advice. In 1688 the young marquis de Grignan came to Paris to join the armies of the King. It was an occasion to introduce him to the social life of the city, and perfect him in the manners and conversation expected of a young courtier. The following year she took up in earnest the teaching of her grand-daughter Pauline, youngest of the Grignan family and most like her grandmother in character and tastes. It is in connection with these children that Madame de Sévigné's views on education are most clearly expressed,² as day by day she follows up the reactions, progress and new experiences of her two enthusiastic

1. See Ch. VIII.

2. See Ch. V.

pupils. Their response is a testimony to her sympathetic handling of children, and to her own undauntedly youthful mind and heart.

The Marquise had now been living for nearly twenty years away from her daughter. Throughout the course of this long separation she had stayed in Paris only for the sake of the services she might render there to the Grignan family. Her son Charles had married in 1684, and was now happily settled in the position and duties of a Breton country gentleman. He had taken over the administration of the lands in Brittany which he was to inherit at her death. It was mainly on account of financial affairs, (the abbé de Coulanges having died in 1687) that Madame de Sévigné had spent so much of her time at les Rochers. At the back of her mind had always been the hope that she might revisit her daughter at Grignan and begin at last to enjoy her company a little more frequently; there was now no further obstacle to this wish. The Marquise, however, had as yet no definite idea of settling with her daughter; it was with no sense of finality that in 1690 she turned her back on the château des Rochers, which she was never to see again, and set out on her second journey to Provence.

LAST YEARS
1690 - 1696.

Madame de Sévigné arrived at the chateau de Grignan for the second time in November 1690. Her letters to Bussy, to Coulanges etc. record the joy of mother and daughter in each other's company. The Marquise had arrived in good health, showing no signs of fatigue or infirmity. Indeed her mind until the very end was to remain remarkably clear and vigorous. Madame de la Fayette, twelve months before, had expressed the fear that her solitary life in Brittany might have a lowering effect on her mental powers:

".....il ne faut point que vous passiez l'hiver en Bretagne, à quelque prix que ce soit: vous êtes vieille, les Rochers sont pleins de bois, les catarrhes et les fluxions vous accableront; vous vous ennuierez, votre esprit deviendra triste et baissera..."¹

1. Lettres, IX 244: 8 Oct. 1689.

Madame de Grignan had been shocked by the words, and the Marquise herself admits some surprise:

"Vous avez donc été frappée du mot de Mme de la Fayette, mêlé avec tant d'amitié. Quoique je ne me laisse pas oublier cette vérité, j'avoue que j'en fus toute étonnée: car je ne me sens aucune décadence encore qui m'en fasse souvenir...."¹

There were in fact no outward signs of advancing age; she was only 63 years old when the words were written and one would hesitate to call her "vieille", but for the fact that in those days a man's expectation of life may have been shorter than it is now. At any rate she was not unprepared; as early as 1671, in her late forties, she had written the following words on her own old age:

"Vous savez que je ne puis souffrir que les vieilles gens disent: "Je suis trop vieux pour me corriger." Je pardonnerois plutôt à une jeune ^{personne} de tenir ce discours. La Jeunesse est si aimable qu'il faudroit l'adorer, si l'ame et l'esprit étoient aussi parfaits que le corps; mais quand on n'est plus jeune c'est alors qu'il faut se perfectionner, et tâcher de regagner du côté des bonnes qualités ce qu'on perd du côté des agréables. Il y a longtemps que j'ai fais ces réflexions et par cette raison je veux tous les jours travailler à mon esprit, à mon ame, à mon coeur, à mes sentiments...."²

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1. Lettres, IX, 334: 30 Nov. 1689.
 2. Lettres, II, 381-2: 7 Oct. 1671.

The thought of death had always been with her, accentuated by her Jansenist readings, brought home more and more by the deaths of friends which her letters often record in these years: Ménage, Mme de Lavardin, Mme de Meckelbourg, la Grande Mademoiselle, Nicole - "le dernier des Romains" - even her old servants Beaulieu and his wife. The deaths of Mme de la Fayette and Bussy-Rabutin in 1693 severed links with her earliest youth; witnessing them the Marquise could not but have a constant reminder of the transience of human life.

Yet it must not be thought that such thoughts cast a gloom over her own final years. On the contrary her mind remained as alert and keen as ever. Her correspondence, irregular now that she no longer had to write to her daughter, is concerned mainly with business matters. Her cousin Coulanges, however, was still in Paris, and his ebullient good spirits are of themselves sufficient to keep alive in the Marquise the spirit of youth. With him her letters retain all their former vitality. She shows in them the same interest in life at Court and in public affairs, particularly the military campaigns of the 1690's, in literary matters and new

preachers, even in the changing coiffure and fashions of the end of the century. A striking characteristic of her old age is her openness to the interests of the young; one never feels the Marquise out of step with her times, disapproving of the ideas and fashions of youth. It was made easier for her, in a sense, by the continuity of the regime under which she lived. The Marquise had witnessed few changes in the way of life around her. The reign of the Roi Soleil had reached its apotheosis in the 1680's, but it was only gradually beginning to decline. Destitution and economic anarchy might be brewing under the surface, but no outward cracks had yet appeared in the edifice of absolute monarchy.

The Marquise's own declining years were equally peaceful. The weaknesses of old age had terrified her once when, remembering the words of Mme de la Fayette, she had contemplated her approaching end:

".....Il me semble que j'ai été trainée, malgré moi, à ce point fatal où il faut souffrir la vieillesse; je la vois, m'y voilà, et je voudrais bien au moins ménager de ne pas aller plus loin, de ne point avancer dans ce chemin des infirmités, des douleurs, des pertes de mémoire des défigurements qui sont près de m'outrager, et j'entends une voix qui dit: "Il faut marcher malgré vous, ou bien, si vous ne voulez pas, il faut mourir," qui est une extrémité où la nature répugne. Voilà pourtant le sort de tout ce qui avance un peu trop: mais un retour à la volonté de Dieu, et à cette loi universelle ou nous sommes condamnés, remet la raison à sa place, et fait prendre patience....."¹

1. Lettres, LX, 334: 30 Nov. 1689.

She had been spared the infirmities she dreaded, however; and even the rigours of Jansenism had not been able to cast over her last years too acute a fear of death. The final letters reflect a certain abatement of anxiety, and the correspondence ends on a note of peace:

".....pour moi, je ne suis plus bonne à rien; j'ai fait mon rôle, et par mon goût je ne souhaiterois jamais une si longue vie: il est rare que la fin et la lie n'en soit humiliante; mais nous sommes heureux que ce soit la volonté de Dieu qui la règle, comme toutes les choses de ce monde: tout est mieux entre ses mains qu'entre les nôtres."¹

Madame de Sévigné died at Grignan, after a short illness on April 18th 1696. She was 70 years old. The best epitaph on a figure so well-known and well-loved would be the countless letters in which her daughter, her friends and all her acquaintance reiterate their sorrow at her passing. But to put her back into the context of her period, no chronicler is better than Saint-Simon:

"Madame de Sévigné, si aimable et de si excellente compagnie, mourut à Grignan chez sa fille qui était son idole et qui le méritait médiocrement. J'étais fort des amis du marquis de Grignan, son petit-fils. Cette femme, par son aisance, ses grâces naturelles, la douceur de son esprit, en donnait par sa conversation à qui n'en avait pas, extrêmement bonne d'ailleurs, et savait extrêmement de toutes sortes de choses, sans vouloir jamais paraître savoir rien."²

1. Lettres, X, 344: 10 Jan. 1696.

2. Mémoires de Saint-Simon, lll, p. 77-78.

CHAPTER FIVE.EDUCATION

French literature of the seventeenth century is particularly fertile in discussions on the nature and scope of feminine education, and it is interesting to see, in the pages of Madame de Sévigné's correspondence, how these questions were debated by the educated women of the time. In her we may find at once the product of an age in which the instruction of girls began for the first time to be considered as a matter of importance, and the exponent of ideas in almost every respect far more liberal and progressive than the most enlightened of her contemporaries.

Two different streams may be discerned in the discussion of the education of women.¹ The first, having a definitely feminist character, is part of the general movement towards equality of the sexes which began in the sixteenth century as an offshoot of the Renaissance. The problem was brought to the fore in

1. C.f. Reynier. G: La Femme au XVII^e Siècle, Paris 1929

in France by the eminent position of women in the courts of Henri IV and Louis XIII. As the century progressed, the stabilisation of court life and the increasing importance of the monarchy, even the heroic events of the Fronde, brought women into places of such prominence that the question arose of how best to fit them for the position they were to occupy. Some women, such as Marguerite de Navarre in the preceding century, or Mlle de Gournay under Louis XIII, had already given the example of a high degree of erudition attained by their own unaided and unencouraged efforts at self-education. Attacks against the feminine sex at the same time prompted retaliation on the part of the women themselves, and so one may find, even in such unexpected places as the novels of Madeleine de Scudéry, a description of a heroine which is at the same time an apology for the education of women.¹

1. Both Clélie and Le grand Cyrus are full of Mlle de Scudéry's views on the education of girls, notably the following, from Clélie: "La beauté est notre partage, on en conclut que nous sommes dispensées de la peine d'apprendre les sciences et les arts, que l'ignorance en nous n'est point un défaut, et qu'il ne faut qu'un peu d'agrément, un médiocre esprit et beaucoup de modestie pour faire une honnête femme. Cependant je suis persuadée que les femmes sont capables de toutes les grandes vertus et qu'elles ont même plus d'esprit que la plupart des hommes..." See Buisson, F. Nouveau Dictionnaire de pédagogie, art. Scudéry, p.1881.

Contemporary philosophical movements contributed their share to the debate. The philosophy of Descartes, for instance, insists on the primacy of the intellect over other human faculties, and gives encouragement to the view that each man should think problems out for himself. Arguments of this kind brought in their train a renewed interest in the relative intelligence of women as compared with men, and the extent of their capacity for abstract thought. Poulain de la Barre, the feminist writer of the second half of the century, in a work which he dedicates to la Grand~~e~~ Mademoiselle¹, insists particularly on the suitability for the feminine public of such works as the Discours de la Méthode, the Traité de l'homme, the Traité des passions de l'âme, etc. and the letters of Descartes to Queen Christina of Sweden. Molière made dramatic material of the problem, putting the cartesian point of view in the Philaminte of the Femmes Savantes, and discussing at the same time the whole question of woman's rights and duties in the home, and of her position with regard to her husband.

1. De l'Education des dames pour la conduite de l'esprit dans les sciences et dans les moeurs, Paris, 1674. Also De l'Egalité des deux sexes, 1673; De l'excellence des hommes contre l'égalité des sexes, 1675.

Contemporary with these debates there is, however, a steady stream of writers who without being militant feminists were yet dissatisfied with the restricted notions of education current among the women of the time, and strove by word and practice to evolve some more comprehensive scheme. In this category one may place Madame de Sévigné; not that she is in any sense an educational theorist: her advice is based only on experience and her own good sense, and given in personal letters which are not intended to sway public opinion on any subject. Her indifference to feminist claims, however, does not extend to the realm of education; and since she was a close observer of one of the greatest educational innovations of the period, the founding of Saint-Cyr, and an intelligent and well-instructed woman besides, there are grounds for linking her name with the movement towards more sympathetic methods of teaching for girls which is a feature of the reign of Louis XIV.

Before considering Madame de Sévigné's own ideas on this topic it may be relevant to re-examine the nature and extent of her own education, and see how it compares with that received by women of the period, both the nobility in general and the intellectual élite to which

she herself belongs. Public education for women did not, of course, begin to exist in France until very much later. There was for a girl in the seventeenth century no means of instruction corresponding, for example, to that for boys at the Jesuit and Oratorian colleges, and the colleges of the Universities. Religious Orders of women devoted to the work of teaching did in fact begin to spring up during the seventeenth century, but the period of their constitution falls rather later than the childhood of Madame de Sévigné; moreover most of them, at least in their beginnings, were not concerned with the rich so much as with the poorer classes who, almost illiterate and deprived of all religious training, were being lost to the Church as a result of the disorganisation following on the wars of religion. Those women of the nobility, therefore, who wished to send their daughters to be educated in a convent, could choose only between the various enclosed Orders which might be willing to accept a limited number of children as boarders. It is important to note that none of the girls so educated - and the great majority were so at the time - could have been in contact during their youth with persons qualified to teach them. They might

or might not have received some form of organised instruction; but in many cases the teacher herself stood in great need of education. Few convents at that time had kept up the ideal of learning of the mediaeval abbeys; their pupils at best would leave the school with the rudiments of reading and writing and some scant experience of household management. Madame de Sévigné, in spite of her mistrust of such a training, sent her daughter for a time to the Visitation convent at Nantes; she herself does not seem to have spent any of her childhood there, notwithstanding her close connection with the foundress of the Order, who was still living at the time. Probably those responsible for the upbringing of Marie de Chantal, and particularly the Abbé de Coulanges, her guardian from the age of ten years, thought little of this method of educating a young girl who showed no disposition to enter the religious life. In passing one may remark that the Visitation Order, although one of the recent foundations of the Church, was not designed for the work of teaching, and was no more suited to it than any other convent.

A rarer though more effective expedient in the seventeenth century was the hiring of a tutor who would instruct the child at home. This method, the usual one

in training the sons of noble houses, was only rarely advocated in the case of a woman. Madame de Sévigné owed it no doubt to the foresight and sagacity of her uncle. The Abbé de Coulanges may not himself have been able to contribute very much to her academic training, though there is evidence of his wise guidance in the formation of her judgement and disposition. The certain fact is that he procured for his ward the best teachers of the time, and there is no doubt that the remarkable depth and variety of Madame de Sévigné's mind is due in great part to this influence in her youth.

The Marquise's own opinions on this subject are revealing. Students of the educational psychology of the Grand Siècle may in fact find that her ideas, expressed in the letters, are at least as interesting and new as those of the other great educationalists of the time: Fénelon and Madame de Maintenon. This is not to say that Madame de Sévigné is in any sense a pedagogue. Her views on education are expressed without any desire to expound doctrine, and indeed without any reference to doctrines new or old. She knew, of course, of the foundation of Saint-Cyr by her friend in 1686, but her letters contain no criticism of it as an educational institution. Possibly she was not aware of its attempts

at innovation. Madame de Maintenon's theories, most of them contained in letters or private conferences to the Dames de Saint-Louis, would not at the time have been accessible to the public. It is interesting to note that Fénelon's work on the education of girls¹ is the near contemporary of most of Madame de Sévigné's letters to Madame de Grignan on the education of Pauline. There is, in fact, some similarity in their views on the upbringing of children, though she seems never to have heard of him until his nomination in 1689 as tutor to the Duc de Bourgogne, and even then to have remained unaware of his writings on a subject so close to her own interests.

Madame de Sévigné's primary interest in education must of course have been the practical problem of the upbringing of her own two children. Documents are unfortunately wanting to give us information on this period of her life, though one may assume that knowing the value of a good education she would have tried as far as she could to give her son and daughter all the advantages she had herself enjoyed. It is not easy to determine whether the young marquis and his sister had one or

1. Published 1687.

several tutors, to guide their early studies; whether they did so or not, no-one could have been better qualified for the post than Madame de Sévigné herself. She brought to the task of training her children a richness of intellectual experience as great as that of any tutor she might have engaged, and with that a psychological understanding of children that appears at its best in the letters about her grandchildren which will be examined later. That both Charles and Françoise de Sévigné had enjoyed a sound academic instruction is evident from the way in which, through the pages of her letters, they share their mother's interest in the world of books, and meet her in discussion on a footing of intellectual equality. Madame de Grignan, for instance, is as familiar as her mother with the works of Corneille and Pascal, able to identify a quotation and pick up even a passing allusion. Her knowledge of Italian had come to her from the Marquise, probably also that of Latin. We know from references in the letters that Madame de Grignan had read the works of Tacitus with her mother at Les Rochers before her marriage, and that the latter had pointed out to her the particular felicities of his style.¹ It was not within Madame de

1. Lettres, II, 258; 28 June 1671.

Sévigné's power, however, to supply the scientific part of her education. If Madame de Grignan was such an ardent disciple of Descartes and of experimentalism, she owed it rather to the influence of the Abbé de la Mousse, doctor in theology and zealous cartesian, of whom the Marquise writes:

"La Mousse est fort glorieux d'avoir fait en vous une merveilleuse écolière."¹

Both Madame de Grignan and her brother had, in fact, a thorough knowledge of cartesian philosophy.² Their education must have been the same in most respects, so that the advantages attributed to the one apply equally to the other. Charles de Sévigné shows himself able to hold his own in discussions on both Jansenism and the philosophy of Descartes, and is the habitual sharer of his mother's literary pursuits at Les Rochers:

"Mon fils nous lit des bagatelles, des comédies qu'il joue comme Molière; des vers, des romans, des histoires; il est fort amusant, il a de l'esprit, il entend bien, il nous entraîne, et nous a empêchés de prendre aucune lecture sérieuse, comme nous en

1. Lettres, II, 364; 20 Sept. 1671. Little is known of la Mousse beyond the fact that he was prior of Groslé and a doctor of Theology. He was probably the illegitimate son of M. du Gué and brother to Mme de Coulanges. C.f Walckenaer, op.cit. vol. IV p.191.

2. See ch. VII: Mme de Sévigné and the philosophy of Descartes.

avons le dessein."¹.

There are many references to Charles' talent for reading aloud and to his gift for mimicry; as for instance in a letter of 1687, in which Madame de Sévigné is lamenting the loss of the property of Livry, through the death of the Abbé de Coulanges:

"Je l'ai pleuré amèrement, et le pleurerai toute ma vie, et non-seulement l'abbé, mais l'abbaye, cette jolie abbaye où je vous ai mené, qui vous fit faire un joli couplet sur les chemins, et où mon fils, par un enthousiasme qui nous réjouit, assis sur un trône de gazon, dans un petit bois, nous dit toute une scène de Mithridate, avec les tons et les gestes, et surprit tellement notre modestie chrétienne, que vous crûtes être à la comédie, alors que vous y pensiez le moins."².

Other allusions show that Charles was not always an obstacle to serious reading, as his mother once seemed to suggest, and that he had, in fact, a bent of mind very similar to her own in his intellectual interests. His French style in the letters that remain to us is remarkably clear and vigorous, with a concision and humorous vitality that compare favourably even with his mother's writing. Madame de Grignan's style is also mentioned and several times praised by Madame de Sévigné³, though we

1. Lettres II, 251: 21 June 1671

2. Lettres, VIII, 124; 24 Oct. 1687.

3. Lettres, II, 57, 69, 112, 124 passim: 11 Feb, 18 Feb, 18 Mar, 23 Mar. 1671

have few examples of it; it is, like her personality, more severe and less attractive than that of the Marquise. Sufficient records remain, in any case, to show that both brother and sister had had an excellent literary training, and must have been as cultured and accomplished as any of the second generation of the Grand Siècle.

The impact made on the reader of the Lettres by the figure of Madame de Grignan is undoubtedly somewhat harsh. If one were to look at the characters of Charles de Sévigné and his sister for evidence of Madame de Sévigné's qualities as a teacher, one might be driven to doubt her capacity for the training of character. It was perhaps not her fault that Charles to a certain extent inherited his father's vagabond disposition, his dissipation and weakness of will. His mother compensated for it by giving him a taste for intellectual activity, a love of solitude and of the land, above all a fundamental sense of his religious obligations that kept him from the worst excesses. He must, none the less, have afforded her a good deal of anxiety in his early years; and it cannot be said that even in later life the Baron de Sévigné developed a very marked personality. The greatest proof of Madame de Sévigné's wisdom in her treatment of her son is the abiding trust that she gave him in herself. There

was, in fact, a very close relationship between them. Even in manhood Charles continued to rely on her advice, turning to her in all the reverses of his erratic career, while she wisely refrained from a prudish attitude to his misdeeds, and yet at the same time never condoned his weakness of will or his betrayal of his friends. It was no doubt largely due to her influence that the young Marquis in later years enjoyed a well-justified reputation for integrity and devotion to public service.

With Madame de Sévigné's daughter the case is rather different. We have too little evidence concerning Madame de Grignan to be able to form a complete judgement of her character, yet even through the pages of her mother's infinitely lenient and forgiving letters, she emerges as a woman of difficult and unattractive personality; undemonstrative though perhaps not unaffectionate, with a touchiness and a tendency to introspection that were no doubt heightened by her constant ill-health. It is curious that she too, in her own way, was irresolute. "Une résolution est une étrange affaire pour vous," says her mother in a letter of the year 1674, "c'est votre bête: je vous ai vue longtemps à décider d'une couleur; c'est la marque d'une âme trop éclairée, et qui voyant d'un coup d'oeil

toutes les difficultés, demeure en quelque sorte suspendue comme le tombeau de Mahomet...Pour moi., je hais l'incertitude et j'^{ai}me qu'on me décide."¹. (i

Perhaps the Marquise's energetic temperament had so smoothed the path for her children in youth that they had never been called upon to exercise responsibility and make decisions. Perhaps, too, her extremely sociable nature had unwittingly driven her daughter in on herself. Madame de Grignan never seems to have been the social success that her mother was in youth, and though many friends make enquiries about her through the pages of the letters, one suspects a friendly sympathy with the Marquise's interests, rather than a genuine concern. Madame de Sévigné, in her dealings with her daughter, does not show the acute psychology that she does in dealing with her son. One cannot altogether clear her of the charge, brought against her by Madame de Grignan herself, that she had brought her up badly; and the Marquise herself is the first to acknowledge it, though both the accusation and the reply are lightly expressed.² One or two anecdotes

1. Lettres, III, 367; 12 Jan. 1674.

2. Lettres, VI, 198; 17 Jan. 1680.

of the youth of Françoise de Sévigné throw an extremely unfavourable light both on her character and on her mother's attitude to it. Madame de Sévigné, in a letter to Provence, relates a visit of Pomenars to Les Rochers, in which he had reminded her of having witnessed a childish quarrel between Françoise and one of her friends:

"On parle longtems là-dessus,.. et puis enfin de Mlle du Plessis, et des sottises qu'elle disoit, et qu'un jour vous en ayant dit une, et trouvant son visage auprès du vôtre, vous n'aviez pas marchandé, et lui aviez donné un soufflet pour la faire reculer; et que moi, pour adoucir les affaires, j'avais dit: "Mais voyez comme ces petites filles se jouent rudement"; et ensuite à sa mère: "Madame, ces jeunes créatures étoient si folles qu'elles se battoient: Mlle du Plessis agagoit ma fille, ma fille la battoit, c'étoit la plus plaisante chose du monde;" et qu'avec ce tour, j'avois ravi Mme du Plessis de voir nos petites filles se réjouir ainsi. Cette camaraderie de vous et de Mlle du Plessis, dont je ne faisais qu'une même chose pour faire avaler le soufflet, les a fait rire à mourir..."¹.

One remembers again that even in the education of her own children Madame de Sévigné suffered from the want of maternal guidance; an occasional wise suggestion from someone more experienced might have helped her to avoid over-indulgence, even as she guided and advised her daughter in the education of her grandchildren.

1. Lettres, II, 294; 26 July 1671.

It is, in fact, to these letters concerning the Grignan family that one must turn in order to appreciate at their true value the Marquise's ideas on education. Her principles are stated more clearly here than anywhere else; though even here, of course, Madame de Sévigné is in no sense setting out to preach a doctrine. She was a teacher by temperament and inclination rather than by any preconceived theories. Her pleasure in educating others appears early in the correspondence. In 1676 she is telling Mme de Grignan of a child, daughter of one of the tenants on her estate, whom she has taken to be her companion at Les Rochers, and whom she and Charles take pleasure in drawing out:

"C'est un petit esprit vif et tout battant neuf, que nous prenons plaisir d'éclairer. Elle est dans une parfaite ignorance; nous nous faisons un jeu de la défricher généralement sur tout: quatre mots de ce grand univers, des empires, des pays, des rois, des religions, des guerres, des astres, de la carte; ce chaos est plaisant à débrouiller grossièrement dans une petite tête, qui n'a jamais vu ni ville, ni rivière, et qui ne croyait pas que toute la terre allât plus loin que ce parc: elle nous réjouit..."¹.

The young girl continues to figure in the letters of this year, and to act as secretary during the Spring months when the Marquise was prevented by rheumatism from the

1. Lettres, IV, 334; 12 Jan. 1676.

free use of her hands. The references to her are frequent and affectionate.¹ A certain imaginative quality of mind made Madame de Sévigné an adept at bringing her conversation down, without condescension, to the level of another's mind, and she must surely have been a well-loved figure with any child with whom she came in contact. That her grandchildren loved her deeply is evident throughout the letters, while she in return devoted herself to them with a whole-hearted affection that was second only to her love for their mother.

Circumstances in fact provided Madame de Sévigné with numerous occasions of showing this devotion, for the birth of Marie-Blanche, the eldest of Madame de Grignan's children, corresponded so nearly with the latter's first departure for Provence that the child was left behind in Paris with the Marquise, to be kept and cared for by her for four years. Details of these years show her great interest in this child though they give few comments on her upbringing. Marie-Blanche was no doubt left, as was the custom of the time, in the hands of nurses and governesses, and there is no suggestion that her grandmother

1. Lettres, IV 312, 387, 396, passim; 1 Jan, 22 Mar., 8 Apr. 1676.

was ahead of her age in her notions of infant training. Many parents indeed, in that age, would have disinterested themselves completely from a child not yet old enough to be a social asset. This seems to have been the case with Madame de Grignan, to whom her mother writes:

"Je serai ravie d'embrasser ma pauvre petite; vous ne la regardez pas; et moi, je veux l'aimer, et prendre sa protection par excès de générosité..."¹.

"Je m'amuse à votre fille; vous n'en faites pas grand cas, mais croyez-moi, nous vous le rendons bien: on m'embrasse, on me connoît, on me rit, on m'appelle. Je suis Maman tout court; et de celle de Provence, pas un mot."².

Yet although the Marquise paints for her daughter a most attractive picture of the little one: "Votre petite..sera dans quinze jours une pataude blanche comme de la neige, qui ne cessera de rire,"³— she never seems to have succeeded in awakening her interest. To the great sorrow of her grandmother Marie-Blanche returned to Provence in the year 1674, and shortly afterwards, at the age of five, was sent to be a boarder in the convent of the Visitation at Aix, where she was to remain and take the veil at the age

1. Lettres, II, 433; 13 Dec. 1671.

2. Lettres, II, 444; 23 Dec. 1671.

3. Lettres, II, 152; 8 Apr. 1671.

of sixteen. Madame de Sévigné, as has already been remarked, had but a poor opinion of convent education, and on this occasion her censures are more than severe.

"J'ai le coeur serré de ma chère petite; la pauvre enfant, la voilà donc bien placée! Elle a bien dissimulée sa petite douleur: je la plains, si vous l'aimez, et si elle vous aime autant que nous nous aimons..."¹.

"Votre petite d'Aix me fait pitié d'être destinée à demeurer dans ce couvent perdu pour vous: en attendant une vocation, vous n'oseriez la remuer, de peur qu'elle ne se dissipe; cette enfant est d'un esprit chagrin et jaloux, tout propre à se dévorer..."².

"..je n'aime point ces baragouines d'Aix: pour moi, je mettrois la petite avec sa tante; elle seroit abbesse, quelque chose; cette place est toute propre aux vocations un peu équivoques: on accorde la gloire et les plaisirs. ..C'est une enfant entièrement perdue, que vous ne reverrez plus...elle se désespérera. On a mille consolations dans une abbaye; on peut aller avec sa tante voir quelquefois la maison paternelle; on va aux eaux, on est la nièce de Madame; enfin il me semble que cela vaut mieux..."³.

Throughout Marie-Blanche's life the appeal is reiterated, and if the insinuations against the fervour of the convent at Aubenas are not very flattering, one must remember that the words apply to a child not yet ten years old, and that

1. Lettres, IV, 451; 17 May 1676.

2. Lettres, VI, 548; 24 July 1680.

3. Lettres, VI, 442; 9 June 1680.

they spring from a genuine distress on the part of the Marquise at the fate of this grand-daughter, about whom little else is known.

The plea, as far as Madame de Grignan is concerned, seems to have fallen on deaf ears; by that time the mother of Marie-Blanche was already too wrapped up in the welfare of her son, Louis-Provence, born in 1671; the hope of the Grignan family, whom the Comtesse adored, to the detriment of her affection for her other children. Yet even her love for him did not make her treatment of her son more enlightened, as appears from the frequent advice given by Madame de Sévigné in her letters to Provence. The child in early years is shy and unadventurous, and the Marquise is obliged to reassure her daughter on this disquieting symptom, and, above all, to urge her not to aggravate it by harassing him unduly. Moreover he is stocky, and small for his age, so that her first counsels are on physical education also:

"Je vous prie que sa timidité ne vous donne aucun chagrin...Ce sont des enfances; et en croissant, au lieu de craindre les loups-garous, ils craignent le blâme, ils craignent de n'être pas estimés autant que les autres; et c'est assez pour les rendre braves et pour les faire tuer mille fois; ne vous impatientez donc point. Pour sa taille, c'est une autre affaire;.. il faut qu'il agisse et qu'il se dénoue; il faut lui

mettre un petit corps un peu dur qui lui tienne la taille: on me doit envoyer des instructions que je vous enverrai..."¹.

She insists a good deal on this necessity of physical activity and skill in games, as much for their therapeutic value as for their social advantages:

"Je voudrais bien que le petit continuât à jouer au mail; qu'on le fasse plutôt jouer à gauche alternativement, que de le désaccoutumer de jouer à droite, et d'être adroit."².

Moral and academic training soon come up for discussion also, and it is in connection with this child that we first find a clear expression of Madame de Sévigné's opinions. Her first advice is typical of her character: she insists, first of all, on the value of home training and a mother's influence, and secondly on the paramount importance of training him in honesty:

"Je trouve que le pichon est fort joli; vous lui faites un bien extrême de vous amuser à sa petite raison naissante; cette application à le cultiver lui vaudra beaucoup. Je vous prie de lui pardonner tout ce qu'il avouera naïvement, mais jamais une menterie..."³.

1. Lettres, IV, 433; 6 May 1676.

2. Lettres, VI, 42; 6 Oct. 1679

3. Lettres, V, 5; 5 Aug. 1676

She concerns herself early with finding him a tutor - a good Jansenist, according to her principles. It is interesting to note that where Madame de Sévigné and her daughter and grand-daughter study the literary languages, Italian and Spanish, the young Marquis, destined for a military and possibly a diplomatic career, begins his early education with a teacher of German, although the rest of his family do not apparently speak the language:

"C'est une petite merveille que (l'Allemand) que vous avez; votre embarras nous a fait rire, qui est de ne pouvoir connaître s'il sait les finesses de la langue allemande, ou si vous confondez le suisse avec cette autre langue. C'est une habileté où il nous semble que vous ne parviendrez jamais; vous prendrez assurément l'un pour l'autre, et vous trouverez que le pichon parlera comme un Suisse, au lieu de savoir l'allemand."¹.

Port-Royal education was especially renowned for its teaching of the humanities. We do not know whether Madame de Sévigné had dreamed of making a classical scholar of her grandson; if so she was doomed to disappointment. In 1682 his mother brought him to Paris so that he might take his part in court life as a prelude to a military career. He was not, in fact, allowed to continue his studies much longer, and in 1688, at the early age of 17, the young

1. Lettres, V, 41. 26 Aug. 1676.

Marquis was already taking part in the King's German campaign, at the head of a cavalry company which his mother had procured for him. He was, in fact, receiving the education usual at the time for a boy of his social rank, one in which book-learning was held to be of minor importance. Madame de Sévigné, however, seems not to have accepted the convention without some reservations. She tries to interest her young grandson in the world of letters, appealing to him, with true psychology, through the medium of his own interests: the military exploits of the great generals of the past.

"Il est impossible qu'avec autant d'esprit et de bon sens, aimant la guerre, il n'ait point envie de savoir ce qu'ont fait les grands hommes du temps passé, et César à la tête de ses Commentaires..."¹.

"Corbinelli s'en échauffe," adds the Marquise, but she herself was too wise to put pressure on a child who was, after all, very young and too active to be greatly attracted by intellectual pleasures. Her methods are sound enough despite this apparent failure; one remembers Fénelon's advice, so little heeded in previous educational theory, on the use which may be made of a child's natural curiosity

1. Lettres, VIII, 426; 24 Jan. 1689

in encouraging him to learn.¹ In the case of her grandson Madame de Sévigné compensates for this lack by giving him other instructions, more necessary perhaps for one in his station and career:

"Quand vous êtes ici, ma chère bonne, vous parlez si bien à votre fils, que je n'ai qu'à vous admirer; mais en votre absence, je me mêle de lui apprendre le manège des conversations ordinaires, qu'il est important de savoir; il y a des choses qu'il ne faut pas ignorer. Il seroit ridicule de paroître étonné de certaines nouvelles sur quoi l'on raisonne; je suis assez instruite de ces bagatelles. Je lui prêche fort aussi l'attention à ce que les autres disent, et la présence d'esprit pour l'entendre vite, et y répondre; cela est tout à fait capital dans le monde. Je lui parle des prodiges de présence d'esprit que Dangeau nous contoit l'autre jour; il les admire, et je pèse sur l'agrément et sur l'utilité même de cette sorte de vivacité. Enfin je ne suis point désapprouvée par Monsieur le Chevalier.² Nous parlons ensemble de la lecture, et du malheur extrême d'être livré à l'ennui et à l'oisiveté; nous disons que c'est la paresse d'esprit qui ôte le goût des bons livres, et même des romans; comme ce chapitre nous tient au coeur, il recommence souvent..."³.

One hears again an echo of Fénelon, who held that a child should be educated to suit his rôle in the world, knowing that the dangers of ignorance were far greater than those

1. Fénelon, De l'Éducation des filles, ed. O. Gréard, Paris, 1885, pp. 18-19.

2. His uncle, brother of the Comte de Grignan.

3. Lettres, VIII, 315ff. 10 Dec. 1688

of a too early maturity. The young Marquis de Grignan profited also by some wise advice on the practical conduct of his affairs, advice that was all too needed in the Grignan household, where his mother was the first to give the example of reckless and unnecessary expenditure:

e / "Monsieur le chevalier est plus utile à ce petit garçon qu'on ne peut se l'imaginer: il lui dit toujours les meilleurs choses du monde sur les grosses cordes de l'honneur et de la réputation, et prend un soin de ses affaires dont vous ne sauriez trop le remercier; il entre dans tout, il se mêle de tout, et veut que le marquis ménage lui-même son argent, qu'il écrive, qu'il suppute, qu'il ne dépense rien d'inutile: c'est ainsi qu'il tâche de lui donner son esprit de règle et d'économie, et de lui ôter un air de grand seigneur, de qu'importe, d'ignorance et d'indifférence, qui conduit fort droit à toutes sortes d'injustices, et enfin à l'hôpital. Voyez s'il y a une obligation pareille à celle d'élever votre fils dans ces principes. Pour moi, j'en suis charmée, et trouve bien plus de noblesse à cette éducation qu'aux autres."

Another remark concerns the young noblemen with whom the Marquis had become acquainted, and one in particular of whom Madame de la Fayette's son had related several ridiculous anecdotes:

"...le chevalier..a fort remercié la Fayette de cet avis, parce qu'en effet il n'y a rien de si important que d'être en bonne compagnie, et que souvent, sans être ridicule, on est ridiculisé par ceux avec qui on se trouve..."¹.

1. Lettres, *ibid.* P. 317

It is a credit to Madame de Sévigné's tact and gentleness that a boy brought up in an atmosphere of such adulation as the young Marquis, and so early given responsibility, should still be ready to accept her advice with confidence. It is wise advice, certainly; there is no better evidence of Madame de Sévigné's balanced judgement and mature knowledge of the world than these letters, which could well have served as a code of conduct for any young man about to begin his public career in seventeenth-century France.

Almost contemporary with the young Marquis' stay in Paris are the letters to Provence concerning the education of Pauline de Grignan. This child, whom her grandmother had narrowly saved from the boarding-school education she so detested, is of all the Grignan children the one most frequently mentioned in the letters. Circumstances gave her mother a greater share in the work of her upbringing than in that of her brother and sister, and Madame de Sévigné's advice is the more detailed in consequence. Madame de Grignan does not seem to have lavished any great affection on the child. "Aimez, aimez Pauline", are almost the first words the Marquise writes of her:¹ an injunction which has to be repeated

1. Lettres, V 225; 21 July 1677

all too often. Madame de Sévigné's infectious enthusiasm for the teaching of others does not seem to have communicated itself to her daughter. Pauline is wilful, intelligent like all the women of her family, but inclined in adolescence to periods of moodiness and rebellion. The personal contact with the child which is, for Madame de Sévigné, a sine qua non of all successful education, requires a patience and gentleness which Madame de Grignan does not possess. Her mother gives her sound advice on the psychology of the child, recalling, one may believe, the methods she herself had employed in youth with her children and to which she now adds the weight of more mature experience:

"Pauline n'est donc pas parfaite; tant mieux, vous vous divertirez à la répéter. Menez-la doucement; l'envie de vous plaire fera mieux que toutes les gronderies..."¹. Gardez-vous surtout de vous accoutumer à la gronder et à l'humilier..."².

"...Il me semble que je l'aime, et que vous ne l'aimez pas assez: vous voudriez qu'elle fût parfaite...vous n'êtes point juste: et qui est-ce qui n'a point de défauts? en conscience, vous attendiez-vous qu'elle n'en eût point? où preniez vous cette espérance? ...il me semble que si j'étois avec vous, je lui rendrais de grands offices, rien qu'en redressant un peu votre imagination, et en vous demandant si une petite personne qui ne songe qu'à plaire et à

1. Lettres, VIII, 309; 8 Dec. 1688

2. Lettres, VIII, 317; 10 Dec. 1688

se corriger, qui vous aime, qui vous craint, et qui à bien de l'esprit, n'est pas dans le rang de tout ce qu'il y a de meilleur..."¹.

As in the case of the young Marquis de Grignan, Madame de Sévigné insists on the value of the child's proper pride in encouraging him to correct his faults:

"...elle a de l'esprit, elle vous aime, elle s'aime elle-même, elle veut plaire; il ne faut que cela pour se corriger..."².

Like Madame de Maintenon, she would appeal first and foremost to the child's reason:

"...ce n'est point dans l'enfance qu'on se corrige: c'est quand on a de la raison... Je vous assure que vous n'y réussirez que par la raison; elle en a; vous saurez lui faire valoir celles que vous lui direz."³.

She suggests practical ways of broadening Pauline's experience: conversation, dictation of letters by her mother which will not only improve her style but increase her self-confidence by giving her a feeling of responsibility:

"Parlez-lui de ce qui lui convient, comme je vous ai ouïe parler souvent à votre fils; de la manière dont

1. Lettres, VIII, 481; 23 Feb. 1689.
2. Lettres, VIII, 491; 28 Feb. 1689.
3. Lettres, VIII, 491; 28 Feb; IX, 74; 8 June 1689.

vous me la représentez, elle en profitera à vue d'oeil et cela vous fera un grand amusement et une occupation digne de vous, et selon Dieu et selon le monde."¹.

Madame de la Fayette is also consulted on the subject, and makes suggestions which the Marquise transmits:

"elle vous conseille d'observer la pente de son esprit, et de la conduire selon vos lumières; elle approuve extrêmement que vous causiez souvent avec elle, qu'elle travaille, qu'elle lise, qu'elle vous écoute, et qu'elle exerce son esprit et sa mémoire..."².

Madame de Sévigné's frequent insistence on style shows again the store she set by a correct knowledge of the French language. She gives advice also on the learning of Italian, on the books in that language which may or may not be given to a child, and answers her daughter's comments with her usual imaginative verve:

"Pauline m'a écrit une lettre charmante. Elle me dit...qu'elle apprend l'italien, que vous êtes sa maîtresse, qu'elle lit le Pastor Fido..." "J'aime fort le régime et le préservatif que son confesseur lui fait prendre contre le Pastor Fido; c'est justement comme la rhubarbe et le cotignac que j'ai vu prendre à Pomponne à Mme de Pomponne avant le repas; mais ensuite elle mangeoit des champignons et de la salade, et adieu le cotignac: à l'application, ma chère Pauline!"³.

1. Lettres, VIII, 232; 29 Oct. 1688

2. Lettres, VIII, 235; 1 Nov. 1688

3. Lettres, IX, 287, 339; 30 Oct., 4 Dec. 1689

Her choice of a reading list for an adolescent girl is not the least interesting feature of Madame de Sévigné's educational theory. One may remark that her daughter had not made a very promising attempt. At the age of 14 Pauline, under her mother's guidance, is reading the Metamorphoses of Ovid, which startles even the Marquise's liberal principles:

"On ne revient point de la à la Guide des Pécheurs"¹. The problem of finding suitable reading matter can have been no easy one, however, in an age when a children's author was almost unknown.² Pauline shows a predilection for novels, which her grandmother, remembering her own weakness, is reluctant to condemn; her remarks on the subject are interesting as a criticism on the early French novel, and on those characteristics of the genre which made it attractive to Madame de Sévigné's generation:

1. Lettres, VIII, 232; 29 Oct. 1688. The reference is to a work by Louis de Grenade, famous Spanish preacher and ascetic. Mme de Sévigné also mentions his Mémorial de la vie chrétienne: Lettres VI, 112.
2. It is curious all the same to note that at least two of the great children's classics of France are the product of the 17th century: the Contes de Perrault, and Mme d'Aulnoy's l'Oiseau bleu.

"Je ne veux rien dire sur les goûts de Pauline; je les ai eus, avec tant d'autres qui valent mieux que moi, que je n'ai qu'à me taire. Il y a des exemples des bons et des mauvais effets de ces sortes de lectures...Pour moi, qui voulois m'appuyer dans mon goût, je trouvois qu'un jeune homme devoit généreux et brave, en voyant mes héros, et qu'une fille devoit honnête et sage en lisant Cléopâtre..."¹.

In her next letter, however, she suggests some more solid reading for a child whose intellectual capacity is above the average. Pauline seems to have had a greater taste for reading than her brother; as early as 1688, the Marquise suggests Nicole's Essais de Morale, as a corrective to that taste for novel-reading which must at all costs be prevented from spoiling her capacity for "les choses solides."². During the years 1688-90 Madame de Sévigné's letters contain a constant stream of advice on her grand-daughter's reading, which, when collated, forms a most interesting programme to compare with the academic standards demanded by other educational theorists of the period. We do not know what were Pauline's reactions, at the age of 14, to the reading of Nicole's essays, but moralists take pride of place in her grandmother's reading list, especially, of course, those of Port-Royal. The

1. Lettres, IX, 315; 16 Nov. 1689.

2. Lettres, VIII, 232; 29 Oct. 1688.

Marquise, however, gives warning against unsuitable writers also:

"Pour Pauline, cette dévoreuse de livres, j'aime mieux qu'elle en avale de mauvais que de ne point aimer à lire...À l'égard de la morale, comme elle n'en feroit pas un si bon usage que vous, je ne voudrois point du tout qu'elle mit son petit nez, ni dans Montaigne, ni dans Charron,¹ ni dans les autres de cette sorte; il est bien matin pour elle. La vraie morale de son âge, c'est celle qu'on apprend dans les bonnes conversations, dans les fables, dans les histoires, par les exemples; je crois que c'est assez."²

By the year 1690, incidentally, Madame de Sévigné is able to congratulate her grand-daughter on her appreciation of the Essais de Morale, a fact which does suggest a child of considerable maturity of mind; for Nicole's style, as has already been remarked, has nothing in the way of clarity or concision to commend it to modern critics. The Marquise's syllabus is, as one might expect, a reiteration of her own favourite readings. Pascal, therefore, is mentioned early and often, and so also are those historical biographies which had given her greatest pleasure:

1. This is the only reference to Charron in the Lettres.
2. Lettres, IX, 413; 15 Jan. 1690.

"...les romans, les comédies, les Voiture, les tout cela est bientôt épuisé: a-t-elle tâté de Lucien? est-elle à portée des petites Lettres? après, il faut l'histoire; si on a besoin de lui pincer le nez pour lui faire avaler, je la plains."

Religious readings also find place in this list, both devotional books and the history of the Church of which the Marquise had herself so wide a knowledge:

"Pour les beaux livres de dévotion, si elle ne les aime pas, tant pis pour elle; car nous ne savons que trop que même sans dévotion, on les trouve charmants..."¹.

For the actual teaching of religious doctrine, Madame de Sévigné recommends the tuition of Madame de Grignan herself, with a somewhat caustic reflection on the religious education of the convents of Provence:

"Pauline n'est donc pas parfaite; je n'eusse jamais cru que la principale de ses imperfections eût été de ne pas savoir sa religion. Vous la lui apprendrez, ma fille, vous la savez fort bien, vous avez de bons livres; c'est un devoir; en récompense votre belle-soeur l'abbesse lui apprendra à vivre dans le monde."².

She gives timely advice, too, on the need of some method in her studies, perhaps remembering Madame de Grignan, whom, in earlier times, she had often taxed with her inability to read a long book through to the end:

1. Lettres, IX, 413; 15 Jan. 1690

2. Lettres, VIII, 461; 7 Feb. 1689.

"Je voudrais qu'elle eût quelque ordre dans le choix des histoires, qu'elle commençât par un bout et finît par l'autre, pour lui donner une teinture légère, mais générale, de toutes choses..."^{1.}

The word "légère" is worthy of note: Pauline, however precocious her development, was not to be turned into a pedant, but to carry her knowledge lightly; even as her grandmother had done, according to Saint-Simon's judgement on her.^{2.}

Happiness is evidently a prerequisite of a successful education in the opinion of Madame de Sévigné. Even in academic subjects she recognised the need for recreative reading: poetry, French and Italian, plays, particularly those of Corneille, in spite of the veto of her confessor whom the Marquise instantly nicknames "votre père Lanterne"^{3.} Charles de Sévigné - for Pauline's education is a topic of discussion in all the family - contributes his share of suggestions for lighter reading:

"Toutes les jolies histoires" (of Ovid) "ne sont-elles point de son goût? il y a mille petits ouvrages qui divertissent et qui ornent parfaitement l'esprit."

1. Lettres, IX, 353; 14 Dec. 1689

2. See p. 163.

3. Lettres, IX, 41; 5 May, 1689

Ne liroit-elle pas avec plaisir de certains endroits de l'histoire romaine?...Ah! que je plaindrai son esprit vif et agissant, si vous ne lui donnez de quoi s'exercer..."¹.

Novel reading has been included by educational theorists in the field of development of the imagination. Pauline's lively imagination is several times mentioned by Madame de Sévigné,² once with a word of warning as to its dangers which shows that she was not unconscious of the need to train this faculty also. The romantic aspect of the novel finds no reference in her criticisms. Madame de Lambert, some twenty years later, was to proscribe the learning of Italian altogether because "il est la langue de l'amour"; but this particular danger for an impressionable child is not explicitly mentioned; nor is any advice given on the training or guidance of the emotions.

No reader can fail to be struck by the breadth of the programme advocated by Madame de Sévigné. When one compares it with, for instance, the ideas of Fénelon and Madame de Maintenon, who are considered the pioneers of feminine education in France, one realises that the

1. Lettres, IX, 418; 15 Jan. 1690.

2. Lettres, IX, 452, 479, 480, 499: 12 Feb., 23 Apr. 1690 and *1270, Mar. 1690 undated.

Marquise was truly years in advance of her time. Madame de Maintenon, who is particularly severe on the question of reading, had built up for Saint-Cyr a system of education that was almost wholly unacademic: "Apprenez-leur à être extrêmement sobres sur la lecture, et à lui préférer toujours le travail des mains"¹. is her advice to a Dame de Saint-Louis. The dangers of intellectual development seem to be uppermost in her mind: "Il ne faut leur abandonner aucun livre en entier, si ce n'est l'Imitation et leurs Heures".² "La lecture fait plus de mal que de bien aux jeunes filles...Les livres font de beaux esprits et excitent une curiosité insatiable."³. One wonders what the writer of these words would have made of the reading list given to Pauline. Even Fénelon, with his apparent advance in the emancipation of feminine education reduces intellectual accomplishments to a poor minimum. At first sight his programme resembles that of Madame de Sévigné: ancient and modern history, poetry, and even unusual subjects like law are recommended to the daughters of the Duc de Beauvilliers. When however, he

1. Entretiens sur l'éducation des filles, ed. Lavallée Paris 1855, p.21.
2. Lettres sur l'éducation des filles, ed. Lavallée, Paris 1854, p.42.
3. Ibid. p. 259.

adds the rider that they should also learn the grammar and the accurate expression of their own language, it becomes apparent that his curriculum ends where Madame de Sévigné's began. The closest approach to her ideal is found in the programme of Mme Lambert, whose suggestions for a young girl's reading are similar in many respects to those of the Marquise, with the exception, as has been said, of the Italian language, and with the addition of the philosophy of Descartes, which Madame de Sévigné neglects; perhaps because she could have relied on her daughter to supply for this need without any further reminder. Even Mme Lambert, however, is far from attaining that breadth of development and true culture which is the essential spirit of the Marquise's educational theory. Her training is wide, but far less deep, and her insistence on the perfect knowledge of one's own language is not so marked. Madame de Sévigné had, of course, the advantage over Madame de Maintenon that she was planning not for a class, but for an individual, who could be followed up and constantly guided when in difficulty. This applies with particular force to her choice of books. Madame de Grignan's maxim that "Tout est sain aux sains" might be dangerous if given too wide

an application, though the effect of a book on an impressionable child could be counteracted within its own family, if the guidance given were timely and wise.

In the matter of training the child Madame de Sévigné has points of resemblance with both Fénelon and Mme de Maintenon, and in some respects falls short of the educational psychology of the latter. Her insistence on the need to teach the child by reason, for instance, is reminiscent of the foundress of Saint-Cyr, who liked to ask her pupils on occasion to define "une demoiselle raisonnable!"¹. Both, of course, owed the idea to Descartes, who had set the example to seventeenth-century teachers of this belief in the primacy of human reason. Madame de Sévigné would agree with Madame de Maintenon also on her attitude towards the religious education of a child. Both recognise the great importance of early religious training and doctrinal teaching. Beyond this, however, Madame de Maintenon is very insistent on the need to establish in a girl's mind a true sense of a hierarchy of duties:

"Quand une fille instruite dira et pratiquera de perdre vèpres pour tenir compagnie à son marimalade tout le monde l'approuvera... Quand une fille dira

1. Entretiens sur l'Education, p.89.

qu'une fille fait mieux de bien élever ses enfants, et d'instruire ses domestiques que de passer sa matinée à l'église, on s'accommodera très-bien de cette religion."¹.

Madame de Sévigné does not actually express in so many words her opinion on this point, but we are sure that the principle would have appealed to her innate sense of justice and balance, since it was, in any case, lived out in her own life.

The instruction was part of the general effort made by Saint-Cyr to fit a girl for the life she would have to lead in the world. On this point, as we have already seen, the Marquise was at one with Madame de Maintenon and with Fénelon, who had also expressed the need many times. She is at one with Fénelon again in his insistence on the supreme value to the child of home education: "J'estime fort l'éducation des bons couvents, mais je compte encore plus sur celle d'une bonne mère."². In fact Fénelon develops the idea rather more than Madame de Sévigné, at least in what concerns infant education, in which he is sometimes considered the pioneer of modern theory. With him, however, the Marquise shares an optimistic view of

1. Lettres sur l'éducation, p.311.

2. Fénelon, op. cit. p.143. Avis à une dame de qualité sur l'éducation de Mademoiselle sa fille.

the nature of the child. The woman who could write as she did on the improvement in Pauline's character, and even suggest "amour-propre" as a possible incentive to perfection, was very far from the pessimism of the education of Port-Royal. It is interesting to note that in her views on the training of children Madame de Sévigné is appreciably less Jansenistic than she is in her judgements on other topics. Most of all is this so in her personal relations with the child. We know from the Règlement drawn up by Soeur Ste. Euphémie (Jacqueline Pascal) the kind of relation which obtained between teacher and pupils. Any display of affection was proscribed by rule, whether from mistress to child or from children to each other; whereas the need for affection, exteriorly manifested, is one of the essential tenets of the Marquise's psychology. Port-Royal and Fénelon are in this respect the two opposing poles of child education in the seventeenth century. The one, through the pen of Nicole, could express the opinion that:

"Tant que les filles auront un coeur tel que celui qu'elles ont, c'est à dire un coeur tiré d'Adam et infecté d'amour-propre, il s'y élèvera toujours des pustules d'envie, de jalousie, de malignité."¹.

1. Lettre à Mme d'Aubry pour l'éducation de ses filles.
Liège, 1706. p. 371.

The other could expose with equal conviction his opinion that:

"Il faut essayer de faire goûter de bonne heure aux enfants...le plaisir d'une amitié cordiale et réciproque...Il faut encore que les parents leur paroissent pleins d'une amitié sincère pour eux..."¹.

Madame de Sévigné's own view lies somewhere between the two. Development of the affections is not a subject to which she appears to have given much thought. It is true that she taxes her daughter with her undemonstrative nature and herself gives abundant example of tenderness towards her grandchildren; but this is rather with a view to promoting the confidence of the child. That that child itself should need to be educated in sympathy does not seem to have entered her mind. Nor is a universal sympathy a feature of her character, or of her daughter's. Lack of tolerance has been noted as one of the harsher aspects of the seventeenth century mentality, and examples of it have been shown in Madame de Sévigné's own life. One would like to have been sure that an incident like the baiting of Mlle du Plessis would not have been allowed to pass uncorrected in the Grignan family. Here a modern education-
alist might blame the relative isolation in which children

1. Fénelon - de l'éducation des filles, p.45-6.

were brought up under the Ancien Régime. Those writers who condemn convent education seem never to have considered the value of a communal life as a corrective to excessive individualism. It is too much to ask of Madame de Sévigné that she should herself take up a point of view so far in advance of her time. She was already, as has been seen, far ahead of her time in many ways, and the charming and cultured personality of the adult Mme de Simiane is sufficient witness of the worth of her ideas on the education of women.

Chapter VI

Madame de Sévigné and the Doctrines of Port-Royal.

That Madame de Sévigné should have been made aware at an early age of the existence of Port-Royal is not surprising.¹ Her youth was passed amid religious controversies of which, as an educated woman living in Paris, she could not have remained ignorant. The history of Jansenism, from its beginnings in Paris in the 1620s to the Peace of the Church in 1669, is a long tale of bitter struggles against Church and State which could not fail to have repercussions in the intellectual elite to which Madame de Sévigné belonged. But apart from this, and apart from all question of Jansenist theology, the Marquise had a surprising number of personal links with Port-Royal in her youth and early married life.

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1. The intimate connection between Madame de Sévigné and the abbey of Port-Royal, the great stronghold of Jansenist doctrine in the seventeenth century, has been noted by all her biographers. The present study is intended not only to reiterate this connection but in its light to examine more closely some of her opinions on questions of theology and religion in general. It is hoped to show that in this, as well as in her choice of reading matter, she was even more Jansenist than has usually been accepted.

In her childhood, first of all, as the orphaned grandchild of Jeanne de Chantal, Madame de Sévigné must often have been conscious of the close friendship that existed between her grandmother and the great reforming Abbess, Angélique Arnauld. It was no doubt for this reason that Arnauld d'Andilly, in 1671, sent her as a present his recent selection of extracts from the letters of Saint-Cyran,¹ and a few weeks later asked the Marquise for the address of her daughter, that he might send them to her also. The original edition, published in 1643, had included several letters addressed by Saint-Cyran to Madame de Chantal during the brief period when, through the intermediary of Mère Angélique, he had been spiritual director to the Foundress of the Visitation Order. One may even suppose, though she does not mention the fact, that Madame de Sévigné had been consulted, or had at least received a copy at the time of this first edition of the Lettres, and so been brought into contact for the first time with the great Arnauld family.²

1. Instructions chrétiennes tirées par M. Arnauld d'Andilly des deux volumes de lettres de Messire Jean du Verger de Hauranne, abbé de Saint-Cyran, 1671.
Lettres, II, 316; 9 Aug. 1671.

2. C.f. C. Gazier: Les Belles Amies de Port-Royal, 1930, pp. 154-5

The contact would in any case have been made shortly afterwards, for in marrying Henri de Sévigné in 1644 the Marquise was forging another link with Port-Royal. At least two members of her husband's family were staunch supporters of the Abbey in the controversies then raging round it. Renaud de Sévigné, indeed, was later to retire there altogether as one of its famous company of "solitaires" and be an indirect means of introducing Madame de Sévigné to the very sanctuary of Jansenism itself; while her acquaintance with the other, the future Cardinal de Retz, developed into a social and intellectual friendship which could not fail to leave its mark on her opinions also.

Her social life at this time brought Madame de Sévigné still more consciously into the flow of Jansenist thought. It is in the home of Madame de Plessis-Guénégaud, with whom she shared a friendship for more than twenty years, that she first began to play a full part in the social life of Paris.¹ Here she made friendships which profoundly influenced her thought, and are reflected throughout her correspondence. Besides being an active centre during the Fronde the hôtel de Nevers was regarded by its enemies as a hotbed of Jansenism. All the leading personalities of the Jansenist cause, who were not bound either by vow or by inclination to

1. See above p. 69

a life of solitude at the Abbaye des Champs, were assiduous visitors at the home of the Plessis-Guénégauds, where, to quote the words of the Jesuit, Rapin:

"...la politesse de la maison, dont elle faisoit les honneurs, la bonne chère, car la table y étoit d'une grande délicatesse et d'une grande somptuosité, la compagnie la plus choisie de Paris, tant de gens de la robe que de la cour, et toutes sortes de divertissements d'esprit, y attiroient tant de monde, mais du monde poly, que c'étoit le rendez-vous le plus universel de la cabale...et tout ce qu'il y avait de brillant parmi la jeunesse de qualité qui florissoit alors dans la ville ou à la cour, se rendoient régulièrement en cet hôtel...On venoit apprendre les nouvelles aventures et les prospérités de Port-Royal pour y faire les réflexions que les intéressés jugeoient à propos, et pour donner vogue à la nouvelle opinion par ce qu'il y avoit de gens délicats à Paris..."¹

Arnauld de Pomponne had always been persona grata at the Hôtel de Nevers; so was his father Arnauld d'Andilly, and it was her great friendship for the latter which later led Madame de Sévigné to pay what seems to have been her only visit to the Abbey of Port-Royal. With other members of the family, however, she was well acquainted also, notably with that abbé Arnauld, brother of Pomponne, who was later to leave in his Mémoires such a charming picture of her family.²

1. P. Rapin, S.J. Mémoires, ed. L. Aubineau, 1865. Tome I, 403-404

2. "Il me semble que je la vois encore telle qu'elle me parut la première fois que j'eus l'honneur de la voir arrivant dans le fond de son carrosse tout ouvert, au milieu de M. son fils et de Mlle. sa fille, tous trois tels que les poètes représentent Latone au milieu du jeune Apollon et de la petite Diane, tant il éclatoit d'agrément et de beauté dans la mère et dans les enfants." Mémoires de l'abbé Antoine Arnauld, collection Petitot, vol. XXXIV p.113.

Of Madame Angélique, who died in 1661, there is no mention in the Lettres de Madame de Sévigné, but there is a reference to Angélique de Saint-Jean, niece and successor to the reforming abbess, who bore the brunt of the later persecutions against Port-Royal, and showed great courage in accepting the disgrace of her brother, Pomponne was dismissed from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 1679, largely on account of his Jansenist intrigues, and a letter written on this occasion by his sister came into the hands of Madame de Sévigné. She writes: "C'est la première fois que j'avais vu une religieuse parler et penser en religieuse"¹ - a rather harsh comment, one feels, on her old friends of the Visitation de Sainte-Marie; but by that time anything coming out of Port-Royal was predisposed to a favourable reception from Madame de Sévigné. Her admiration for Henri Arnauld as Jansenist and Bishop is shown by her reactions to her first meeting with him, and by her frequent reference to him simply as "le saint évêque".

"J'ai diné, comme vous savez, avec ce saint prélat: sa sainteté et sa vigilance pastorale est une chose qui ne se peut comprendre; c'est un homme de quatre-vingt-sept ans, qui n'est plus soutenu dans les fatigues continuelles qu'il prend que par l'amour de Dieu et du prochain. J'ai causé une heure en particulier avec lui; j'ai trouvé dans sa conversation toute la vivacité de l'esprit de ses frères; c'est un prodige, je suis ravie de l'avoir vu de mes yeux..."²

1. Lettres, VI, 104; 29 Nov. 1679.

2. Lettres, VII, 284; 21 Sept. 1684.

Countless other references show that Madame de Sévigné, apart from her religious sympathies, considered herself a close personal friend of the Arnauld family, and that this esteem was mutual and lasting. In 1672 the Marquise writes to Arnauld d'Andilly:

"Parlez-moi de l'amitié que vous avez pour moi; donnez-moi la joie de voir que vous êtes persuadé que vous êtes au premier rang de tout ce qui m'est le plus cher au monde; voilà ce qui m'est nécessaire pour me consoler de votre absence, dont je sens l'amertume au travers de toute l'amour maternelle."¹

Coming from Madame de Sévigné, this was indeed high praise, and perhaps her daughter, with her complicated, jealous temperament, felt that she had cause to regard the Arnaulds with a less favourable eye. At all events, although they loved and admired her greatly, Madame de Grignan had frequently to be urged to show a return of affection:

"Que dites-vous de (la joie) de M.d'Andilly, de voir M.Pomponne Ministre et secrétaire d'Etat? En vérité il faut louer le Roi d'un si beau choix...Un petit mot de réjouissance, au père et au fils ne seroit-il point de bonne grâce à vous, qui êtes si aimée de toute la famille?"²

Her brother Charles was later to show himself as ardent a Jansenist as his mother, but Madame de Grignan had less connection than they with the Arnauld family, and was in

1. Lettres, III, 173; 11 Dec. 1672

2. Lettres, II, 357; 13 Sept. 1671.

any case more wavering in her sympathy to Port-Royal.

Madame de Sévigné, however, was not alone among the great ladies of the period in her interest in Jansenism. Indeed, when we compare her to the other secular benefactresses of Port-Royal we see that her attachment in some respects falls far short of theirs. She never shows signs of having wished, like Madame de Sablé and the Princesse de Guéméné, to leave the affairs of the world altogether and make the monastery her permanent home. Nor was she ever in a position to protect her friends against persecution from the King, as did Madame de Longueville. The Plessis-Guénégauds had their own private apartments in the Paris abbey, to which they could retire from time to time to make a retreat. They are mentioned in the Nécrologe¹ as signal benefactors. The Marquise is not, though her uncle-by-marriage, Renaud de Sévigné, finds place there among the other "solitaires". Only in a sympathetic sense can one really refer to Madame de Sévigné as a "belle amie" of Port-Royal. The Plessis-Guénégauds, again, had given their children, both boys and girls, a standard Port-Royal education; Madame de Sévigné had preferred for her daughter her old allegiance to the Soeurs de Sainte-Marie. That very daughter was, in fact, the greatest obstacle to her complete

1. Nécrologe de l'abbaye de Port-Royal etc. Amsterdam, 1723.

immersion in Port-Royal. It was a tie which kept the Marquise to the world: one, perhaps, of which a true Jansenist would not greatly approve. Arnauld d'Andilly had once called her a "jolie païenne"¹ because of her too great affection for her daughter. But besides this, and in spite of her links with the family, her first reaction to true Jansenist doctrine seems to have been a certain scepticism. The earliest reference in the Lettres is to the Formulaire condemning the five propositions of Augustinus, which an edict of the Assemblée-Générale had ordered all ecclesiastics to sign. It was the first enforcement of this edict, in 1661, which had caused the death of Pascal's sister Jacqueline, and in general been a source of great suffering to all the nuns of the Abbey. Yet Madame de Sévigné's judgement, in 1664, is cool enough; writing to Pomponne whose sister, also a Port-Royal nun, had been forced to acquiesce, she says:

"Monsieur de Paris lui a donné une certaine manière de contre-lettre qui lui a gagné le coeur: C'est cela qui l'a obligée de signer ce diantre de formulaire... Mais voici encore une image de la prévention; nos soeurs de Sainte-Marie m'ont dit: "Enfin Dieu soit loué! Dieu a touché le coeur de cette pauvre enfant: elle s'est mise dans le chemin de l'obéissance et du salut." De là je vais à Port-Royal: j'y trouve un certain grand solitaire que vous connoissez, qui commence par me dire: "Eh bien, ce pauvre oison a signé; enfin Dieu l'a abandonnée, elle a fait le saut". Pour moi, j'ai pensé mourir de rire en faisant réflexion sur ce que fait la préoccupation. Voilà bien le monde en son naturel. Je crois que le milieu de ces extrémités est toujours le meilleur."²

1. Lettres, II, 193; 27 April 1671

2. Lettres, I, 444-5; 20 Nov. 1664

One does not feel that there can have been in Madame de Sévigné's mind at this period a very great attachment to Jansenist doctrines as such. In fact the whole story of her penetration of the doctrines of Port-Royal is rather that of a friendship with the Arnaulds, ripening into an admiration of their heroism, and then gradually, as her mind matured and her need for a strong spiritual conviction grew greater, into a wholehearted, passionate acceptance of their beliefs on Providence and grace.

It is from the year 1674 that critics usually date Madame de Sévigné's complete conversion to Jansenism. In that year she visited Arnauld d'Andilly at Port-Royal-des-Champs, whither he had retired a few months earlier with one of his sons. She spent several hours with the old man, and saw there also her uncle Renaud de Sévigné, and came back fired with enthusiasm for the abbey and its inhabitants:

"Ce Port-Royal est une Thébaïde; c'est le paradis; c'est un désert où toute la dévotion du christianisme s'est rangée; c'est une sainteté répandue dans tout ce pays à une lieue à la ronde. Il y a cinq ou six solitaires qu'on ne connoît point, qui vivent comme les pénitents de saint Jean Climaque.¹ Les religieuses sont des anges

1. Arnauld d'Andilly had published in 1661 l'Echelle sainte ou les degrés pour monter au ciel, composés par saint Jean Climaque, et traduit du grec en françois. The casual reference - there is no other - suggests that Madame de Grignan would also have been familiar with the work. An earlier version published 1654, is by le Maître, nephew of d'Andilly and another "solitaire" of Port-Royal.

sur terre. Mlle de Vertus y acheve sa vie avec une résignation extrême, et des douleurs inconcevables: elle ne sera pas en vie dans un mois. Tout ce qui les sert, jusqu'aux charretiers, aux bergers, aux ouvriers, tout est saint, tout est modeste. Je vous avoue que j'ai été ravie de voir cette divine solitude, dont j'avois tant ouï parler; c'est un wallon affreux, tout propre à faire son salut."¹

The Marquise does not seem to have spoken with the nuns, none of whom were personal acquaintances; nor did she ever, as far as one can discover, repeat her visit to the abbey. But there is no doubt that she was profoundly influenced by what she saw there. Madame de Sévigné had not needed, as had Madame de Longueville and the other benefactresses of Port-Royal, to be converted to Jansenism from a life of intrigue and of the follies of the world. So, too, the steps leading to her conviction are less spectacular than theirs. But it seems certain that from this time we may date her complete adherence to Jansenist doctrines, an adherence which grew ever more enlightened as she read more deeply into the questions raised, and was more and more absorbed by Port-Royal spirituality.

That friendship with the Arnauld family should lead to an easy acceptance of Jansenist principles was natural enough; every member of the family was ardently controversialist, and a constant stream of literature, both polemical and devotional, poured out of Port-Royal during the period of its

1. Lettres, III, 390; 26 Jan. 1674.

existence as a centre of Jansenist activities. Madame de Sévigné's interest is mainly with the devotional side, though she was well aware of the controversies also, and well able, as will be seen later, to distinguish for herself the issues involved. Most people, no doubt, were first made aware of the importance of these questions by the severity of the royal edicts against Jansenism. Madame de Sévigné's first approach to the controversy was probably through the writings of Antoine Arnauld, when there appeared in 1643 the treatise de la Fréquente Communion. There is no direct reference to her having read the book, but her opinions are obviously deeply coloured by its arguments and we find her, in 1680, making a clandestine present of it to the nuns of the Visitation Convent at Nantes.¹ Other works of the Arnauld family followed at regular intervals, many of them presented by the authors themselves. Reference has already been made to d'Andilly's edition of the letters of Saint-Cyran,² and to his translation of the works of St. Jean Climaque.³ Madame de Sévigné had also read his translation of the Jewish historian Josephus,⁴ and it is probable that

1. Lettres, VI, 413; 25 May 1680

2. See p.207.

3. See p.214.

4. Lettres, V, 61; 16 Sept. 1676: Histoire de l'Ancien Testament tire de l'Écriture sainte, a posthumous publication 1675. In fact all d'Andilly's works had been published in that year, Madame de Sévigné no doubt possessed a copy of her own.

her knowledge of Saint Augustine came to her through the translations of Port-Royal, for which various members of the family were jointly responsible.

Another book very much in favour is the Figures de la Sainte Ecriture or the Bible de Royaumont,¹ an abridged and illustrated version of the Bible, anonymously published in 1669:

Le style en est fort beau, et vient de bon lieu: il y a des réflexions des Pères fort bien mêlées. Cette lecture est fort attachante..."²

It was certainly the same influence which led her to read so deeply into the history of the early Church, and even into the writings of the Fathers themselves. Madame de Sévigné's knowledge of the bases of Jansenist doctrine is not secondhand but drawn from their sources - the writings of St. Paul, St. Augustine and their sixth century supporters. Her comments on the Jesuit historian Maimbourg show the Marquise taking a very Jansenist view of the history of the early Church: /²

"J'emploie (mon temps) à courir l'Arianisme: c'est une histoire étonnante; le style et l'auteur même m'en déplaisent beaucoup; mais j'ai un crayon, et je me venge à marquer des traits de jésuite, qui sont trop plaisants, et par l'envie qu'il a de faire des applications des ariens aux jansénistes, et par l'embarras

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1. The book was known under various titles (see bibliography) and attributed to the Jansenist Saci, though in fact written by his secretary Fontaine. See Sainte-Beuve, Port-Royal, Paris, Hachette, 1859, tom III, vol III, p.179.
 2. Lettres, V, 42; 28 Aug. 1676

où il est d'accommoder les conduites de l'Eglise dans les premiers siècles avec celles d'aujourd'hui. Au lieu de passer légèrement là-dessus, il dit que l'Eglise, pour de bonnes raisons, n'en use plus comme elle faisoit; cela réjouit.¹

A return to the primitive usages of Christianity was one of the chief arguments used by the Jansenists in defence of their rigorous moral and religious code. It was the main theme of Arnauld's Traité de la Fréquente Communion that the Jesuits had relaxed this usage, and in general this was the charge most often levelled by the Jansenists against all whose severity fell short of that of Port-Royal. Here again Madame de Sévigné shows that she kept abreast of the controversy with a more than superficial interest, and was able to appreciate, and pass judgement on, the arguments of both sides. Her general reading was serious above the average for one who was primarily a mondaine, though in the best sense of the word; but she never appears immersed in the world of books, nor displays any pedantry in expressing her judgements of them. It is remarkable how much the stamp of Jansenism is on her reading, even in topics far removed from controversy. In 1676, for instance, there figure among her historical readings the Mémoires of a certain M.de Pontis, whose reminiscences remind the Marquise

1. Lettres, VI, 554; 28 July 1680. Maimbourg's Histoire de l'Arrianisme was published 1672. For other works of his mentioned in the letters of Madame de Sévigné see p.145.above.

of her youth under the reign of Louis XIII; the author ended his life as a "solitaire" at Port-Royal, while the interest of the book is heightened for her by the recommendation of the Prince de Condé, a noted patron of the Jansenists.¹ In 1675 she read at Les Rochers the Vie de Saint Thomas de Cantorbéry, by another Jansenist historian Camboust de Pontchâteau.² The Histoire de l'Eglise, mentioned several times in the letters of 1689, is the work of yet another writer of Jansenist sympathies, Antoine Godeau, Bishop of Vence;³ while in 1690 she recommends to Pauline the historical anecdotes of one Varillas,⁴ an indifferent scholar who was for several years a protégé of Pomponne, and an occasional guest at his country house at Bonair. The well-known Vie de Saint-Louis by Filleau de la Chaise

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1. Memoires de Louis de Pontis, 1676. Lettres, V, 18; 12 Aug. 1676
 2. La vie de saint Thomas, archevêque de Cantorbéry et martyr tirée des quatre auteurs contemporains qui l'ont écrite, et des historiens d'Angleterre qui en ont parlé, des lettres du saint, du pape Alexandre III et de plusieurs grands personnages du même temps, et des annales du cardinal Baronius. 1674. Lettres, IV, 256; 1 Dec. 1675.
 3. Godeau: Histoire de l'Eglise, 1653-78. Lettres, IX, 316; 16 Nov. 1689.
 4. Varillas: Anecdotes de Florence ou l'histoire secrète de la maison des Médicis, 1685. Lettres, IX, 409; 11 Jan. 1690. See also Michaut: Biographie Universelle.

holds a special place in Madame de Sévigné's library. The author had already in 1672 composed a preface to one of the Port-Royal editions of the Pensées of Pascal. He seems moreover to have been a personal friend of the Sévigné family:

"..le pauvre la Chaise, qui vous aimoit tant, qui avoit tant d'esprit, qui en avoit tant mis dans la Vie de Saint Louis, est mort à la campagne d'une petite fièvre; M. du Bois en est très-affligé." 1

The material for this preface had been given to Filleau de la Chaise by Tillemont, part-author of an Histoire de Tertullien et d'Origène, a work issuing from Port-Royal which Madame de Sévigné mentions in 1675;² a further proof of the interest in early Church history which she shared with the Jansenists. Le Tourneux was another of her favourite authors to the end of her life. His works of spirituality stood on her "table de dévotion", alongside those of Nicole and the Letters of Saint-Cyran. Attention has already been drawn to the fact that Madame de Sévigné, who was an assiduous reader of devotional books for at least the last twenty-five years of her life, seldom if ever chose any but Jansenist writers. This becomes more striking when one considers the

1. Lettres, VIII, 225; 25 Oct. 1688. For M. du Bois see below p. 243.

2. The other contributors were le Tourneux and du Fossé; the latter publishing the work in 1675, under a pseudonym. Lettres, IV, 137; 17 Sept. 1675.

widespread development of different schools of spirituality in France at the time.¹ Bérulle and the Oratorians, the Jesuits, M.Olier, had each sought to popularise particular methods of prayer, and a keen and vital interest in these various interpretations of the spiritual life is one of the chief features of the religious revival in seventeenth century France. Madame de Sévigné had long been linked, by education and by family ties, to the Visitation Order and Saint Francois de Sales. Yet for all her veneration for her grandmother Jeanne de Chantal, there is no evidence that she ever came under the influence of their writings; though her cousin Bussy once suggested them to her as an alternative to Jansenist scrupulosity, of which he did not approve:

"..je sais à quel point de perfection vous aspirez, et qu'outre qu'il ne vous est pas possible d'y atteindre en votre condition, c'est que je le crois même inutile. Sauvons-nous avec notre bon parent saint Francois de Sales: il conduit les gens en paradis par de plus beaux chemins que Messieurs du Port-Royal."

Since, however, these spiritual counsels were preceded by the advice: "Vivons bien et nous réjouissons..." it is perhaps not surprising that Madame de Sévigné should have rejected them; nor is this necessarily an indication of her true opinion on the works of the bishop of Geneva:

1. Cf. H. Brémond, Histoire Littéraire du sentiment religieux en France, Paris 1916 - 36; P. Pourrat, La Spiritualité chrétienne Paris, 1918 - 28, particularly Vol IV; Du Jansénisme à nos jours.

"Je ne suivrai que trop vos conseils dans la noble confiance que vous trouvez qu'il faut avoir pour son salut: je crains même que vous ne m'appreniez cette prière fervente que vous faites les matins, et qui vous donne sujet de ~~ne~~ plus penser à Dieu tout le reste de la journée; car il faut dire le vrai, cela est fort commode; mais aussi c'est bien tout ce que nous pourrons faire que d'aller par ce chemin-là jusqu'en paradis; assurément nous n'irons pas plus haut. C'est l'avis de la Provençale."¹

It is true that Madame de Sévigné had in one respect met with very varied schools of spirituality, and that was in her contact, either personal or by reading, with the great preachers of the day: Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Mascaron, Fléchier. Into this appreciation, however, there necessarily enters an aesthetic element, particularly in the seventeenth century where the art of rhetoric was at its height in the Church;^{so} that the most Jansenist tendencies would be no obstacle to her admiration of the Jesuit Bourdaloue.

Even in literary questions, in fact, Madame de Sévigné to a certain extent kept her Jansenist affiliations. An example of this may be her preference for P. René le Bossu, "janséniste, c'est à dire cartésien en perfection", whose Traité du poème épique Corbinelli ranked even higher than that of Boileau.² Boileau himself, of course, as Madame de Sévigné knew, had links with Jansenism, and it is to her we owe the well-known account of his arguments with a Jesuit

1. i.e. Madame de Grignan. Lettres, V, 160, 163; 14 & 19 May 1677
2. Lettres, V, 87; 2 Oct. 1676.

father on the merits of Pascal's style:

"A propos de Corbinelli, il m'écrivit l'autre jour un fort joli billet; il me rendoit compte d'une conversation et d'un dîner chez M. de Lamoignon: les acteurs étoient les maîtres du logis, M. de Troyes, M. de Toulon, le P. Bourdaloue, son compagnon, Despréaux et Corbinelli. On parla des ouvrages des anciens et des modernes; Despréaux soutint les anciens, à la réserve d'un seul moderne, qui surpassoit à son gout et les vieux et les nouveaux. Le compagnon du P. Bourdaloue qui faisoit l'entendu, et qui s'étoit attaché à Despréaux et à Corbinelli, lui demanda quel étoit donc ce livre si distingué dans son esprit? Il ne voulut pas le nommer, Corbinelli lui dit: "Monsieur, je vous conjure de me le dire, afin que je le lise toute la nuit." Despréaux lui répondit en riant: "Ah, Monsieur, vous l'avez lu plus d'une fois, j'en suis assuré." Le jésuite reprend, et presse Despréaux de nommer cet auteur si merveilleux, avec un air dédaigneux, un cotal riso amaro. Despréaux lui dit: "Mon Père, ne me pressez point." Le Père continue, Enfin Despréaux le prend par le bras, et le serrant bien fort lui dit: "Mon Père, vous le voulez: eh bien! c'est Pascal, morbleu!" - Pascal, dit le Père, tout rouge, tout étonné, Pascal est beau, autant que le faux peut l'être. - Le faux, dit Despréaux, le faux! sachez qu'il est aussi vrai qu'il est inimitable; on vient de le traduire en trois langues." Le Père répond: "Il n'en est pas plus vrai." Despréaux s'échauffe, et crie comme un fou: "Quoi? mon Père, direz vous qu'un des vôtres n'ait pas fait imprimer dans un de ses livres qu'un chrétien n'est pas obligé d'aimer Dieu? Osez-vous dire que cela est faux? - Monsieur, dit le Père en fureur, il faut distinguer. - Distinguer, dit Despréaux, distinguer, morbleu! distinguer, distinguer si nous sommes obligés d'aimer Dieu!" et prenant Corbinelli par le bras, s'enfuit au bout de la chambre; puis revenant, et courant comme un forcené, il ne voulut jamais se rapprocher du Père, s'en alla rejoindre la compagnie, qui étoit demeurée dans la salle où l'on mange: ici finit l'histoire, le rideau tombe..." 1

Madame de Sévigné no doubt knew of Boileau's previous disputes on this subject of the love of God as understood by

1. Lettres, IX, 415; 15 Jan. 1690.

the Jesuits, a subject which was later to inspire his well-known Epître XII, addressed to the abbé Renaudot. Her acquaintance with Boileau, however, had developed rather through their meetings at the home of Gourville, than through any common interest in Jansenism; and one must of course beware of supposing that her intellectual life was entirely bounded by the tastes and tenets of Port-Royal. That she was equally capable of appreciating the works of its opponents is shown by her good friendship with the Père Rapin, S.J., one of the most merciless biographers of Jansenism:

"Je vis l'autre jour le bon Père Rapin; je l'aime; il me paroît un bon homme et un bon religieux; il a fait un discours sur l'histoire et sur la manière de l'écrire qui m'a paru admirable. Le P. Bouhours étoit avec lui; l'esprit lui sort de tous cotés. Je fus bien aise de les voir tous deux..." 1

Yet the number of Madame de Sévigné's connections with Jansenist writers is too great to be purely coincidental. Jansenism in the seventeenth century had its literary as well as its controversial side. For her at least there was such a thing as a Jansenist style, and within the field selected for their activities the writers of Port-Royal did enjoy a considerable literary reputation with the reading public of the period.

1. Lettres, V, 531; 29 May 1679; the work to which she refers is the P. Rapin's Instructions pour l'histoire, publ. 1677.

One of these activities which Madame de Sévigné much appreciated was that of controversy with the Calvinists. There is no doubt that the religion of Port-Royal did present a certain similarity of doctrine with Calvinism, in that both insisted particularly on the predestination of the elect, and preached a religion of fear rather than of mercy. One of the accusations most frequently levelled at the Jansenists was that of sharing the heresies of the Reformed Church. It was desire to clear themselves of this charge that had led Arnauld and Nicole to enter so often into public argument with Calvinist ministers on theological questions. Nicole's Préjugés légitimes contre les calvinistes, published in 1671, is much admired by Madame de Sévigné,¹ and in general she shows great interest in the question of the reformed religion, reading and criticising the arguments of both sides:

"Nous lisons des livres de ministres: il y en a un qui répond aux Préjugés, où je voudrais que M. Arnauld eût répondu; mais je crois qu'on lui a défendu, et l'on aime mieux laisser sans réponse un livre qui fait tort à la religion, que d'en voir un qui peut justifier pleinement les jansénistes contre les traits fort

1. Lettres, VII, 75; 15 Sept. 1680.

pressants que ce ministre leur donne..."¹

An answer was in fact published, though she does not refer to it until several years later. This was the Perpétuité de la Foi, which appeared under the name of Arnauld in three parts, 1669, 1672 and 1676. The true author, however, was Nicole, who, according to Sainte-Beuve, refused as a cleric in minor orders to put his name to a work of theology.²

Madame de Sevigne again speaks of it with great admiration:

"Nous lûmes hier le onzième livre du premier tome de la Perpétuité de la Foi de M. Arnauld. Il répond à quelques injures et accusations du ministre Claude: bon Dieu! quelle justesse de raisonnement! quelle harmonie! comme cela étrangle son homme à tout moment!..."³

The Marquise had already read the de Schismatico Anglicano published by Saunders in 1585 and translated by Maucroix,⁴

1. Lettres, VII, 85; 22 Sept. 1680. The "livres des ministres" refers to the Défense de la Réformation by the Protestant minister Jean Claude, see bibliog. With regard to Nicole's book, it is interesting to note the very similar comment of another Jansenist at the time, though this refers not to the Préjugés but to the first part of the Perpétuité de la foi: Il faut croire que Dieu ne permettra pas que les mauvais desirs des jésuites et de leurs amis empêchent la publication de ce livre; ils craignent qu'il ne donne trop de réputation aux auteurs, et qu'il ne leur soit trop honteux de persécuter des gens qui travaillent avec tant de fruit pour la défense de l'Eglise." Lettre de Cambout de Pontchâteau, 1668, cited by Sainte-Beuve, Port-Royal, tom IV, vol. V, p.334.
2. Port-Royal, tom IV, vol. V, p.335.
3. Lettres, IX, 430; 25 Jan. 1690.
4. Le schisme d'Angleterre, Paris, 1676. Lettres, V, 61; 16 Sept. 1676.

and in 1684 was to read the refutation of this book also: the Réformation d'Angleterre by the famous Protestant historian Gilbert Burnet, ¹ recommended to her by one of her friends. In 1687 she very frequently mentions the Vérité de la Religion Chrétienne by a Protestant theologian Jacques Abbadie, ² a book which acquired a great popularity among the cultured public of the period, and of which she writes:

"Je crois que si ce livre m'avait donné autant d'amour de Dieu qu'il m'a fortement persuadée de la vérité de ma religion, je serois une vraie sainte; mais c'est toujours une grande avance et une grande obligation que nous avons à cet homme-là, de nous avoir ôté nos misérables doutes, et d'avoir si fortement répondu à mille objections qui paroissoient fortes; mais après lui tout est aplani...On est tout persuadé et tout instruit de la vérité et de la sainteté d'une religion qu'on n'avoit jamais considérée que superficiellement..."³

At a later date she declares that with Abbadie, Pascal and Godeau's Histoire de l'Eglise "on serait toute prête à souffrir le martyre"⁴ Some years after, towards the end of her life, Madame de Sévigné read and found enjoyable the works of a converted huguenot, M.de Bruys, author in 1685-7 of a detailed refutation of the doctrines he had abjured.⁵

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1. Translated by Rosemond, 1683-85. Lettres, VII, 297; 4 Oct. 1684.
 2. Traité de la Vérité de la Religion chrétienne, 1684.
 3. Lettres, VIII, 176; 26 Aug. 1688.
 4. Lettres, IX, 316; 16 Nov. 1689.
 5. Lettres, IX, 498; 23 April 1690. Bruys had published in 1685 a Défense de culte extérieur de l'Eglise catholique, followed in 1686 by Réponse aux plaintes des protestants and Traité de l'Eucharistie and in 1687 by a Traité de l'Eglise ou l'on montre que les principes des calvinistes se contredisent.

She had, as a matter of fact, had a certain personal experience of Protestantism through her friendship with the Princesse de Tarente, aunt of the Princesse Palatine, duchess of Orléans. Once at least she had come into close contact with Protestant forms of worship, and that owing to a very curious arrangement which subsisted in the seventeenth century in her own parish church at Vitré. Here, in consequence of the destruction of the Protestant temple in 1671, the village church was shared by faithful of both denominations, a large screen having been erected to divide the nave from the choir; Madame de Sévigné describes how on Christmas day 1675 she went with the Princesse to their joint place of worship:

"La bonne princesse alla à son prêché; je les entendois tous qui chantoient des oreilles, car je n'ai jamais entendu des tons comme ceux-là; je sentis un plaisir sensible d'aller à la messe; il y avait longtemps que je n'avais senti de la joie d'être catholique. Je dinaï avec le ministre; mon fils disputa comme un démon. J'allai à vêpres pour le contrecarrer; enfin je compris la sainte opiniâtreté du martyr." 1

But in spite of the tolerant attitude of mind which this letter portrays, Madame de Sévigné's reaction to the actual suppression of heresy was no different from that of any Frenchwoman of the period. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 called forth this comment in one of her letters:

"Bourdaloue s'en va, par ordre du Roi, prêcher à Montpellier, et dans ces provinces où tant de gens se sont

1. Lettres, IV, 296; Christmas Day 1675.

convertis sans savoir pourquoi. Le P. Bourdaloue de leur apprendra, et en fera de bons catholiques. Les dragons ont été de très-bons missionnaires jusqu'ici; les prédicateurs qu'on envoie présentement rendront l'ouvrage parfait. /e

Vous aurez vu, sans doute, l'édit par lequel le Roi révoque celui de Nantes. Rien n'est si beau que tout ce qu'il contient, et, jamais aucun roi n'a fait et ne fera rien de plus mémorable." 1

Critics have deplored this attitude of Madame de Sévigné, forgetting that what now seems to historians an arbitrary act of dictatorship was to the men and women of the time the natural expression of the zeal and piety of the King. The Marquise's reaction on this occasion is of a piece with her attitude to the pillaging of Brittany by the King's troops in the riots of 1675. The cruelty of man towards man move / to bitterness a philosopher like La Bruyère of a later generation; but in general tolerance was not a feature of the age.

An example of this among the writings of Port-Royal itself are the Lettres Provinciales of Pascal. Through the pages of Madame de Sévigné's letters emerges the fact that even some of Pascal's contemporaries found his controversial methods too violent: her friend Brancas, for instance, declared to Corbinelli that there was little charity in them, and that they made a mockery of religion.²

1. Lettres, VII, 470; 28 Oct. 1685.

2. Lettres, V, 259; 6 Aug. 1677.

But this was no doubt an unusual criticism at the time for one not actively engaged in the controversy, and in Madame de Sévigné at least the Petites Lettres aroused only an unbounded admiration. From first to last in her letters we find multiple references to the beauty of Pascal's style and to his influence on all the literary productions of Port-Royal: "Personne n'a écrit sur ce ton que ces Messieurs, car je mets Pascal de moitié à tout ce qui est de beau".¹ The Provinciales in particular were greeted with enthusiasm and read and re-read by Madame de Sévigné and her son.² Reference has already been made to the fact that the first Lettres were distributed from the Hôtel de Nevers, which the Marquise had frequented in her early married life.³ It is very probable that she had there heard the author read them, as a member of the Jansenist audience gathered round Madame du Plessis-Guénégaud. It seems clear from her frequent references to his health and physical appearance that Madame de Sévigné had personally known Pascal during his life.⁴ It was his style that

1. Lettres, II, 369; 23 Sept. 1671.

2. Lettres, V, 227; July 1677. Other references occur in 1680 and 1689. See bibliog.

3. See above p. 70.

4. Lettres, II, 324; 16 Aug. 1671; IX, 30-31; 24 April 1689 etc.

chiefly attracted her. She refers to Boileau's opinion of him in the Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes,¹ and the highest praise she can give to any Port-Royal writings is that they are "de la même étoffe que Pascal."² Expressions drawn from the Provinciales recur under her pen, usually used in the same ironic sense that Pascal himself used them. In reference, for instance, to the diverse opinions of her doctors on the treatment she should follow: "On a bien raison de dire qu'il y a des auteurs graves pour appuyer toutes les opinions probables";³ and in speaking of her plans to stay at Les Rochers, instead of returning to Paris in the spring of 1690: "Laissons mûrir ce dessein...comme une opinion probable dans Pascal."⁴ We know that Madame de Grignan must have been as familiar as her mother with the works of Pascal, though she evidently appreciated them less.

1. See p.223

2. Lettres, II, 225; 23 May 1671.

3. Lettres, V, 39; 26 Aug. 1676.

4. Lettres, IX, 495; 23 April 1690. The reference is to a passage in the 6ème Provinciale where the Jesuit describes progressive acceptance of a new opinion: "D'abord le docteur grave qui l'a inventée l'expose au monde, et la jette comme une semence pour prendre racine. Elle est encore faible en cet état mais il faut que le temps la mûrisse peu à peu; et c'est pourquoi Diana, qui en a introduit plusieurs, dit en un endroit: J'avance cette opinion, mais parce qu'elle est nouvelle, je la laisse mûrir au temps..."

The Marquise in one instance reproaches her with lack of enthusiasm, and takes occasion to praise Pascal in more unmeasured terms than she had yet used:

"Quelquefois pour nous divertir, nous lisons les Petites Lettres: bon Dieu, quel charme! et comme mon fils les lit! Je songe toujours à ma fille, et combien cet excès de justesse et de raisonnement serait digne d'elle; mais votre frère dit que vous trouvez que c'est toujours la même chose: ah, mon Dieu! tant mieux; peut-on avoir un style plus parfait, une raillerie plus fine, plus naturelle, plus délicate, plus digne fille de ces dialogues de Platon qui sont si beaux? Mais après les dix premières lettres quel sérieux, quelle solidité, quelle force, quelle éloquence, quel amour pour Dieu et pour la vérité, quelle manière de la soutenir et de la faire entendre ne trouve-t-on point dans les huit dernières lettres, qui sont sur un ton tout différent! Je suis assurée que vous ne les avez jamais lues qu'en courant, grappillant les endroits plaisants; mais ce n'est point cela quand on les lit à loisir." 1

One may note that thirty years after their advent the Lettres Provinciales, for Madame de Sévigné at least, had lost none of their first charm; and one must note too, the accuracy of her analysis and her sensitiveness to the variations of style which are a most attractive feature of Pascal's method. There is this difference, on which she remarks, between the early and later letters. The ironic tone which is the essential weapon of the first series, and which can in truth be compared to Plato's Socratic dialogues,² gives place to the indignant eloquence of one sincerely

1. Lettres, IX, 367; 21 December 1689.

2. Cf. Sainte-Beuve, Port-Royal tom III, vol III p.47 and Paul Courier whom he quotes as sharing the opinion of Madame de Sévigné.

fighting for the truth. The provincial gentleman to whom the letters were addressed disappears from the scene, and henceforth Pascal's vehement arguments are directed at the Jesuits alone: as Madame de Sévigné says: "le ton est tout différent."

Of Pascal's personal philosophy as reflected in the Pensées and in his letters there is less mention in the correspondence of Madame de Sévigné. It is unfortunate that the early editions of Pascal - the ones accessible to the Marquise - should have so attenuated his thought. We should like to know what impact the full discovery of it would have made on a mind which had, in a sense, so many affinities with his own. For Madame de Sévigné, as for Pascal, conversion to Jansenism had been a slow process, involving a certain period of scepticism before it emerged into the full conviction of Augustinian faith. In both one finds an exceptional clarity of mind, that power of objective thought which is the hall-mark of seventeenth century classicism. Both were widely read in philosophy; yet both with equal force rejected rationalism as an uncertain criterion in matters of religion, and drew their convictions from the strength of their interior faith. "Dieu sensible au coeur, voilà votre bienheureux état," writes Madame de Sévigné in 1692,¹

1. Lettres, X, 84; 29 Oct. 1692, to Madame de Guitant.

echoing the words of Pascal's thought:

"C'est le coeur qui sent Dieu et non la raison. Voilà ce que c'est que la foi, Dieu sensible au coeur, non à la raison." 1

Her infrequent references to the Pensées yet have this in common, that they emphasise above all Pascal's sentiment of the wretchedness of man. There is an echo of Pascal, for instance, in her description of the death of her uncle Charles de Saint-Aubin:

"...enfin on le jette dans cette fosse profonde, où on l'entend descendre, et le voilà pour jamais..." 2

One feels that she appreciated also in Pascal the artist, the poetry of his deep emotional sense of the infinity of God and the smallness of man.

Yet there are other qualities which we should expect Madame de Sévigné to admire in Pascal, and which find little mention: his psychological intuition, for instance, and the clarity with which he expresses his analyses of the human heart. For these qualities she turns mainly to the writings of Nicole. It seems probable that the works of Nicole, as one of Port-Royal's foremost writers, were far more popular

1. Pascal, Oeuvres, ed. Strowsky, 1831, vol III, 47.
 2. Lettres, VIII, 274; 19 Nov. 1688. C.f. Pascal, Oeuvres, III, 13: "Le dernier acte est sanglant, quelque belle que soit la comédie en tout le reste: on jette enfin de la terre sur la tête et en voilà pour jamais." /n

in the seventeenth century than French critics have been willing to admit. The qualities so admired in him by Madame de Sévigné - his eloquence, perspicacity and precision of style - no longer appear self-evident, while his wordiness repels the modern reader; even a contemporary critic, writing, it is true, before the Provinciales, once said that a Port-Royal writer did not know the meaning of a brief, incisive phrase.¹ Yet the fact that widely-read and cultured women like Madame de Sévigné and her daughter could praise Nicole in such unqualified terms goes far to support the contention of a modern critic that: "He as much as Pascal or Arnauld was chiefly responsible for the enthusiasm felt by the intelligentsia of his own day for the wit and eloquence of the Port-Royal authors."² It is certain that no biographer of Nicole could afford to neglect the testimony of Madame de Sévigné: she spoke of him more frequently in her letters than of any other Port-Royal writer; The Essais de Morale she first read soon after their publication in the summer of 1671, and at once begins to discuss them with her daughter. One phrase in particular has displeased them both: "L'orgueil est une enflure du coeur par laquelle

1. Père Vavassor, quoted Sainte-Beuve, Port-Royal, tom II vol. III, 547-9.

2. Abercrombie, N.: The Origins of Jansenism, Oxford 1936, p.276

l'homme s'étend et se grossit en quelque sorte en lui-même."

On considers, however, Madame de Sévigné accepts the expression and even praises it as the most apt metaphor for the circumstances.¹ Her praise thereafter knows no bounds:

"...pour le reste, ne vous avais-je pas dit que c'était de la même étoffe que Pascal? Mais cette étoffe est si belle qu'elle me plaît toujours, Jamais le coeur humain n'a mieux été anatomisé que par ces Messieurs -là..." 2

"Je poursuis cette morale de Nicole que je trouve délicieuse; elle ne m'a encore donné aucune leçon contre la pluie, mais j'en attends, car j'y trouve tout; et la conformité à la volonté de Dieu me pourroit suffire, si je ne voulais un remède spécifique..." 3

"Je lis M. Nicole avec un plaisir qui m'enlève, surtout je suis charmée du troisième traité des Moyens de conserver la paix avec les hommes; lisez-le, je vous prie, avec attention, et voyez comme il fait voir nettement le coeur humain, et comme chacun s'y trouve, et philosophes, et Jansénistes et Molinistes, et tout le monde enfin. Ce qui s'appelle chercher dans le fond du coeur avec une lanterne, c'est ce qu'il fait: il nous découvre ce que nous sentons tous les jours, et que nous n'avons pas l'esprit de démêler, ou la sincérité d'avouer; en un mot je n'ai jamais vu écrire comme ces Messieurs-là." 4

Few of Madame de Sévigné's contemporaries, it is true, have lavished such praise on Nicole, though Bossuet, Boileau and Racine⁵ all speak of him with consideration, and Fléchier

1. Lettres, II, 369; 23 Sept. 1671.

2. Lettres, II, 329; 19 Aug. 1671.

3. Lettres, II, 369; 23 Sept. 1671.

4. Lettres, II, 376; 30 Sept. 1671.

5. Cf. Bossuet, Correspondance, ed. Urbain et Lévesque, (Les grands Ecrivains de la France) vol. IV, 372; XII, 276, 277, 298. Racine, Oeuvres, VI, 567, 584, 598.

was glad to have Nicole's opinion on his own great work, the Vie de l'empereur Théodose. Their testimonies have in common a great respect for Nicole's own personality, and whatever may be the modern verdict on his style, there is no doubting his integrity nor the moral worth of his writings. Madame de Sévigné shows discrimination, at any rate, in reserving her highest praise for his Moyens de Conserver la paix avec les hommes, which is still judged to be the best of the Essais de Morale. She continued to read them assiduously as they came from the press, and to praise Nicole's analysis of the human heart, which taught her to understand her own reactions and sentiments:

"...il faut faire des actes de résignation à l'ordre et à la volonté de Dieu. M.Nicole n'est-il pas encore admirable là-dessus? J'en suis charmée, je n'ai rien vu de pareil. Il est vrai que c'est une perfection un peu au-dessus de l'humanité, que l'indifférence qu'il veut de nous pour l'estime ou l'improbation du monde: je suis moins capable que personne de la comprendre; mais quoi que dans l'exécution on se trouve faible, c'est pourtant un plaisir que de méditer avec lui, et de faire réflexion sur la vanité de la joie ou de la tristesse que nous recevons d'une telle fumée; et à force de trouver ses raisonnements vrais, il ne serait pas impossible qu'on s'en pût servir dans certaines occasions. En un mot, c'est toujours un trésor, quoi que nous en puissions faire, d'avoir un si bon miroir des faiblesses de notre coeur." 1

And in another letter three days later:

"Parlons un peu de M.Nicole: il y a longtemps que nous n'en avons rien dit... Devinez ce que je fais: je

1. Lettres, II, 403; 1 Nov. 1671.

recommence ce traité; je voudrais bien en faire un bouillon et l'avaler...Il dit que l'éloquence et la facilité de parler donnent un certain éclat aux pensées: cette expression m'a paru belle et nouvelle; le mot d'éclat est bien placé, ne le trouvez-vous pas?.." 1

Elsewhere she comments again on the language and adds:

"...on croit n'avoir lu de français que ce livre"... 2

One suspects, in this extravagant praise, that Madame de Sévigné is partly swayed by the appreciation of her daughter, and also perhaps that her personal interest in the topic has outrun her cooler judgement on the author's style. Elsewhere she finds an allusion to herself in the "moi" de M. Nicole, a curious expression foreshadowing the Romantic use of the word two centuries later:

"On ne peut pas vous parler plus à bride abattue que je viens de faire de tout mon moi, comme dit M.Nicole.." 3

Nicole's "instruction solide" 4 impressed the Marquise as much as his power of analysis; only in one respect did she fail to follow his teaching: when with a true Jansenist's outlook he disparages human affections and preaches that "circoncision du coeur" which she found in his Réflexions morales:

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1. Lettres, II, 407-8; 4 Nov. 1671.
 2. Lettres, IV, 332; 12 Jan. 1676.
 3. Lettres, X, 32; 12 July 1691. Cf. X, 45; 26 July 1691.
 4. Lettres, X, 106; 10 Mar. 1693.

"...ma chère enfant, je ne vous dit pas que vous êtes mon bût, ma perspective; vous le savez bien, et que vous êtes d'une manière dans mon coeur, que je craindrais fort que M. Nicole ne trouvât beaucoup à y circoncrire..."^{s/} 1

In certain respects Nicole was not a true Jansenist. His beliefs on grace, for instance, fall far short of the intransigence of Port-Royal; towards the end of his life there were divergences between him and the other leading figures of Jansenism. In respect of his teaching on the sovereign will of God, however, Nicole displays nothing but the most orthodox Jansenism. The dogma of Providence, on which he insists so frequently that it is an essential feature of his philosophy, was one well calculated to find an echo in Madame de Sévigné's own convictions. His teaching in this respect affected her profoundly; it was part of a religious experience which seems to have come upon her in middle life, leaving her, after a period of trial and sorrow, wedded yet more inseparably to Jansenism.

It was in 1680 that Madame de Sévigné read the greatest number of Jansenist works. She was then in her early fifties. Her normally robust health had been badly shaken by illness some years before, and though now fully restored she seems to have emerged from the experience with a deepened consciousness of man's mortality and the transience of earthly joy.

1. Lettres, IX, 411; 15 Jan. 1690.

There are some very complex remarks in this period on the dangers of too great a security in which sorrow may come upon one unawares:

"Les réflexions que vous faites sur le mécompte éternel de nos projets sont fort raisonnables; pour moi, c'est ma plus ordinaire méditation, et à tel point que je me console des inquiétudes qui viennent brouiller la joie de vous voir bientôt à Paris, par la crainte que j'aurais de quelque accident imprévu, si cette joie était toute pure et toute brillante: je me la laisse donc obscurcir, comme vous disiez l'autre jour, afin qu'à la faveur de quelques tribulations, je puisse en approcher avec plus de sûreté..." 1

At this time very old friends - Foucquet, La Rochefoucauld - were taken from her by death, and her letters take on an unwonted note of gravity. To her ever-present fears for the well-being of her daughter were also added anxiety for her ^{was} son Charles, whose irresponsibility and dissatisfaction with life were a constant source of irritation. Even social life weighed on her, and her letters reflect a real need of a period of solitude and quiet thought. She spent the greater part of the year - from May to October - at Les Rochers, in the company of Charles who was suffering the ill-health brought on by his vagaries, and it was in this sober frame of mind that Madame de Sévigné began, with Nicole's Traité de la soumission à la volonté de Dieu, her most protracted study of Jansenist doctrine.

1. Lettres, VII, 98; 6 Oct. 1680.

It would be interesting to be able to trace a progression in Madame de Sévigné's acceptance of Jansenism, a gradual conversion of her mind to its beliefs. In her case, however, as has been noted elsewhere, it is impossible to speak of a conversion; never at any period of her life was she involved in intrigue or estranged from religious belief. There is, of course, a progression in her knowledge of the Jansenist party, as a party, and a period in which her sympathies were not yet wholly engaged in its cause. But in the matter of doctrinal belief one may say that with Madame de Sévigné to understand was to accept, so that the problem was not one of conversion but rather of her deepening grasp of the doctrines of predestination and grace. Her reaction to Nicole, for instance was one of spontaneous enthusiasm almost from the first. Nicole, however, left to himself, was a moral philosopher, and could hardly be called a theologian of Port-Royal. His doctrines in any case show variations on orthodox Jansenism; the true exposition of Jansenist teaching Madame de Sévigné, in this summer of 1680, drew from their source in the writings of Saint Augustine.

The importance of Augustine's writings as the basis of Jansenist doctrine is well known. Indeed, the rehabilitation of Augustine as the primary authority in the Church on matters of grace was the motive which first impelled Jansenius

to write his treatise. It was this over-emphasis, together with an insufficient knowledge of the Pelagian controversy which was the occasion of most of Augustine's teaching, that led him into error. For the needs of the time had led the great Doctor to emphasise certain aspects of the problems of predestination and free-will which the subsequent teaching of the Church had restored to their correct place in the scheme of Christian doctrine. For the Jansenists, however, all authority save that of Augustine was to be disregarded, and thence arose that perhaps unconsciously distorted version of his teaching which earned them the condemnation of the Church. The controversy had, of course, greatly popularised the works of Augustine among educated laymen, and Madame de Sévigné had as usual kept herself well informed of the arguments. She is a true Jansenist, too, in thinking that a great part of the conflict was due to the ill-will of the Jesuits in refusing to acknowledge the truly Augustinian character of the doctrine of Port-Royal.

Madame de Sévigné first read Saint Augustine in the autumn of 1676, in a translation by Jean Ségui which had appeared a few months before. This work combined two books of St. Augustine, the Livres de la Prédestination des saints et du don de la Persévérance. Almost immediately her reactions are enthusiastic:

"Nous lisons saint Augustin, et nous sommes convertis sur la prédestination et sur la persévérance..." 1

A post-script from Charles in the same letter, however, suggests that he, at any rate, was not yet fully converted, and since it was their habit to discuss and comment on their readings together, we may perhaps include Madame de Sévigné in the doubts expressed:

"Il s'en faut encore quelque chose que nous ne soyons convertis: c'est que nous trouvons les raisons des semi-pélagiens fort bonnes, et celles de saint Paul et de saint Augustin fort subtiles, et dignes de l'abbé Têtu. Nous serions fort contents de la religion, si ces deux saints n'avoient jamais écrit: nous avons toujours ce petit embarras..." 2

Another reference at about this time shows how the translation had made the works of Augustine popular in Paris:

"Nous lisons toujours saint Augustin avec transport: il y a quelque chose de si grand et de si noble dans ses pensées, que tout le mal qui peut arriver de sa doctrine aux esprits mal faits est bien moindre que le

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1. Lettres, V, 126; 30 Oct. 1676. Madame de Sévigné refers to the work under various slightly different titles. The correct version is: Les deux livres de saint Augustin de la Prédestination des saints et du don de la Persévérance, avec les lettres 105, 106 et 107 de ce saint Docteur, Paris, Desprez, in - 12, 1676. (The translation was for a time attributed to another Jansenist author, M. du Bois, who was a friend of the Marquise.) See [unclear] p. [unclear].)
 2. Lettres, V, 126; 30 Oct. 1676.
 3. Lettres, V, 128; 4 Nov. 1676.

bien que les autres en retirent. Vous croyez que je fais l'entendue; mais quand vous verrez comme cela s'est familiarisé, vous ne serez pas étonnée de ma capacité..."¹

In 1680 Madame de Sevigne refers again to the problem of human freedom, and to a phrase drawn from the treatise de Gratia et Libero Arbitrio which she confesses herself unable to understand:

"Je n'ai rien à vous répondre sur ce que dit saint Augustin, sinon que je l'écoute et je l'entends, quand il me dit et me répète cinq cents fois dans un même livre que tout dépend donc, comme dit l'apôtre, "non de celui qui veut, ni de celui qui court, mais de Dieu qui fait miséricorde à qui il lui plaît; que ce n'est point en considération d'aucun mérite que Dieu donne sa grâce aux hommes, mais selon son bon plaisir, afin que l'homme ne se glorifie point, puisqu'il n'a rien qu'il n'ait reçu." Et tout un livre sur ce ton, plein des passages de la Sainte Ecriture, de saint Paul, des oraisons de l'Eglise... Quand je lis tout ce livre, et que je trouve tout d'un coup: Comment Dieu jugerait-il les hommes, si les hommes n'avaient point de libre arbitre? en vérité je n'entends point cet endroit, et je suis toute disposée à en faire un mystère..."

It is interesting to note that this passage follows immediately on that in which Madame de Sévigné describes the conversion of Madame de la Sablière in such augustinian language:

"Madame de la Sablière est dans ses Incurables, fort bien guérie d'un mal que l'on croit incurable depuis quelque temps, et dont la guérison réjouit plus que nulle autre. Elle est dans ce bienheureux état; elle est dévote et vraiment dévote; elle fait un bon usage

1. Lettres, V, 128; 4 Nov. 1676.

de son libre arbitre; mais n'est-ce pas Dieu qui le lui fait faire? n'est-ce pas Dieu qui la fait vouloir? n'est-ce pas Dieu qui l'a délivrée de l'empire du démon? n'est-ce pas Dieu qui a tourné son coeur? n'est-ce pas Dieu qui la fait marcher et la soutient? n'est-ce pas Dieu qui lui donne la vue et le désir d'être à lui? c'est cela qui est couronné; c'est Dieu qui couronne ses dons. Si c'est là ce que vous appelez le libre arbitre, ah! je le veux bien..." 1

One cannot fail to note that Madame de Sévigné has here touched upon the very crux of the Jansenist problem. According to Jansenius' interpretation, Saint Augustine had taught and emphasised the fact that the grace of God is irresistible to man in a way that inevitably destroys the notion of freedom. This is the doctrine which was condemned in the 4th of the Extrait de quelques propositions in 1643. It is still more trenchantly expressed in the propositions of Cornet, presented for condemnation in 1653: "Interiori gratiae in statu naturae lapsae nunquam resistitur".² The problem, for those theologians who accepted Augustine as the only infallible teacher on grace, lay in deciding whether in fact, according to his doctrine, man under the impulse of grace were still a free agent, and secondly, whether the recipient of grace were free to sin. Madame de Sévigné has grasped the essentials of the Augustinian doctrine, based on

1. Lettres, VI, 475-76; 21 June 1680.

2. Cf. Abercrombie, N.: The Origins of Jansenism, (Appendix.)

the texts from St. Paul which she quotes, that grace is purely gratuitous, wholly unmerited by man. She understands also the paradox by which Augustine represents the grace of God as being despite its irresistible character, a liberation: a liberation, that is, from the bondage of sin, and the forces of concupiscence that prevent him from choosing the good. She accepts even the mysterious predestination of the elect, and having done so is brought up short by the apparent contradiction: how reconcile these doctrines with man's responsibility and freedom? It was at this point that the Jansenists, by rigidly insisting on their own interpretations of the terms "grace efficace" and "servitude du péché" had put themselves outside the Church in a matter where she had, until that time, allowed a certain latitude of thought. Madame de Sévigné finds the problem beyond her - and indeed it was and is still the most perplexing of all the much-discussed questions of grace. She declares herself, however, ready to submit her mind and heart (though to what is not clear: whether to the Jansenist tenets in blind faith, or to the Jesuits who claim to represent the mind of the Church.) It remains true that, as she says, the issue of this particular controversy in no way affects the truth of man's complete dependance on God:

"...comme ce libre arbitre ne peut pas mettre notre salut en notre pouvoir, et qu'il faut toujours dépendre de Dieu, je ne cherche pas à être éclaircie davantage sur ce point, et je veux me tenir, si je puis, dans l'humilité et la dépendance..." 1

Following on this comes the account of an argument between Madame de Sévigné and a huguenot lady on the subject of infant baptism, using in her defence the very words used by Saint Augustine to describe the fallen human race:

"Nous avons ici une petite huguenote qui dit que les enfants morts sans baptême vont tout droit en paradis sur la foi de leurs pères. Ah! Mademoiselle, vous vous moquez de moi: comment voulez-vous qu'un enfant d'Adam qu'une partie de cette masse corrompue, (2) voie et connaisse Dieu? Il ne faut donc point de rédempteur, si l'on peut aller au ciel sans lui: voilà, Mademoiselle, une grande hérésie..."

Shortly after this Madame de Sévigné returns to the subject of Saint Augustine with a long list of his works to be recommended to her daughter:

"Mais une bonne fois, ma très-chère, mettez un peu votre nez dans le livre de la Prédestination des saints, de saint Augustin, et du don de la persévérance: c'est un fort petit livre, il finit tout. Vous y verrez d'abord comme les papes et les conciles renvoient à ce Père, qu'ils appellent le docteur de la grâce; ensuite vous trouverez des lettres des saints Prosper et Hilaire, qui font mention des difficultés de certains prêtres de Marseille, qui disent tout comme vous; ils se

1. Lettres, VI, 478; 21 June 1680.

2. This is the "massa peccati" of Augustine's writings, otherwise found as Massa iniquitatis, irae, offensionis etc. C.f. Abercrombie, The Origins of Jansenism, p.16.

nomment Semi-Pélagiens. Voyez ce que saint Augustin répond à ces lettres, et ce qu'il répète cent fois. Le onzième chapitre du Don de la persévérance me tomba hier sous la main; lisez-le, et lisez tout le livre, il n'est pas long; c'est où j'ai puisé mes erreurs, je ne suis pas seule, cela me console; et en vérité je suis tentée de croire qu'on ne dispute aujourd'hui sur cette matière avec tant de chaleur que faute de s'entendre." 1

The controversy over infant baptism arose with the Pelagians rather than with their later 'Semi-Pelagian' disciples; but when in the year 429 the Augustinian theologians Prosper and Hilary took up arms against this recrudescence of heresy, Augustine's teaching on infant baptism is mentioned, as Madame de Sévigné says, in the letters in which they confided their difficulties to the saint. This is evidently the source of her own information on the question, since she does not seem to have read the earlier Augustinian works in which the problem was discussed.² Madame de Grignan evidently refused to be convinced, for they return to the question in a later letter, with Madame de Sévigné again using the exact terms - the 'utility' of the sacrament of Baptism - which are used by both sides in the Pelagian controversy:

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1. Lettres, VI, 487; 26 June 1680, See p. 242 . The translation of Saint Augustine by Ségui also contained the letters from his disciples mentioned in this reference.
 2. The only work of Saint Augustine mentioned before the Prédestination des Saints is his Confessions; Lettres, IV, 378.

"J'ai dessein de vous convaincre d'être hérétique: non, ma fille, quand vous en devriez désespérer, la mort de Jésus-Christ ne suffit point sans le baptême; il le faut d'eau ou de sang; c'est à cette condition qu'il a mis l'utilité que nous en devons recevoir: rien du vieil homme n'entrera dans le ciel, que par la régénération de Jésus-Christ..." 1

Finally, in July of the same year is found a passage which has rightly been considered as final proof of Madame de Sévigné's Jansenism, one in which, quoting St. Paul and St. Augustine, she gives her most Jansenist exposition of her beliefs on grace and the sovereign will of God:

"Vous lisez donc Saint Paul et saint Augustin; voilà les bons ouvriers pour établir la souveraine volonté de Dieu. Ils ne marchandent point à dire que Dieu dispose de ses créatures, comme le potier: il en choisit, il en rejette. Ils ne sont point en peine de faire des compliments pour sauver sa justice; car il n'y a point d'autre justice que sa volonté: c'est la justice même; c'est la règle même; et après tout, que doit-il aux hommes? que leur appartient-il? rien du tout. Il leur fait donc justice, quand il les laisse à cause du péché originel, qui est le fondement de tout, et il fait miséricorde au petit nombre de ceux qu'il sauve par son fils..." 2

There is no commentary possible on these words, save that they are the purest Jansenism. Madame de Sévigné's quotation of a text from Saint Paul, so often used, both by Augustine and Jansenius, as the foundation of their doctrine; her identification of God's justice with His sovereign will, in opposition to Malebranche whose works she had also been

1. Lettres, VI, 531; 17 July 1680.
2. Lettres, VI, 523-4; 14 July 1680.

reading at about this time; her insistence on "le petit nombre des élus", all mark her out as a most ardent and convinced disciple of Port-Royal. And for further proof there is her own profession of faith in the next sentence:

"...Jésus-Christ le dit lui-même: "Je connais mes brebis, je les mènerai paître moi-même, je n'en perdrai aucune, je les connais, elles me connaissent. Je vous ai choisis, dit-il à ses apôtres, ce n'est pas vous qui m'avez choisi." Je trouve mille passages sur ce ton, je les entends tous; et quand je vois le contraire, je dis:... c'est qu'ils parlent aux hommes, et je me tiens à cette première et grande vérité, qui est toute divine, qui me représente Dieu comme Dieu, comme un maître, comme un souverain créateur et auteur de l'univers, et comme un être très-parfait, comme dit votre père..." 1

The reader of all these passages cannot fail to remark how intimate was Madame de Sévigné's acquaintance with the works and indeed the very words of Saint Augustine, as with the particular interpretation given to them by the Jansenists; nor can one doubt her whole-hearted approval, in all matters of doctrine, of the teaching of Port-Royal. There is matter for interest, in this last-quoted passage particularly, in her singular interpretation of a Gospel text usually taken to illustrate the saving mercy of Christ: "Je connais mes brebis, elles me connaissent, je n'en perdrai aucune..." The sense of personal relationship with Christ is not often found in the religious writings of Port-Royal, with the notable exception of Pascal. Indeed one might say of the whole

1. i.e. Descartes. See ch. VII.

religious outlook of the seventeenth century that it was theocentric rather than Christocentric; Christ is there, of course, but as the Redeemer, shedding His blood for the elect, while the object of one's personal allegiance and service is the Father; the omnipotent, all-perfect Deity in whom, as Madame de Sévigné shows, Jansenism and Cartesianism met and merged.

Augustine's chief doctrines on grace and predestination had been exposed and commented in detail by Jansenius at the beginning of the seventeenth century. There is no evidence that Madame de Sévigné ever read the Augustinus, the first manifesto which had been so enthusiastically adopted by Port-Royal. No doubt few laymen did so: the theories explained therein were more accessible to them in the French writings of Arnauld and his contemporaries. Madame de Sévigné, as we have seen, was perfectly familiar with these and accepted the Port-Royal interpretations of Augustine, apparently without question. It is indeed doubtful whether the question of any other authority ever presented itself seriously to her mind. She was more than ready to take up the attitude, put about by Port-Royal itself, that the entire discussion was only the result of misunderstanding, that the chief barrier to reconciliation was the Jesuit persecution of "ces Messieurs", and that the Pope himself would be inclined

to side with Port-Royal, were it not for the machinations of the Society of Jesus in Rome:

"Je lis des livres de dévotion, parce que je voudrais me préparer à recevoir le Saint-Esprit; ah! que c'eût été un vrai lieu pour l'attendre que cette solitude! mais il souffle où il lui plaît, et c'est lui-même qui prépare les coeurs où il veut habiter; c'est lui qui prie en nous par des gémissements ineffables. C'est saint Augustin qui m'a dit tout cela; je le trouve bien janséniste, et saint Paul aussi; les jésuites ont un fantôme qu'ils appellent Jansénius, à qui ils disent mille injures; ils ne font pas semblant de voir où cela remonte..." 1

"Je vous mandai l'autre jour mon avis sur cette lettre du clergé: je suis ravie quand je pense comme vous. Le mot de fantôme, qu'ils combattent grossièrement, s'est trouvé au bout de ma plume comme au bout de la vôtre, et ils lui donneront cent coups après la mort. Cela me paraît comme quand le comte de Gramont disait que c'était Rochefort qui avait marché sur le chien du Roi, quoique Rochefort fût a cent lieues de là. En vérité, ceux que nos prélats appellent les jansénistes n'ont pas plus de part à ce qui leur vient de Rome; mais leur malheur, c'est que le Pape est un peu hérétique aussi..." 2

The rest of her letter is nothing but a commentary on the crisis which had recently arisen in the French Church over the question of the régale, and in which the Jansenist bishops, usually so Gallican, had surprisingly sided with Rome. Madame de Sévigné's attitude towards Rome is difficult to determine. As a "frondeuse" of independent temperament, living at a predominantly Gallican epoch of French history, one would not expect her to be totally submissive.

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1. Lettres, VI, 442; 9 June 1680. The references are to the works quoted V, 111; see p. 242.
 2. Lettres, VII, 4; 4 Aug. 1680.

There is a note of independence in the detached way in which she comments on current affairs within the Church; for instance on the severe reprimand sent by Innocent XI to Louis XIV, when the latter refused to relinquish the droit de régale, which he had extended to the whole kingdom in 1673. Madame de Sévigné writes to her daughter:

"Je vous envoie la lettre du pape; serait-il possible que vous ne l'eussiez point? Je le voudrais. Vous verrez un étrange pape; comment? il parle en maître; vous diriez qu'il est le père des chrétiens. Il ne tremble point, il ne flatte point, il menace; il semble qu'il veuille sous-entendre quelque blâme contre Monsieur de Paris. Voilà un homme étrange; est-ce ainsi qu'il prétend se raccommoier avec les Jésuites? et après avoir condamné soixante-cinq propositions, ne devait-il pas filer plus doux?..." 1

The reference to the sixty-five propositions, drawn from the work of various suspect casuists, which had been condemned by the Pope at the request of two French bishops, both of whom were Jansenist sympathisers, makes one suspect that the entire passage is an ironic allusion to the discomfiture of the Jesuits. In general, however, it is remarkable that Madame de Sévigné takes up towards the policy of Rome the very attitude of the Jansenists themselves - one of alternate approval or dissent, according to their own immediate advantage. One must remember, however,

1. Lettres, VI, 524-6; 14 July, 1680.

that for the average Catholic of the seventeenth century the authority of the Church was, in practice vested in the Bishops, though of course the ultimate decision in any given case rested always with Rome. It was the Bishops, and in particular the Archbishop of Paris, who, in the Jansenists' eyes, were responsible for the condemnation of Port-Royal; and of course it was always possible to plead as the Jansenists did, that the appeal to Rome might have gone in their favour had the Holy See been better informed. The great practical difficulties of travel and communication made for an almost inevitable Gallicanism on the part of the ordinary layman; Madame de Sévigné, indeed, is better informed than most on the ultramontane affairs of the Church, partly, no doubt, on account of her friendship with Retz, who had represented France at the conclave which elected Innocent XI, and with Coulanges, who accompanied the Cardinal d'Estrées to Rome on this very question of the régale. Madame de Sévigné in her general attitude to the Princes of the Church is very typical of her age, and indeed of a certain section of the intellectual élite of all ages. Her criticism of abuses is instant and withering; she will tolerate nothing base in those who should have so high an ideal. The affair of the régale calls forth her sarcasm, and produces more than one anecdote at the expense of the

higher clergy:

"Monsieur de Rennes...m'a conté qu'au sacré de Madame de Chelles (1) les tentures de la couronne, les pierreries au soleil du saint-sacrement, la musique exquise, les odeurs, et la quantité d'évêques qui officioient, surprirent tellement une manière de provinciale qui était là, qu'elle s'écria tout haut: N'est-ce pas ici le paradis? - Ah! non, madame, dit quelqu'un, il n'y a pas tant d'évêques"... 2

Where the Marquise meets with true sanctity, however, she is equally generous in her approbation, as, for instance, in her whole attitude to Mademoiselle de Grignan's decision to enter the Carmelites, or in her account of the death of the Bishop of Avranches:

"...un saint évêque, qui avait si peur de mourir hors de son diocèse, que pour éviter ce malheur, il n'en sortoit point du tout: il y en a d'autres qu'il faudroit que la mort tirât bien juste pour les y attraper..." 3

Severe though she may occasionally be, however, there is in Madame de Sévigné not the slightest trace of anti-clericalism. Rather is her criticism the result of a high ideal and a true love of that religion which she will not see profaned. There is no doubting the orthodoxy of her beliefs, nor her fundamental spirit of submission.

Madame de Sévigné's attitude to the Jesuits is in some

1. Sister of Madame de Fontanges, mistress of Louis XIV and a notorious galante. The abbey had been a famous centre of intrigue in the earlier part of the reign.
2. Lettres, VII, 71; 11 Sept. 1680.
3. Lettres, IX, 43; 9 May 1689.

respects the same mixture of criticism and goodwill. She had little love for them as a Society. She refers with disgust to their political activities, and sides unerringly with the Jansenists in all theological matters. But in personal relationships her naturally sociable temperament comes to the fore and she can frequently meet them on terms of true friendship. One cannot say that Madame de Sévigné shows many signs of having studied their arguments in the matter of grace, though she had given considerable thought to their principles of moral theology. The latter had, of course, become very familiar to the intelligentsia of Paris, as a result both of the Lettres Provinciales and of the condemnation of certain casuist principles mentioned above.¹ Madame de Sévigné mentions Escobar,² the Jesuit casuist whose lax moral principles had been so scathingly refuted by Pascal, and whose name is satirised by other contemporary writers.³ These were probably her own informants on the matter, for it seems unlikely that she had ever read any of his works. She refers also to Molina, the famous Jesuit theologian whose theories in the discussion of freedom and

1. See p. 253

2. Lettres, V, 216; 16 July 1677; VI, 542; 21 July 1680, where she excuses Madame de Grignan's laziness on the grounds of Escobar's definition: "Vous savez qu'il n'est pas aisé de commettre ce péché, puisque selon un casuiste de notre connoissance, "la paresse est un regret que les sacrements soient la source de la grâce, et que les choses spirituelles soient spirituelles." Cette définition vous met fort à couvert."

3. Cf. Molière, Tartufe, IV, 5.

predestination had been condemned in great detail in the first part of Jansen's Augustinus. Here again it is probable that the Marquise's acquaintance with his teaching was purely through Jansenist refutations. Mademoiselle de Grignan, for instance, who had for a time contemplated entering the convent of the Benedictines at Gif, would if she did so be exchanging the school of saint Augustine for that of Molina. The Paris Carmelites whom she had first frequented were well-known Jansenist sympathisers; one presumes the Benedictines to have been under the direction of the Society of Jesus. Another reference though slight may be an echo of Molinist language. It was Molina's opinion that grace, though freely given by God, depended for its efficacy entirely on the co-operation of man's will. Madame de Sévigné relates her fruitless attempts to dissuade her son from selling his commission in the army:

"...plus je donne de force à mes raisons, plus il pousse les siennes, avec une volonté se déterminée, que je comprends que c'est là ce qui s'appelle vouloir efficacement..." 1.

The Marquise, again, judges Corbinelli to have Molinist tendencies, while being at heart a true Jansenist - though

1. Lettres, VI, 333; 29 Mar. 1680.

the whole problem of Corbinelli's religion, and particularly of his dilettante pseudo-mysticism, escapes her altogether, and she can only regain her peace of mind by invoking in his favour her favourite dogma of Providence:

"Son coeur est toujours dans la perfection de toutes les vertus morales; elles seront chrétiennes, quand il plaira à cette chère Providence, que nous adorons toujours..." 1

It is in fact this deep belief in the Providence of God which is in most cases a corrective to the severity of Madame de Sévigné's Jansenism. The doctrines of predestination and enslavement to sin, which take on an almost fatalistic character in her writings, are tempered by a trust in God which relieves them of some of their pessimism. The doctrine of Providence is for Madame de Sévigné the explanation of all the mystery of suffering, as of all the public and private crises which bespangle her own life, particularly during this middle period. The emphasis shifts slightly from the sovereign will of God to His beneficent care of all His creatures - the one inspiring awe and the other a loving confidence. It is a characteristic of her own spirituality - her own particular devotion, as she says, and the one on which she leans most strongly in time of need:

1. Lettres, VII, 206; 8 Jan. 1683.

"Nous verrons ce que la Providence a ordonné; car j'ai toujours, toujours, cette Providence dans la tête: c'est ce qui fixe mes pensées, et qui me donne du repos, autant que la sensibilité de mon coeur le peut permettre, /e car on ne dispose pas toujours à son gré de cette partie; mais au moins je n'ai pas à gouverner en même temps et mes sentiments et mes pensées: cette dernière chose est soumise à cette volonté souveraine; c'est là mon rosaire, c'est là mon esclavage de la Vierge; et si j'étais digne de croire que j'ai une voie toute marquée, je dirois que c'est la mienne..." 1

"Pour ma Providence, je ne pourrais pas vivre en paix, si je ne la regardois souvent: elle est la consolation des tristes états de la vie, elle abrège toutes les plaintes, elle calme toutes les douleurs, elle fixe toutes les pensées..." 2

References to Providence in the letters of Madame de Sévigné are too numerous for individual analysis, but it is evident that it was to Port-Royal again that she owed this feature of her spirituality, and mainly, as she herself acknowledges, to the writings of Nicole.³ She applies it to public events no less than to her own personal experiences; for instance in her account to her daughter of the events following on the "Glorious Revolution" in England in 1688:

"Voilà de si grands événements, qu'il n'est pas aisé d'en comprendre le dénouement, surtout quand on jette les yeux sur l'état et sur les dispositions de toute

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1. Lettres, VI, 407; 18 May 1680.
 2. Lettres, IX, 114-15; 13 July 1689.
 3. See p. 234-39, above.

l'Europe. Cette même Providence qui règle tout démêlera tout; nous sommes ici les spectateurs très-aveugles et très-ignorants..." 1

She makes herself the apostle of the doctrine in her letters to Bussy-Rabutin, who answers them in a surprisingly Jansenist strain:

"Ce que vous dites de la Providence...est fort bien; quelque fertile que je sois quelquefois en pensées et en expressions, je n'y saurois rien ajouter, sinon que je reçois toutes mes disgraces de la main de Dieu, comme des marques infaillibles de prédestination" 2

Belief in Providence becomes, for Madame de Sévigné, a form of reparation for her faults, chief of which in her eyes is that all-embracing affection for her daughter which, as a true Jansenist, she is bound to deplore, while being yet unable to control it wholly:

"Ma fille, Dieu veut qu'il y ait dans la vie des temps difficiles à passer; il faut tâcher de réparer, par la soumission à ses volontés, la sensibilité trop grande que l'on a pour ce qui n'est point lui. On ne saurait être plus coupable que je le suis sur cela." 3

One might, indeed, wonder how the follower of a creed so fatalistic as Jansenism could ever consider his future life with anything but fear. The theme of death looms large in the later correspondance of Madame de Sévigné, though it is perhaps the infirmities of old age, rather than the moment

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1. Lettres, VIII, 388; 6 Jan. 1689.
 2. Lettres, VIII, 191; 28 Sept. 1688.
 3. Lettres, VIII, 248; 8 Nov. 1688.

of death, that cause her apprehension. Her excessive love of Madame de Grignan certainly disturbs her conscience in the face of approaching death. Over and against this, however, one must set a quiet confidence in salvation that possessed her ever more entirely in her old age. Already in 1680, after a most Augustinian description of the mystery of predestination she had yet been able to add: "Pour moi, je me sens assez portée à faire honneur à la grâce de Jésus-Christ".¹ This sentiment of peace grows in her maturity, fortified by an inner conviction that she, somehow, will not be one of those for whom the Redemption of Christ has been of no avail. The last letters of her life reflect it strikingly:

"Vous me demandez si je suis toujours une petite dévote qui ne vaut guère: oui, justement, ma chère enfant, voilà ce que je suis toujours, et pas davantage, à mon grand regret. Oh! tout ce que j'ai de bon, c'est que je sais ma religion, et de quoi il est question; je ne prendrai point le faux pour le vrai; je sais ce qui est bon et ce qui n'en a que l'apparence; et j'espère ne m'y point méprendre, et que Dieu m'ayant déjà donné de bons sentiments, il m'en donnera encore: les grâces passées me garantissent en quelque sorte celles qui viendront, en sorte que je vis dans la confiance, mêlée pourtant de beaucoup de crainte..."²

Another passage which throws a rather attractive light on her personality comes later in the year 1690:

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1. Lettres VII, 449: 12 June 1680.
 2. Lettres, IX, 413; 15 Jan. 1690.

"Pour moi, j'ai une fantaisie que je n'ose dire qu'à vous: c'est que si j'étois dévot, comme par exemple M. de la Garde, je crois, contre l'ordinaire, que je conviendrois avec mes amis des grâces singulières et précieuses que je recevrais de Dieu, du changement de mon coeur qu'il auroit tourné avec cette douce et miraculeuse puissance qui fait que nous ne nous reconnaissons pas nous-mêmes; et dans le transport de cette charmante métamorphose, touchée, comme je le suis naturellement, de la reconnaissance, au lieu de dire mille maux de moi, comme font les dévots, de me charger d'injures, de m'appeller un vaisseau d'iniquité, je ferois honneur à la grâce de Jésus-Christ, et j'oublierais mes misères, pour célébrer ses louanges et ses miséricordes..." 1

To the year of her death, however, and in spite of this gradual mellowing of her nature, Madame de Sévigné kept her Jansenist conscience in the matter of religious practice.²

It is remarkable how a discipline which seems to the modern reader to require an almost inhuman purity of conscience meets with Madame de Sévigné's wholehearted approval. She was in no sense, as a critic has said,³ a religious fanatic; balance is an essential feature of her outlook, and few people, outside the seventeenth century, could ever claim to have preserved their minds and hearts in such perfect, clear-sighted equilibrium. Yet in her attitude towards human affection, for instance, she is quite as rigorous as

1. Lettres, IX, 509; 24 May 1690.

3. Cf. E. Magne, le coeur et l'esprit de Madame de la Fayette, p. 173.

2. Cf. H. Busson: La Religion des Classiques, Paris, Presses Universitaires, 1948.

the most severe solitaries of Port-Royal. In May of the year 1675 she was twice refused Communion on account of her excessive affection for her daughter; but her only comment is one of complete approval. Madame de Grignan shows a disposition to mock at this inordinate scrupulousness on the part of a Jansenist confessor; but Madame de Sévigné only reiterates her former opinion:

"Vous riez, ma bonne, de la pauvre amitié; vous trouvez qu'on lui fait trop d'honneur de la prendre pour un empêchement à la dévotion: il ne lui appartient pas d'être un obstacle au salut; on ne la considère jamais que par comparaison; mais je crois qu'il suffit qu'elle remplisse tout le coeur pour être condamnée; et quoi que ce puisse être qui nous remplisse de cette sorte, c'est plus qu'il n'en faut pour n'être pas en état de communier..." (1)

For the Jansenists any excessive sentiment was blame-worthy; one remembers the dictum of Jansenius that "On ne peut sans péché aimer aucune créature", (2) and Pascal's reproach to Madame de Périer on the affection she showed her children. (3) The measure of the Marquise's progress in Jansenism is shown by the fact that when, two years previously, she had under similar circumstances been refused absolution for her persistent hatred of the Bishop of Marseilles, an enemy of the Grignan family, her reaction

1. Lettres, lll, 493; 26th June 1675.

2. Augustinus, ll, 12.

3. Letter of 1st. April 1648, éd Strowski lll, 426.

had been very different:

"Je voulus hier aller à confesse. Un très-habile homme me refusa très bien l'absolution, à cause de ma haine pour l'Evêque. Si les vôtres ne vous en font pas autant, ce sont des ignorants qui ne savent pas leur métier..."

And a few days later:

"Il faut présentement aller à confesse: cette conclusion m'a adouci l'esprit; je suis comme un mouton; bien loin de me refuser l'absolution, on m'en donnera deux..." 1

The chief source of Jansenist practice both for Confession and for Communion is Arnauld's treatise de la Fréquente Communion, which in its turn was based on the letters and oral counsels of Saint-Cyran. We know how the effect of the latter on Port-Royal had been so to distort the discipline of the Church as to render the reception of Communion almost impossible. Indeed Saint-Cyran had been at pains to persuade his penitents that the heights of sanctity lay in complete abstention from the Sacraments, and from the practice of saying Mass. Arnauld in his defence of his treatise had pleaded that it advocated frequent attendance at Communion; which indeed it did, but under conditions so difficult to attain as to be quite out of the reach of the average Christian. Contemporary satirists had nicknamed it l'Infréquente. Yet Madame de Sévigné, whose judgements are usually remarkably balanced - she shows herself sceptical

1. Lettres, III, 300, 330; 4 & 24 Dec. 1673.

of any excessive severity - inveighs against the practice of frequent Communion, especially as advocated by the Jesuits and by the customs of Provence. Frequent, for her, means not daily but weekly and even monthly attendance at the Sacraments. She commiserates with her daughter, who as wife of the lieutenant-general of Provence, is obliged to give public example by a frequent reception of Communion:

"Oh, mon Dieu! dites-leur que saint Louis, qui était plus saint que vous n'êtes sainte, ne communiait que cinq fois l'année..." 1

On another occasion she expresses satisfaction that the practice of receiving Communion should have been cut out of ceremony of investiture of the Ordre du Saint-Esprit, where, as she says, it was so often profaned; a criticism which may very well have been true. In 1683 she is astonished to find that the Jesuit preacher Bourdaloue is at least as severe as the Jansenists in his condemnation of unworthy Communion; her surprise, indeed, would seem to suggest an easy acceptance of the current Jansenist caricature of Jesuit doctrine. The sermon which calls forth the remark² is a commentary on the "Domine non sum dignus", Madame

1. Lettres, VIII, 515; 9 Mar. 1689.

2. Lettres, VII, 221; 5 Mar. 1683.

de Sévigné describes it as "marcher sur des charbons ardents". In a later letter she herself gives a very Jansenist commentary on this prayer, type of the necessary dispositions for receiving the Sacraments:

"Pour la communion qu'il faut faire, c'est la grande affaire. Nous lisons ici des livres qui font trembler, ce que je dis bien sincèrement: Domine non sum dignus, et dans cette vérité où je suis abîmée, je fais comme les autres..."¹

In the matter of Confession Madame de Sévigné is equally severe, finding it perfectly natural that M. de Longueville should have absolution deferred for two months, even though he was on the point of going to the wars: "Ce fut une confession conduite par nos amis..."² This too was a burning question in the seventeenth century, where Jesuit and Jansenist practice differed considerably, and where absolution was often refused to those concerned in the numerous public scandals, from Louis XIV down. Arnauld complains of death-bed repentances which to him are lacking in all sincerity and true contrition. Madame de Sévigné herself, deeply Christian though she is, is Christian in the seventeenth century manner: enlightened and objective, suspicious of mysticism and of easy exterior practice, but

1. Lettres, IX, 557; 1292 (undated)
 2. Lettres, III, 136; 3 July 1672.

ever ready to acknowledge true virtue where she finds it.

The same spirit appears in her personal devotional practices, as revealed in the Correspondance. "Tout y est en pèlerinages" is her disapproving comment on the religion of Provence, and again in opposition to the Jesuits who had rehabilitated the procession as a form of popular devotion, she describes with a cool detachment the well-known Parisian procession to the shrine of Sainte-Geneviève. She spends countless summers in Brittany without any mention of the sanctuary of Sainte Anne d'Auray, and passes through Chartres with only the slightest indirect reference to its devotion to Our Lady. It is true that a great many popular manifestations of piety in the seventeenth century mingled Christian and pagan elements with no discrimination whatsoever. It is more difficult to understand Madame de Sévigné's attitude towards devotion to our Lady, in which she not only attacks abuses but repudiates on her own account certain long-established practices of the Church; for example, that of the Rosary:

envie / "Je ne dis plus mon chapelet: à mesure que je suis avancée dans l'idée de'être dévote, j'ai retranché cette dévotion, ou pour mieux dire cette distraction..." 1 / i

1. Lettres, IV, 331; 12 Jan. 1676.

In another letter she seems to suggest that Marian devotion in some way detracts from her devotion to Christ. Her selection of night prayers, mentioned in 1690, is very Jansenist in spirit:

"Nous ôtâmes doucement: "Souvenez-vous, très-pieuse Vierge Marie," et nous disions des oraisons de saint Augustin, de saint Prosper, et des Miserere en français;.. Voici donc (ma prière) présentement: "Mon Dieu, faites-moi la grâce de n'aimer que les (biens que le) temps amène et qu'il ne peut ôter." C'est l'éternité en paroles couvertes, c'est la prière des vrais chrétiens, c'est ce que l' Eglise demande..." 1

Jansenism had had to defend itself again and again against the charge of seeking to abolish the worship of the Mother of God, though its protagonists could say with truth, at any rate in the early part of the controversy, that their only concern was to remedy abuses. There is an echo of Pascal's Provinciales in Madame de Sévigné's account of the absurd devotion to Our Lady of Madame de Lyonne, a notorious "galante".² In her private chapel, built at Les Rochers in 1680, Madame de Sevigne has inscribed the words: "SOLI DEO HONOR ET GLORIA", of which, as she says: "Cela ne me brouille pas avec la Princesse de Tarente,"³ it is true that Jansenism

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1. Lettres, IX, 551; 1289 (undated)
 2. Lettres, IV, 530; 17 July 1676.
 3. Lettres, VII, 3; 4 Aug. 1680.

has links with Calvinism in its repudiation of devotion to the Saints, and in general on its insistence on prayer to the Godhead rather than personal or private devotions.

Chapter VIIMadame de Sévigné
and the Philosophy of Descartes.

It has sometimes been thought that Madame de Sévigné was one of the most cartesian of seventeenth century writers, and it is certain that no study of her intellectual background would be complete without a reference to the theories of Descartes. Cartesianism was part of her mental furniture as it was that of every educated woman of the period, to a greater or lesser degree. It remains to decide how far, if at all, Madame de Sévigné was truly influenced by Descartes in her outlook on life, and whether one could justify, in her case, the epithet of "cartésienne".

Cartesian philosophy came into vogue in France in about the year 1660.¹ Its general principles were, of course, already known, but around that date they were greatly popularised by a series of well-written, elegant

1. C.f. F.Bouillier, Histoire de la Philosophie cartésienne, Paris, 1854, in-80.

and clear little treatises, destined to set forth for the general public the arguments for and against Descartes' philosophy, of which only the critics had hitherto been aware.¹ Hence-forth cartesianism became a subject of free discussion in the "salons" of all the great ladies of Paris and the provinces and fragments of cartesian philosophy came into their conversation as easily as the colourful and exaggerated vocabulary of the "préciosité" to those of a previous decade. Academies sprang up all over Paris for the diffusion of Descartes' theories in physics and astronomy,² and no educated man or woman could have remained wholly outside the orbit of the new philosophy.

Madame de Sévigné was not, it is true, of the generation most familiar with cartesian philosophy. By the time it was widely known her own mind had been formed by such tutors as Chapelain, Ménage and the writers of Port-Royal to a more scholastic and discursive way of thought. But she shows herself constantly aware of it, and had particularly close links with Descartes in the circle of her own acquaintances. There was first of all the great friend of

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1. Such were the Discours sur le discernement de l'âme et du corps by Cordemoy, 1666; Traité de l'esprit de l'homme by Louis de la Forge, 1666; Entretiens de physique by Rohault, 1671; and Parallèle des principes de la physique d'Aristote et de celle de Descartes by P. René Le Bossu, a friend of Madame de Sévigné and Madame de Grignan, 1674.
 2. C.f. Harcourt Brown: Scientific Organizations in Seventeenth-Century France, Baltimore 1934.

her youth, the Cardinal de Retz, one-time intriguer and "frondeur", now in his old age an ardent student of Descartes. In his retirement at Commercy the Cardinal carried on with his near neighbour Dom Robert Desgabets, prior of the Benedictine abbey of Breuil, what might be termed a "cercle d'études" on Descartes. Here were thrashed out such questions as the mode of union of soul and body and the movement of the earth round the sun.¹ Corbinelli, another close friend of Madame de Sévigné, frequented Retz and brought back accounts of these discussions to the Marquise and her daughter.² It is probable that Corbinelli and Retz had helped to educate Madame de Grignan in cartesianism. Retz was very fond of her, though she does not always seem to have reciprocated his affection, and Corbinelli professed great admiration for her intelligence and capacity for abstract argument. Madame de Sévigné was further acquainted with the family of Descartes in Brittany.

1. See V.Cousin: Fragments de philosophie cartésienne, Paris 1852, in-120, p.118 ff.

2. D.Desgabets was also a member of a cartesian society in Paris which studied philosophical questions. There were several of these, notably those of P.Mersenne at the Minimes de la Place Royal, Abbé Picot, prieur du Rouvre, Habert de Montmor, etc. These were contemporary with Descartes and frequently visited by him.

She mentions in a letter to her daughter a niece of the philosopher whom she met at Rennes in 1680: "cella-là sait /e quasi aussi bien que vous sa philosophie"; and also a Jesuit nephew torn between fear of his Order and admiration for his illustrious uncle.¹ These relationships are a pleasure to her, and she welcomes them as an added link with her daughter far away in Provence:

"J'ai toujours des affaires à elle; il me semble qu'elle vous est de quelque chose du côté paternel de M. Descartes; et dès là je tiens un petit morceau de ma chère fille." 2

Another relationship which might have brought Madame de Sévigné to cartesianism was that with Port-Royal. We know from the Mémoires of Fontaine³ that the solitaries spent their leisure hours in discussing cartesian philosophy and were so imbued with Descartes' doctrine of animal automatism that they did not hesitate to practise the most cruel experiments in vivisection on their own animals. Antoine Arnauld, "le grand Arnauld", their most ardent polemist, had been one of the first to challenge Descartes' theories, and their controversy was carried on when Malebranche's works first began to appear in 1674.⁴ It continued

1. Lettres, Vol.VII, p.23; 14 Aug.1680.

2. Lettres, Vol.IX, p.57-8; 18 May 1689.

3. See Sainte-Beuve: Port-Royal, tom II, vol.II, p.313, 435.

4. Recherche de la Vérité, 1674.

through the greater part of Madame de Sévigné's life. Nevertheless she seldom seems aware of Arnauld's objections to Descartes; one may say that cartesianism never came to her through Port-Royal. It is true that she once described someone as "janséniste, c'est à dire cartésien en perfection"¹; but for herself the two philosophies do not seem to have been interdependent. Cartesianism was never more to her than an objective theory. Jansenism was a way of life which demanded the whole-hearted adherence of its converts, and struck at the very roots of her being. Madame de Sévigné was too clearheaded to confuse their relative importance.

Considering all this and considering the popularity of Descartes' ideas in seventeenth century society, Madame de Sévigné came to them late in life. She was fifty years old when she read her first cartesian work,² and there is no evidence that she ever read any other. Even of the lighter résumés listed above she mentions only two - the Traité de l'esprit de l'homme by Louis de la Forge and the Entretiens de Physique of Rohault. All additional knowledge is such as could have been acquired in conversation

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1. This was P. René Le Bossu, mentioned above p.222. Lettres, vol. V, p.62-3; 16 Sept. 1676.
 2. Lettres, V, 29; 19 Aug. 1676.

with her friends and her daughter. Her grasp of the most important points of Descartes' doctrine may fairly be said to be only rudimentary, and it is rare for her to express a definite opinion of her own.

Before being able to understand Descartes' philosophy, Madame de Sévigné had to be taught to reason "selon la méthode". In this her teacher was Corbinelli. This lively and intelligent Florentine with the mind of a Renaissance humanist dabbled in all the philosophies of the time, and his personality strikes a curious note in the letters of Madame de Sévigné. It was as a friend of Retz that she first opened her house to him, and was anxious all her life over his unorthodox religious views. He in return provided her with a topic of conversation for Madame de Grignan and introduced her, in 1676, to Descartes' Traité des passions de l'âme. But Madame de Sévigné took time to master the system underlying the new philosophy, and this preliminary teaching - oral, no doubt, and conducted by means of discussions in the cool of the long summer evenings at Livry - was her only acquaintance with the Discours de la Méthode and the Méditations. The metaphysics of cartesianism have few direct references in her letters. There is in 1680 a well-known account of a discussion held in her presence on the genesis of ideas. These present include her son,

Charles de Sévigné, a certain P. Damaie, and a Gassendist Breton gentleman of their acquaintance; Corbinelli's opinion is invoked by his letters, and "ils me divertissent au dernier point."¹ But though she reports faithfully to her daughter on each one's opinion, she passes no judgement that suggests a conviction of her own. Other discussions she witnessed between the Prior of Livry and Corbinelli, in the presence of her friend Madame de la Troche:

"Corbinelli dit qu'il n'y a que Dieu qui doit être immuable; tout autre immutabilité est une imperfection; il étoit bien en train de discourir aujourd'hui. Madame de la Troche et le Prieur de Livry étoient ici: il s'est bien divertie à leur prouver tous les attributs de la divinité..."²

There are references to arguments between Corbinelli and Madame de Grignan herself on abstruse metaphysical problems, and the philosopher is mentioned as "votre père Descartes". In all this Madame de Sévigné appears as a spectator rather than a participant. She wishes only to be able to report to her daughter all that she has heard, and in order to do so faithfully she must be able to understand the rules of the game:

"Corbinelli et La Mousse parlent assez souvent de votre père Descartes. Ils ont entrepris de me rendre capable d'entendre ce qu'ils disent, j'en suis ravie, afin de

1. Lettres, VII, 74; 15 Sept. 1680.

2. Lettres, III, 474; 7 June 1675.

n'être point comme une sott^e bête, quand ils vous tiendront ici. Je leur dis que je veux apprendre cette science comme l'homme, non pas pour jouer mais pour voir jouer." 1

It is true that her language is sprinkled with allusions to cartesian principles, which might lead the reader to believe her an enthusiastic devotee of the new philosophy. But a further knowledge of Madame de Sévigné will show that this was no more than a discreet way of flattering her daughter, and a reflection of the fashion of the time. No doubt many great ladies could have referred to themselves in conversation as "une substance qui pense" and to their bodies as "une machine"; just as modern society women may know much of the idiom of psycho-analysis and have very little acquaintance with its principles. On the one or two occasions when Madame de Sévigné found herself truly able to keep up with a philosophical argument she expresses a certain surprise, and is almost pathetically anxious to convince her daughter that this is yet another thing they are able to share. An example occurs when she refers to a discussion between Madame de Grignan and Mademoiselle Descartes, niece of the philosopher, on an unspecified topic, in which Madame de Grignan appears to have acquitted herself

1. Lettres, IV, 522; 8 July 1676.

well:

"Je l'entends, je vous assure que je l'entends, et je ne crois pas qu'on puisse mieux dire sur ce terrible sujet. Il y a longtemps que dans mon ignorance je dis: Mais ne faut-il pas de miracle pour expliquer ce mystère, selon la philosophie d'Aristote? ...La bonne D. sera ravie, elle gardera le silence, je vous en réponds; et tout au plus, elle vous admirera avec un fort aimable cartésien, ami de mon fils, qui est fort digne de cette confiance. Soyez en repos, ma chère enfant; cette lettre vous fera bien de l'honneur, sans aucun chagrin". 1

By this time the theories of Descartes had been condemned by the Church and the teaching of his philosophy forbidden in the Schools.² In particular, as Arnauld has pointed out, Descartes' teachings on the properties of matter and his failure to distinguish between substance and accidents was incompatible with the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist. The topic of Madame de Grignan's argument mentioned above is not known, but one wonders whether she was not herself venturing onto this dangerous terrain. If so one is not surprised at the slight note of anxiety in Madame de Sévigné's comments on her daughter's views, and her assurances of the most

1. Lettres, IX, 77; 12 June 1689.

2. Descartes' works were put on the Index in 1660. In 1671 a decree forbade the teaching of Cartesian philosophy in the colleges of the University of Paris, and in 1675 this decree was extended to the provinces. The Jesuits were particularly anxious to see it enforced in the Oratorian schools, where Cartesianism was very strong, and the story of Descartes' philosophy during this period is one of constant struggle between these two powerful religious Orders. Boileau's Arrêt Burlesque is a gibe at the condemnation of 1671. For Madame de Sévigné's awareness of this see p. 317 below.

complete secrecy in all communication of her letters. The note is sounded more than once throughout the Lettres, but it is interesting to remark that the Marquise never shows any concern with the controversial side of cartesianism, or appears to realise its inherent dangers. As a well-instructed Catholic one would expect her to show some reaction to a condemnation of the Church; and in the case of the Jansenist persecutions her reactions were speedy and violent. Her silence in the present case seems to confirm the opinion that her interest in the metaphysics of cartesianism was more speculative than practical, and that it affected her religious life in no way whatsoever.

In the main it was Descartes' physics which became most popular in the France of the seventeenth century. Madame de Sévigné was not of the generation that went so enthusiastically to the 'cartesian discussions' held in the 1660s by such savants as Régis and Huyghens, but she shows a certain familiarity with the main ideas of cartesian physics. They must have been hard to grasp for the average layman, and bewildering to a world brought up on the mediaeval doctrine of final causes. The Marquise knew, for instance, of the controversy that divided physicists of the period, when the ideas of Descartes' Principes de philosophie, 1644, were again put forward in Le Monde ou Traité de la Lumière,

a posthumous publication of 1677.

"(La Mousse) fait des catéchismes les fêtes et les dimanches; il veut aller en paradis. Je lui dis que c'est par curiosité, et afin d'être assuré une bonne fois si le soleil est un amas de poussière qui se meut avec violence, ou si c'est un globe de feu." 1

Descartes was not the first to begin research into the nature of the forces which propelled the stars. Aristotelian theory which had come down to the mediaeval world through St. Thomas, speaks of intelligences or angels guiding the myriad worlds of the universe.² The publication of this system caused a vogue for astronomy in which Madame de Sévigné also shared. In 1675 she received a present of a telescope; it accompanied her on her journey down the Loire, and there is an amusing account of the use to which she put it:

"Vous ai-je parlé d'une lunette admirable, qui faisoit notre amusement dans le bateau? C'est un chef-d'oeuvre; elle est encore plus parfaite que celle que l'abbé vous a laissée à Grignan; cette lunette rapproche fort bien les objets de trois lieues; que ne les rapproche-t-elle de deux cents? Vous pensez l'usage que nous en faisons sur ces bords de Loire; mais voici celui que j'en fais ici: Vous savez que par l'autre bout elle éloigne, et je la tourne sur Mademoiselle

1. Lettres, II, 378; 30 Sept. 1671.

2. La Fontaine's reference to this belief, in the Discours à Madame de la Sablière, shows that whatever its value it was still a current theory in the 17th century.

du Plessis, et je la retrouve tout d'un coup à deux lieues de moi; je fis l'autre jour cette sottise sur elle et sur mes voisins; cela fut plaisant, mais personne ne m'entendit: s'il y avoit eu quelqu'un que j'eusse pu regarder seulement, cette folie m'auroit bien réjouie. Quand on se trouve bien oppressée de méchante compagnie, il n'y a qu'à faire venir sa lunette et la tourner du côté qui éloigne..." 1

The heavens seem to have provided, in the years between 1660 and 1680, an unusual number of curious and interesting phenomena among them seven comets, of which the brightest were in 1664 and 1680. Madame de Sévigné describes how, in company with many others, she sacrificed a night's sleep to watch the comet in 1664, and how that of 1680, Halley's comet, brought fear of ill-omen to the superstitious courtiers of Louis XIV. 2

The question of the system of the universe ultimately helped to discredit Descartes in the eyes of the Sorbonne theologians, despite all his efforts to avoid trouble. Among scientists there were three possible points of view. The Ptolemaic system supposed the earth to be the fixed and motionless centre of the universe. That of Copernicus was the exact reverse, while Tycho-Brahé³ sought to conciliate the two by imagining the sun moving round the earth and the

1. *Lettres*, IV, 163; 6 Oct. 1675.

2. *Lettres*, I, 470; 17 Dec. 1664; VII, 133; 2 Jan. 1681.

3. Tycho-Brahé, 1546-1601, a Danish astronomer and scientist, whose system, being a *via media*, was accepted by many scientists in the XVIIth century who did not wish - or dare - to profess that of Copernicus.

planets round the sun.¹ Descartes had adopted the Copernican system until, in 1633, Galileo was condemned by the Church. The hypothesis of Copernicus was not yet acceptable to a world for which, until then, almost the only source of information had been the Bible; the Jesuits in particular had shown themselves bitter adversaries of a heliocentric conception. Anxious himself to avoid condemnation, Descartes held up the printing of the treatise: Le Monde ou Traité de la lumière in which he had adopted the Copernican theory, and the work was never published until after his death. He re-wrote part of it in a modified form, however, in the Principes de Philosophie. In this new version there was another attempt to bypass the difficulty. Descartes suggested that the earth was carried along in the general movement of the heavens, as a ship, according to his own metaphor, might be borne forward by the waves, with no actual power of self-motion. He was extremely careful at all times to avoid attributing motion to the earth itself, and in

1. The alternatives were once expressed in indifferent verse:
 "Chacun en sa manière a bâti l'univers.
 L'un par un ciel qui meut tous les cieux qu'il enserre
 Fait tourner le soleil à l'entour de la terre.
 L'autre fixe le ciel, et par un tour pareil
 Il fait rouler la terre à l'entour du soleil.
 Un autre survenant, par une adresse extrême
 Forge des deux premiers un mitoyen système."
 Maudit, Mélange de diverses poésies: Epître à M. du Hamel.
 ap. Busson. La Religion des classiques. p. 103.

general to present his view as a mere hypothesis, not as an explanation. But in point of fact his whole theory stands or falls with that of Copernicus, as Descartes himself was well aware.

Madame de Sévigné expresses no opinion of her own on this matter, but she does touch on another closely related to it. The mechanical conception of the universe proposed by Descartes raised a host of other problems about the nature of movement in inanimate beings. The laws of gravity and hydrostatics were as yet unstated, but scientists like Huyghens and Pierre Perrault¹ had tried to account for such phenomena as the origin of fountains and waterspouts. In 1689 in the drawing-room of Mademoiselle de Goileau Madame de Sévigné witnessed a discussion on the laws of motion, between Corbinelli and certain other "beaux esprits" - the abbé de Polignac, the abbé de Rohan etc. and

"..ils avoient de la peine à comprendre ce mouvement que Dieu donne à la boule poussée par l'autre; ils vouloient que la première communiquât son mouvement, et vous savez comme l'abbé de Polignac et Corbinelli crioient là-dessus: cela me divertissoit, et me faisoit souvenir grossièrement de ma petite cartésienne, que j'étois si aise d'entendre, quoique indigne." 2

1. Brother of Claude Perrault the architect and Charles the author.

2. Lettres, VIII, 469; 16 Feb. 1689.

There is nothing to suggest that the Marquise herself took part in the argument, though she obviously knew that it arose from Descartes' explanation of the movement of the planets. In the Traité de la lumière he had compared their motion to that of a rolling ball set in movement by other balls of greater density though smaller than itself - the particles of the "matière du ciel" in which the planets bathed. Another example used by Descartes is that of a boat carried along by the current of a river; observation had shown him that the boat moves slower than the current which carries it, that a light boat moves faster than a heavy one, etc. because of the resistance they encounter; but that both do, all the same, overcome resistance and keep their forward motion:

"Et généralement parlant, plus un corps est gros, plus il lui est facile de communiquer une partie de son mouvement aux autres corps, et plus il est difficile aux autres de lui communiquer quelque chose du leur." 1

It must have been to this account that the argument referred, and the exact similarity of words suggests that the Marquise was able to follow the gist of it, even though she may not have read the actual work. It is seldom that she takes an active part in discussion of such complex physical problems; it seems likely that, but for her daughter's interest, she

1. Descartes, Oeuvres, XI, Traité de la lumière, x, p.67-9.

would never have given them great thought. But the above quotation at least implies that at times she was able to grasp even a difficult astronomical theory.

There is one of Descartes' theories, however, with which Madame de Sévigné had much more than a passing acquaintance. The topic of the Beast-machine was perhaps the most immediately controversial of all the philosopher's teachings; it was also the most readily accessible to the layman, and the popularity of animal automatism was largely responsible for the diffusion, in the seventeenth century, of Descartes' beliefs in physics.¹ The controversy raged unabated well on into the eighteenth century. It provided a topic of argument for the ruelles of the précieuses no less than for the philosopher's study and is reflected in almost every branch of literature. It is one of the few points of cartesian teaching to which Madame de Sévigné shows a vehement reaction.

During the 1630's Descartes was led by his experiments to the conclusion that animals were automata, having in themselves no principle of movement other than a purely mechanical one. The main foundation for his hypothesis was that the animal, having no speech, could give no evidence

1. Cf. L.C. Rosenfield, From Beast-machine to Man-machine, New York, 1941.

of any mental process, and there was therefore no certainty that it was endowed with mind. For Descartes the animal is in fact a highly accurate machine, producing certain reactions by a complicated system of pulleys and levers, much as a clock produces movement when it has been wound up. He even goes so far as to say that a man-made machine, built by a clever artist in exact imitation of an animal would be indistinguishable from the animal itself.¹ In passing one may add that Descartes' human physiology is built up on exactly the same principles, and that although he never denies man the life of the spirit, his conception of the functioning of the human body is again a purely mechanical one. For Descartes the essence of spirit is reflective

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1. "~~Est~~ je m'estois icy particulièrement aresté a faire voir, que, s'il y avoit de telles machines, qui eussent les organes et la figure d'un singe ou de quelque autre animal sans raison, nous n'aurions aucun moyen pour reconnoistre qu'elles ne seroient pas en tout de mesme nature que ces animaux..." Oeuvres, tom. VI, Discours de la méthode, 5e partie, p. 56.
 2. Malebranche and Bossuet, Fontenelle and later Voltaire take part in the discussion; also la Fontaine's Discours à Madame de la Sablière, the poetry of Madame Deshoulières and the letters exchanged between Mademoiselle Descartes and Mademoiselle de Scudéry, Boileau's Satire VIII, etc. See Rosenfield, op. cit. p. 154 ff.

consciousness of self. The essence of matter is extension in space. There is no interaction between the two. The theory of animal automatism is therefore a natural consequence of his two main premises on the nature of being, and it does in fact make its appearance early in his philosophy. Madame de Sévigné is quite correct in linking, as she does, the two questions of whether "la matière raisonne" and "quelle sorte de petite intelligence Dieu a donnée aux bêtes."¹

The principle of animal mechanism Descartes defended against strong opposition, not only on physical but on moral and theological grounds. It seemed to him that to differentiate so clearly between spirit and matter was to safeguard the primacy and immortality of the human soul, and he was always anxious to clear himself of any suspicion of unorthodoxy, in this as in all other matters. The Schools had taught hitherto - and in this they were successors of Aristotle - that the animal had a sensitive soul, inferior to man's but spiritual none the less. Descartes dwelt with great insistence on the supposed dangers of this belief, which according to him, was a debasement of the value of

1. Lettres, II, 376; 30 Sept. 1671.

the spirit.¹ His opponents however, and particularly the libertines, were quick to point out that the reverse was also true. All the evidence of theology and common-sense had hitherto led man to believe that animals were endowed with certain reactions similar to human reactions - that they felt jealousy, fear, affection, and were sensitive to pain. If this opinion were to be proved false, there would necessarily go with it a good part of man's belief in his own spiritual nature. Thinking, feeling, loving, might well be mechanical processes in man also; was there in fact any reason for imposing upon him the responsibilities and sanctions of a being with an immortal soul? It is easy to understand why the theory of animal automatism should have roused opposition out of all proportion to its initial importance.

The debate was not in fact wholly new to seventeenth century France. Already Montaigne² and Gassendi³ had tried to investigate the nature of animal soul. In the steps of

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1. "Après l'erreur de ceux qui nient Dieu...il n'y en a point qui esloigne plutost les esprits foibles du droit chemin de la vertu, que d'imaginer que l'âme des bestes soit de mesme nature que la nostre, et que par conséquent nous n'avons rien à craindre, ni à esperer, après cette vie, non plus que les mouches et les fourmis..." Oeuvres, tom. VI, Discours de la methode, 5e partie, p.59.
 2. Apologie de Raymond de Sebonde. Essais, II, 12
 3. Edit. 1658. Physicae, III, 3: de anima. See A.S. Brett, The Philosophy of Gassendi, Macmillan, 1908.

the ancients and particularly the Stoics, these two thinkers had exalted the wisdom and intelligence of animals to the disadvantage of man. Gassendi attributed to animals a kind of physiological soul endowed with particular sensory ideas, a flame-like substance composed of fiery particles, material in substance. The controversy is reflected in the literature of the time. Madame de la Sablière was an ardent Gassendist, and La Fontaine has several references to the problem, among them a succinct exposition of Gassendi's theory.¹ It is evident that automatism was a much-discussed topic among the educated men and women of the period. It forms the subject of one of Madame de Sévigné's most famous letters, and is one aspect of cartesianism on which she did not hesitate to differ strongly with Descartes and her daughter.

In her reactions to automatism Madame de Sévigné adopts what one feels must have been the common-sense view of the layman in the seventeenth century. She simply discards it as an unreasonable theory, unsupported by the evidence of

1. The Discours à Madame de la Sablière describes how Nature forms the animal soul:

t / "Je subtiliserais un morceau de matière,
 Que l'on ne pourrais plus concevoir sans effort,
 Quintessence d'atôme, extrait de la lumière,
 Je ne sais quoi plus vif et plus mobile encore
 Que le feu...."

her own observations. Her first references record a dispute between la Mousse and the young Bishop of St.

Pol-de-Léon in Brittany:

"La Mousse parle des petites parties¹ avec cet évêque, qui est cartésien à brûler; mais dans le même feu, il soutient que les bêtes pensent. Voilà mon homme; il a été aussi loin qu'on peut aller dans cette philosophie, et M. le Prince en est demeuré à son avis. Leurs disputes me divertissent fort."²

Madame de Sévigné is evidently in full agreement with this opinion. The reference shows that even Descartes' disciples felt that automatism was an unproven hypothesis, and that the problem was discussed with equal warmth by philosophers and nobility. A few months later, recording the premature death of the Bishop of St. Pol, Madame de Sévigné refers again to his views:

"Je crois présentement que l'opinion léonique est la plus assurée: il voit de quoi il est question, ma bonne, et si la matière raisonne ou ne raisonne pas, et quelle sorte de petite intelligence Dieu a donnée aux bêtes"³

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1. The theory of the universe contained in Descartes' Principes de Philosophie, in which the words "petites parties" recur on almost every page.
 2. Lettres, II, 345; 2 Sept. 1671. "M. le Prince" refers to Condé who is famous for his patronage of men of letters, particularly the libertine poets and freethinkers of the period. The Bishop of St. Pol-de-Léon, the abbé Montigny, had been a close friend of several well-known literary figures, notably Comart, Mlle de Scudéry, Pellisson and Chapelain, whom he defended vigorously at the time of the publication of La Pucelle. It is interesting to find him thus linked with Chapelain's pupil. He had himself a certain reputation as a poet and, apparently, as a cartesian and was a member of the Académie française.
 3. Lettres, II, 376; 30 Sept. 1671.

The best-known reference to the question in her letters is in 1672 in an answer to Madame de Grignan:

"Parlez un peu au Cardinal de vos machines, des machines qui aiment, des machines qui ont une élection pour quelq'un, des machines qui sont jalouses, des machines qui craignent. Allez, allez, vous vous moquez de nous; jamais Descartes n'a prétendu nous le faire croire." 1

Madame de Sévigné, whose own little dog, "Marphise", accompanied her on all her travels to Paris, Livry and les Rochers, could hardly be expected to regard it only as a machine; and as a matter of fact she was quite correct in adding that "jamais Descartes n'a prétendu nous le faire croire."

Descartes had never been ready to credit the animal with any form of psychic activity; and though in later life he was forced by his critics to modify his original belief, and grant to animals some measure of sense perception and a corporeal soul, he would certainly have rejected the innovations introduced into his doctrine by Madame de Grignan. 2

1. Lettres, II, 543; 23 March 1672.

2. The true cartesian doctrine is clearly expressed by Malebranche in the Recherche de la Vérité; IV, Part II, ch. VII says: "Ils mangent sans plaisir, ils crient sans douleur, ils croissent sans le savoir; ils ne désirent rien, ils ne craignent rien, ils ne connaissent rien; et s'ils agissent d'une manière qui marque intelligence, c'est que Dieu les ayant faits pour les conserver, il a formé leur corps de telle façon qu'ils évitent machinalement et sans crainte tout ce qui est capable de les détruire."

We need not, however, assume that Madame de Sévigné is here trying to correct a misinterpretation of Descartes' teaching. Rather does she appear to be expressing the common-sense view that the philosophy of reason could not seriously be expounding anything so unreasonable. The empiricist objectors to automatism took their stand on their own experience, rejecting both the arguments of rationalism and those of theology. From her opinions one might class Madame de Sévigné with them, but there is no sign that she wished to delve into the subtleties of the controversy.¹ Nor does she appear to be moved by the moral or religious aspect, or even to be aware of the materialistic tendency of Descartes' theory. The most one can say is that Madame de Sévigné was aware of the question and of the contradictions in the cartesian doctrine which not even the most loyal followers of the philosopher had been able to dissipate. Her own opinion is clearly opposed to that of Descartes.

There is in one of the Lettres an instance in which Madame de Sévigné applies the language of automatism to human psychology, and it is interesting to note that she was aware of the connection between the two. In 1687, writing

1. There is no mention anywhere in the Lettres of either Gassendi or Bernier.

to her daughter of her dejected state after their recent separation, she says:

"Si on osoit penser ici, on seroit accablé de cette pensée; mais on la rejette et on est comme un automate. Notre charrette mal graissée reçoit et fait des visites, nous allons par les rues; mais nous nous gardons bien d'avoir une âme." 1

Descartes' theory of animal mechanism, as has already been pointed out, was the natural consequence of his ideas on human physiology. He first came to automatism through the body-machine, and his human physiology was almost as popular in the seventeenth century, as his doctrine of the beast-machine; popular, that is, with the layman; its effect on medical theory and practice will be discussed later. For Madame de Sévigné, if one may judge by the Lettres, the process was reversed. She was already conversant with the theory of automatism in its details long before, in 1676, she read the Traité des Passions de l'âme. She had, it is true, been introduced in 1673 to the cartesian writings of Louis de la Forge;² but beyond expressing her admiration she makes no comment on them. Madame de Sévigné's response to the reading of Descartes himself is far more

1. Lettres, VIII, 109-10; 27 Sept. 1687.

2. The full title of his treatise is: Traité de l'esprit de l'homme, de ses facultés et fonctions, et de son union avec le corps, suivant les principes de René Descartes. Paris 1666.

revealing. It seems to have been shortly before this that Corbinelli and La Mousse undertook to educate her in cartesianism, and probably the Traité des Passions was part of their curriculum. Descartes' physiology is one part of his system of philosophy which Madame de Sévigné seems to have mastered thoroughly for herself.

Descartes' conception of the human body was a purely mechanical one. Movement was the principle of life. The action of the heart produced "animal spirits" which in their turn set in motion all the muscles of the body. These animal spirits operate through the nerves which are hollow vessels leading to the muscles, swelling or contracting as the spirits pass into them, and causing the muscles themselves to swell or contract. The same animal spirits carry sensual impressions to the brain.¹ Madame de Sévigné alludes to these "esprits animaux, qui circulent dans les nerfs et font des traces dans le cerveau."² One aspect of the theory which seems to have attracted her is the explanation Descartes suggests for the affection which draws two people to one another; according to the philosopher these spirits were set in motion particularly by the

1. Descartes, Passions de l'âme, 1ère partie. Art XII p.336
 2. Lettres, VII, 38; 25 Aug. 1680.

emotions of love and friendship, and moved the will to unite itself to the object of its affection. "Je vous aime trop" says Madame de Sévigné to her daughter, "pour que les petit esprits ne se communiquent pas de vous à moi, et de moi à vous."¹

Belief in animal spirits was not, as a matter of fact, peculiar to Descartes. He himself had borrowed it from Galen, and Hobbes and Gassendi had also taught it in their works. It continued to be developed by physicists well into the eighteenth century. Madame de Sévigné uses it to good advantage in one at least of her letters, that containing the somewhat ironic description of the capture of the city of Aire by the armies of the King:

u/ "(les ennemis) ont été tellement frappés de la frayeur que leur a donnée notre canon, que les nerfs de dos qui servent à se tourner, et ceux qui font remuer les jambes pour s'enfuir, n'ont pu être arrêtés par la volonté d'acquérir de la gloire; et voilà ce que fait que nous prenons des villes." 2 27 01

The chief weakness of cartesian physiology was its inadequate explanation of the relation between soul and body. In spite of the constant criticisms which obliged him to elucidate his theories, Descartes never gave a

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1. Lettres, II, 271; 5 July 1671; also vol. V, 103-4; 14 Oct. 1676, and II, 167; 15 April 1671, passim.
 2. Lettres, V, 3; 5 Aug. 1676.

satisfactory solution to this problem. Nor was he truly able to explain how the initial formation of the human embryo could be explained according to a mechanical thesis. These very technical questions find no echo in the correspondence of Madame de Sévigné. One other difficulty, however, she does touch upon. Cartesian philosophy had reduced the properties of matter to the single one of extension in space, denying to it all sensible qualities of light, sound, colour, taste, etc. This left on Descartes the onus of explaining the sensory impressions received by man from the world outside himself; which he did, though in terms which might appear paradoxical, and were made more so by the desire of some of his followers to flout the accepted mediaeval ways of thought. Mediaeval scholars had attributed the reception of sense impressions to the secondary sensitive soul in man. Descartes, however, was especially at pains to prove that ^{it} man received these impressions at all, ^{it was} not because colour, warmth and light were qualities inherent in matter, but because material objects of a certain kind aroused in man the sensations associated with colour, light and warmth. These sense impressions, as he rightly pointed out, were in the soul and not in the external object; but Descartes had never denied that there was in the material world some quality which corresponds to our ideas of colour and light.

The distinction is most clearly expressed by Malebranche in the Recherche de la vérité;

"Ce n'est que depuis Descartes qu'à ces questions confuses et indéterminées, si le feu est chaud, si l'herbe est verte, etc., on répond en distinguant l'équivoque des termes sensibles qui les expriment. Si par chaleur, couleur, saveur, vous entendez un tel ou tel mouvement des parties sensibles, le feu est chaud, l'herbe est verte. Mais si par chaleur et les autres qualités, vous entendez ce que je sens auprès du feu, ce que je vois lorsque je vois de l'herbe, le feu n'est point chaud et l'herbe n'est pas verte, car la chaleur que l'on sent et les couleurs que l'on voit ne sont que dans l'âme." 1

Malebranche's theory is obviously satisfactory from the philosophical point of view; but it is evident that these distinctions had escaped the Marquise, who at first had only retained the notion that colour was somehow in the soul, and had therefore rejected the cartesian explanation of sensation. Even the philosopher's niece, ardent cartesian as she was, does not appear very convinced on the point:

"Elle m'a conté qu'elle vous avoit écrit qu'avec le respect qu'elle devoit à son oncle, le bleu étoit une couleur..." 2

Madame de Sévigné was first made aware of the problem, it seems, through Dom Robert Desgabets, who pushed it to exaggerated limits. There is a rather bewildered comment,

1. Ap. Bouillier, op.cit. vol.I, p. 104.
2. Lettres, IX, 54; 15 May 1689.

after Corbinelli had returned from one of his expeditions to Commercy:

"Enfin, après avoir bien tourné, notre âme est verte" 1.

All sense impressions were explained by Descartes in the same way; Madame de Sévigné refers especially to that of taste:

"Corbinelli vous répondra sur la grandeur de la lune, et sur le goût amer ou doux. Il m'a contentée sur la lune mais je n'entends pas bien le goût. Il dit que ce qui ne nous paroît pas doux est amer: je sais bien qu'il n'y a ni doux ni amer: mais je me sers de ce qu'on nomme abusivement doux et amer, pour le faire entendre aux grossiers... 2

One can see that she was here beginning to understand the principle; a later reference suggests that she had, in fact, mastered it completely. After having watched a fire-eating tumbler perform in her drawing-room at les Rochers, the Marquise exclaims:

1. Lettres, V, 195; 30 June 1677.

e/ C.f. 19 July 1677, where Corbinelli is urging Mme de Grignan to spare her mother anxiety by taking more care of her health: Je suis malcontent de vous; je ne vous trouve point just: je suis honteux d'être votre maître. Si notre père Descartes le savoit, il empêcheroit votre âme d'être verte, et vous seriez bien honteuse qu'elle fût noire, ou de quelque autre couleur."

2. Lettres, V, 36; 2 Aug. 1676. C.f. Descartes, Oeuvres, tom. IX, Principes de Philosophie, 4e partie, art. 192, p.313; also tom XI, Traité des Saveurs, p.539.

"Cela prouve votre philosophie, ma bonne, et qu'assurément le feu n'est point chaud, et ne nous cause le sentiment de chaleur que selon la disposition des parties." 1

There is one other aspect of Descartes' Passions de l'âme to which Madame de Sévigné makes no direct reference, though it could not have failed to interest her. For Descartes in his treatise does not regard human passions only from the physical point of view. He examines in great detail the part played in them by the faculties of the soul, and especially the control of the will. In his eyes this control is absolute. No moralist has ever so exalted the power of man over his passions, and the very titles of the sections of his work are sufficiently revealing: "Art. XLV. - Quel est le pouvoir de l'âme au regard de ses passions. Art. XLVIII. - En quoi on connaît la force ou la faiblesse des âmes. Art. L. - Qu'il n'y a point d'âme si faible qu'elle ne puisse, étant bien conduite, acquérir un pouvoir absolu sur ses passions." 2 There is in the words the echo of one of Corneille's tirades, and one remembers that Madame de Sévigné was a contemporary of Camille and Pauline, and a fervent admirer of the great

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1. Lettres, VI, 499; 30 June 1680. The opinion here in question is also found in Malebranche, Conversations chrétiennes which the Marquise was reading at the time.
 2. Oeuvres, tom XI, Passions de l'âme, Ie partie, p.362, 366, 368.

tragedians. Her comment on certain lines of Polyeucte are an indirect criticism of the Passions de l'âme. She quotes:

"Ainsi de vos désirs toujours reine absolue
Les plus grands changements vous trouvent résolue.." 1

and adds:

"Voilà deux vers à retenir, et où la Providence devrait conduire les sages comme les philosophes. Si je ne suis dans cet état bienheureux, ce n'est pas faute de la méditer souvent, et d'observer toutes ses démarches..." 2

But one feels that this optimistic view of human nature was not hers in practice, and there is evidence that she was never in agreement with her daughter's somewhat cold conception of the strength of human affection. In her constant struggle with this all-embracing affection, Madame de Sévigné derived more comfort from the pessimistic fatality of Port-Royal than from the philosophy of Descartes.

As one advances further into the study of Descartes, in company with Madame de Sévigné, it becomes evident that she was not, in the true sense, a cartesian at all. On her own confession she found its arguments difficult to follow, and undertook to study them only for the sake of her daughter, who was the true cartesian of the family. Speaking of

1. Polyeucte, act II, sc. 2.
2. Lettres, VII, 80; 18 Sept. 1680.

philosophy in general, Madame de Sévigné makes a very significant remark: She had been meditating in the woods at Les Rochers, trying to do a little philosophising for herself, and she remarks:

"Si j'avois quelqu'un pour m'aider à philosopher, je pense que je deviendrois une de vos écolières, mais je ne rêve que comme on faisoit du temps que le coeur était à gauche...Il me faudra toujours quelques petites histoires; car je suis grossière comme votre frère: les choses abstraites vous sont naturelles et nous sont contraires..."

It is interesting that Madame de Sévigné should include her son in this opinion, for we find him on several occasions in the Lettres mentioning cartesian works, and conducting arguments with his sister in his own right. He was one of the party, for instance, who took part in the discussion mentioned above on the genesis of ideas, and he appears to have been familiar with most of the principles of Descartes.¹ Madame de Sévigné may have been doing him less than justice on this occasion. The letter goes on:

"Ma fille, pour être si opposées dans nos lectures, nous n'en sommes pas moins bien ensemble; au contraire, nous sommes une nouveauté l'une pour l'autre; et enfin je ne souhaite au monde que de vous revoir, et jouir de la douceur qu'on trouve dans une famille aussi aimable que la mienne." 2

There is here a certain anxiety on the part of the Marquise,

1. See also vol. VII, 73, 74; 15 Sept. 1680; and IX, 76, his knowledge of the Physique de Rohault.

2. Lettres, VI, 447-48; 9 June 1680.

lest a divergence of view should mean an estrangement from her daughter. In philosophy, as indeed on almost every topic, she referred all things to Madame de Grignan. Indeed one may ask oneself whether Madame de Sévigné would ever have given to the teachings of Descartes the attention that she did, had her daughter not been such an ardent cartesian. By her temperament as well as by her mind she was unsuited to the new philosophy. The imaginative faculties predominated in her, as every page of her writing shows. Those branches of Descartes' philosophy which she studied most deeply are mainly those which make some appeal to the imagination - automatism, human physiology, and his dazzling vision of an immense and eternal universe. Style, too entered into her appreciation of any work. There is no evident pleasure for Madame de Sévigné in the reading of Descartes, as there is in the writings of "ces messieurs de Port-Royal", or in the histories of France which her daughter despised. Her mind, as she herself says, needed something concrete to feed on, and her will was never stirred by the arid propositions of cartesian philosophy.

One may not, however, dismiss her acquaintance with it as wholly superficial. As an intelligent woman living in an intellectual age, Madame de Sévigné could not have ^{been} unaware that a change was taking place in the traditional

modes of thought of her country. Cartesianism is above all the triumph of pure reason over scholastic philosophy; and though the name of rationalism is more appropriate to the thought of the eighteenth century, no thinking Frenchwoman of the reign of Louis XIV could have failed to note that a new spirit was stirring abroad - a revolutionary way of thought that made man's reason the sole criterion of truth. If even such mercurial society women as Madame de Coulanges could understand and criticise the new philosophy,¹ to refuse the same capacity to Madame de Sévigné would be to do her a grave injustice. She was independent in her judgements, too, as has already been seen. Her great attachment to her daughter never fettered her intellectually; in questions where she felt strongly, as for instance that of automatism, her views were boldly expressed, and she did not hesitate to disagree with Madame de Grignan.

Critics have already attempted to estimate the value of the Jansenist movement as an antidote to cartesianism in the France of the seventeenth century,² The question may also be discussed in relation to Madame de Sévigné. The influence of Port-Royal was strongly upon her at all times,

1. Lettres, IX, 200; 11 Sept. 1689.

2. See Chapter VI, and cf. F. Brunetière, Etudes Critiques sur l'histoire de la littérature française, Paris, 1880 - 1907, in 80; vol. IV.

and may have been in part responsible for her lack of real enthusiasm for the rationalist philosophers. The Marquise was a woman of deep moral convictions. Descartes never wrote the treatise on morals of which he gives a preliminary sketch in the Discours de la Méthode. It was partly because of the vagueness of its moral teaching that the best of the Port-Royal writers fought against his philosophy. Madame de Sévigné's admiration for Pascal knew no bounds.¹ We know that her daughter was inclined to speak contemptuously of him,² but for the Marquise his teachings were all that was best in Port-Royal, and they appealed to her heart rather than to her reason. They were at the same time a way of life and an inspiration, and Madame de Sévigné's ardent, unintellectual nature needed a deeply human philosophy. She was but little attached to her cartesian opinions. Madame de Grignan might cling to them through every theological storm,³ but her mother was far from ready to be a martyr for the sake of the new philosophy. Jansenism, however, had both its martyrs and its saints, and brought her what she truly sought, a philosophy which was also a

1. See chapter VI.

2. Lettres IX, 367; 21 December 1689.

3. Lettres V, 500, 24 November 1678.

religious doctrine.

In fact, it is only where she finds cartesianism in conjunction with a religious doctrine that Madame de Sévigné truly studies it with fervour on her own account. This truth becomes most evident in her reading of Malebranche, the greatest of Descartes' disciples. It is here that Madame de Sévigné's knowledge of cartesianism shows the greatest depth.

With Malebranche cartesian philosophy became, if one may so express it, cartesian theology. As the Marquise says of the Conversations chrétiennes:

"C'est toute la philosophie de votre père accommodée au christianisme; c'est la preuve de l'existence de Dieu sans le secours de la foi." ¹ e/

Those are indeed the two aspects of Malebranche's work. His aim was to Christianise the philosophy of reason, and especially to complete Descartes' metaphysics, in the many places where they had been found wanting. The glory of God is the essential theme of his philosophy. Opposition to scholasticism is the fundamental principle of his thought, and he seeks to replace the subtleties of the Schools by a direct, and one might almost say an empirical, approach to God and the works of His creation.

Malebranche's first and best-known work, the Recherche de la vérité, was published in 1674. The Conversations

1. Lettres, VI, 468; 19 June 1680.

chrétiennes, to which Madame de Sévigné refers in 1680,¹ were a simplified version written in dialogue form for the Duc de Chevreuse; and published in 1677. Of the Recherche de la vérité Madame de Sévigné says frankly that it was too difficult for her to understand,² and even of the Conversations she seems to be in some doubt:

"Je vous manderai si ce livre est à la portée de mon intelligence. S'il n'y est pas, je le quitterai humblement, renonçant à la sotte vanité de contrefaire l'éclairée, quand je ne le suis pas."

The remark reveals in Madame de Sévigné an intellectual humility which is attractive. There is in her nothing of the "femme savante". In reading Malebranche, however, she was to come in contact with some very complex issues, and the controversies attendant on his writings are frequently reflected in the Lettres. She refers for instance, to the opinion that all is in order in the world. This was Malebranche's solution to the problem of evil in the universe, which he had been challenged to explain. Having put forward the theory that the greater glory of God was the only standard by which to judge creation, he was obliged to account in some way for the imperfections to be found

1. Lettres, VI, 458; 15 June 1680.

2. Lettres, VI, 513; 7 July 1680.

therein; for the fact that, in this perfect creation, some lands were flooded and others parched with drought; that a peasant's harvest was ruined by a hail-storm; or a child born with some monstrous deformity. For Malebranche all these anomalies were sufficiently justified by the general Providence of God, whose wisdom is far beyond man's comprehension, and who must, since He Himself is perfect, have created the most perfect universe possible. The theory was to be re-expressed in the eighteenth century by Leibnitz, and bitterly satirised in Voltaire's "Candide". Madame de Sévigné herself refutes the philosophy of optimism, not in the rationalist spirit of the eighteenth century, but in the light of her jansenist convictions. The issue was, of course, being hotly contested at that very time by Arnauld on behalf of Port-Royal; it is interesting to note how quickly the Marquise herself puts her finger on the difficulty. We do not know whether she read the controversial writings of either side; but there is a reference to one of its chief arguments, the words of St. Paul: O altitudo which Arnauld interpreted in the sense of complete submission to the arbitrary caprice of God in the conduct of the universe. Madame de Sévigné, in the Port-Royal tradition, puts the sovereign will of God as the only criterion of order in the world; her criticism of Malebranche has a slight

note of mockery:

"Je voudrais bien me plaindre au Père Malebranche des souris qui mangent tout ici; cela est-il dans l'ordre? Quoi? de bon sucre, des bons fruits, des compotes! Et l'année passée, était-il dans l'ordre que de vilaines chenilles dévorassent toutes les feuilles de notre forêt et de nos jardins, et tous les fruits de la terre?...Oui, mon père, tout cela est bon; Dieu en sait tirer sa gloire: nous ne voyons pas comment, mais cela est vrai; et si vous ne mettez la volonté de Dieu pour toute règle et pour tout ordre, vous tomberez dans de grands inconvénients..." 1

Malebranche had pointed out that the full quotation from St. Paul, "O altitudo divitiarum sapientiae" referred not to God's will but to His unsearchable wisdom. It therefore laid on no man the obligation to believe, as the more extreme Jansenists had sought to do, that all things in the universe were good because divinely planned. Madame de Sévigné was evidently aware of this subtle distinction in terms, and elsewhere quotes St. Augustine in support of her opinion.² In the present case, as once before when cartesianism presented her with an apparently unreasonable doctrine, she inclines to think that the philosopher was not serious in the belief himself:

"Je supplie M. de Grignan d'excuser cette apostrophe au bon père, que je suis persuadée qui se moque de nous,

1. Lettres, VII, 4; 4 Aug. 1680.

2. Lettres, VI, 523; 14 July 1680. The question of Mme de Sévigné's knowledge of augustinian philosophy has already been discussed.

quand il dit de ces choses-là, d'autant plus qu'il y a plusieurs endroits dans ses livres où il dit précisément le contraire." 1

Madame de Sévigné does not state in which books Malebranche said "précisément le contraire"; one is inclined to think that her information came by hearsay, and that she was in any case less concerned with vindicating Malebranche than with finding for herself a satisfactory explanation of the problems involved.

Another very difficult question mentioned by Madame de Sévigné in connection with Malebranche is that of the extent and nature of man's freedom, and the predestination of the elect. Malebranche had declared that any idea of a personal Providence was incompatible with the greatness and sovereign wisdom of God. He therefore rejected the personal predestination which was so fundamental a tenet of Jansenism. To him the Redeemer sent by God had died for all men, and a man could be damned only if he resisted grace. The Jansenist belief in "un petit nombre d'élus" laid the emphasis of salvation too much on the individual, and too little on the universal glory of God. For Malebranche, therefore, every man received the same impulse and attraction of grace towards God, and it was according to the response

1. Lettres, VII, 4; 4 Aug. 1680.

of the Christian that his eternity was decided. Madame de Sévigné found this interpretation very contrary to her previous beliefs:

"Je suis toujours choquée de cette impulsion que nous arrêtons tout court; mais si le Père Malebranche a besoin de cette liberté de choix qu'il nous donne, comme à Adam, pour justifier la justice de Dieu envers les adultes, que fera-t-il pour les petits enfants? Il faudra en revenir à l'altitudo..." 1

It will be seen that Madame de Sévigné in reading Malebranche had met with some of the most hotly debated theological problems of all time, and had studied them more deeply than one would have expected her to do. Metaphysical arguments meant more to her when practical issues were involved, especially such urgent issues as man's personal salvation. In general she adopts the Augustinian solution to these questions, and it is evident that Malebranche's writings did in fact lead her back to Port-Royal.

1. Lettres, VI, 513; 7 July 1680.

CHAPTER EIGHT.THE MEDICAL WORLD OF THE SEVENTEENTH
CENTURY

At first sight it may seem strange to include in a study of Madame de Sévigné's intellectual experience a chapter on medicine. The seventeenth century, however, was a period of transition in the world of medicine, the last stand of the old traditionalist school of thought which dominated the Faculté de Médecine, and the bitter quarrels that attended its dissolution find echoes in a great many literary works of the time; so that it is impossible to study the literary life of seventeenth century France without being made aware in some measure of these questions. Moreover in Madame de Sévigné's letters are frequent references to health and hygiene, and to medical practitioners, as indeed is normal in letters as spontaneous and homely as hers, full of the practical details of family life. Anxiety over her family's health is only one aspect of these references, however; her opinions on medical theory and personalities are in themselves original and revealing.

The world into which Madame de Sévigné was born was,

from the medical point of view, the heir to several traditions.¹ Mediaeval theory had been fed mainly on the doctrines of Aristotle and the great figures of Greek medicine, Hippocrates and Galen. From these the earliest practitioners had acquired their fundamental tenets: the theory of humours and animal spirits, the division of all nature into four elements. The Greek influence inspired the dogmatic, a priori methods which prevailed in the Faculté de Médecine, theoretical rather than practical, regarding medicine rather as a branch of natural philosophy than as a science in its own right. This learning had, however, come down to the University of Paris through the intermediary of the Arab philosophers, and thereby become tainted with the mysterious medical theories of the peoples of Islam. Cabbalistic treatments and remedies abounded, and the barriers between medicine and magic were very ill-defined.

The faithful guardians of these amalgamated traditions were the doctors of the Faculté de Médecine; this had in the twelfth century broken off from the parent body, the Faculté de Théologie of the Sorbonne, to become an

1. C.f. P. Delaunay, Le Monde médical au XVIe, XVIIe, XVIIIe Siècle, Paris, Collection Hippocrate, 1935.

autonomous corporation, highly organised and jealously exclusionist, whose history during the seventeenth century is one long sequence of disputes over privilege.¹ Alongside this official body, though in no way accepted by it, there flowered during the Renaissance period the neo-platonist school of medical thought. These new philosophers whose pantheistic conception of nature identified man, physically as well as spiritually, with the universe in which he dwelt, searched the stars and the mineral world for the causes and remedies of all their ills. The sixteenth century reinstated the occult sciences and brought back the wisdom of the East into its medical theory. It was the golden age of alchemy and astrology, of Paracelsus and Nostradamus, who was himself a doctor of Montpellier. Treatment was given in accordance with the conjunction of the stars, and remedies were too often simple charms or magic amulets. The thought behind this semi-wizardry was confused: a blend of traditional Greek theory and the hermetic arts, and above all the urge to overthrow dialectic, to experiment and observe and discover for oneself the mysterious world of man.

1. C.f. M. Raynaud, Les Médecins au temps de Molière, Paris, 1862, in - 80.

It is indeed inaccurate to refer to such as a school of thought, for there is here nothing like an organised body of doctrine. Nevertheless traces of these beliefs remained to affect seventeenth century medical theory, particularly that of the innumerable charlatans and empiric practitioners who flourished in the Paris of the "Grand Siècle".

But it was not along these unorthodox paths that the future development of ~~medecine~~ medicine was destined to lie, and the fetters of traditionalism continued to weigh heavily on the Faculté de Médecine for many years. It was Descartes who first sowed the seeds of revolution in French medical thought, and even then the transformation was accomplished but slowly. With the advent of rationalism, however, men began to take towards the art of healing a more practical attitude. It came gradually to be regarded less as a doctrine than as a technique to be built up on solid facts, and with certain inviolable rules. It is significant that this change of outlook was brought about from outside the medical profession, by a philosopher who was also a mathematician, and who regarded biology from a purely mechanical angle. Henceforth medicine would develop slowly into an autonomous

science. But the experimental method sponsored by Descartes found much deep-rooted opposition among the older members of the Faculté, who sided with the doctors of Theology in the frequent condemnations of cartesianism that occurred during this period.¹ Among the younger generation of physicians, however, the scientific method was in many cases enthusiastically received, and it is interesting to note at this point that one of those most instrumental in the diffusion in France of Descartes' biological theories is the Saumur doctor, Louis de la Forge, whose writings have already been mentioned in another connection as part of Madame de Sévigné's library.²

This movement towards a positive scientific attitude in medical questions coincided with several important physiological discoveries in the seventeenth century. Independently of Descartes' influence there already existed in the medical world, though mainly outside the Faculté, a growing urge to experiment rather than theorise. Ambroise Paré had already in the sixteenth century begun the reform of surgery, and all over Europe the Universities were beginning to enlarge their medical curriculum. The most

1. See p. 278 above

2. See above p. 274.

urgently needed reforms were the study of anatomy by means of dissections, and the introduction of clinical teaching and practical observation to supplement the academic teaching already given in the Schools. In 1628 Harvey discovered the system of the circulation of the blood. This was in fact the dawn of a new era in medicine. It was acclaimed as such by Descartes, who added that he had confirmed Harvey's doctrine by his own experiments, though he did not, in fact, adopt his theory of the heart's action. Nevertheless Madame de Sévigné's remarks show how clearly Descartes was linked in the public mind with the new biological discoveries. In Boileau's Arrêt Burlesque, which in 1671 had attacked the attempted condemnation of Cartesian doctrine by the University of Paris and the Parlement, the new medical teaching is placed side by side with the rationalist philosophy which the Sorbonne had opposed. It was on the Faculty of Medicine, however, that the satirist poured his greatest scorn:

"Ordonne au chyle d'aller droit au foie, sans plus passer par le coeur, et au coeur de le recevoir. Fait défense au sang d'être plus vagabond, errer ni circuler dans le corps, sous peine d'être entièrement livré et abandonné à la Faculté de

Médecine..."¹

When in 1678 the Marquise writes to Bussy-Rabutin:

"Les jésuites sont plus puissants que jamais: ils ont fait défendre aux pères de l'Oratoire d'enseigner la philosophie de Descartes et par conséquent au sang de circuler"².

It is obvious that she has the Arrêt Burlesque in mind, and that for her also the condemnation of Cartesianism involved much more than an objection to his doctrines on theological grounds. The intellectual life of the period was undergoing a radical change, and repercussions of his theories were being felt in every sphere of knowledge. Whether Madame de Sévigné herself felt the change in all its fulness is hard to say. She was perhaps rather close to the time to have so broad a vision. Yet it is some indication of her intelligence and mental acumen that she should have been aware of the importance of these struggles; they were specialised questions in a field where the layman would not ordinarily be expected to penetrate.

Meanwhile other important developments were taking place in Paris itself. In 1622 an Italian, Aselli, dis-

1. Arrêt Burlesque 1671

2. Lettres, V, 493: 12 Oct. 1678. For the struggles of the Oratorians and the Jesuits on this point, see above p. 278n.

covered the lacteal vessels, and his research in this field was carried on by Pecquet, a physician of Montpellier¹, who attended Fouquet and through him became acquainted with Madame de Sévigné. In 1663 and 1655, Fagon and Mattot both published theses in the University of Paris in support of Harvey's theory, and in 1673 Louis XIV set the seal on their opinions by the creation, in the Jardin du Roi, of a special chair of anatomy "pour la propagation des doctrines nouvelles". The Jardin du Roi, the present Jardin des Plantes, itself marked the beginning of a new line of research, having been instituted by Richelieu in 1626 for the development of botanical studies and the teaching of surgery. As with philosophy and the natural sciences, the new discoveries were popularised by public lectures, mainly attended, it is true, by medical men, but well-known to the intellectual élite of Paris. Later in the century a member of the Académie des Sciences, du Verney, began his famous demonstrations of anatomy, and conducted dissections in the "boutique" of one Matthieu Geoffroy, an apothecary. Animals were kept ready for the purpose

1. C.f. Le Maguet, Le monde médical parisien sous le Grand Roi, Paris 1899.

in the town menageries and in 1681 an elephant having died at Versailles, the members of the Académie des Sciences were invited to perform an autopsy. The surgeon on this occasion was again du Verney, in company with Claude Perrault, the famous physician and architect who was later satirised by Boileau, during the querelle des Anciens et des Modernes:

.... "Notre assassin renonce à son art inhumain;
Et désormais, la règle et l'équerre à la main,
Laisant de Galien la science suspecte,
De mauvais médecin devient bon architecte."¹.

Thus it was that public dissections were widely attended and very popular; even women were often present at them.² We know that Madame de Grignan was familiar with the principles of anatomy and at pains to learn as much as possible about human physiology. Her mother mentions the fact in a letter to friends, in 1679:

"(Madame de Grignan) se gouverne un peu à sa fantaisie, et sous l'ombre de la philosophie de M. Descartes, qui lui apprend l'anatomie, elle se moque un peu des régimes et des remèdes communs. Enfin on ne mène pas une cartésienne comme une autre personne..."³.

1. Boileau, Art Poétique, chant IV.

2. C.f. Reynier, G. La femme au XVIIe Siècle, Paris 1929.

3. Lettres, V, 538; 13 June 1679.

Her mother nevertheless approved her desire to increase her knowledge, and shows every disposition to credit her daughter with a particular aptitude for medical studies:

"Quelle lecture! et quel plaisir de vous entendre discourir sur tous les chapitres que vous traitez! C'est la médecine me ravit; je suis persuadée qu'avec cette intelligence et cette facilité d'apprendre que Dieu vous a donnée, vous en saurez plus que les médecins: il vous manquera quelque expérience, et vous ne tuerez pas impunément comme eux; mais je me fierais bien plus à vous qu'à eux pour juger d'une maladie."¹

Madame de Sévigné herself does not show a direct interest in medical theory as such. There is no suggestion, for instance, that she read deeply into it, as her daughter did. The new knowledge was diffused mainly in a generation later than her own. It was in any case a very specialised topic for one whose turn of mind was fundamentally unscientific. We must suppose Madame de Sévigné, however, to have been constantly reminded of the development of cartesian medical theory by her daughter's references to it. We know that Descartes' explanation of the functions of the human body was a purely mechanical one, and that Madame de Grignan as his faithful disciple spoke of herself as "une machine". Madame de Sévigné takes up the expression in one of her own letters:

1. Lettres, VI, 93; 24 Nov. 1679.

"Vous nous direz comme vous vous trouvez,
et comme cette pauvre substance qui pense,
et qui pense si vivement, aura pu conserver
sa machine si belle et si délicate dans un
bon état, pendant qu'elle étoit si agitée..."¹.

We find Madame de Sévigné explaining in cartesian
language the effect of her treatment at the baths of
Vichy:

"...la tête et tout le corps sont en mouvement,
tous les esprits en campagne..."².

It was here too that she tried to convert to cartesian
thinking the medical man who was attending her:

"Je fais lire mon médecin, qui me plaît; il
vous plairait aussi. Je lui mets dans la tête
d'apprendre la philosophie de votre père Descartes;
je ramasse des mots que je vous ai ouï dire..."³.

Madame de Sévigné evidently realised that an incursion
into rationalism meant, for a medical man, a radical
alteration in his way of thinking. One might also
mention the violent medical quarrels which shook the
seventeenth century, and were widely publicised in the
pamphlet Press. Such were the lawsuits over the status

1. Lettres, VIII, 225; 25 Oct. 1638
2. Lettres, IV, 468, 474, 28 May, 1 June 1676. The theory
of animal spirits was found originally in Galen, but
Mme. de Sévigné seems more likely to have heard of it
through Descartes' writings.
3. Lettres, IV, 474, 1 June 1676.

of surgeon-barbers in the Faculté de Médecine, and the famous Querelle de l'antimoine, which degenerated into a veritable pamphlet war, and in which several secondary literary figures took part.¹

It is indeed a very interesting feature of the development of medicine in the period under review that it had many close links with the literary life of the time. Medicine was still, in the early seventeenth century, an art rather than a science, and as such allied to philosophy and the study of the classics. The great literary centre of Madame de Sévigné's youth, the Hôtel de Rambouillet, was the resort of several prominent medical figures. She may have met there the doctor Pilet de la Mesnardière, of whom Richelieu commanded an "Ars Poetica" for the rising generation of literary men. In Mlle de Scudéry's salon she may have heard Cureau de la Chambre² read part of the Traité des Passions which he dedicated to "l'illustre Sapho", or heard some of the curious anecdotes which were later incorporated into his treatise

1. C.f. Raynaud, Les Médecins au temps de Molière, p.174 ff.

2. Physician-in-ordinary to the Queen, Anne of Austria, and later to the King; soon to be Professor of Anatomy in the Jardin Royal. He was also a member of the Académie Française.

against animal automatism.¹ If so she must have been glad to find such an ardent supporter of her own views. We know too that several of Madame de Sévigné's closer friends belonged to both the literary and the medical world. Her own tutor, Chapelain, had studied medicine in his youth. The abbé Bourdelot, who celebrated her beauty in his verse -

"il m'appelle la mère des Amours; mais il a beau dire, je trouve ses vers méchants,"².

- was physician to the Queen of Sweden. In the salons of the second literary generation the presence of medical men is more frequent still. Women of the seventeenth century tended more and more to take an interest in scientific questions, and their receptions to be more and more mixed in character: the precursors of those of the eighteenth century. Madame de la Sablière, for instance, already presided over a veritable "cercle" of savants before even she admitted La Fontaine into her company. The Jansenist society that revolved round Madame de Sablé's home in the Place Royale³ could have

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1. Traité de la connaissance des animaux, où tout ce qui a été dit pour et contre le raisonnement des Bêtes est examiné, Paris, 1648, in 4^o. Also: Discours sur l'amitié et la haine qui se trouvent entre les animaux, Paris, 1667, in - 8^o.
 2. Lettres, IV, 262-3; 4 Dec. 1675. See below p. 333.
 3. The cercle included La Rochefoucauld and Madame de la Fayette.

not many a medical man in attendance on this celebrated "malade imaginaire".

The seventeenth century physician participated in another way in the literary life of the time. The diffusion of scientific knowledge by means of written treatises in French continued the movement, begun by Descartes, to popularise the vernacular as a medium of technical explanation. We know that Madame de Sévigné's tutor Ménage rebelled against the banishment of Latin from medical works. But he was himself a classical scholar, whereas doctors and scientists tended more and more to write in their own tongue. In doing so they came up against interesting problems of vocabulary, involving the enrichment of the language with many new scientific terms. Madame de Grignan as a faithful cartesian proscribes the use of the unscientific term: vapeurs; and the Marquise asks her to suggest an alternative:

"Vous ne voulez donc pas qu'on dise vapeurs; mais que ferons-nous si vous nous ôtez ce mot? car on le met à tout; en attendant que vous autres cartésiens en ayez trouvé un autre, je vous demande permission de m'en servir."¹.

Madame de Sévigné's own use of medical terminology

1. Lettres, IX, 29; 22 April 1689.

presents little that is unusual. She refers frequently to "humeurs", and once to the cartesian way of describing them when, speaking of the anger of Madame de Grignan's brother-in-law, she calls it "des effervescences d'humeur"¹. and adds:

"Voilà un mot dont je n'avais jamais entendu parler; mais il est de votre père Descartes, je l'honore à cause de vous."².

This is humour in the medical sense, and this use of the word recurs in the Lettres. Sometimes, too, it is found to mean more specifically a temper of mind. There are for instance the two covered walks at Livry, the one sunny and warm, the other cool and dimly-lit, which are respectively "l'humeur de ma mère" and "l'humeur de ma fille."³ One is reminded of Ben Jonson's "Every Man in his Humour"; no doubt she realised how the word was

1. In the old medical theory a choleric temper was attributed, as were all fluctuations of mood, to a disturbance in the secretions of the body, in this case to an excess of bile. Madame de Sévigné must have been thoroughly familiar with this, the main-spring of contemporary medical art.
2. Lettres, IX, 145; 2 Aug. 1689. The term effervescence actually comes not from Descartes, but is found in the Système de philosophie of Sylvain Régis, Paris, 1690, tom II, vol. IV, part V, ch. III.
3. Lettres, IV, 275; 15 Dec. 1675. See also VI, 33, 387, 545, 4 Oct. 1679; 9 May and 21 July 1680.

changing in meaning, and how many such words were being altered by the spread of the new learning.

In considering the connection between medicine and literature in this period one is, however, bound to admit that they were sometimes less happily related. A surprising number of the literary works of the "Grand Siècle" are directed in some way against the medical profession, in particular against the members of the Faculté. Their greatest opponent was of course Molière, who by bringing their "moeurs" onto the stage had so often made the physicians an object of public satire. He was not the first to do so; the "docteur" was already a traditional comic character in the *commedia dell'Arte*. But Molière's doctors are not merely stock characters; they reveal in their creator a considerable knowledge of the language and practice of the Faculté de Médecine.¹ The theatre-going public was a wide one, and no doubt he contributed greatly to the interest shown by the average laymen in the medical questions of the century. He is one of the authors most frequently quoted by Madame de Sévigné; of those quotations a very large number are from the plays that deal with some aspect of medicine. His satire

1. C.f. Raynaud, *op.cit.* ch. VII & VIII.

delights her, and she has no difficulty in finding analogous scenes within her own experience:

"On me contoit hier la comédie de ce Malade Imaginaire, que je n'ai point vue:" (She was then staying at Livry.) "Il était donc dans l'obéissance exacte à ces messieurs; il comptait tout: c'était seize gouttes de vin dans treize cuillerées d'eau; s'il y en eût eu quatorze tout eût été perdu. Il prend une pilule, on lui a dit de se promener dans sa chambre; mais il est en peine, et demeure tout court, parce qu'il a oublié si c'est en long ou en large: cela me fit fort rire, et l'on applique cette folie à tout moment."¹.

Madame de Sévigné not only enjoyed the satire but expresses regret at the scenes that Molière missed, and that he might have turned to good account in his attack against the doctors:

"L'Anglois a promis au Roi sur sa tête...de guérir Monseigneur dans quatre jours. C'est dommage que Molière soit mort; il ferait une scène merveilleuse de Daquin, qui est enragé de n'avoir pas le bon remède, et de tous les autres médecins, qui sont accablés par les expériences, par les succès, et par les prophéties comme divines de ce petit homme."².

Again, during a long illness of Madame de Coulanges, who had been subjected to all kinds of treatments:

1. Lettres, V, 66; 16 Sept. 1676. In the comedy Argan is not actually counting drops of wine, but grains of salt; but it is obvious that Mme de Sévigné is quoting from hearsay.

2. Lettres, VII, 128; 8 Nov. 1680.

"J'ai pensé vingt fois à Molière depuis que j'ai vu tout ceci..."¹.

To subject a dying doctrine to public ridicule may be an effective way of killing it outright, and Molière's satire could not fail to have a deep effect on public opinion. The profession lent itself to satire in unfortunate ways, mainly by the pompousness and verbose technical jargon of its members, a jargon that too often concealed a slender experience. Molière burlesqued their official ceremonial as well as their bedside manner, but his quarrel with them was at bottom a scientific one.² Madame de Sévigné does not see it so; for though acquainted with the rival medical theories of the time, what she enjoyed in Molière was his realistic representation of a comic situation. But we have seen that she was aware of the importance of the cartesian revolution, and therefore the better able to enjoy the Arrêt Burlesque of Boileau,³ with its scathing satire on the Faculté. Another question much discussed at the period was that of the merits of various remedies. As an admirer of La Fontaine Madame de

1. Lettres, V, 76; 25 Sept. 1676.

2. See M. Raynaud; *op. cit.*

3. Boileau's Arrêt Burlesque, published in 1671, was the answer to the attempted condemnation of Descartes' doctrine by the Sorbonne theologians & the Parlement. See above p. 317.

Sévigné may have read the poem on Le Quinquina which celebrated this, the latest panacea for all ills. Her own opinions on remedies and the art of healing in general will be examined later, but she must have been aware of the quarrels that raged round them. The Querelle de l'antimoine, in particular, degenerated into a furious pamphlet war in which epigrams, acrostics and even sonnets of dubious literary merit were poured out in support of one side or the other. It is indeed curious to find such problems taking literary form and even being played out on the stage. Molière, Boileau and La Fontaine drew their information from the medical men who were their friends, and we know that one at least of the opponents of Molière met him on his own ground, in a violently satirical comedy entitled "Elomire Hypocondre" ou Les Médecins vengés. Madame de Sévigné had too much good taste to attach much importance to literature of this type. Its very existence, however, is evidence that in the seventeenth century the world of science and that of letters were still closely allied, and ready to take up arms in each other's quarrels.

It will be seen that Madame de Sévigné had a certain experience of the new medical theories of the seventeenth

century, and was aware of their importance though she had not studied them in very great detail. It is curious to contrast with this evidence of an alert mind her totally unscientific attitude, in practice, towards médecine and medical practitioners. Her guiding principle in matters of health would seem to be to prefer the illegal to the legal practitioner, the new untried remedy to the older accepted one; and in case of doubt to follow her own prejudice without reference to the facts.

In her attitude towards doctors the Marquise shows an almost immovable bias against the members of the Parisian Faculté de Médecine: "Que j'en veux aux médecins! Quelle forfanterie que leur art..."¹ and her condemnation of them is at times startlingly virulent; thus speaking of one who was evidently a protégé of Madame de Grignan's:

"Je parlerai à M. du Chesne de votre petit médecin et nous lui ferons tuer quelques malades dans notre quartier, pour voir un peu comme il s'y prend; ce serait dommage qu'il n'usât pas du privilège qu'il a de tuer impunément. Ce n'est pas que la saison ne soit contraire aux médecins. Le remède de l'Anglois qui sera bientôt public, les rend fort

1. Lettres, V, 66; 16 Sept. 1676.

méprisables, avec leurs saignées et leurs médecines..."¹.

To write such words in modern times would be to lay oneself open to the charge of libel, but a study of Madame de Sévigné's contemporaries shows that she was not alone in her opinions nor in her acid denunciations. Boileau, for instance, in his Art Poétique² makes the same insinuation:

"Dans Florence jadis vivait un médecin
Savant hâbleur, dit-on, et célèbre assassin,
Lui seul y fit longtemps la publique misère;
Là le fils orphelin lui redemande un père;
Ici le frère pleure un frère empoisonné.
L'un meurt vide de sang, l'autre plein de sené;
Le rhume à son aspect se change en pleurésie,
Et par lui la migraine est bientôt frénésie.
Il quitte enfin la ville, en tous lieux détesté.
De tous ses amis morts un seul ami resté..."

It is piquant to notice that this is directed against one of the foremost medical figures of the time.³ Madame de Sévigné's friends evidently shared her opinion of medical men in general; in 1702, after her death, we find Madame de Coulanges lamenting another of their friends, the Duchesse de Sully:

1. Lettres, VI, 71; 1 Nov. 1679. For the Remède de l'Anglois see p.345.

2. Boileau, Art Poétique, Chant IV, 1-10.

3. Claude Perrault, later famous as the architect of the colonnade of the Louvre.

"Je la vis la veille de sa mort; elle se croyait bien malade, mais elle était bien éloignée de penser que le terme fût aussi court; sa docilité pour les médecins l'a tuée..."¹.

It must be admitted that Madame de Sévigné's condemnations are sweeping; but tolerance was not a feature of the times.

What is remarkable in the Marquise's criticisms is that, even more than Boileau's, they are directed against the greatest names in the profession. She was herself attended by several of those physicians who were at some time honoured with a position in the Royal household, or distinguished by their share in the striking discoveries of the period. Yet it is against these that she directs her most scathing attacks. Daquin, Fagon, Aliot, and Félix, newly-named Chief Surgeon to the King, meet with little favour under her pen. Their slightest error is held up to ridicule, and she enjoys

1. Lettres, X, 470: 4 April 1702, Mme de Coulanges to Mme de Grignan. The duchesse d'Orléans in her correspondence repeatedly complains of the Parisian doctors. Mme de Sévigné says: On dit que la nouvelle Madame... ne fait pas cas des médecins et encore moins des médecines. Quand on lui présenta son médecin elle dit qu'elle n'en avoit que faire, qu'elle n'avoit jamais été ni saignée ni purgée: que quand elle se trouvoit mal, elle faisoit deux lieues à pied, et qu'elle étoit guérie..." II, 423: 2 Dec. 1671.

nothing better than to call in a second or third or fourth opinion, and in the end to follow her own:

"Pour Vichy, je ne doute nullement que je n'y retourne cet été. Véson dit qu'il voudrait que ce fût tout à l'heure; de l'Orme dit que je m'en garde bien en cette saison; Bourdelot¹. dit que j'y mourrais, et que j'ai donc oublié que je ne suis que feu, et que mon rhumatisme n'était venu que de chaleur. J'aime à les consulter pour me moquer d'eux: peut-on rien voir de plus plaisant que cette diversité? Ils m'ôtent mon libre-arbitre à force de me laisser dans l'indifférence... je prendrais leur avis selon qu'il me conviendra..."².

She is illogical, too, in her attitude, and we find her occasionally reproaching her daughter with just the kind of unconsidered criticism in which she herself indulged:

"Je crois qu'il est difficile de contester un homme sur son paillet qui a tous les jours des expériences."³.

One must remember, of course, that the social position of a physician in the seventeenth century was still only that of a high-class retainer to most noble families. Madame de Sablé, for instance, had attached Vallant to her household, although he was a fully qualified doctor, and made him perform the duties of secretary and steward as well as those of a physician.

1. The abbé Bourdelot whose house was a centre of Cartesian discussion. See above p. 323.

2. Lettres, V, 38; 26 Aug. 1676.

3. Lettres, VIII, 109; 27 Sept. 1687.

Madame de Sévigné, during her stay at Vichy, commissioned her doctor to read to her, concealed behind a curtain, during the boring moments of her treatment.¹ She might not have expected such complaisance from a Daquin or a Fagon, but her manner of referring to them is scarcely less condescending: "Le petit Daquin est premier médecin" she says in 1672, and adds:

"La faveur l'a pu faire autant que le mérite..."²

Doctors were mainly drawn from the bourgeoisie and treated as such; the Marquise speaks of them as Fagon, Daquin, tout court. Only her relations with Pecquet were slightly different. For him she had a lasting appreciation, based not on his professional aptitudes but on her gratitude for his heroic devotion to Fouquet, the friend of both.

Besides the Faculté there was, however, in seventeenth century Paris, a very large body of illegal practitioners, varying in merit from qualified doctors of another University to mere confidence-men. A good many of them were clerics, members of one or other of the mendicant Orders, who might have studied for a short time at some

1. Lettres, IV, 468; 28 May 1676.

2. Lettres, III, 30; 22 April 1672. The quotation is from Le Cid.

University other than Paris, but subsisted mainly on the fragmentary information picked up on their travels round the world. They were particularly successful with the nobility; the bourgeois, no doubt, was more cautious and more used to trouts. There is a famous illustration of this in the history of the Capucins du Louvre. These two, so named because the King took them under his protection and found them lodgings in the Louvre palace, were wandering friars, the proprietors of a remedy called the "baume Tranquille", which enjoyed an extraordinary reputation for some years. They had lived in the Levant, and claimed to have exceptional knowledge of oriental medicine - a proof that the wisdom of the East was still influential in seventeenth century medical theory. They were expelled from Paris and recalled, and finally expelled again by the attacks of The faculté and the other empirics. They then took refuge in Rennes where the Duc de Chaulnes became their protector. Madame de Sévigné shows wild enthusiasm for their achievements both in Paris and Brittany, attributing to them a power which is little short of miraculous; thus when two neighbours of hers had been brought near to death by the treatments of various doctors she writes:

"Ils ont remis sur pied une des deux femmes qui étaient mortes..."¹.

A few days later, it is true, the patient succumbs and some awkward explanations become necessary; but the Marquise is not daunted by this contretemps:

"Une des femmes que traitaient nos capucins est morte, parce qu'ils n'ont pas eu l'esprit de lui refaire un poumon tout neuf: elle avait vidé plus de la moitié du sien quand ils la prirent; aussi n'ont-ils jamais dit qu'ils la guériraient, mais qu'ils lui donneraient des jours, et feraient en sorte qu'elle mourrait doucement..."².

Madame de Sévigné had first come to know the Capuchins in Paris and at this moment, 1685, they were attending her for an obstinate skin infection which refused to yield to treatment. It was not they who cured her in the end, but her faith in them remains unshaken, and involves her in some amusing contradictions. She sends to Rennes to ask them to visit her, but on the plea of the activities of their enemies in the district they refuse to leave their convent, and she, instead, has to visit them, a move which she never made for the premier médecin du Roi. The treatment is at first wonderfully effective:

1. Lettres, VII, 398; 13 June 1685.

2. Lettres, VII, 415; 1 July 1685.

"Je serai assez malheureuse, ma chère enfant, pour ne laisser guérir pas les capucins..."
 "Je craindrois de ne plus reconnaître la jambe malade, et de m'y tromper, comme Arlequin..."

After a time, however, things take a turn for the worse, and that in spite of "Eau d'arquebusade"^{1.} and of a poultice of herbs which, in order to be fully effective, has to be buried in the earth after having touched the patient - "riez-en si vous voulez". Madame de Grignan grows understandably anxious, and has to be told once again of the merits of the Capucins:

s / "Ne soyez point en peine de ma jambe; les capucins l'ont emporté sur moi; ils ont voulu la faire suer, elle a sué; j'en ai eu du chagrin, parce que je ne m'y attendais point: cela est passé et nous sommes bons amis..."

Finally, after more anxious questions from Provence and further assurances from Madame de Sévigné, the latter has to make a slightly shamefaced retreat:

"Il est vrai qu'après vous avoir dit vingt fois: "Je suis guérie," et m'être servie un peu légèrement de tous les termes les plus forts pour vous persuader ce que je croyais moi-même une vérité, vous êtes en droit de vous moquer de tous mes discours; je m'en moquerais la première, aussi bien que de mon infidélité, qui me faisait toujours

1. "On appelle Eau d'arquebusade une eau composée, dont on se sert contre les coups de feu," Dict. Acad., 1762. "Eau composée se dit d'une liqueur artificielle, exprimée de quelque plante, de quelque drogue...ou composée de différents sucs." op. cit. See below p. 345.

approuver les derniers remèdes, et bandire
ceux que je quittais, sans qu'enfin, enfin..."

There follows an account of her latest discovery, the
Princesse de Marente, who sends her maid over from her
neighbouring estate, and finally triumphs over the
obstinate ill;

"Je suis donc sous le gouvernement de cette
princesse et de sa bonne et capable garde, qui
lui fait tous ses remèdes, qui est approuvée des
capucins" - a very necessary recommendation -
"qui guérit tout le monde à Vitré, et que Dieu
n'a pas voulu que je connusse plus tôt, parce
qu'il voulait que je souffrisse, et que je fusse
mortifiée par l'endroit le plus mortifiant pour
moi"...

The second remedy is a poultice of rose-petals, boiled
in milk, and applied three times a day: a more agreeable
treatment could not be imagined, but one is bound to
notice that all this enthusiasm follows a very few days'
experience.¹ Madame de Sévigné was not temperamentally
inclined to caution.

This story has been quoted at length to illustrate
the Marquise's general attitude towards those who prac-
tised without the authority of the Faculté de Médecine.
She was not always so indulgent, however, even for
empiric medicine, and often finds in Molière a useful

1. The story of the Marquise's illness is told in the
Lettres, vol. VII, pp.373-426; 11 Apr. - 22 July 1635.

illustration of her views:

"Villebrune" (a former friar turned physician)
 "m'avait dit que sa poudre ressuscitait les
 morts; il faut avouer qu'il y a quelque chose
 du petit garçon qui joue à la fossette."¹.

There are times when she views the whole question of
 healing with fatalistic cynicism, as in the account of
 La Rochefoucauld's last illness:

"Il a choisi de l'Anglois, des médecins et de
 frère Ange:..C'est frère Ange qui le tuera, si
 Dieu l'a ordonné."².

In the event of any cure, however, it is the empirics
 who receive all the glory for the Marquise steadily
 refuses to attribute any merit to the stolid dogmatic
 practitioners of the Faculté:

"M. de la Rochefoucauld est toujours dans la même
 situation;..cela déplaît à l'Anglois, mais il
 croit que son remède viendra à bout de tout; si
 cela est, j'admirerai la bonté des médecins de ne
 le pas tuer, assassiner, déchirer, massacrer car
 enfin les voilà perdus: c'est leur ôter la vie que
 de tirer la fièvre de leur domaine."³.

1. Lettres, IV, 518; 6 July 1676. The quotation is from
Le Médecin malgré lui, act I; Sc.5.

"Il n'y a pas trois semaines encore qu'un jeune enfant
 de douze ans tomba du haut du clocher en bas, et se brisa
 sur le pavé la tête, les bras et les jambes. On n'y eut
 pas plus tôt amené notre homme, qu'il le frotta par tout
 le corps d'un certain onguent qu'il sait faire; et l'enfant
 aussitôt se leva sur ses pieds, et courut jouer à la
 fossette."

2. Lettres, VI, 307; 13 March 1680. For the Remède de
 l'Anglois see below P. 345

3. Lettres, VI, 311; 15 March 1680.

One may indeed wonder what exactly Madame de Sévigné asked of a medical man: certainly not sound training or much experience, or adequate qualifications. Some gained her confidence by their social attractions: in 1676 we find her extolling the current physician to the Benedictine abbey of Chelles:

"Ma chère, c'est un homme de vingt-huit ans, dont le visage est le plus beau et le plus charmant que j'aie jamais vu: il a les yeux comme Madame de Mazarin et les dents parfaites; le reste du visage comme on imagine Rinaldo; de grandes boucles noires qui lui font le plus agréable tête que vous ayez jamais vue. Il est italien, et parle italien comme vous pouvez penser; il a été à Rome jusqu'à vingt-deux ans; enfin, après quelques voyages, M. de Nevers et M. de Brissac l'ont amené en France.."1.

It is hard to see, in all this, what exactly were his qualifications for practising medicine, and it is perhaps fortunate that he treated Madame de Sévigné only for very minor ills. His remedies were bizarre enough:

"C'est lui qui me conseille de mettre mes mains². dans la vendange, et puis une gorge de boeuf, et puis, s'il en est encore besoin, de la moelle de cerf, et de la reine de Hongrie..."3

There is further mention of "une pilule très-approuvée,

1. Lettres, IV, 433; 6 May 1676.
2. Madame de Sévigné was then suffering from swollen hands, the after-effects of a severe attack of rheumatism.
3. Eau de la reine de Hongrie, see below p. 345.

avec un bouillon de bétouine; cela purge le
cerveau avec une douceur très-salutaire..."¹.

Amonio was later expelled with a certain éclat by the
Abbess of Chelles, but Madame de Sévigné kept a
lingering penchant for him for some time. She was not
alone in this for in 1695 we find Madame de Coulanges
being similarly taken in by an attractive Italian
empiric, Carette, of whom the most she can say, after
five months' unsuccessful treatment, is that "ses
remèdes ne m'ont point fait un mal sensible."² As
for Madame de Sévigné, she shows herself all too ready
to believe anyone with a new treatment, who knows how
to cry up his wares with a certain amount of charm.
As a critic has said,³ few people can have consulted so
many doctors as the Marquise, or followed their advice
so ill.

In the matter of the remedies themselves, her
preferences are scarcely less arbitrary. There have

1. Lettres, V. 47, 60: 2 and 16 Sept. 1676. The Dict. Acad.
1696, remarks on the use of bétouine as a cure for
rheumatism and gout.

2. Lettres, X, 319; 30 Sept. 1695.

3. M. Raynaud: Les Médecins au temps de Molière. pp.127-131.

already been several instances in this study of the kind of treatment in vogue during this period; their name was legion. Some were evidently the standard treatments advocated by the Faculté de Médecine, various forms of purging and bleeding, which Madame de Sévigné had sufficient experience to mistrust. Bleeding was indeed an abuse in almost every medical Faculty of Europe at the time, though the doctors of Paris seem to have been particularly addicted to it. Even young children were bled for the slightest indisposition; there was a case on record in Paris of the bleeding of a child three days old.¹ The Marquise advises Madame de Grignan against the bleeding of her young son, who is in perfect health and in no need of such a remedy.

"Ne soyez point en peine de la santé de votre enfant: ni saignée, ni médecine, rien du tout, ma fille, à moins que vous ne vouliez lui ôter un bon appétit, un doux sommeil, un sang reposé, une grande vigueur dans les fatigues: voilà ce qu'un médecin pourrait lui ôter, si nous le mettions entre ses mains."²

Bleeding was used also as a precautionary measure, or,

1. C.f. Guy Patin, Correspondance, ap. Raynaud, op.cit. p. 183.

2. Lettres, VIII, 320; 13 Dec. 1688

as Madame de Sévigné suggests, as a last resort in a doubtful diagnosis:¹.

"Il y a des fêtes continuelles à Versailles, hormis de l'accouchement de Madame la Dauphine; car les médecins ne pouvant lui faire d'autre mal, se sont si bien mécomptés, qu'ils l'ont saignée dans la fin du troisième mois, et dans le huitième, tant ils sont enragés de vouloir toujours faire quelque chose."

Madame de Sévigné's own rule in these matters was to let well alone; and it is to her credit that she was no "malade imaginaire", nor inclined, like her daughter, to meet trouble halfway. In 1676 she rejoices at having found a new doctor, one Sanguin who, despite his name, is not addicted to bleeding:

"...ayant vu de quelle façon les médecins font saigner rudement une pauvre personne, et sachant que je n'ai point de veines, je déclarai hier au premier président de la cour des aides, qui me vint voir, que si je meurs jamais, je le prierai de m'amener M. Sanguin dès le commencement... Il n'y a qu'à voir ces messieurs pour ne vouloir jamais les mettre en possession de son corps..."²;

Another favourite device was purging of the humours, which could be carried out in a variety of ways, (as is shown by Boileau's Arrêt Burlesque). Madame de Sévigné's

1. Lettres, VII, 189; 28 July 1682.

2. Lettres, V, 76; 25 Sept. 1676. The remark follows an account of the illness of Mme de Coulanges who had been bled several times for a persistent fever.

favourite is the "poudre du bonhomme", a purgative powder invented by Charles de l'Orme, senior physician to Marie de Médicis; apparently a rather drastic treatment but one which nevertheless agrees with the Marquise. Other remedies she mentions vary from the latest discoveries of the empirics to the traditional old wives' tales open to all. They are too numerous to be examined in very great detail here.¹ One which is frequently referred to in the Lettres is the famous "Baume Tranquille" prepared by the Capucins du Louvre, and which Madame de Sévigné sent to her daughter with detailed instructions for its use. Two months later Madame de Grignan has not yet tried it, which might lead one to suppose that she exercised greater discernment in the choice of medicines than her mother; this is not the case, however. It was Madame de Grignan, on the contrary, who first introduced the Marquise to the second of her favourite remedies, the "eau de la reine de Hongrie"; its properties apparently were not only medical:

"Elle est divine, je vous en remercie toujours...
C'est une folie comme le tabac: quand on y est
accoutumé on ne peut plus s'en passer. Je la

1. A. Franklin in La vie privée d'autrefois (Paris 1887 - 1902 devotes a chapter of vol. IX to these remedies, some of which contained as many as forty different ingredients.

trouve bonne contre la tristesse..."¹.

Another remedy, the "remède de l'Anglois", was a solution of wine and quinine reputed to be an infallible cure for all kinds of agues. The medicinal properties of quinine had only been discovered in the sixteenth century, and it was still regarded with awed veneration. The "remède de l'Anglois" was the property in France of an English knight, Talbot, who was ordered by the King to make the secret public. Madame de Sévigné refers several times to the arguments attendant on its publication, and the inevitable jealousy of the Faculté towards a successful foreigner. Other remedies she mentions are "eau d'arquebuse", "eau de cerises", "eau de lin", etc. and various "onguents" and "emplâtres" sent her by her friends.⁽²⁾ Most of these were herbal concoctions, which

1. Lettres, IV, 186: 16 Oct. 1675. The "eau de la reine de Hongrie" is described in detail in the Dict. Acad., 1694:- "Elle se fait de deux livres de rosmarin cueillies le matin et dans un temps sec, et mises dans une cucurbite que l'on doit couvrir d'un alembic aveugle..après qu'on a versé sur les fleurs de rosmarin trois livres de bonne eau-de-vie...Elle fortifie le coeur tirée par le nez ou prise par la bouche, ou bien si l'on s'en frotte les tempes et les sutures. Elle aide à la digestion et dissipe les coliques. Elle a encore d'excellentes qualités pour la paralysie, l'apoplexie, gouttes, douleurs froides, brûlures, défaillances et palpitations de coeur."
2. Most of these are also found in the Dict. Acad., 1694.

could easily be prepared at home. We know that the Princesse de Tarente, who prided herself on her medical knowledge, had a large collection of these home-made remedies. Others contained such ingredients as "yeux d'écrevisses", "sang de lièvre", etc. or viper's flesh in some form. Vipers were greatly prized as a medical ingredient even before the seventeenth century.¹ Charles de Sévigné attributes all his good health to their beneficent influence² and we have already noted his mother's reaction to the preparation of Madame de La Fayette's "bouillon de vipères".³

There were also a few preparations containing mineral substances - not very many, for chemistry as a science was as yet almost unknown. Paracelsus and the sixteenth century alchemists had first introduced it, though with them it had been a philosophical doctrine, a reaching out towards the perfection of man by his complete moral and physical unity with the vast universe. The furious dis-

1. The Dict. Acad. 1696, 2e éd. in a long article on Vipères cites Galen and other classical authors for their use in medical preparations, as a cure for leprosy, dysentery, various fevers, toothache etc. and adds a description of the preparation of poudre and trochisques de vipères.

2. Lettres, VII, 8 July 1685.

3. See above p. 90.

discussions over the use of antimony which divided the Faculté at the beginning of the seventeenth century were mainly medical; it was a powerful emetic and as such dangerous in the hands of an inexperienced practitioner. The Faculté for a long time forbade its use by the doctors of Paris, but by the middle of the century it was more generally known, and Madame de Sévigné is on the whole favourably disposed towards this remedy. The final blow in its favour was struck in 1658, when the young King was unexpectedly cured of an attack of typhoid fever by this much-dreaded remedy, which at once became the most fashionable of wonder-working cures. The sale of these medicines, then as now, depended a great deal on their transient popularity; Madame de Sévigné occasionally admits that she is more swayed by public opinion in her choice of a treatment than by its intrinsic merits, and any cure as widely publicised as that of the young monarch would be certain to have repercussions on the apothecaries' shops. They were the chief manufacturers of all these remedies, but no great control was exercised at the time over the preparation of any medicines, and private persons seem to have had fairly easy access to dangerous drugs. The use in medicine of such compositions

as mercury, arsenic, and various opiates was unregulated by any fixed laws; this laxity had its grim counterpart in the scandalous poison trials which took place later in the century, when some of the greatest in the land were suspected of having trafficked in poisons.

Perhaps the most curious of the remedies mentioned by Madame de Sévigné is her "poudre de sympathie". This famous preparation seems to have originated in England in the Jacobean period, and been introduced into France by a Royal physician who had also attended James I. It was a mixture of vitriol and Arabian gum, which was said to have extraordinary properties of healing. Its most distinctive feature was that it was not applied directly to any wound, though it was reckoned particularly effective for wounds and open sores. All that was required, to obtain a speedy and perfect cure, was that a little of the powder be sprinkled over a dressing which had previously been dipped in the blood of the patient. The latter need not, of course, be present in person at the operation! Under the right conditions, cures could be performed over a distance of a thousand miles, and the "poudre de sympathie" was guaranteed as a painless and

never-failing remedy.¹ We may add that it was not Madame de Sévigné herself, but the cartesian Madame de Grignan who first discovered this remedy for an infected wound: another proof that in spite of the new philosophy, the practical attitude towards science was very slowly transformed. There was a precedent for this attempt at long-distance cures. Among the many curious writings of Théophrastè Renaudot there is found in 1642 a publication entitled:

La Présence des Absents, ou
facile moyen de rendre présent au médecin l'estat
d'un malade absent. Dressés par les docteurs en
médecine consultants charitablement à Paris pour
les pauvres malades. Destiné à familiariser avec
l'anatomie les gens du monde, et aussi à ceux qui
ne voudront ou ne pourront faire venir le médecin
chez eux, soit pour en estre trop éloigné, ou
n'avoir pas le moyen de payer le voyage de ceux
auxquels ils se confient, et qui ne pourront ou
r (s) ne voudrons/ estre transportés chez eux.

We find Madame de Sévigné in 1696 writing from Provence an account of her daughter's health to a doctor in Paris;² it seems that for the medical practitioners of the seventeenth century there was only a step from diagnosis-

1. The Dictionnaire de l'Académie, 1696, gives no explanation other than that "elle guérit les plaies par une faculté magnétique."

2. Lettres, X, 345; 25 Jan. 1696.

by-proxy to healing-by-proxy. It had long been common knowledge that a death-wound inflicted in a duel could be healed, if the blade which had caused it were bound up in a certain liniment, and the dressing frequently renewed. "La poudre de sympathie" was not, in Madame de Sévigné's case, a very effective cure, though as usual she finds a hundred good excuses for it, and in fact would do anything rather than show mistrust in a treatment recommended by her daughter:

"Je crois que la poudre de sympathie n'est point faite pour de vieux maux; elle n'a guéri que la moins fâcheuse de mes petites plaies; j'y mets présentement de l'onguent noir, qui est admirable; et je suis si près d'être guérie, que vous ne devez plus penser à moi que pour m'aimer, et vous intéresser à la solide espérance que j'ai présentement."¹

Yet another form of treatment which Madame de Sévigné underwent was a cure at the spas of Vichy and Bourbon; taking the waters was a fashionable pastime in court society, as in many countries besides France. The Marquise appears to have followed the usual course of treatment. There is nothing particularly remarkable in her experi-

1. Lettres, VII, 357; 7 Feb. 1685. Contemporary dictionaries give no clue to the nature of the "onguent noir."

ences from the medical point of view; and as the treatment is firmly regulated by her doctor, and in any case fairly drastic, she is disinclined to add any remedies of her own choosing, and settles down instead to describe the unique atmosphere of a fashionable health resort in mid-summer, the height of the season. All the types of high society pass through her delightful descriptions, from retired military men suffering from gout to the ageing Mme de Réquigny "qu'on cherche à se guérir de soixante et seize ans, dont elle est fort incommodée. ."¹. Madame de Sévigné's own ailments occupy most of the letters at this period, but she still has time to notice the performance of other people:

"Mme de Brissac avait aujourd'hui la colique; elle était au lit, belle et coiffée à coiffer tout le monde: je voudrais que vous eussiez vu ce qu'elle faisait de ses douleurs, et l'usage qu'elle faisait de ses yeux et des cris, et des bras, et des mains qui traînaient sur sa couverture, et les situations, et la compassion qu'elle voulait qu'on eût; charmée de tendresse et d'admiration, j'admire cette pièce et je la trouvai si belle, que mon attention a dû paraître un saisissement dont je crois qu'on me saura bon gré; et songez que c'était pour l'abbé Bayard, Saint-Hérem, Montjeu et Plancy que la scène était ouverte..."².

1. Lettres, IV, 476; 4 June, 1676

2. Lettres, IV, 458; 21 May, 1676.

It might be thought that a study of Madame de Sévigné's opinions on the art of medicine does not do her great credit; neither her discernment nor her practical intelligence appear in a very favourable light. But in this question, perhaps more than in any other, it is important to place her against the background of her age. Credulous she might be, and sweeping in her indictments on what was, after all, an honourable profession; but even a cursory study of the writings of her contemporaries will show that her opinions were shared by them all. Even the most intellectual "femme savante", as we have seen, was more inclined to trust to her own private judgement in matters of health than to consult the official guardians of medical knowledge. It was the fashion for great ladies of the time to make collections of more or less effective cures, and to exchange recipes with their friends. At a critical moment of the Foucquet trial, the prisoner's mother cured the Queen-Dowager with an ointment of her own composition, and his sister, Mme de Charrost, was equally famous for her cures. The Princesse de Tarente claimed to have great experience in medicine, and possibly she did have a certain skill. Many women dabbled in medicine in one form or another. Madame de

Montespan's private library has been found to contain many medical books, and the Grande Duchesse de Toscane in 1680 could write of herself: "Moi qui m'entends en médecine en perfection..." Madame de Sévigné made no such claim, though she may have had more knowledge than she actually showed. On the whole it seems likely that she never had a very profound experience of medical doctrine. She liked to reason about matters of health, to know why she was being given such a treatment, and not another. Her interests, however, were seldom truly scientific; they were predominantly psychological and human. She preferred histories and biographies to scientific works, and even while she admires, shows little desire to imitate her daughter's prowess in medicine.

Chapter IX

Aesthetic Appreciation.

Recent criticism has tended to dispel the legend of a Grand Siècle wholly indifferent to the charms of country life.¹ It is now recognised that there was in fact a considerable feeling for nature in the literature of this period, and that particularly among the poets of the first half of the century. Poets like Théophile, Maynard and Saint-Amant express the charm of nature in language which, though too often deformed by euphuism and gallantry, is none the less sincere. The theme of solitude is a favourite one with these writers. Not only Madame de Sévigné but a whole generation grew up to an ideal of country life proposed by such poems as Saint-Amant's Ode à la Solitude:

"Oh! que j'aime la solitude!
 Que ces lieux sacrés à la nuit,
 Eloignés du monde et du bruit,
 Plaisent à mon inquiétude!"².

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1. C.f. Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises, July, 1954: Le Sentiment de la nature au XVIII^e Siècle.
 2. Lettres, II, 279; 15 July 1671.

In the poetry of Saint-Amant nature is presented as a feast for the eye and a pleasant background for meditation. With certain other poets it is seen rather as the ideal of the virtuous life. In the poem Stances, Racan develops this idea of the pastoral life, lived out in the peace and harmony of the countryside; there man, freed from the disturbing ambitions of city life, may grow to a contented old age. Racan's poetry is praise of nature freed from the romanesque element which marred the work of earlier poets, while it retains all their charm and polished elegance.

"Les ombres des coustaux s'allongent dans les plaines,
Desja de toutes parts les laboueurs lassez
Trainent devers les bourgs leurs coutres renversez,
Les Bergers ont desja leurs brebis ramenés,
Le Soleil ne luit plus qu'au haut des cheminées." ¹

The advent of the new reign brings about a change in the sentiment of nature in both poetry and prose. A great deal of the simple appreciation disappears; except in the work of La Fontaine there is little nature poetry. A new element, however, comes into prose and novel writings, one which reappears in French literature in the Romantic period, namely a tentative suggestion of nature as a

1. Racan, Bergeries, V, 5, 2930, éd. S.T.F.M. 1937, p.255.

background for rêverie.¹ In the novels of Madeleine de Scudéry there is such a suggestion, and in her Promenade de Versailles a description not only of the formal, organised natural scenery which the seventeenth century could appreciate, but of a wilder, more imaginative background. Bouhours in his writings introduces the note of rêverie induced by the sea;² while the Prince de Clèves in Madame de La Fayette's story seeks solace in nature for his unhappiness in love. In the field of art, too, the great figures of seventeenth century France, Poussin and Le Lorrain, were landscape painters.

The appreciation shown by Madame de Sévigné for nature is therefore not such an anomaly as it has sometimes been considered. The writers who chose nature themes in the seventeenth century - Racan, Maynard, Madeleine de Scudéry - were the popular authors of her youth, many of whom had been personally known to her through the Hôtel de Rambouillet, and whose works she frequently quotes.³

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1. C.f. Mornet, Histoire de la littérature française classique, Paris, 1942. p.293 ff.
 2. C.f. Bouhours, les Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène Paris 1671, 1^{er} entretien.
 3. See Lettres, II, 224, 279; VI 541; 23 May, 12 July, 1671; 17 July, 1680.

It was to her, rather than to the generation contemporary with Racine and Boileau, that such works mainly made appeal. Critics of Madame de Sévigné's literary tastes have often overlooked this important factor of her position in time with regard to the masterpieces of classical literature. In the same way her great love of nature may in part be attributed to youthful influences which authors younger than she did not experience so strongly. The theme of solitude would even have been familiar to her through her contacts with Port-Royal. True, the hermit's life, as these solitaries understood it, had little in common with the charms of Saint-Amant; yet even they had had recourse to a country background, albeit a wild and austere one; and Madame de Sévigné no doubt knew the Ode à la Solitude in which Arnauld d'Andilly had followed the current literary fashion.

As in literature so in her own life Madame de Sévigné reflects the tastes of her age. The ideal of pastoral life set forth in the Bergeries of Racan found practical expression in the multitude of country homes which sprang up around Paris in the second half of the century. In an age of great architecture many of these stately mansions were treasure-houses of beauty, enriched within and with-

out with all the works of art that money could command. The ideal of life there was a peaceful one. Rustic pursuits and pastimes replaced the noisier pleasures of the town. It is true that for many a wealthy family retirement to the country meant no abatement of its frenzied search for amusement; the Mémoires of Mademoiselle de Montpensier, however, serve to give some idea of what country life could be for those of a less frivolous turn of mind:

"...Il serait bon de concerter tous ensemble du lieu de l'habitation, et délibérer si on choisirait les bords de la Seine ou ceux de l'Oise. Quelques-uns aimeroient mieux les bords de la mer. On prendroit un grand plaisir à planter et à voir croître des arbres différents; le soin d'ajuster son jardin et sa maison occuperait aussi beaucoup. Ceux qui aiment la vie active travailleroient à toutes sortes d'ouvrages, comme à peindre ou à dessiner, et les plus paresseux entretiendroient ceux qui s'occuperoient de la sorte. On nous enverroit tous les livres nouveaux et tous les vers, et ceux qui les auroient les premiers, auroient une grande joie d'en aller faire part aux autres. Je ne doute pas que nous n'eussions quelques personnes qui mettroient aussi quelques ouvrages en lumière, selon leur talent. Ceux qui aiment la musique la pourroient entendre, puisque nous aurions parmi nous des personnes qui auroient la voix belle et qui joueroient du luth, du clavecin et d'autres instruments."¹.

1. Mémoires, de Mademoiselle de Montpensier, Collection Petitot tom. XLIII, p.65.

One can see how closely Madame de Sévigné's own occupations conform to this picture. Life in the family of the Plessis-Guénégauds, who had just such a country residence, must have initiated her into this atmosphere, which was that of her own houses at Livry and Les Rochers, though no doubt on a less ambitious scale. Country life might also be advocated for its benefits to health. The duchess of Orléans in her correspondence constantly complains of being unable to live in the air of Paris, and Madame de Sévigné makes frequent references to the departure for a country rest of her friend Madame de La Fayette:

"Après avoir été un mois à la campagne à se reposer, à se purger, à se rafraîchir, elle revient comme un gardon..."¹.

For the lesser nobility there were also purely practical reasons: life in the country was simpler and less expensive than life in town. The Sévigné fortunes, always rather precarious, were probably responsible for the early retirement to the country of the young Marquis de

1. Lettres, III, 62; 13 May 1672. Un gardon: Petit poisson blanc d'eau douce. "On dit proverbialement: sain comme un gardon" (Dictionnaire de l'Académie de 1694.)

Sévigné and his wife, in the early days of their married life in 1646. Bussy and his friend Pierre Lenet tax them with this motive, in a poem which is one of the few documents we possess relating to the Marquise's youth:

"Peut-être aussi que le ménage
 Que vous faites dans le village
 Fait aller votre revenu
 Où jamais il ne fut venu;
 Ce sont raisons fort pertinentes,
 D'être aux champs pour doubler ses rentes..."¹.

It is doubtful whether the most prolonged retirement could ever have repaired the fortunes of the spendthrift Marquis de Sévigné, and one may find in the words a refutation of Bussy's later charge of avarice against his cousin. All her life Madame de Sévigné was beset by financial worries, and many decades later she is still to be found seeking this means of redressing her income and reducing expenditure.²

Nature, for those who retired to it in this way, became a background for quiet meditation. Never in the seventeenth century is there any question of man seeking nature for the emotional experience it may afford him;

1. Lettres, éd. Monmerqué, I, 348

2. Lettres, IX, 164-5; 17 Aug. 1689.

nor does nature under any circumstances dominate man. The classical ideal of beauty in sobriety could never have found satisfaction in an idea of nature as wild and untamed; the primitive forces of earth make no appeal to the Grand Siècle. Nor is nature an overwhelming emotional experience, as it is with the Romantics. It is not even exotic or particularly colourful. For the seventeenth century the chief attraction of the country lies in the rhythmical peace of the rustic life, in a natural setting controlled and subdued for over a thousand years by the hand of man. A sense of security is uppermost; there is none of the wild intoxication for which the Romantic poet longs.

In the mind of Madame de Sévigné also this was the true meaning of the country life, though to it she added an element of *rêverie* which was a special feature of her temperament and circumstances. The theme of nature as a setting for reflection, and even for sorrowful reflection, was not wholly absent from other literary works; Mademoiselle de Scudéry has already been quoted. In Madame de Sévigné, however, it becomes a matter of personal experience. The Marquise, inclined as she was by temperament to reflection and quiet, sought them particularly

against a background of trees and woods, in the peace of her country retreats at Livry and in Brittany. Her desire for them at times amounts to an almost physical craving:

"Je souhaite avec une grand passion d'être hors d'ici où l'on m'honore trop: je suis extrêmement affamée de jeûne et de silence...Ce sera avec une joie sensible que je retrouverai le repos et le silence de mes bois..."C'est à cette heure, ma fille, que je suis dans le repos de mes bois, et dans cette abstinence et ce silence que j'ai tant souhaité..."¹.

She has recourse to nature in times of trial, particularly against the ever-recurring trial of the absence of her daughter.

"M. de Pompone et Mme de Vins m'ont écrit tendrement sur ce que je leur mandais de mes sentiments" (- on the occasion of Pompone's disgrace in 1679 -) "Ils me mandent qu'il leur faut dans cet abord le repos de la campagne: qu'ils s'en accommodent mieux que de Paris; je comprends fort bien cette fantaisie: quand je suis fâchée, il me faut Livry..."².

Madame de Sévigné does, however, love nature with a love less superficial than that of her contemporaries. She spent in it a far greater proportion of her life than was usual at the time: driven to it no doubt by financial

1. Lettres, VII, 14, 15, 20; 6 & 14 Aug. 1680.

2. Lettres, VI, 118; 6 Dec. 1679.

need and the obligation of looking after her estates, but also as a matter of preference. The Lettres edited by M. Monmerqué include a letter in which Madame de La Fayette, in 1689, strove to persuade her not to remain and spend the winter at Les Rochers.¹ Madame de La Fayette, as we know, had her garden in Paris in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, to which Madame de Sévigné repaired on summer evenings to enjoy the conversation of the Comtesse and La Rochefoucauld. Madame de La Fayette herself was not insensible to the pleasures of the country. Nevertheless her witty, intellectual mind was only truly at ease in the atmosphere of the city. Her mental life needed the stimulus of conversation and company in order to expand and be seen at its best; and the chief stimulus, of course, was the company of La Rochefoucauld. Madame de Sévigné, though no less intellectually active, felt neither need nor inclination for the mental sparring of the salon, and at least in later life owed much more of her maturity of mind to the pacifying, deepening influences of the countryside.

Madame de Sévigné's literary life, however, - her life, that is, not of composition but of experience of

1. Lettres, IX, 243; de Madame de La Fayette, 3 Oct. 1689.

literature - is closely connected with her appreciation of rural life. It is not only the nature poets of her own time, but all her wide acquaintance with poetry of other ages and nations that goes to heighten her aesthetic feeling for the beauties of nature. With her the two are so closely related as to be inseparable. It is here that she belongs very definitely to her own period and is the reverse of romantic; in her mind she cannot separate beautiful scenery from its literary associations. What these associations are throw a revealing light on the breadth of her reading - the works of Virgil, Horace, and above all of the Italian Renaissance come constantly into her letters. There is an echo of the Virgilian underworld in her wonderful account of the forge at CÔsne, which she visited in 1677:

5 / "Hier soir, à CÔsne, nous allâmes dans un véritable enfer: ce sont des forges de Vulcain; nous y trouvâmes huit ou dix cyclopes forgeant, non pas les armes d'Enée, mais des ancres pour les vaisseaux... Nous étions au milieu de quatre fourneaux; de temps en temps ces démons venoient autour de nous, tout fondus de sueur, avec des visages pâles, des yeux farouches, des moustaches brutes, des cheveux longs et noirs; cette vue pourroit effrayer des gens moins polis que nous. Pour moi, je ne comprenoit pas qu'on pût résister à nulle des volontés de ces Messieurs-là dans leur enfer. Enfin nous en sortîmes avec une pluie de pièces de quatre sous, dont notre bonne compagnie les rafraîchit pour faciliter notre sortie..."¹.

1. Lettres, V, 340-41: 1 Oct. 1677

Guarini, Tasso and other Renaissance poets had also had a great influence on Madame de Sévigné; though her love of nature is not sensuous in the way that theirs is sensuous, her gardens are embellished by quotations from their works which she had read in youth and learnt by heart:

"Pour nos sentences, elles ne sont point défigurées; je les visite souvent; elles sont même augmentées et deux arbres voisins disent quelquefois les deux contraires:

La lontananza ogni gran piaga salda,
et
Piaga d'amor non si sana mai.

Il y en a cinq ou six dans cette contrariété..."¹.

Madame de Sévigné read and wrote Italian with ease, and shows particular appreciation for Italian literature. There is an acknowledged debt to another Italian author, Boiardo, in her attractive description of an incident at Les Rochers; it is an account of an accident which happened to the Marquise's daughter-in-law in her carriage in Brittany:

"..Les belles petites juments étoient échappées, elles coururent longtemps, comme fait la jeunesse quand elle a la bride sur le cou. Enfin l'une se trouve à Vitré, l'autre dans une métairie; ceux de

1. Lettres, IV, 194; 20 Oct. 1675.

Vitré furent étonnés de voir la nuit cette petite créature, toute échauffée, toute harnachée, et vouloient lui demander des nouvelles de mon fils. Vous souvient-il du cheval de Rinaldo, qu'Orlando trouva courant avec son hernois, sans son maître? Quelle douleur! il ne savoit à qui en demander des nouvelles; enfin, il s'adresse au cheval:

Dimmi, caval gentil, ch'è di Rinaldo?
Il tuo caro signor, ch'è divenuto?

s/ Je ne sait pas bien ce que Rubicano répondit; mais je vous assure que les deux petites bêtes sont dans l'écurie fort gaillardes, au grand contentement del caro signore."¹.

A visit to Dol,² where she was within reach of several old friends without being able to contact any of them, reminds the Marquise of the magic palace of Orlando Furioso, which made its inhabitants invisible to those who sought them; while the well-known description of the cutting down of trees at her property at Le Buron is full of mythological and literary allusions:

"Je fus hier au Buron, j'en revins le soir; je pensai pleurer en voyant la dégradation de cette terre; il y avait les plus vieux bois du monde; mon fils, dans son dernier voyage, lui a donné les derniers coups de cognée. Il a encore voulu vendre un petit bouquet qui faisoit une assez grande beauté; tout cela est pitoyable... Toutes

1. Lettres, IX, 361-62; 21 Dec. 1689.

2. Lettres, VII, 433; 1 Aug. 1685.

ces dryades affligées que je vis hier, tous ces vieux sylvains qui ne savent plus où se retirer, tous ces anciens corbeaux établis depuis deux cents ans dans l'horreur de ces bois, ces chouettes qui, dans cette obscurité, annonçoient, par leurs funestes cris, les malheurs de tous les hommes; tout cela me fit hier des plaintes qui me touchèrent sensiblement le coeur; et que sait-on même si plusieurs de ces vieux chênes n'ont point parlé, dans ce lieu où étoit Clorinde? Ce lieu étoit un luogo d'incanto, s'il en fut jamais: j'en revins toute triste..."¹.

Not only classical but contemporary writers influence Madame de Sévigné's love of nature. L'Astrée, the great model of pastoral life to all the early seventeenth century, finds many references in her letters. She was reminded of it particularly by the country around Vichy, where she stayed to take the waters in 1676, and to which she always referred with great appreciation:

"Mme de Brisseac...et deux ou trois autres me vinrent recevoir au bord de la jolie rivière d'Allier: je crois que si on y regardoit bien, on y trouveroit encore des bergers de L'Astrée."².

"je donne tous les soirs un violon avec un tambour de basque qui me coute quatre sous; et dans ces prés et ces jolis bocages, c'est une joie d'y voir danser les restes des bergers et des bergères de Lignon."³.

1. Lettres, VI, 422; 27 May 1680.

2. Lettres, IV, 453; 19 May 1676.

3. Lettres, IV, 482; 8 Jun. 1676.

The greatest nature poet of the age, La Fontaine, is also one of the authors most frequently quoted by the Marquise, though in truth one cannot say that it is for his love of nature that she appreciates him most. Naturally enough, perhaps, for a contemporary reader, she is more attracted by the literary form in which La Fontaine excelled, that of the fable. A great deal of her appreciation, too, goes to the Contes, where the naturalist is less to the fore. Yet their appreciation of nature is in some respects similar. The Fables, although the form does not lend itself to rêverie, do contain a certain element of rêverie in their presentation of nature: for instance in such phrases as

"Sur les humides bords des royaumes du vent."

In Les Amours de Psyché, which Madame de Sévigné knows and frequently quotes, La Fontaine enumerates the pleasures he desires:

"Jusqu'aux sombres plaisirs ^{'un} ~~des~~ ~~coeurs~~ mélancoliques".

Nature, with him, is the background for moralisation, as it so often is with Madame de Sévigné, who, like most of the authors of her century, is essentially a moralist.

Paul Rousselot says of her:¹ "Aimant et sentant la nature

1. C.f. Buisson: Nouveau dictionnaire de pédagogie, art. Sévigné.

comme bien peu de ses contemporains, elle en reçoit l'impression morale plus encore que l'impression pittoresque". Madame de Sévigné does not convey her moral reflections by illustrations drawn from nature in the way of La Fontaine; with her it remains merely the background which induces these reflections. At the same time she is particularly fitted to enjoy his acute observation and eye for detail, which is in some respects similar to her own. Many of Madame de Sévigné's descriptions of animals and of country life have the imaginative, human quality which is so remarkable in La Fontaine:

"Où prenez-vous ma bonne, qu'on entende des rossignols le 13e de juin? Hélas! ils sont tous occupés du soin de leur petit ménage: il n'est plus question, ni de chanter, ni de faire l'amour; ils ont des pensées plus solides. Je n'en ai pas entendu un seul ici; ils sont en bas, vers ces étangs, vers cette petite rivière.."

"J'écris dans le milieu du jardin comme vous l'avez imaginé, et les rossignols et les petits oiseaux ont reçus avec un grand plaisir, mais sans beaucoup de respect, ce que je leur ai dit de votre part..."

"Ne vous représentez point que je sois dans un bois obscur et solitaire, avec un hibou sur ma tête..."¹.

One may note that Madame de Sévigné, whose study of the sciences never seems to have included botany, had all a

1. Lettres, VII, 406; 17 June 1685; III 409, 2 June 1674 IX, 340; 4 Dec. 1689.

true countrywoman's knowledge and love of birds and animals.

It remains to determine what particular characteristics of her love of nature mark Madame de Sévigné out from among her contemporaries. Perhaps one could say that she shared all the appreciation that they might also have had, but carried it to a far greater degree of intensity. Where the seventeenth century lady sought rest and quiet in the country Madame de Sévigné seeks aesthetic experience. She finds intense pleasure in rustic pursuits such as hay-making, clearing of woods in autumn, or simply wandering in the fields, "causant avec nos vaches et nos moutons."¹ It was, of course, fashionable in the eighteenth century for great ladies to don rustic garments and make pretence, as did Marie Antoinette and her ladies, of sharing in the work of the countryside. With Madame de Sévigné, however, there is none of this affectation still savouring of préciosité, but a genuine healthy pleasure in an exercise which is both enjoyable and aesthetically satisfying. That the aesthetic element is not absent from her appreciation is clear from the beauty of her own words in describing it:

1. Lettres, VI, 64; 25 Oct. 1679..

"Savez-vous ce que c'est que faner? il faut que je vous explique: faner est la plus jolie chose du monde, c'est retourner du foin en batifolant dans une prairie..."¹.

There follows the well-known account of her parting with Picard, her Parisian serving-man, who did not know how to appreciate the beauties of country life. But one feels that part of her enjoyment is satisfaction at the benefit to her lands. Where the seventeenth century landowner sought the country in order to oversee his estates, the Marquise adds to a sense of duty a true love of the land, and especially of the woods and trees which constitute such a large proportion of the Sévigné inheritance. Her love of trees is a striking feature. She witnesses the de-afforestation of Brittany with genuine grief, and compensates for it by careful planning and planting of her own woods at Les Rochers:

"Je viens de ces bois; vraiment ces allées sont d'une beauté à quoi je ne m'accoutume point. Il y en a six que vous ne connoissez point du tout, mais celles que vous connoissez sont fort embellies par la beauté du plant. Le mail est encore plus beau que tout le reste, et c'est l'humeur de ma fille..."².

1. Lettres, II, 292; 22 July 1671

2. Lettres, IV, 275; 15 Dec. 1675. For "l'humeur de ma fille" see above p. 325.

"Je m'en vais faire planter:

"Car que faire aux Rochers, à moins que l'on ne plante."¹.

"Planter", moreover, does not mean merely looking on: the Marquise takes an active part in the proceedings:

"Nous avons aussi des planteurs qui font des allées nouvelles, et dont je tiens moi-même les arbres, quand il ne pleut pas à verse; mais le temps nous désole, et fait qu'on souhaiteroit un sylphe pour nous porter à Paris.." ².

"Je ne sais pas, ma bonne, ce que vous avez fait ce matin; pour moi, je me suis mise dans la rosée jusqu'à mi-jambes pour prendre des alignements. Je fais des allées de retour tout autour de mon parc, qui seront d'une grande beauté; si mon fils aime les bois et les promenades, il bénira ma mémoire."³.

The planning of gardens is a striking feature of the seventeenth century estate, with the Le Nôtre as chief architect of most of the Royal gardens. Madame de Sévigné's is in keeping with the scenery of Brittany. It is mainly trees and vistas, has a maze, sheltered walks, and summer-houses like those in the gardens of the Château de Fresnes, where she has stayed with the Plessis-Guénégauds. In

1. Lettres, IV.243; 20 Nov. 1675. The line is a parody of La Fontaine's fable Le Lièvre et les Grenouilles:

"Car que faire en un gîte, à moins que l'on ne songe?"

2. Lettres, II, 408; 4 Nov. 1671.

3. Lettres, II, 400; 28 Oct. 1671.

later years her son was to cut down some of the trees and replan the approach to the house according to a design of Le Nôtre: possibly on his personal advice, though that is not clear:

"..(mon fils) se pique de belle vue....et à tel point, qu'il veut faire un mur d'appui dans son parterre, et mettre le jeu de paume en boulingrin, ne laisser que le chemin, et faire encore là un fossé et un petit mur. Il est vrai que s'il le fait, ce sera une très-agréable chose, et qui fera une beauté surprenante dans ce parterre, qui est tout fait sur le dessin de M. Le Nôtre, et tout plein d'orangers dans cette place Coulanges."¹.

One could multiply quotations on the beauty of her park-lands, and particularly on her love of trees, into which there enters, as well as her aesthetic appreciation, the satisfaction of knowing that the work will survive her, will perpetuate her memory for generations to come.².

Madame de Sévigné's appreciation of nature was to be a constant solace to her throughout the years. There is in it no element of ecstasy or voluptuousness; she is not carried out of herself as the Romantics were. Nevertheless there does enter into her enjoyment a certain sensuous

1. Lettres, IX, 253; 12 Oct. 1689.

2. Lettres, II, 256, 285; 24 June, 19 July 1671; IV, 149 171; 29 Sept, 9 Oct. 1675 etc.

pleasure which marks her out from her contemporaries. In the cool of the evening at Livry and Les Rochers, eyes and ears are feasted with the sights and sounds of the country, while the heady perfume of jasmine and syringa remind her of Provence. Provençal scenery attracted her little; she hated its monotone evergreen landscapes and its torrid climate, just as she had little love for natural beauty that was sombre or wild. Even the countryside of Brittany, outside her own domain, was harsh. Her ideal of beauty was in Livry, shadowed, cool and temperate, and like the era to which she belonged, eminently civilised.

Colour is a striking feature of Madame de Sévigné's aesthetic sense,¹ albeit the muted colours of Spring and Autumn, not the exotic riot of summer. She refers constantly to her delight in the young green of the hedgerows in Spring, describing them in detail to her daughter:

"La beauté de Livry est au-dessus de tout ce que vous avez vu: les arbres sont plus beaux et plus verts, tout est plein de ces aimables chèvrefeuilles.."

1. C.f. A.Adam: Le sentiment de la nature au XVIIe Siècle en France dans la nature et dans les arts, Cahiers de l'Association internationale des Etudes françaises, July 1954, p.5.

"Ces bois sont toujours beaux: le vert en est cent fois plus beau que celui de Livry. Je ne sais si c'est la qualité des arbres ou la fraîcheur des pluies; mais il n'y a pas de comparaison: tout est encore aujourd'hui du même vert du mois de mai. Les feuilles qui tombent sont feuille-morte; mais celles qui tiennent encore sont vertes; vous n'avez jamais observé cette beauté."¹

The crystal clarity of autumn skies enhancing the colours of the woods, the early morning frosts in the park at Livry, inspire some of her most beautiful descriptions. The colouring, it is true, is always delicate, expressed in the very lightest touches; there is no feeling in the seventeenth century for the exoticism of the Romantics. But that she should attempt to describe it at all marks her out in her period as one particularly sensitive to natural beauty; just as there is a touch of impressionism in her well-known expression:

"Je serois fort heureuse dans ces bois, si j'avois une feuille qui chantât: ah! la jolie chose qu'une feuille qui chante! et la triste demeure qu'un bois où les feuilles ne disent mot, et où les hiboux prennent la parole...."².

Another curious feature of her nature description is her moonlight scenery, from which the imaginative note is

1. Lettres, III, 90; 30 May, 1672; IV, 193; 20 Oct. 1675.

2. Lettres, VI, 488; 26 June 1680.

never absent:

"L'autre jour on me vint dire: "Madame, il fait chaud dans le mail, il n'y a pas un brin de vent; la lune y fait des effets les plus plaisants du monde." Je ne pus résister à la tentation; je mets mon infanterie sur pied; je mets tous les bonnets, coiffes et casaques qui n'étoient point nécessaires; je vais dans ce mail, dont l'air est comme celui de ma chambre; je trouve mille coquesigrues, des moines blancs et noirs, plusieurs religieuses grises et blanches, du linge jeté par-ci, par-là, des hommes noirs, d'autres ensevelis tout droits contre les arbres, de petits hommes cachés, qui ne montraient que la tête, des prêtres qui n'osoient approcher. Après avoir ri de toutes ces figures, et nous être persuadés que voilà ce qui s'appelle des esprits, et que notre imagination en est le théâtre, nous nous en revenons sans nous arrêter, et sans avoir senti la moindre humidité. Ma chère enfant, je vous demande pardon, je crus être obligée, à l'exemple des anciens comme nous disoit ce fou que nous trouvâmes dans le jardin de Livry, de donner cette marque de respect à la lune: je vous assure que je m'en porte fort bien..."¹.

Panoramic scenery holds less interest for the Marquise, though she had more opportunity of appreciating the varied French landscape than most women of her time. The extreme difficulty of travelling through seventeenth century France would have daunted the bravest; though to a man the obstacles to journeying for pleasure might have seemed less great, to a woman, bound as she was to enclosed

1. Lettres, VI, 453; 12 June 1680.

carriages on bad roads and to the endless stream of bag and baggage which accompanied her everywhere, a voyage was not a hardship to be lightly undertaken. Madame de Sévigné describes her party setting off for Les Rochers in the Spring of 1671:

"Il me semble que vous voulez savoir mon équipage... Je vais à deux calèches, j'ai sept chevaux de carrosse, un cheval de bât qui porte mon lit, et trois ou quatre hommes à cheval; je serai dans ma calèche tirée par mes deux beaux chevaux; l'abbé sera quelquefois avec moi. Dans l'autre, mon fils, la Mousse et Hélène; cela aura quatre chevaux avec un postillon..."¹.

The Marquise travelled widely for a woman of the period, not only to Provence and Brittany but to Vichy and Bourbon, and on several occasions through Normandy on a round trip from Paris to Les Rochers. Many different aspects of the French landscape greeted her on these journeys; her comments on them throw a revealing light on the type of scenery that appealed to her.² Provence she disliked, while the country round Bourbon-l'Archambault seemed to her "plat et couvert comme la Bretagne." Vichy delighted her always, not only for its fancied resemblance to the country of l'Astrée, but for its own particular charm:

1. Lettres, II, 213; 13 May 1671.

2. C.f. A. Babeau, Les Voyageurs en France depuis la Renaissance jusqu'à la Révolution, Paris 1885, in - 120

"Je vais être seule, et j'en suis fort aise; pourvu qu'on ne m'ôte pas le pays charmant, la rivière d'Allier, mille petits bois, des ruisseaux, des prairies, des moutons, des chèvres, des paysannes qui dansent la bourrée dans les champs, je consens de dire adieu à tout le reste; le pays seul me guérirait..."¹.

Normandy also she found attractive, particularly its river-side scenes which are typical of the quiet rusticity which pleases her best:

"J'ai vu le plus beau pays du monde; j'ai vu toutes les beautés et les tours de cette belle Seine pendant quatre ou cinq lieues, et les plus agréables prairies du monde; ses bords n'en doivent rien à ceux de la Loire: ils sont gracieux, ils sont ornés de maisons, d'arbres, de petits saules, de petits canaux qu'on fait sortir de cette grande rivière: en vérité, cela est beau; je ne connoissois point la Normandie, je l'avois vue trop jeune..."².

This is in fact the type of natural scenery that approximates most closely to the seventeenth century ideal. Le Nôtre and his disciples had imposed on the chatelains of France an ideal of order and sobriety in keeping with the classical spirit of the age. It is the same orderly, restrained landscape which Madame de Sévigné praises in such detail in her passage down the Loire from Orléans to Nantes:

1. Lettres, IV, 474; 1 June 1676.

2. Lettres, IX, 37-8; 2 May 1689.

"Nous sommes montés dans le bateau à six heures, par le plus beau temps du monde; j'y ai fait mettre le corps de mon grand carrosse, d'une manière que le soleil n'a point entré dedans; nous avons baissé les glaces; l'ouverture du devant fait un tableau merveilleux; celle des portières et des petits côtés nous donne tous les points de vue qu'on peut imaginer... Je regarde, j'admire cette belle vue qui fait l'occupation des peintres³. Nous passons tous les ponts avec un plaisir qui nous les fait souhaiter; il n'y a pas beaucoup d'ex-voto pour les naufrages de la Loire, non plus que pour la Durance: il y auroit plus de raison de craindre cette dernière, qui est folle, que notre Loire, qui est sage et majestueuse..."¹.

This particular journey was attractive too by reason of its comparative safety, though the most seasoned traveller of the present day might recoil at the thought of "douze heures de suite dans ce carrosse si bien placé, si bien exposé..." Of Brittany which she so often traversed, the Marquise in reality knew only a limited area: the southernmost parts of basse-Bretagne, which apart from Les Rochers she found unremarkable. Heathland and moorland have no attractions for her, and the sea-coast of Brittany she scarcely mentions. There is one interesting reference to the origin and name of a now-famous western port, one of the first to be set up by the Compagnie des Indes:

1. Lettres, VI, 386; 9 May 1680

"Nous allâmes le lendemain, qui étoit jeudi, dans un lieu qu'on appelle l'Orient, à une lieue dans la mer; c'est là qu'on reçoit les marchands et les marchandises qui viennent d'Orient..."¹.

But of the long Atlantic sea-board of Finistère there is no further description, nor of the quieter northern reaches which with her daughter she had visited in 1661, and again in 1669 with Mme de Chaulnes. Seascapes have virtually no place in Madame de Sévigné's descriptions; nor has mountain scenery which for the most part evokes only fear. Not until La Nouvelle Héloïse does mountain scenery come into its own in French literature.

What is more surprising is to find in Madame de Sévigné so little appreciation of the architectural beauties of the cities through which she passed. Her journey down the Loire in 1680 takes her through Orléans, Blois, Tours and Saumur, cities whose mediaeval and Renaissance castles have made them famous throughout Europe. Madame de Sévigné, interested as she is in history, makes no reference to their crowded cultural and historical associations. Although so much of her reading was historical, so that she must have been better informed than most women of her time on such subjects as early Ecclesiastical history and the Crusades, the Marquise had little sense of the romance of history.

1. Lettres, IX, 159; 12 Aug. 1689.

The seventeenth century was perhaps too dazzled by its present glory to have much regard for the past. Such relics as Gothic cathedrals and the palaces of François Ier make no appeal to her imagination. She passes through Rouen with no memories of Joan of Arc, and through Chartres without a mention of its shrine and cathedral. Notre-Dame is to her a parish church, the scene of great liturgical ceremonies, and no more. Well-read as she is, and sensitive to beauty, she yet passes these scenes with no more reflection than might any other traveller of her period, though these are pleasure-trips, quite distinct from the usual routine of her journeys into Brittany. It was not until the nineteenth century that literature truly began to recognise and recreate the mediaeval glories of France.

Even so one might expect the Marquise to show more appreciation of those architectural monuments, traces of a yet older civilisation, which spanned her journeys to Provence: the Roman amphitheatre of Arles, the aqueduct of Nîmes, which receive but a passing mention. She does refer with interest, in one of her northern journeys, to the preservation of a Roman encampment on the Somme:

"Il y a un camp de César à un quart de lieue d'ici, dont on respecte encore les tranchées: cela figure

avec le pont du Gard."¹.

The city of Aix-en-Provence would have associations with the Crusades, whose history she had read; the city of Avignon, with its famous bridge and the Palace of the Popes, is remembered only by the accident to her daughter's boat on her first journey to Provence. *Marseille* at least the *Marquise* admires, not so much for its history as for the harbour and massive fortifications, and the naval manoeuvres which the Bishop invited her to watch, during her visit in 1673; the atmosphere of the city pleased her too, and stirred her imagination as Gothic and Renaissance beauties had not been able to do:

"Je suis charmée de la beauté singulière de cette ville. Hier le temps fut divin, et l'endroit d'où je découvris la mer, les bastides, les montagnes et la ville, est une chose étonnante...La foule des chevaliers qui vinrent hier voir M. de Grignan à son arrivée; des noms connus, des Saint-Hérem, etc; des aventuriers, des épées, des chapeaux du bel air, des gens faits à peindre une idée de guerre, de roman, d'embarquement, d'aventures, de chaînes, de fers, d'esclaves, de servitude, de captivité; moi, qui aime les romans, tout cela me ravit et j'en suis transportée.. Je demande pardon à Aix, mais *Marseille* est bien plus joli, et est plus peuplé que

1. Lettres, IX, 33; 27 Apr. 1689.

Paris à proportion: il y a cent mille âmes. De vous dire combien il y en a de belles, c'est ce que je n'ai pas le loisir de compter. L'air en gros y est un peu scélérat..."¹.

The remark was no doubt all too true and it is curious that of all her acquaintance with the provinces of France, it should have been this city of heterogeneous population and doubtful repute that impressed her most, or at least inspired her most detailed descriptions.

The architecture of the present, however, was to the Marquise as to all her contemporaries a source of constant interest. The classical period in seventeenth century France is famous for the glories of its architecture no less than for its literary achievements. Madame de Sévigné could not have remained unaware of the multitude of beautiful palaces growing up around her: Versailles, Trianon, Marly, Maintenon, Vaux-le-Vicomte, to name only the greatest. Her frequent references to Louis XIV's embellishments at Versailles show how much it was a topic of interest in the conversation at the time. She mentions the difficulties encountered, and the ruinous expense to the King:

"La cour est à Saint-Cloud; le Roi veut aller samedi à Versailles; mais il semble que Dieu ne le veuille pas par l'impossibilité que les bâtiments soient en état de le recevoir, et par la mortalité prodigieuse

1. Lettres, III, 183; (1673) +311, undated.

des ouvriers, dont on remporte toutes les nuits, comme de l'Hôtel-Dieu, des charrettes pleines de morts: on cache cette triste marche pour ne pas effrayer les ateliers et pour ne pas décrier l'air de ce favori sans mérite. Vous savez ce bon mot sur Versailles."¹

The account makes a grim commentary on the splendours of classical France. The result apparently justifies the expenditure, however, for the Marquise describes the finished work with all her old enthusiasm:

"Je reviens de Versailles; j'ai vu ces beaux appartements, j'en suis charmée. Si j'avois lu cela dans quelque roman, je me ferois un château en Espagne d'en voir la vérité. Je l'ai vue et maniée; c'est un enchantement, c'est une véritable liberté, ce n'est point une illusion comme je le pensois. Tout est grand, tout est magnifique, et la musique et la danse sont dans leur perfection..."².

In 1676 she mentions Trianon which Mme de Grignan had not yet seen, and other royal residences, Marly and the Louvre, where she had often visited la Grande Mademoiselle. On the whole, however, when one considers the innumerable artistic achievements of the Grand Siècle, one is surprised at the scant number of references in her letters. Some of the greatest architectural beauties of Paris are of seventeenth century construction. Anyone living in the

1. Lettres, V, 492; 12 Oct. 1678.

2. Lettres, VII, 217; 9 Feb. 1683.

city at the time must have found new wonders daily springing up before his eyes. Madame de Sévigné's letters to her daughter are a succession of vignettes of Parisian life: even as a matter of general interest one would expect some comment on these new constructions. But while she notes every new literary production with avid interest, the Marquise is almost wholly silent on the subject of art. The great names of the time - Perrault, Blondel, Bernini - might be totally unknown to her from the sole evidence of her correspondence. The long controversy over the extension of the Louvre seems to have passed her by altogether, as do the many minor constructions, the mausoleums, triumphal arches and gateways of the period. The erection by the Marquis de la Feuillade of a statue in honour of the King, on the Place des Victoires, is remembered by an incident, admittedly picturesque; but there is evidently no knowledge of the artist, though an unexpected one of those of ancient Greece:

en/ "(L'évêque d'Autun) vous dira...comme M. de la Feuillade, courtisan passant tous les courtisans passés, a fait venir un bloc de marbre qui tenoit toute la rue Saint-Honoré, et comme les soldats qui le conduisoit ne voulant point faire de place au carrosse de Monsieur le Prince, qui étoit dedans, il y eut un combat entre les soldats et les valets

de pied; le peuple s'en mêla, le marbre se rangea, et le prince passa. Le prélat vous pourra conter encore que ce marbre est chez M. de la Feuillade, qui fait ressusciter Phidias ou Praxitèle pour tailler la figure du Roi à cheval dans ce marbre, et comme cette statue lui coûtera plus de trente mille écus.."¹.

Such erections as the Porte Saint-Denis by Blondel and the Invalides by J-H. Mansart are unmentioned", though the Marquise does describe Mansart's greatest work, the building of Clagny for Madame de Montespan. The tombs of great national figures, Richelieu, Mazarin and Colbert, all of which she had an opportunity to see, are passed over in silence, as is that of Turenne, for whom she had had such great admiration during his life.

Moreover when the Marquise remarks on some architectural feature, she seldom pauses over technical points, nor shows any but a general acquaintance with its technique and terminology. One cannot, of course, judge her on the sole evidence of the letters; she may have had much more accurate knowledge than is here displayed. The most one can say is that she had not that interest in the subject that would prompt her, in an age remarkable for the expansion of architecture in France, to find out more of its technique. Yet there had been, in the course of the century, a movement for the popularisation of this as of

1. Lettres, V, 551: 20 July 1679.

many other branches of knowledge. There existed an Académie royale d'architecture, founded in 1648, and an Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, founded 1663; and since these foundations treatises on art and architecture had become available to the public in increasing numbers. Nearly all the leading architects of the time had expressed their theories in written form. Nor were examples wanting of private landowners embellishing and altering their homes; even women, as the Marquise de Rambouillet had shown, could set a new fashion in domestic architecture.

Madame de Sévigné herself carried out some less ambitious alterations to her own house in Paris, and with the help of her uncle to the property of Les Rochers. Her old home, now the Musée Carnavalet, is one of the few examples of sixteenth century architecture still to be seen in Paris. It was the work of François Mansart. She describes with great satisfaction her long negotiations and final occupation of the house, lamenting only the fact that the style is not quite up to date:

"..Dieu merci, nous avons l'hôtel de Carnavalet. C'est une affaire admirable: nous y tiendrons tous, et nous aurons le bel air; comme on ne peut pas tout avoir, il faut se passer des parquets et des petites

cheminées à la mode; mais nous aurons du moins une belle cour, un beau jardin, un beau quartier, et de bonnes petites filles bleues, qui sont fort commodes, et nous serons ensemble, et vous m'aimez, ma chère enfant..."¹.

Later, in deference to her daughter's desire for modernity, she had some of the rooms altered by the Abbé de Coulanges, unfortunately destroying in the process some valuable Henri II chimney-pieces which Mansart had respected in his original adaptation of the house,² but which the Marquise dismisses as "de vieilles antiquailles". The expression may be a clue to her apparent indifference for the châteaux of François Ier. She was both too close and too far removed from the period to appraise it accurately.

The Marquise's architect in these modifications is often the "Bien Bon", the Abbé de Coulanges, who seems to have had a considerable practical knowledge of building and planning. The alterations at Les Rochers were far more extensive than those of Paris; Madame de Sévigné was not exempt from the current urge to extend and embellish her property, though financial considerations might prevent her from doing so on a very lavish scale. She describes to her daughter the progress of the chapel, adding many

1. Lettres, V, 346-7; 7 Oct. 1677. The "filles bleues" refers to a community of nuns, the Annonciades, who were her neighbours in the hôtel de Carnavalet.

2. C.f. Guide explicatif du Musée Carnavalet, Paris 1903.

interesting details: how the work is carried out, under the direction of the Abbé, by the local peasantry; the tenant farmer turning bricklayer for the occasion, so that in harvest time the building stands idle.¹ In her usual graphic phrases she gives a picturesque account of it;

"..J'ai dix ou douze charpentiers en l'air, qui lèvent ma charpente, qui courent sur les solives, qui ne tiennent à rien, qui sont à tout moment sur le point de se rompre le cou, qui me font mal au dos à force de leur aider d'en bas. On songe à ce bel effet de la Providence que fait la cupidité; et l'on remercie Dieu qu'il y ait des hommes qui pour douze sous veuillent bien faire ce que d'autres ne feroient pas pour cent mille écus. "O trop heureux ceux qui plantent des choux! quand ils ont un pied à terre, l'autre n'en est pas loin;" je tiens ceci à'un bon auteur."²

The chapel was blessed and opened for use in 1675, with a grand procession of the local clergy. Charles de Sévigné, when he came to live at Les Rochers after his marriage, continued to improve the property, working mainly on the gardens close to the house, and embellishing the entrance with wrought-iron gates which are his mother's pride.³ The work, however, is always carried out under the prudent eye of the Abbé de Coulanges, who guards

1. Lettres, II, 272; 8 July 1671

2. Lettres, II, 408; 4 Nov. 1671. C.f. Rabelais, Pantagruel IV.

3. Lettres, IX, 102. 29 June 1689.

against unwary expenditure. Not so at the château de Grignan, where the Comtesse indulges in such extensive alteration as to leave the family well-nigh ruined at the end of the century; though Coulanges, it is true, thought the result "un des plus magnifiques châteaux que je connoisse."¹

Building in Provence, however, and on the foundations of a mediaeval castle, was not within the experience of most seventeenth century landowners. Madame de Sévigné had watched many of her friends improve their homes as she did, and so been associated with several famous buildings of the Grand Siècle. The château de Fresnes, belonging to the Plessis-Guénégauds, was a fine example of a stately private mansion. In 1676 she revisited one of the most beautiful, the château of Vaux-le-Vicomte, famous, like Versailles, for its fountains; but the property for her must have held still greater significance for its memories of Fouquet:

"J'arrivai ici dimanche, ma très-chère belle; j'avois couché à Vaux, dans le dessein de me rafraichir auprès de ces belles fontaines, et de manger deux oeufs frais. Voici ce que je trouvai: le comte de Vaux, qui avoit su mon arrivée, et qui me donna un très-bon souper;

1. Lettres, X, 186; 27 Aug. 1694.

et toutes les fontaines muettes et sans une goutte d'eau, parce qu'on les raccomodoit: ce petit mécompte me fit rire."¹.

Fountains were a feature of seventeenth century gardens: the Marquise describes those of another friend, the Duc de Chaulnes who had had water brought to his home in Picardy from a neighbouring village, at great expense and with all kinds of up-to-date machinery:

"Nous avons vu les machines de M. de Chaulnes: elles sont admirables, et d'une simplicité sublime. On voit cinq gros jets d'eau dans ce parterre et ces boulingrins, un abreuvoir qui est un petit canal, des fontaines à l'office, à la cuisine, à la lessive, et autrefois il n'y avoit pas de quoi boire. Louez-le un peu de son courage, car tout ce pays se moquoit de lui..."².

Another recent building in which she shows great interest is that of the Abbé Bayard, the chateau of Langlar, near Vichy. The Abbé's experiments in planning here seem to epitomise the Grand Siècle's ideal for a garden, of nature embellished by art:

"Plût à Dieu, ma chère enfant, que par effet de magie blanche ou noire, vous pussiez être ici! Vous aimeriez premièrement les solides vertus du maître de la maison; la liberté qu'on y trouve plus grande qu'à Fresnes, et vous admireriez le courage et l'adresse qu'il a eue de rendre une affreuse montagne la plus belle, la plus délicieuse

1. Lettres, IV, 505; 1 July 1676.

2. Lettres, IX, 28; 22 Apr. 1689

et la plus extraordinaire chose du monde. Je suis sûre que vous seriez frappée de cette nouveauté. Si cette montagne étoit à Versailles je suis sûre qu'elle auroit ses parieurs contre les violences dont l'art y opprime la pauvre nature dans l'effet court et violent de toutes les fontaines..."¹.

Madame de Sévigné, who did not often move in Court circles, might not have had much opportunity of visiting the greatest mansions of the century, though she did, of course, know and appreciate the palace of Versailles. She mentions Clagny, which the King had built for Madame de Montespan, and refers also to the gardens planned by Le Nôtre, with whose technique she would have been familiar from the Tuileries and Versailles:

"Vous fûmes à Clagny: que vous dirai-je? c'est le palais d'Armide; le bâtiment s'élève à vue d'oeil; les jardins sont faits: vous connaissez la manière de le Nôtre; il a laissé un petit bois sombre qui fait fort bien; il y a un petit bois d'oranger dans de grandes caisses; on s'y promène; ce sont des allées où l'on est à l'ombre; et pour cacher les caisses, il y a des deux côtés des palissades à hauteur d'appui, toutes fleuries de tubéreuses, de roses, de jasmin, d'oeillets: c'est assurément la plus belle, la plus surprenante, la plus enchantée nouveauté qui se puisse imaginer: on aime fort ce bois..."².

Earlier than this la Grande Mademoiselle had come into residence at the Palais du Luxembourg, by reason of the death of her stepmother, who had there tried some inno-

1. Lettres, IV, 490; 15 June 1676.

2. Lettres, IV, 21; 7 Aug. 1675. The château de Clagny no longer exists.

vations of her own, with rather less success:

"La veille Madame est morte d'une veille apoplexie qui la tenoit depuis un an. Voilà Luxembourg à Mademoiselle, et nous y entrerons. Elle avoit fait abattre tous les arbres du jardin de son côté, rien que par contradiction: ce beau jardin étoit devenu ridicule; la Providence y a pourvu. Il faudra le faire raser des deux côtés, et y mettre le Nôtre pour y faire comme aux Tuileries."¹

The interior decoration of these palaces was no less lovely than their construction. The Grand Siècle is a period of fertile achievement in the lesser arts: engraving, mosaics, wood-carving and gold and silver work, no less than in painting and sculpture. Individual names would no doubt be harder to recognise in this field. Innumerable artists must have been employed in the interior decoration of a palace such as Versailles, besides the great craftsmen with whom it is usually connected; Le Brun, Le Vau and Perrault. It was François Ier who had chiefly been responsible for the development of the arts in France. Madame de Sévigné was probably familiar with the names and work of the Italian Renaissance painters. She knew enough, at least, to draw from them a passing simile, as in her account of one of Bourdaloue's oraisons funèbres:

1. Lettres, III, 8-9; 6 Apr. 1672

"De vous dire de quels traits tout cela étoit orné, il est impossible, et je gâte même cette pièce par la grossièreté dont je la croque. C'est comme si un barbouilleur vouloit toucher à un tableau de Raphaël."¹.

Bussy turns the simile back on her a few years later, with reference to the perfection of her own style:

"Je n'ai pas touché à vos lettres, Madame: le Brun ne toucheroit pas à un ouvrage du Titien, où ce grand homme auroit eu quelque négligence. Cela est bon aux ouvrages des médiocres génies d'être revus et corrigés."².

The Marquise may of course have had a far more extensive knowledge of painting than these scanty references show.

In one letter she remarks, for instance, on the habit of a certain Venetian painter, Jacopo da Ponte, called le Bassan, of bringing the figure of his dog into all his compositions:

"Il y a dans tout ce qui vient de vous autres un petit brin d'impétuosité qui est la vraie marque de l'ouvrière: c'est le chien du Bassan..."³.

It is difficult to assess the implications of a comment like this, which may or may not show detailed knowledge, particularly as the expression is used metaphorically elsewhere in the language of the time.⁴.

1. Lettres, VIII, 49: 25 Apr. 1687.

2. Lettres, VII, 139; 17 Jan. 1681

3. Lettres, II, 525; 9 Mar. 1672.

4. Lettres, V, 272: 13 Aug. 1677. Cf. Tallemant des Réaux who quotes the Bishop of Laon's saying that "Mme de Sévigné étoit dans les ouvrages de Ménage, comme le chien de Bassan dans les portraits de ce peintre: il ne pouvoit s'empêcher de l'y mettre." Historiettes, IV, 204n.

In the same way one must presume the Marquise to have had a certain knowledge of early French painting, in spite of her silence on such figures as Poussin and Lesueur. Both had been alive during her lifetime, though not in the period covered by her correspondence. Her acquaintance with contemporary painting seems most often to have been fortuitous, the result of her moving in a cultured society rather than of a deep interest of her own. There is no suggestion, for instance, that she visited buildings for the sake of their artistic beauty, or frequented the galleries of the Académie de Peinture, where "Oeuvres de reception" were exhibited to the public. A particularly popular and successful exhibition of painting in 1673 is not mentioned by Madame de Sévigné.¹ Le Brun, the best-known artist of the reign of Louis XIV, is familiar to her for his funeral monument to the Chancellor Séguier, which the Marquise greatly admires:

"Le mausolée touchoit à la voute, orné de mille lumières et de plusieurs figures convenables à celui qu'on vouloit louer. Quatre squelettes en bas étoient chargés des marques de sa dignité, comme lui ôtant les honneurs avec la vie. L'un portoit son mortier, l'autre sa couronne de duc, l'autre son ordre, l'autre ses masses de chancelier.

1. C. f. Lemonnier, L'art français au temps de Louis XIV, Paris, 1911.

Les quatre Arts étoient éplorés et désolés d'avoir perdu leur protecteur: la Peinture, la Musique, l'Eloquence et la Sculpture. Quatre Vertus soutenoient la première représentation: la Force, la Justice, la Tempérance et la Religion. Quatre anges ou quatre génies recevoient au-dessus cette belle âme. Le mausolée étoit encore orné de plusieurs anges qui soutenoient une chapelle ardents, qui tenoit à la voute. Jamais il ne s'est rien vu de si magnifique, ni de si bien imaginé: c'est le chef-d'oeuvre de le Brun.¹

The majority of the Marquise's contemporaries would perhaps have corroborated her final remark, though one might have expected her to mention other works, particularly those which had some connection with the military exploits of the King: the Batailles d'Alexandre and the Passage du Rhin; or, in another field of achievement, the Gobelin tapestries and the most moving tomb of le Brun's own mother in the church of Saint-Nicholas-du-Chardonnet.

Le Brun's rival, Pierre Mignard, is known to the Marquise in the same way, not for his frescoes in the Val-de-Grâce, but for his portrait-painting; which had brought her into personal contact with him. Mignard had painted her daughter as well as herself. The portrait occupied a prominent place in her house, and was the admiration of all who visited her in Paris:

1. Lettres, III, 58; 6 May 1672.

"Faucher, de l'hôtel d'Estrées, me vint voir hier...il voulût voir votre portrait: il est romain, il s'y connoît; je voudrois que vous et M. de Grignas eussiez pu voir l'admiration naturelle dont il fut surpris, quelles louanges il donna à la ressemblance, mais encore plus à la bonté de la peinture, à cette tête qui sort, à cette gorge qui respire, à cette taille qui s'avance: il fut une demi-heure comme un fou. Je lui parlai de celui de la Saint-Géran, il l'a vu. Je lui dis que je le croyois mieux peint; il me pensa battre; il m'appella ignorante, et femme, qui est encore pis. Il appelle des traits de maître ces endroits qui me paroissoient grossiers c'est ce qui fait le blanc, le lustre, la chair, et sortir la tête de la toile. Enfin, ma fille, vous auriez ri de sa manière d'admirer. Il en a fait tant de bruit, que M. de Louvigny vint hier me voir; mais en effet c'étoit votre aimable portrait; il en fut charmé."¹.

M. de Louvigny had also been painted by Mignard; his portrait is the subject of a burlesque account by Madame de Sévigné of a visit to the artist's studio a few days later:

"J'ai été tantôt chez Mignard, pour voir le portrait de Louvigny: il est parlant; mais je n'ai pas vu Mignard: il peignoit Madame de Fontevault, que j'ai regardée par le trou de la porte; je ne l'ai pas trouvée jolie; l'abbé Têtu étoit auprès d'elle, dans un charmant badinage; les Villars étoient à ce trou avec moi: nous étions plaisantes."

Mignard has left numerous portraits of well-known seventeenth-century figures; one or two of the most famous are mentioned by the Marquise, who perhaps saw

1. Lettres, IV, 115, 119; 4 & 6 Sept. 1675.

them in his studio in the manner of Louvigny's: that of Madame de Maintenon as Saint Frances of Rome, and the posthumous portrait of Turenne on horseback, which he executed in 1676.

In spite of her more frequent references to Le Brun and Mignard, however, one cannot say that the Marquise derives as intense an enjoyment from this as she does from the other arts. Only rarely does one feel that a beautiful painting is for her an experience on the aesthetic level of music or literature. Her appreciation in this field is undeveloped, possibly through an omission in her early education. She had among her close acquaintances men and women who were outstanding patrons of the arts: Foucquet, whose magnificent home had given employment to several of the great craftsmen of the time, and who had thereafter filled it with treasures of every kind; the Plessis-Guénégauds, also noted for the artistic beauties of their château. Madame de Plessis-Guénégaud herself practised the arts, a rare accomplishment for a woman of those days, and one which Madame de Sévigné shows no desire to emulate. Her teacher was Nicholas Loir, one of the minor painters of the period who had worked at the decoration of Versailles, and was willing occasionally to give private lessons to aristocratic pupils.

This particular one would not appear from her friend's letters to have been very talented:

"Il faut que je vous dise comme je suis présentement. J'ai M. d'Andilly à ma main gauche, c'est à dire du coté de mon coeur; j'ai Mme de la Fayette à ma droite; Mme du Plessis devant moi, qui s'amuse à barbouiller de petites images..."¹

The description is of Fresnes, which the Marquise had previously called "un palais enchanté".² The same is true in lesser measure, of the chateau de Grignan. The Comte and Comtesse are both apparently fond of pictures, and have accumulated them in all their apartments encouraged by "le petit Coulanges", who, as a member of the Embassy suite in Rome, is in a good position to procure works of art. That may be one of the things Madame de Sévigné has in mind when she urges her son-in-law to "renvoyer toutes les fantaisies ruineuses qui servent chez lui par quartier".³ One would like all the same, to have known more about his "petits tableaux". The Marquise is tantalisingly vague on the subject, no less than on that of the portraits which adorn her own home in the Hotel Carnavalet.

In the question of music, however, she is far more explicit, and her appreciation must have been proverbial, for it is one of the characteristics noted in 1660 by Somaize in his Dictionnaire des précieuses. Madame de Sévigné's letters are in fact a most interesting commentary on the seventeenth century development of music, which like that of all the arts, received a marked impetus from the patronage of Louis XIV. The first step had been the foundation of the Opéra in 1669. The opera is perhaps the

1. Lettres, I, 493; 1 Aug. 1667.

2. Lettres, I, 440; 18 Nov. 1664.

3. Lettres, IV, 439-40; 5 June 1680.

form of music which most readily springs to mind as typical of the Grand Siècle. Unlike most musical forms, it was equally popular with all classes of society, perhaps because of its combination of all the arts, the music and choreography being greatly enhanced by the splendour and variety of the decor. Even great artists such as Le Brun did not disdain to turn their talents to the production of scenery, particularly for the operas and comedies-ballets commanded by the King. The Marquise comments several times on the beauty of décor of popular theatrical pieces which she saw in Paris. In her case, however, the chief source of enjoyment is the music, and Lully the most appreciated composer. Lully-"Baptiste", as she more often calls him - had been the moving spirit behind the foundation of the Opéra, and was the sole authority over the Court music of Louis XIV. Independent, ambitious, a parvenu, he occupies much the same position with regard to the King's household as Voiture in the Hôtel de Rambouillet; a hard and prolific worker, who spared neither himself nor his collaborators in the many operas which he produced. Madame de Sévigné quotes from them often: Alceste, Thésée, Atys, Cadmus et Hermione; the words are those of Quinault, but the praise goes unreservedly to "Baptiste":

"On joue jeudi l'opera," (Alceste) "qui est un prodige de beauté: il y a déjà des endroits de la musique qui ont mérité mes larmes; je ne suis pas seule à ne les pouvoir soutenir; l'âme de Mme de la Fayette en est alarmée." 1.

1. Lettres, III, 358-9; 8 Jan. 1674.

"J'ai été hier à l'opéra avec Mme de Coulanges et Mme d'Heudicourt, M. de Coulanges, l'abbé de Grignan et Corbinelli; il y a des choses admirables; les habits sont magnifiques et galants; il y a des endroits d'une extrême beauté; il y a un sommeil et des songes dont l'invention surprend; la symphonie est toutes de basses et de tons si assoupissants, qu'on admire Baptiste sur nouveaux frais... Il y a cinq ou six petits hommes tous nouveaux, qui dansent comme Faure, de sorte que cela seul m'y feroit aller; et cependant on aime encore mieux Alceste..."¹

The "cinq ou six petits hommes tous nouveaux" would seem to suggest that the Marquise was a sufficiently frequent patron of the theatre to know the usual cast; this also appears true from the astonishing number of her quotations from Quinault's libretto. They are the measure of its popularity in contemporary Paris; one can almost hear the Marquise humming over the score, which must have been on the lips and in the drawing rooms of thousands of admirers of Lully in fashionable society.² The craze for his music is recorded by La Fontaine in his Epître à M. de Nyert, in 1677:

"Le Français, pour lui seul, contraignant sa nature,
N'a que pour l'opéra de passion qui dure,
Et quiconque n'en chante, ou bien plutôt n'en gronde
Quelque récitatif, n'a pas l'air du beau monde."³

In Madame de Sévigné's case, as a matter of fact, it was not only Lully but the operatic form which was attractive:

1. Lettres, IV, 436; 6 May. 1676

2. Cf. Romain Rolland, Musiciens d'autrefois, Paris, 1908.

3. Oeuvres, IX. 159

"Vous avez une musique, ma chère; je crois que je la trouverois admirable: j'honore tout ce qui est opéra; et quoique que je fasse l'entendue, je ne suis pas si habile que M. de Grignan, et je crois que j'y pleurerois comme à la comédie..." 1.

She frequently mentions having sent the scores on to Provence, where Mme de Grignan, though she might sometimes hire a group of performers of chamber-music, had no opportunity otherwise of keeping up with current Parisian fashions, and seems in any case to have had less taste for it than her mother, who occasionally is obliged to defend her favourite "Baptiste".

Her patronage extends also to other composers in the genre, to Mollier and his son-in-law Itier, of whom she saw an unnamed opera in the house of Pellissari in 1674. Neither musician has come down to posterity, though both had been choreographers in the King's ballets and members of his Household. The opera, especially Lully's, was often a thin veil for topical allusion, which greatly added to the enjoyment of the audience; particularly when, as described by Madame de Sévigné, it referred to the affairs of the King and his growing coolness for Montespan:

1. Lettres, IV, 291; 22 Dec. 1675

"L'opéra est au-dessus de tous les autres...Il y a une scène de Mercure et de Cérès, qui n'est pas bien difficile à étendre; il faut qu'on l'ait approuvée, puisqu'on la chante: vous en jugerez." 1.

A kindred art was the comédie-ballet; the early reign of Louis XIV had been especially fertile in these entertainments, in which the King himself and the younger members of the Court often took part. Mademoiselle de Sévigné had danced in Benserade's Ballet des Arts in 1663, with a special verse commemorating the fact that it was her first entry into society. The ballet was an occasion for the ladies of the Court to display their grace and beauty in the variety of splendid costumes designed for them. Nearly twenty years later Madame de Sévigné relives it in detail, lamenting not only the present exile from her daughter, but the passing of so many of the figures who had shared this, perhaps the happiest period of her life:

"Je ne sais quand on dansera ce ballet"(one which Quinault had just written for the King)
"vraiment ce sera une belle piece; vous croyez bien que, pour moi, je dirai:

1. Lettres, VI, 255; 9 Feb. 1680. The lines in question are worthy of quotation, particularly if, as she suggests, they were the King's tactful paving of the way to a coming separation.

"Peut-être qu'il m'estime encore;
Mais il m'avait promis qu'il m'aimerait toujours.
L'amour qui pour lui m'anime
Deviens plus fort chaque jour;
Est-ce assez d'un peu d'estime
Pour le prix de tant d'amour?"

To which Mercure replies:

"Il sent l'ardeur qu'un tendre amour inspire,
Mais un amant chargé d'un grand empire
N'a pas toujours le temps de bien aimer"...

Prosepine
Act I
sc.ii.

"Ce n'est pas là un ballet comme celui où dansoit ma fille: il y avoit telle et telle; elle y faisoit un petit pas admirable sur le bord du théâtre," et là-dessus je conterai tout le ballet; mais vous-meme, ma fille, je crois que sans radoterie vous pourrez dire qu'il ne fait point souvenir du vôtre, et qu'il y avoit quatre personnes avec feu Madame, que les siècles entiers auront peine à remplacer, et pour la beauté, et pour la belle jeunesse, et pour la danse: Ah! quelles bergères et quelles amazones!....." 1.

Madame de Grignan had apparently been a very good dancer. It is accordingly an art which the Marquise particularly appreciated, in the wholehearted way in which she embraces all her daughter's interests. She enjoys peasant dancing equally well, however, remarking on the skill of the gipsy dancers who once visited her in Brittany; while those of the country round Vichy gave special performances at her request:

"...je voudrois bien vous envoyer pour la noce deux filles et deux garçons qui sont ici, avec le tambour de basque, pour vous faire voir cette bourrée. Enfin les Bohémiens sont fades en comparaison. Je suis sensible à la parfaite bonne grâce: vous souvient-il quand vous me faisiez rougir les yeux à force de bien danser? Je vous assure que cette bourrée dansée, sautée, coulée naturellement, et dans une justesse surprenante, vous divertiroit assurément." 2.

We do not know whether the Marquise herself had been as good a dancer as her daughter. She had probably been taught by a dancing-master as a child, as her daughter certainly had been. The description of a provincial reunion at Rennes gives her occasion to display a certain knowledge of technique.

1. Lettres, VII, 92; 29 Sept. 1680.

2. Lettres, IV, 488-89; 11 June 1676.

"Nous fîmes danser l'autre jour le fils de ce sénéchal de Rennes qui étoit si fou, qui a eu tant d'aventures... Imaginez-vous un homme d'une taille toute parfaite, d'un visage romanesque, qui danse d'un air fort noble, comme Pécourt, comme Favier, comme Saint-André, tous ces maîtres lui ayant dit: "Monsieur, nous n'avons rien à vous montrer, vous en savez plus que nous." Il dansa ces belles chaconnes, les folies d'Espagne, mais surtout les passe-pieds avec sa femme, d'une perfection, d'un agrément qui ne se peut représenter: point de pas réglés, rien qu'une cadence juste, des fantaisies de figures, tantôt en branle comme les autres, et puis à deux seulement comme des menuets, tantôt en se reposant, tantôt ne mettant pas les pieds à terre. Je vous assure, ma fille, que vous qui êtes connoisseuse, vous auriez été fort divertie de l'agrément de cette sorte de bal..."¹.

Others besides the King patronised artists and musicians, and concerts were often given in private houses, though never, as far as we know, in the hotel Carnavalet. Charles de Sévigné is mentioned as having heard a symphony by Itier and le Camus in the salon of Mlle Raymond, in company with Ninon de l'Enclos, Mme de la Sablière and several others.² Mlle Raymond was herself a well-known singer; Madame de Sévigné had already heard her, in the house of the Comtesse du Lude, sing part of a new ballet Psyché, the joint work of Molière, Corneille, Quinault and Lulli.³

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1. Lettres, IX, 132033; 24 July 1689. The three artists here mentioned were famous members of the company then playing at the Opera. Louis Pécourt had composed music for the King.
 2. Lettres, II, 95 ; 6 Mar, 1671
 3. Lettres, II, 66 ; 18 Feb. 1771.

The Marquise her-self seems to have been less attracted by instrumental music than by vocal. She had a pleasant singing voice, and was delighted to find in her son-in-law the Comte de Grignan a similarity of taste in this respect. The latest vocal compositions pass between them, from Paris to Provence; she wishes him by her when she hears another famous singer, Mlle Hilaire,¹ in the house of Mme de la Fayette, and learns an Italian duet, that she may sing it with him when she visits Grignan. Singing as a personal accomplishment had fairly recently become fashionable, and that largely through the influence of Italy. The King had set ~~an~~ example by having a music tutor; and one remembers the music master of Molière's Bourgeois Gentilhomme. Church music had also received a new impetus from the influence of Lulli. Certain parishes in Paris were becoming famous for their choirs and organists, the congregation flocked to them accordingly, particularly to the parish church of Saint-Paul, of which Ménage has an anecdote to tell:

"Comme on chantoit un Crédo à Saint-Paul, en méchante musique, Madame de Sévigné disoit:
 "Ah! que c'est faux!" Puis, se tournant vers ceux qui l'écoutoient: "Ne croyez pas, dit-elle, que je renonce à la foi; je n'en yeux pas à la lettre, ce n'est qu'au chant!"²

She remarks however, on the beauty of the funeral service for the Chancellor Seguier, for whom Lulli had written the Requiem:

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1. Both Mlle Raymond and Mlle Hilaire are mentioned by La Fontaine in his Epitre à M. Niert: sur l'Opera. Oeuvres IX, 157.
 2. Menagiana, ed. 1693, p.32.

"Baptiste avait fait un dernier effort de toute la musique du Roi. Ce beau Miserere y étoit encore augmenté; il y a eu un Libera où tous les yeux étoient pleins de larmes. Je ne crois point qu'il y ait une autre musique dans le ciel."¹.

In the last quotation, which betrays a genuine aesthetic pleasure, one feels a love of music that is more than a passing satisfaction. "J'ai été tantôt chez Ytier", she says on a certain occasion; "j'avois besoin de musique;"². and the remark seems enough to put her musical appreciation, if not on level with her appreciation of nature, at least in the realm of that artistic experience which one would expect to find in one of her sensitivity.

1. Lettres, III, 60; 6 May 1672.

2. Lettres, II 165; 15 April 1671.

Chapter X.

CONCLUSION.

When Madame de Sévigné died in the year 1696, she had outlived a great number of the correspondents and friends whose interests fill the pages of her letters. When her death was followed in 1705 by that of her daughter, Madame de Grignan, their correspondence was allowed for a time to fall into relative oblivion. It was not forgotten for long. Already during her lifetime the Marquise had enjoyed a considerable reputation as a writer, albeit among a restricted circle of friends. Certain allusions even in her letters hint at the possibility of one day finding herself in print; and it may well be, that, sincere and spontaneous as they are, they were not composed in total unawareness of the future. A bare thirty years had in fact elapsed when there appeared the first printed selection of the letters of Madame de Sévigné: and succeeding editions have continued the work of making her voice heard and her charm appreciated, by an audience vaster a thousand times than she could ever have dreamed.

One question must emerge from even a partial reading of the Marquise's correspondence: to what extent is it a faithful portrait of the intellectual life of her times? In the past it has been customary to regard her primarily as a chronicler of seventeenth-century life, and in particular of that literary life with which circumstances so frequently put her in contact. To regard her exclusively from this angle, however, would be to do her a grave injustice. The metaphor which the Marquise applied to herself, in speaking of Cartesian philosophy: " Je veux apprendre cette science comme l'homme, non pas pour jouer mais pour voir jouer," is one which must be treated with the greatest of reservations. Modern works of criticism have done much to redress the balance, and in investigating the different aspects of learning in the seventeenth century, have brought new significance to those passages of her letters which bear upon the opinions of her times. Particularly is this true in the fields of science and religion. The present writer's aim has been to correlate this evidence in a new picture of Madame de Sévigné, which may perhaps enable her readers to estimate more accurately her share in the intellectual activities of her age.

In the domain of literature little that is new can be said of Madame de Sévigné. One can but emphasise again, as her many biographers have done, the number and variety of her personal contacts and the extraordinary extent of her reading. The former, indeed, had of necessity an element of chance; but the latter was a matter of choice, and one is the more in admiration of its depth and range. One might indeed contend that of all the literature accessible to the seventeenth-century reader, not one major work is missing from Madame de Sévigné's library. Classical Greek and Latin, the Renaissance literature of Europe, contemporary drama, poetry and prose figure abundantly on her bookshelves, while her bibliography bears witness that they were assiduously and frequently read. There are omissions, no doubt. The Marquise's selection is bounded by her tastes and still more by those of her period, which would not lead her to appreciate, for instance, the works of England, Scandinavia and Germany, and would scarcely allow her to know the Renaissance literature of her own nation.

It would be unrealistic to expect of her that she should remain wholly free from the limitations of public opinion. Everything that the age had to offer, however, she sampled with enthusiasm: epic, lyric, satire, and poetic theory; tragic and comic muse; picaresque and heroic novel. To every literary fashion, every important development of technique she was keenly and intelligently alive, as aware at seventy as she had been at seventeen, holding within her experience the long span of glorious achievements which were to make French classicism famous throughout the world.

Particularly is this remarkable in the realm of ideas. The Marquise had not a deeply philosophical mind; and she was born into a world in which the rationalist revolution which marks the seventeenth century lay as yet only in germ. To understand it at all required a considerable reversal of habitual ways of thought. Yet her acquaintance with Cartesianism is one which may not be lightly dismissed. The interest was, on her own confession, vicarious,; and not a matter of deep personal conviction. She had none the less a considerable knowledge of its principles, and had addressed herself to a variety of difficult problems, particularly those of scientific theory.

Here she is able to speak in the terms and with the accuracy of a person at least conversant with the premises of Descartes' thought, and often to report an argument in a way which shows her to have been more than just an idle spectator. One could not with accuracy call her a devotee of Cartesianism: but all that came her way she made the effort to understand, with that universal interest which marks her choice of books and her selection of her friends; and in at least one instance, where the study of Descartes' theory brought her in contact with Malebranche, she was able to envisage the effect of it on theological belief, and at once, put her finger on its weakness.

It is indeed in religious controversy that the Marquise's intellectual powers find their full play. How closely she followed the Jansenist argument may again be gauged by her reading. Few laymen, however topical the question in the (the) 17th seventeenth century, can have gone back, as she did, to the writings of Saint Augustine to discover at first hand the bases of the doctrines of Port-Royal. It is true that inquiry into such controversies is a feature of the age, one against which Fenelon repeatedly warns the readers of his treatise De l'éducation des filles.

The Marquise is typical of the times in taking such an ardent interest in these questions, and in thinking no topic outside the scope of her judgement. She does not confine herself, however, to the immediate problems arising from the persecution of Port-Royal. The religious position of the Huguenots and the Protestants of England is equally absorbing, and it is interesting to note the effect of such discussions on her selection of reading matter. Both sides of the argument are faithfully reflected; and the Marquise seldom fails to fill in her knowledge with additional works on some subsidiary topic: the history of the early Church as a background to Augustine, the English Reformation as a contrast to the French. Her understanding of theological controversy is limited, of course; one must beware of presenting Madame de Sévigné as either a theologian or a religious fanatic. At no time is she wholly absorbed by these problems, and indeed on more than one occasion she admits her inability to follow an argument any further. But the interest lies rather in the fact that she should tackle them at all, and should seek the arguments at their source, instead of being content with the

ready-made opinions which she could easily have found around her, had she been merely a chronicler of social life and not a highly intelligent woman.

Medical matters also loom large in Madame de Sévigné's correspondence. That is not to class her as a valetudinarian, for most of her concern is for other people. Towards her own experience of ill-health she preserves an attitude of robust common-sense. The same is hardly true, however, of her attitude to medical theory, which may sometimes appear to do little credit to her judgement. Her views, it is true, are unconsidered; but she admits the fact with disarming candour, and one must remember that as far as medical science is concerned, the Marquise was living in a period of transition where the doctrines themselves were unsure, a fact which should certainly modify any evaluation of her intellectual ability in this field.

The discussion of child education which is particularly prominent towards the end of her life brings final confirmation of the Marquise's intellectual activity. The standard she demands is a high one, and one cannot doubt that the programme traced by her for the younger members of her family had been lived out already in her own personal experience.

It shows great confidence in the human mind. Few people of her time, or indeed of any time, would have put before a young girl a curriculum of such breadth, would have demanded so sustained an intellectual effort as the Marquise demands of her grand-daughter, Pauline. Few, on the other hand, could have presented it so attractively, nor inspired it with that infectious enthusiasm which she could only communicate because she herself possessed it so abundantly. One has only to compare the educational theory of Madame de Sévigné with that of the most progressive of her contemporaries to realise that, at least as far as academic programmes are concerned, she is living in a different age from theirs.

Madame de Sévigné's love of nature has become proverbial. Even this, however, can be regarded from another point of view as evidence of the breadth of her culture. For the pleasure she derives from a moonlit walk or a beautiful landscape is not merely a satisfaction of the senses or a vaguely emotional appreciation. It is a pleasure intensified tenfold by the associations it awakens.

All the crowded memories of myth and legend and lyric poetry that spring to her mind before a beautiful scene show how richly that mind is furnished. One cannot divorce her aesthetic sense from its background of literature and art.

As a final remark one might add that in a century so fertile in literary production Madame de Sévigné tasted of almost every form of intellectual activity, and that her tastes are broadly typical of her age. All the figures great and small which we have grown to associate with the classicism of France; all the forms of literature; all the movements of thought, with the possible exception of the Epicurean, are reflected in her pages. It matters little that her judgements on them have not always been borne out by posterity; that she should rate Corneille above and Racine below what our modern standards demand; that she should put Nicole on a par with Pascal, or extol the heroic novel, or allow herself to be too easily swayed by second rate critics. The important fact is that she should have lived so close to these figures, that the thoughts of Corneille, Racine, Pascal and Nicole should have formed so intimate a part of her daily outlook on life; in a word that all

the widespread cultural influences which went to the making of classical literature should have been hers also, to such an eminent degree.

It has not been possible in this study to draw any very detailed comparison between Madame de Sévigné and other intellectual women of her time. It is perhaps sufficient to say that they were for the most part her friends, for without being in any way a pedant she naturally gravitated towards the elite of French society. And yet she was, in a way, more typical than they of seventeenth-century France. Her alertness of mind and independence of judgement are qualities which might be found elsewhere among the great ladies of the court; but in the first flush of intellectual emancipation, there were few of them who did not err on the side of pedantry and affectation. It is in Madame de Sévigné that one first finds displayed that gracious blend of learning and charm which is most representative of the role of women in the intellectual life of France.

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Owing to the abundance of allusions to printed works the first and last references only have been cited in each case.

Where Madame de Sévigné read a foreign work in the original language, the title has been given in that language; where she read a work in translation the title has been given in the language of the translation.

The sign + denotes a work which Madame de Sévigné was actually reading or had recently read at the time of reference. Other titles are taken from an allusion clear enough to assume a first-hand knowledge on the part of the Marquise. If such knowledge is only probable the work has been cited in parenthesis [] ; similarly if Madame de Sévigné cites an author without reference to a work, or if any author, title or edition cannot be surely identified, the title is given in parenthesis.

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