

THE WOMEN OF THE FRENCH SALONS

By Amelia Gere Mason

PREFACE

It has been a labor of love with many distinguished Frenchmen to recall the memories of the women who have made their society so illustrious, and to retouch with sympathetic insight the features which time was beginning to dim. One naturally hesitates to enter a field that has been gleaned so carefully, and with such brilliant results, by men like Cousin, Sainte-Beuve, Goncourt, and others of lesser note. But the social life of the two centuries in which women played so important a role in France is always full of human interest from whatever point of view one may regard it. If there is not a great deal to be said that is new, old facts may be grouped afresh, and old modes of life and thought measured by modern standards.

In searching through the numerous memoirs, chronicles, letters, and original manuscripts in which the records of these centuries are hidden away, nothing has struck me so forcibly as the remarkable mental vigor and the far-reaching influence of women whose theater was mainly a social one. Though society has its frivolities, it has also its serious side, and it is through the phase of social evolution that was begun



FREE
eBooks



WHOEVER
WHENEVER
WHEREVER
YOU ARE

INSTANTLY DOWNLOAD THESE MASSIVE BOOK BUNDLES

CLICK ANY BELOW TO ENJOY NOW

3 AUDIOBOOK COLLECTIONS

Classic AudioBooks Vol 1 ■ Classic AudioBooks Vol 2 ■ Classic AudioBooks Kids

6 BOOK COLLECTIONS

Sci-Fi ■ Romance ■ Mystery ■ Academic ■ Classics ■ Business

in the salons that women have attained the position they hold today.

However beautiful, or valuable, or poetic may have been the feminine

types of other nationalities, it is in France that we find the

forerunners of the intelligent, self-poised, clear-sighted, independent

modern woman. It is possible that in the search for larger fields the

smaller but not less important ones have been in a measure forgotten.

The great stream of civilization flows from a thousand unnoted rills

that make sweet music in their course, and swell the current as surely

as the more noisy torrent. The conditions of the past cannot be revived,

nor are they desirable. The present has its own theories and its own

methods. But at a time when the reign of luxury is rapidly establishing

false standards, and the best intellectual life makes hopeless struggles

against an ever aggressive materialism, it may be profitable as well as

interesting to consider the possibilities that lie in a society equally

removed from frivolity and pretension, inspired by the talent, the

sincerity, and the moral force of American women, and borrowing a

new element of fascination from the simple and charming but polite

informality of the old salons.

It has been the aim in these studies to gather within a limited compass

the women who represented the social life of their time on its

most intellectual side, and to trace lightly their influence upon

civilization through the avenues of literature and manners. Though the

work may lose something in fullness from the effort to

put so much into
so small a space, perhaps there is some compensation in
the opportunity
of comparing, in one gallery, the women who exercised
the greatest power
in France for a period of more than two hundred years.
The impossibility
of entering into the details of so many lives in a
single volume is
clearly apparent. Only the most salient points can be
considered. Many
who would amply repay a careful study have simply been
glanced at, and
others have been omitted altogether. As it would be out
of the question
in a few pages to make an adequate portrait of women who
occupy so
conspicuous a place in history as Mme. De Maintenon and
Mme. De Stael,
the former has been reluctantly passed with a simple
allusion, and
the latter outlined in a brief resume not at all
proportional to the
relative interest or importance of the subject.

I do not claim to present a complete picture of French
society, and
without wishing to give too rose-colored a view, it has
not seemed to
me necessary to dwell upon its corrupt phases. If truth
compels one
sometimes to state unpleasant facts in portraying
historic characters,
it is as needless and unjust as in private life to
repeat idle and
unproved tales, or to draw imaginary conclusions from
questionable data.
The conflict of contemporary opinion on the simplest
matters leads
one often to the suspicion that all personal history is
more or less
disguised fiction. The best one can do in default of
direct records
is to accept authorities that are generally regarded as
the most

trustworthy.

This volume is affectionately dedicated to the memory of my mother, who followed the work with appreciative interest in its early stages, but did not live to see its conclusion.

Amelia Gere Mason Paris, July 6, 1891

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I. SALONS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Characteristics of French
Woman--Gallic Genius for Conversation--Social
Conditions--Origin of the
Salons--Their Power--Their Composition--Their Records

CHAPTER II. THE HOTEL DE RAMBOUILLET Mme. De

Rambouillet--The
Salon Bleu--Its Habitués--Its
Diversions--Corneille--Balzac--Richelieu--Romance of the
Grand Conde--the Young Bossuet--Voiture--The Duchesse de
Longueville--Angelique Paulet--Julie d'Angennes--Les
Precieuses
Ridicules--Decline of the Salon--Influence upon
Literature and Manners

CHAPTER III. MADEMOISELLE DE SCUDERY AND THE SAMEDIS

Salons of the
Noblesse--"The Illustrious Sappho"--Her Romances--The
Samedis--Bons Mots
of Mme. Cornuel--Estimate of Mlle. De Scudery

CHAPTER IV. LA GRANDE MADEMOISELLE Her Character--Her

Heroic Part in the
Fronde--Her Exile--Literary Diversions of her Salon--A
Romantic Episode

CHAPTER V. A LITERARY SALON AT PORT ROYAL Mme. De Sable--Her

Worldly Life--Her Retreat--Her Friends--Pascal--The

Maxims of La
Rochefoucauld--Last Days of the Marquise

CHAPTER VI. MADAME DE SEVIGNE Her Genius--Her Youth--Her
Unworthy
Husband--Her Impertinent Cousin--Her love for her
Daughter--Her
Letters--Hotel de Carnavalet--Mme. Duplessis Guengaud--
Mme. De
Coulanges--The Curtain Falls

CHAPTER VII. MADAME DE LA FAYETTE Her Friendship with
Mme. De
Sevigne--Her Education--Her Devotion to the Princess
Henrietta--Her
Salon--La Rochefoucauld--Talent as a Diplomatist--
Comparison with Mme.
De Maintenon--Her Literary Work--Sadness of her Last
Days--Woman in
Literature

CHAPTER VIII. SALONS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
Characteristics of
the Eighteenth Century--Its Epicurean Philosophy--
Anecdote of Mme. Du
Deffand--The Salon an Engine of Political Power--Great
Influence of
Woman--Salons Defined--Literary Dinners--Etiquette of
the Salons--An
Exotic on American Soil

CHAPTER IX. AN ANTECHAMBER OF THE ACADEMIE FRANCAISE The
Marquise de
Lambert--Her "Bureau d'Esprit"--Fontenelle--Advice to
her Son--Wise
Thoughts on the Education of Women--Her Love of
Consideration--Her
Generosity--Influence of Women upon the Academy

CHAPTER X. THE DUCHESSE DU MAINE Her Capricious
Character--Her
Esprit--Mlle. De Launay--Clever Portrait of her
Mistress--Perpetual
Fetes at Sceaux--Voltaire and the "Divine Emilie"--
Dilettante Character

of this Salon

CHAPTER XI. MADAME DE TENCIN AND MADAM DU CHATELET An
Intriguing
Chanoinesse--Her Singular Fascination--Her Salon--Its
Philosophical
Character--Mlle. Aisse--Romances of Mme. De Tencin--
D'Alembert--La Belle
Emilie--Voltaire--the Two Women Compared

CHAPTER XII. MADAME GEOFFRIN AND THE PHILOSOPHERS
Cradles of the New
Philosophy--Noted Salons of this Period--Character of
Mme. Geoffrin--Her
Practical Education--Anecdotes of her Husband--
Composition of her
Salon--Its Insidious Influence--Her Journey to Warsaw--
Her Death

CHAPTER XIII. ULTRA PHILOSOPHICAL SALONS--MADAME
D'EPINAY Mme. De
Graffigny--Baron D'Holbach--Mme. D'Epinay's Portrait of
Herself--Mlle.
Quinault--Rousseau--La Chevrette--Grimm--Diderot--The
Abbe
Galiani--Estimate of Mme. D'Epinay

CHAPTER XIV. SALONS OF THE NOBLESSE--MADAME DU DEFFAND
La Marechale
de Luxenbourg--The Temple--Comtesse de Boufflers--Mme.
Du Dufand--Her
Convent Salon--Rupture with Mlle. De Lespinasse--Her
Friendship with
Horace Walpole--Her Brilliancy and her Ennui

CHAPTER XV. MADEMOISELLE DE LESPINASSE A Romantic
Career--Companion
of Mme. Du Deffand--Rival Salons--Association with the
Encyclopedists--D'Alembert--A Heart Tragedy--Impassioned
Letters--A Type
Unique in her Age

CHAPTER XVI. THE SALON HELVETIQUE The Swiss Pastor's
Daughter--Her
Social Ambition--Her Friends Mme. De Marchais--Mme.

D'Houdetot--Duchesse
de Lauzun--Character of Mme. Necker--Death at Coppet--
Close of the Most
Brilliant Period of the Salons

CHAPTER XVII. SALONS OF THE REVOLUTION--MADAME ROLAND
Change in the
Character of the Salons--Mme. De Condorcet--Mme.
Roland's Story of
her Own Life--A Marriage of Reason--Enthusiasm for the
Revolution--Her
Modest Salon--Her Tragical Fate

CHAPTER XVIII. MADAM DE STAEL Supremacy of Her Genius--
Her Early
Training--Her Sensibility--A Marriage de Convenance--Her
Salon--Anecdote
of Benjamin Constant--Her Exile--Life at Coppet--Secret
Marriage--Close
of a Stormy Life

CHAPTER XIX. SALONS OF THE EMPIRE AND RESTORATION--
MADAME RECAMIER A
Transition period--Mme. De Montesson--Mme. De Genus--
Revival of the
Literary Spirit--Mme. De Beaumont--Mme. De Remusat--Mme.
De Souza--Mme.
De Duras--Mme. De Krudener--Fascination of Mme.
Recamier--Her
Friends--Her Convent Salon--Chateaubriand Decline of the
Salon

CHAPTER I. SALONS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

_Characteristics of French Woman--Gallic Genius for
Conversation--Social
Conditions--Origin of the Salons--Their Power--Their
Composition--Their
Records._

"Inspire, but do not write," said LeBrun to women.
Whatever we may think

today of this rather superfluous advice, we can readily pardon a man living in the atmosphere of the old French salons, for falling somewhat under the special charm of their leaders. It was a charm full of subtle flattery. These women were usually clever and brilliant, but their cleverness and brilliancy were exercised to bring into stronger relief the talents of their friends. It is true that many of them wrote, as they talked, out of the fullness of their own hearts or their own intelligence, and with no thought of a public; but it was only an incident in their lives, another form of diversion, which left them quite free from the dreaded taint of feminine authorship. Their peculiar gift was to inspire others, and much of the fascination that gave them such power in their day still clings to their memories. Even at this distance, they have a perpetual interest for us. It may be that the long perspective lends them a certain illusion which a closer view might partly dispel. Something also may be due to the dark background against which they were outlined. But, in spite of time and change, they stand out upon the pages of history, glowing with an ever-fresh vitality, and personifying the genius of a civilization of which they were the fairest flower.

The Gallic genius is eminently a social one, but it is, of all others, the most difficult to reproduce. The subtle grace of manner, the magic of spoken words, are gone with the moment. The conversations of two centuries ago are today like champagne which has lost

its sparkle.

We may recall their tangible forms--the facts, the accessories, the thoughts, even the words, but the flavor is not there. It is the volatile essence of gaiety and wit that especially characterizes French society. It glitters from a thousand facets, it surprises us in a thousand delicate turns of thought, it appears in countless movements and shades of expression. But it refuses to be imprisoned. Hence the impossibility of catching the essential spirit of the salons. We know something of the men and women who frequented them, as they have left many records of themselves. We have numerous pictures of their social life from which we may partially reconstruct it and trace its influence. But the nameless attraction that held for so long a period the most serious men of letters as well as the gay world still eludes us.

We find the same elusive quality in the women who presided over these reunions. They were true daughters of a race of which Mme. De Graffigny wittily said that it "escaped from the hands of Nature when there had entered into its composition only air and fire." They certainly were not faultless; indeed, some of them were very faulty. Nor were they, as a rule, remarkable for learning. Even the leaders of noted literary salons often lacked the common essentials of a modern education. But if they wrote badly and spelled badly, they had an abundance of that delicate combination of intellect and wit which the French call ESPRIT. They had also, in superlative measure, the social gifts which

women of genius reared in the library or apart from the world, are apt to lack. The close study of books leads to a knowledge of man rather than of men. It tends toward habits of introspection which are fatal to the clear and swift vision required for successful leadership of any sort. Social talent is distinct, and implies a happy poise of character and intellect; the delicate blending of many gifts, not the supremacy of one. It implies taste and versatility, with fine discrimination, and the tact to sink one's personality as well as to call out the best in others. It was this flexibility of mind, this active intelligence tempered with sensibility and the native instinct of pleasing, that distinguished the French women who have left such enduring traces upon their time. "It is not sufficient to be wise, it is necessary also to please," said the witty and penetrating Ninon, who thus very aptly condensed the feminine philosophy of her race. Perhaps she has revealed the secret of their fascination, the indefinable something which is as difficult to analyze as the perfume of a rose.

A history of the French salons would include the history of the entire period of which they were so prominent a factor. It would make known to us its statesmen and its warriors; it would trace the great currents of thought; it would give us glimpses of every phase of society, from the diversions of the old noblesse, with their sprinkling of literature and philosophy, to the familiar life of the men of letters, who cast about

their intimate coteries the halo of their own genius. These salons were closely interwoven with the best intellectual life of more than two hundred years. Differing in tone according to the rank, taste, or character of their leaders, they were rallying points for the most famous men and women of their time. In these brilliant centers, a new literature had its birth. Here was found the fine critical sense that put its stamp on a new poem or a new play. Here ministers were created and deposed, authors and artists were brought into vogue, and vacant chairs in the Academie Francaise were filled. Here the great philosophy of the eighteenth century was cradled. Here sat the arbiters of manners, the makers of social success. To these high tribunals came, at last, every aspirant for fame.

It was to the refinement, critical taste, and oral force of a rare woman, half French and half Italian, that the first literary salons owed their origin and their distinctive character. In judging of the work of Mme. De Rambouillet, we have to consider that in the early days of the seventeenth century knowledge was not diffused as it is today. A new light was just dawning upon the world, but learning was still locked in the brains of savants, or in the dusty tomes of languages that were practically obsolete. Men of letters were dependent upon the favors of noble but often ignorant patrons, whom they never met on a footing of equality. The position of women was as inferior as their education, and the incredible depravity of morals was a sufficient

answer to the oft-repeated fallacy that the purity of the family is best maintained by feminine seclusion. It is true there were exceptions to this reign of illiteracy. With the natural disposition to glorify the past, the writers of the next generation liked to refer to the golden era of the Valois and the brilliancy of its voluptuous court. Very likely they exaggerated a little the learning of Marguerite de Navarre, who was said to understand Latin, Italian, Spanish, even Greek and Hebrew. But she had rare gifts, wrote religious poems, besides the very secular "Heptameron" which was not eminently creditable to her refinement, held independent opinions, and surrounded herself with men of letters. This little oasis of intellectual light, shadowed as it was with vices, had its influence, and there were many women in the solitude of remote chateaux who began to cultivate a love for literature. "The very women and maidens aspired to this praise and celestial manna of good learning," said Rabelais. But their reading was mainly limited to his own unsavory satires, to Spanish pastorals, licentious poems, and their books of devotion. It was on such a foundation that Mme. De Rambouillet began to rear the social structure upon which her reputation rests. She was eminently fitted for this role by her pure character and fine intelligence; but she added to these the advantages of rank and fortune, which gave her ample facilities for creating a social center of sufficient attraction to focus the best intellectual life of the age,

and sufficient power to radiate its light. Still it was the tact and discrimination to select from the wealth of material about her, and quietly to reconcile old traditions with the freshness of new ideas, that especially characterized Mme. De Rambouillet.

It was this richness of material, the remarkable variety and originality of the women who clustered round and succeeded their graceful leader, that gave so commanding an influence to the salons of the seventeenth century. No social life has been so carefully studied, no women have been so minutely portrayed. The annals of the time are full of them. They painted one another, and they painted themselves, with realistic fidelity. The lights and shadows are alike defined. We know their joys and their sorrows, their passions and their follies, their tastes and their antipathies. Their inmost life has been revealed. They animate, as living figures, a whole class of literature which they were largely instrumental in creating, and upon which they have left the stamp of their own vivid personality. They appear later in the pages of Cousin and Sainte-Beuve, with their radiant features softened and spiritualized by the touch of time. We rise from a perusal of these chronicles of a society long passed away, with the feeling that we have left a company of old friends. We like to recall their pleasant talk of themselves, of their companions, of the lighter happenings, as well as the more serious side of the age which they have illuminated. We seem to see their faces, not their manner, watch the play of intellect and

feeling, while they
speak. The variety is infinite and full of charm.

Mme. de Sevigne talks upon paper, of the trifling
affairs of every-day
life, adding here and there a sparkling anecdote, a bit
of gossip, a
delicate characterization, a trenchant criticism, a dash
of wit, a
touch of feeling, or a profound thought. All this is
lighted up by
her passionate love of her daughter, and in this light
we read the
many-sided life of her time for twenty-five years. Mme.
de La Fayette
takes the world more seriously, and replaces the playful
fancy of her
friend by a richer vein of imagination and sentiment.
She sketches for
us the court of which Madame (title given to the wife of
the king's
brother) is the central figure--the unfortunate Princess
Henrietta whom
she loved so tenderly, and who died so tragically in her
arms. She
writes novels too; not profound studies of life, but
fine and exquisite
pictures of that side of the century which appealed most
to her poetic
sensibility. We follow the leading characters of the age
through the
ten-volume romances of Mlle. de Scudery, which have
mostly long since
fallen into oblivion. Doubtless the portraits are a
trifle rose-colored,
but they accord, in the main, with more veracious
history. The Grande
Mademoiselle describes herself and her friends, with the
curious naivete
of a spoiled child who thinks its smallest experiences
of interest to
all the world. Mme. de Maintenon gives us another
picture, more serious,
more thoughtful, but illuminated with flashes of
wonderful insight.

Most of these women wrote simply to amuse themselves and their friends.

It was only another mode of their versatile expression.

With rare

exceptions, they were not authors consciously or by intention. They

wrote spontaneously, and often with reckless disregard of grammar and

orthography. But the people who move across their gossiping pages are

alive. The century passes in review before us as we read. The men and

women who made its literature so brilliant and its salons so famous,

become vivid realities. Prominent among the fair faces that look out

upon us at every turn, from court and salon, is that of the Duchesse de

Longueville, sister of the Grand Conde, and heroine of the Fronde. Her

lovely blue eyes, with their dreamy languor and "luminous awakenings,"

turn the heads alike of men and women, of poet and critic, of statesman

and priest. We trace her brief career through her pure and ardent youth,

her loveless marriage, her fatal passion for La Rochefoucauld, the final

shattering of all her illusions; and when at last, tired of the world,

she bows her beautiful head in penitent prayer, we too love and forgive

her, as others have done. Were not twenty-five years of suffering and

penance an ample expiation? She was one of the three women of whom

Cardinal Mazarin said that they were "capable of governing and

overturning three kingdoms." The others were the intriguing Duchesse de

Chevreuse, who dazzled the age by her beauty and her daring escapades,

and the fascinating Anne de Gonzague, better known as the Princesse

Palatine, of whose winning manners, conversational charm, penetrating intellect, and loyal character Bossuet spoke so eloquently at her death. We catch pleasant glimpses of Mme. Deshoulieres, beautiful and a poet; of Mme. Cornuel, of whom it was said that "every sin she confessed was an epigram"; of Mme. de Choisy, witty and piquante; of Mme. de Doulanges, also a wit and femme d'esprit.

Linked with these by a thousand ties of sympathy and affection were the worthy counterparts of Pascal and Arnauld, of Bossuet and Fenelon, the devoted women who poured out their passionate souls at the foot of the cross, and laid their earthly hopes upon the altar of divine love. We follow the devout Jacqueline Pascal to the cloister in which she buries her brilliant youth to die at thirty-five of a wounded conscience and a broken heart. Many a bruised spirit, as it turns from the gay world to the mystic devotion which touches a new chord in its jaded sensibilities, finds support and inspiration in the strong and fervid sympathy of Jacqueline Arnauld, better known as Mere Angelique of Port Royal. This profound spiritual passion was a part of the intense life of the century, which gravitated from love and ambition to the extremes of penitence and asceticism.

A multitude of minor figures, graceful and poetic, brilliant and spirituelles, flit across the canvas, leaving the fragrance of an exquisite individuality, and tempting one to extend the list of the versatile women who toned and colored the society of the

period. But we have to do, at present, especially with those who gathered and blended this fresh intelligence, delicate fancy, emotional wealth, and religious fervor, into a society including such men as Corneille, Balzac, Bossuet, Richelieu, Conde, Pascal, Arnault, and La Rochefoucauld--those who are known as leaders of more or less celebrated salons. Of these, Mme. de Rambouillet and Mme. de Sable were among the best representative types of their time, and the first of the long line of social queens who, through their special gift of leadership, held so potent a sway for two centuries.

CHAPTER II. THE HOTEL DE RAMBOUILLET

Mme. de Rambouillet--The Salon Bleu--Its Habitués--Its Diversions--Corneille--Balzac--Richelieu--Romance of the Grand Conde--The Young Bossuet--Voiture--The Duchesse de Longueville--Angélique Paulet--Julie d'Angennes--Les Precieuses Ridicules--Decline of the Salon--Influence upon Literature and Manners_

The Hotel de Rambouillet has been called the "cradle of polished society," but the personality of its hostess is less familiar than that of many who followed in her train. This may be partly due to the fact that she left no record of herself on paper. She aptly embodied the kind advice of Le Brun. It was her special talent to inspire others and to combine the various elements of a brilliant and complex social life. The rare tact which enabled her to do this lay largely

in a certain self-effacement and the peculiar harmony of a nature which presented few salient points. She is best represented by the salon of which she was the architect and the animating spirit; but even this is better known today through its faults than its virtues. It is a pleasant task to clear off a little dust from its memorials, and to paint in fresh colors one who played so important a role in the history of literature and manners.

Catherine de Vivonne was born at Rome in 1588. Her father, the Marquis de Pisani, was French ambassador, and she belonged through her mother to the old Roman families of Strozzi and Savelli. Married at sixteen to the Count d'Angennes, afterwards Marquis de Rambouillet, she was introduced to the world at the gay court of Henry IV. But the coarse and depraved manners which ruled there were altogether distasteful to her delicate and fastidious nature. At twenty she retired from these brilliant scenes of gilded vice, and began to gather round her the coterie of choice spirits which later became so famous.

Filled with the poetic ideals and artistic tastes which had been nourished in a thoughtful and elegant seclusion, it seems to have been the aim of her life to give them outward expression. Her mind, which inherited the subtle refinement of the land of her birth, had taken its color from the best Italian and Spanish literature, but she was in no sense a learned woman. She was once going to study Latin, in order to

read Virgil, but was prevented by ill health. It is clear, however, that she had a great diversity of gifts, with a basis of rare good sense and moral elevation. "She was revered, adored," writes Mme. de Motteville; "a model of courtesy, wisdom, knowledge, and sweetness." She is always spoken of in the chronicles of her time as a loyal wife, a devoted mother, the benefactor of the suffering, and the sympathetic adviser of authors and artists. The poet Segrais says: "She was amiable and gracious, of a sound and just mind; it is she who has corrected the bad customs which prevailed before her. She taught politeness to all those of her time who frequented her house. She was also a good friend, and kind to every one." We are told that she was beautiful, but we know only that her face was fair and delicate, her figure tall and graceful, and her manner stately and dignified. Her Greek love of beauty expressed itself in all her appointments. The unique and original architecture of her hotel,--which was modeled after her own designs,--the arrangement of her salon, the pursuits she chose, and the amusements she planned, were all a part of her own artistic nature. This was shown also in her code of etiquette, which imposed a fine courtesy upon the members of her coterie, and infused into life the spirit of politeness, which one of her countrymen has called the "flower of humanity." But this esthetic quality was tempered with a clear judgment, and a keen appreciation of merit and talent, which led her to gather into her society many not "to the manner born." Sometimes she delicately aided a needy

man of letters
to present a respectable appearance--a kindness much
less humiliating
in those days of patronage that it would be today. As
may readily be
imagined, these new elements often jarred upon the
tastes and prejudices
of her noble guests, but in spite of this it was
considered an honor to
be received by her, and, though not even a duchess, she
was visited by
princesses.

Adding to this spirit of noble independence the prestige
of rank,
beauty, and fortune; a temper of mingled sweetness and
strength;
versatile gifts controlled by an admirable reason; a
serene and tranquil
character; a playful humor, free from the caprices of a
too exacting
sensitivity; a perfect savoir-faire, and we have the
unusual combination
which enabled her to hold her sway for so many years,
without a word of
censure from even the most scandal-loving of
chroniclers.

"We have sought in vain," writes Cousin, "for that which
is rarely
lacking in any life of equal or even less brilliancy,
some calumny or
scandal, an equivocal word, or the lightest epigram. We
have found only
a concert of warm eulogies which have run through many
generations....
She has disarmed Tallemant himself. This caricaturist of
the seventeenth
century has been pitiless towards the habitues of her
illustrious house,
but he praises her with a warmth which is very
impressive from such a
source."

The modern spirit of change has long since swept away

all vestiges of
the old Rue Saint-Thomas-du-Louvre and the time-honored
dwellings that
ornamented it. Conspicuous among these, and not far from
the Palais
Royal, was the famous Hotel de Rambouillet. The Salon
Bleu has become
historic. This "sanctuary of the Temple of Athene," as
it was called
in the stilted language of the day, has been illuminated
for us by the
rank, beauty, and talent of the Augustan age of France.
We are more or
less familiar with even the minute details of the
spacious room, whose
long windows, looking across the little garden towards
the Tuileries,
let in a flood of golden sunlight. We picture to
ourselves its draperies
of blue and gold, its curious cabinets, its choice works
of art, its
Venetian lamps, and its crystal vases always filled with
flowers that
scatter the perfume of spring.

It was here that Mme. de Rambouillet held her court for
nearly thirty
years, her salon reaching the height of its power under
Richelieu, and
practically closing with the Fronde. She sought to
gather all that was
most distinguished, whether for wit, beauty, talent, or
birth, into an
atmosphere of refinement and simple elegance, which
should tone down all
discordant elements and raise life to the level of a
fine art. There
was a strongly intellectual flavor in the amusements, as
well as in the
discussions of this salon, and the place of honor was
given to genius,
learning, and good manners, rather than to rank. But it
was by no means
purely literary. The exclusive spirit of the old
aristocracy, with its

hauteur and its lofty patronage, found itself face to face with fresh ideals. The position of the hostess enabled her to break the traditional barriers, and form a society upon a new basis, but in spite of the mingling of classes hitherto separated, the dominant life was that of the noblesse. Woman of rank gave the tone and made the laws. Their code of etiquette was severe. They aimed to combine the graces of Italy with the chivalry of Spain. The model man must have a keen sense of honor, and wit without pedantry; he must be brave, heroic, generous, gallant, but he must also possess good breeding and gentle courtesy. The coarse passions which had disgraced the court were refined into subtle sentiments, and women were raised upon a pedestal, to be respectfully and platonically adored. In this reaction from extreme license, familiarity was forbidden, and language was subjected to a critical censorship. It was here that the word PRECIEUSE was first used to signify a woman of personal distinction, accomplished in the highest sense, with a perfect accord of intelligence, good taste, and good manners. Later, when pretension crept into the inferior circles which took this one for a model, the term came to mean a sort of intellectual parvenue, half prude and half pedant, who affected learning, and paraded it like fine clothes, for effect.

"Do you remember," said Flechier, many years later, in his funeral oration on the death of the Duchesse de Montausier, "the salons which are still regarded with so much veneration, where the

spirit was
purified, where virtue was revered under the name of the
incomparable
Arthenice; where people of merit and quality assembled,
who composed
a select court, numerous without confusion, modest
without constraint,
learned without pride, polished without affectation?"

Whatever allowance we may be disposed to make for the
friendship of the
eminent abbe, he spoke with the authority of personal
knowledge, and at
a time when the memories of the Hotel de Rambouillet
were still fresh.
It is true that those who belonged to this professed
school of morals
were not all patterns of decorum. But we cannot judge by
the Anglo-Saxon
standards of the nineteenth century the faults of an age
in which a
Ninon de L'Enclos lives on terms of veiled intimacy with
a strait-laced
Mme. de Maintenon, and, when age has given her a certain
title to
respectability, receives in her salon women of as
spotless reputation as
Mme. de La Fayette. Measured from the level of their
time, the lives of
the Rambouillet coterie stand out white and shining. The
pure character
of the Marquise and her daughters was above reproach,
and they were
quoted as "models whom all the world cited, all the
world admired, and
every one tried to imitate." To be a precieuse was in
itself an evidence
of good conduct.

"This salon was a resort not only for all the fine wits,
but for every
one who frequented the court," writes Mme. de
Motteville. "It was a sort
of academy of beaux esprits, of gallantry, of virtue,
and of science,"

says St. Simon; "for these things accorded marvelously. It was a rendezvous of all that was most distinguished in condition and in merit; a tribunal with which it was necessary to count, and whose decisions upon the conduct and reputation of people of the court and the world, had great weight."

Corneille read most of his dramas here, and, if report be true, read them very badly. He says of himself:

Et l'on peut rarement m'écouter sans ennui,
Que quand je me produis par la bouche d'autrui.

He was shy, awkward, ill at ease, not clear in speech, and rather heavy in conversation, but the chivalric and heroic character of his genius was quite in accord with the lofty and rather romantic standards affected by this circle, and made him one of its central literary figures. Another was Balzac, whose fine critical taste did so much for the elegance and purity of the French language, and who was as noted in his day as was his namesake, the brilliant author of the "Comédie Humaine," two centuries later. His long letters to the Marquise, on the Romans, were read and discussed in his absence, and it was through his influence, added to her own classic ideals, that Roman dignity and urbanity were accepted as models in the new code of manners; indeed, it was he who introduced the word URBANITE into the language. Armand du Plessis, who aimed to be poet as well as statesman, read here in his youth a thesis on love. When did a Frenchman ever fail to write with

facility upon this fertile theme? After he became Cardinal de Richelieu he feared the influence of the Hotel de Rambouillet, and sent a request to its hostess to report what was said of him there. She replied with consummate tact, that her guests were so strongly persuaded of her friendship for his Eminence, that no one would have the temerity to speak ill of him in her presence.

Even the Grand Conde courted the muses, and wrote verses which were bad for a poet, though fairly good for a warrior. If it be true that every man is a poet once in his life, we may infer that this was about the time of his sad little romance with the pretty and charming Mlle. du Vigean, who was one of the youthful attractions of this coterie. Family ambition stood in the way of their marriage, and the prince yielded to the wishes of his friends. The Grande Mademoiselle tells us that this was the only veritable passion of the brave young hero of many battles, and that he fainted at the final separation. United to a wife he did not love, and whom he did not scruple to treat very ill, he gave himself to glory and, it must be added, to unworthy intrigues. The pure-hearted young girl buried her beauty and her sorrows in the convent of the Carmelites, and was no more heard of in the gay world.

It is evident that the great soldier sometimes forgot the urbanity which was so strongly insisted upon in this society. He is said to have carried the impetuosity of his character into his conversation. When he had a good cause, he sustained it with grace and

amiability. If it was a bad one, however, his eyes flashed, and he became so violent that it was thought prudent not to contradict him. It is related that Boileau, after yielding one day in a dispute, remarked in a low voice to a friend:

"Hereafter I shall always be of the opinion of the Prince when he is wrong."

Bossuet, when a boy of seventeen, improvised here one evening a sermon on a given theme, which was so eloquent that it held the company until near midnight. "I have never heard any one preach so early and so late," remarked the witty Voiture, as he congratulated the youthful orator at the close.

This famous bel esprit played a very prominent part here. His role was to amuse, and his talents gave him great vogue, but at this distance his small vanities strike one much more vividly than the wit which flashed out with the moment, or the vers de societe on which his fame rests.

He owed his social success to a rather high-flown love letter which he evidently thought too good to be lost to the world. He sent it to a friend, who had it printed and circulated. What the lady thought does not appear, but it made the fortune of the poet. Though the son of a wine merchant, and without rank, he had little more of the spirit of a courtier than Voltaire, and his biting epigrams were no less feared.

"If he were one of us, he would be insupportable," said Conde. But his caprices were tolerated for the sake of his inexhaustible wit, and he

was petted and spoiled to the end.

A list of the men of letters who appeared from time to time at the Hotel de Rambouillet would include the most noted names of the century, besides many which were famous in their day, but at present are little more than historical shadows. The conversations were often learned, doubtless sometimes pretentious. One is inclined to wonder if these noble cavaliers and high-born woman did not yawn occasionally over the scholarly discourse of Corneille and Balzac upon the Romans, the endless disputes about rival sonnets, and the long discussions on the value of a word. "Doubtless it is a very beautiful poem, but also very tiresome," said Mme. de Longueville, after Chapelain had finished reading his "Pucelle"--a work which aimed to be the Iliad of France, but succeeded only in being very long and rather heavy.

This lovely young Princess, who at sixteen had the exaltation of a religieuse, and was with difficulty won from her dreams of renunciation and a cloister, had become the wife of a man many years her senior, whom she did not love, and the idol of the brilliant world in which she lived. La Rochefoucauld had not yet disturbed the serenity of her heart, nor political intrigues her peace of mind. It was before the Fronde, in which she was destined to play so conspicuous a part, and she was still content with the role of a reigning beauty; but she was not at all averse to the literary entertainments of this salon, in which her own fascinations were so delightfully sung. She found the

flattering verses
of Voiture more to her taste than the stately epic of
Chapelain, took
his side warmly against Benserade in the famous dispute
as to the
merits of their two sonnets, "Job" and "Urania," and won
him a doubtful
victory. The poems of Voiture lose much of their flavor
in translation,
but I venture to give a verse in the original, which was
addressed to
the charming princesse, and which could hardly fail to
win the favor of
a young and beautiful woman.

De perles, d'astres, et de fleurs,
Bourbon, le ciel fit tes couleurs,
Et mit dedans tout ce melange
L'esprit d'une ange.

But the diversions were by no means always grave or
literary. Life was
represented on many sides, one secret, doubtless, of the
wide influence
of this society. The daughters of Mme. de Rambouillet,
and her son, the
popular young Marquis de Pisani, formed a nucleus of
youth and gaiety.
To these we may add the beautiful Angelique Paulet, who
at seventeen
had turned the head of Henri IV, and escaped the fatal
influence of that
imperious sovereign's infatuation by his timely, or
untimely, death.
Fair and brilliant, the best singer of her time, skilled
also in playing
the lute, and gifted with a special dramatic talent, she
was always
a favorite, much loved by her friends and much sung by
the poets. Her
proud and impetuous character, her frank and original
manners, together
with her luxuriance of blonde hair, gained her the
sobriquet of La Belle
Lionne. Nor must we forget Mlle. de Scudery, one of the

most constant
literary lights of this salon, and in some sense its
chronicler; nor the
fastidious Mme. de Sable.

The brightest ornament of the Hotel de Rambouillet,
however, was Julie
d'Angennes, the petted daughter of the house, the
devoted companion and
clever assistant of her mother. Her gaiety of heart,
amiable temper,
ready wit, and gracious manners surrounded her with an
atmosphere of
perpetual sunshine. Fertile in resources, of fine
intelligence, winning
the love alike of men and women, she was the soul of the
serious
conversations, as well as of the amusements which
relieved them. These
amusements were varied and often original. They played
little comedies.
They had mythological fetes, draping themselves as
antique gods and
goddesses. Sometimes they indulged in practical jokes
and surprises,
which were more laughable than dignified. Malherbe and
Racan, the latter
sighing hopelessly over the attractions of the dignified
Marquise, gave
her the romantic name of Arthenice, and forthwith the
other members of
the coterie took some nom de parnasse, by which they
were familiarly
known. They read the "Astree" of d'Urfe, that platonic
dream of a
disillusioned lover; discussed the romances of
Calprenede and the
sentimental Bergeries of Racan. Such Arcadian pictures
seemed to have a
singular fascination for these courtly dames and plumed
cavaliers. They
tried to reproduce them. Assuming the characters of the
rather insipid
Strephons and florimels, they made love in pastoral
fashion, with pipe

and lute--these rustic diversions serving especially to while away the long summer days in the country at Rambouillet, at Chantilly, or at Ruel. They improvised sonnets and madrigals; they praised each other in verse; they wrote long letters on the slightest pretext. As a specimen of the badinage so much in vogue, I quote from a letter written by Voiture to one of the daughters of Mme. de Rambouillet, who was an abbess, and had sent him a present of a cat.

"Madame, I was already so devoted to you that I supposed you knew there was no need of winning me by presents, or trying to take me like a rat, with a cat. Nevertheless, if there was anything in my thought that was not wholly yours, the cat which you have sent me has captured it." After a eulogy upon the cat, he adds: "I can only say that it is very difficult to keep, and for a cat religiously brought up it is very little inclined to seclusion. It never sees a window without wishing to jump out, it would have leaped over the wall twenty times if it had not been prevented, and no secular cat could be more lawless or more self-willed."

The wit here is certainly rather attenuated, but the subject is an ungrateful one. Mme. de Sevigne finds Voiture "libre, badin, charmant," and disposes of his critics by saying, "So much the worse for those who do not understand him." One is often puzzled to detect this rare spirituelle quality; but it is fair to presume that it was of the volatile sort that evaporates with time.

All this sentimental masquerading and exaggerated gallantry suggests the vulnerable side of the Hotel de Rambouillet, and the side which its enemies have been disposed to make very prominent. Among those who tried to imitate this salon, Spanish chivalry doubtless degenerated into a thousand absurdities, and it must be admitted that the salon itself was not free from reproach on this point. It became the fashion to write and talk in the language of hyperbole. Sighing lovers were consumed with artificial fires, and ready to die with affected languors. Like the old poets of Provence, whose spirit they caught and whose phrases they repeated, they were dying of love they did not feel. The eyes of Phyllis extinguished the sun. The very nightingales expired of jealousy, after hearing the voice of Angelique.

It would be difficult, perhaps, to find anywhere a company of clever people bent upon amusing themselves and passing every day more or less together, whose sayings and doings would bear to be exactly chronicled. The literary diversions and poetic ideals of this circle, too, gave a certain color to the charge of affectation, among people of less refined instincts, who found its esprit incomprehensible, its manners prudish, and its virtue a tacit reproach; but the dignified and serious character of many of its constant habitues should be a sufficient guarantee that it did not greatly pass the limits of good taste and good sense. The only point upon which Mme. de Rambouillet seems to have been open to

criticism was a certain formal reserve and an over-fastidious delicacy; but in an age when the standards of both refinement and morals were so low, this implies a virtue rather than a defect. Nor does her character appear to have been at all tinged with pretension. "I should fear from your example to write in a style too elevated," says Voiture, in a letter to her. But traditions are strong, and people do not readily adapt themselves to new models. Character and manners are a growth. That which is put on, and not ingrained, is apt to lack true balance and proportion. Hence it is not strange that this new order of things resulted in many crudities and exaggerations.

It is not worth while to criticize too severely the plumed knights who took the heroes of Corneille as models, played the harmless lover, and paid the tribute of chivalric deference to women. The strained politeness may have been artificial, and the forms of chivalry very likely outran the feeling, but they served at least to keep it alive, while the false platonism and ultra-refined sentiment were simply moral protests against the coarse vices of the time. The prudery which reached a satirical climax in "Les Precieuses Ridicules" was a natural reaction from the sensuality of a Marguerite and a Gabrielle. Mme. de Rambouillet saw and enjoyed the first performance of this celebrated play, nor does it appear that she was at all disturbed by the keen satire which was generally supposed to have been directed toward her salon. Moliere himself disclaims all intention of attacking the true

precieuse; but the world is not given to fine discrimination, and the true suffers from the blow aimed at the false. This brilliant comedian, whose manners were not of the choicest, was more at home in the lax and epicurean world of Ninon and Mme. de la Sabliere--a world which naturally did not find the decorum of the precieuses at all to its taste; the witticism of Ninon, who defined them as the "Jansenists of love," is well known. It is not unlikely that Moliere shared her dislike of the powerful and fastidious coterie whose very virtues might easily have furnished salient points for his scathing wit.

But whatever affectations may have grown out of the new code of manners, it had a more lasting result in the fine and stately courtesy which pervaded the later social life of the century. We owe, too, a profound gratitude to these women who exacted and were able to command a consideration which with many shades of variation has been left as a permanent heritage to their sex. We may smile at some of their follies; have we not our own which some nineteenth century Moliere may serve up for the delight and possible misleading of future generations?

There is a warm human side to this daily intercourse, with its sweet and gracious courtesies. The women who discuss grave questions and make or unmake literary reputations in the salon, are capable of rare sacrifices and friendships that seem quixotic in their devotion. Cousin, who has studied them so carefully and so sympathetically,

has saved from
oblivion many private letters which give us pleasant
glimpses of their
everyday life. As we listen to their quiet exchange of
confidences, we
catch the smile that plays over the light badinage, or
the tear that
lurks in the tender words.

A little son of Mme. de Rambouillet has the small pox,
and his sister
Julie shares the care of him with her mother, when every
one else
has fled. At his death, she devotes herself to her
friend Mme. de
Longueville, who soon after her marriage is attacked
with the same
dreaded malady. Mme. de Sable is afraid of contagion,
and refuses to
see Mlle. de Rambouillet, who writes her a
characteristic letter. As it
gives us a vivid idea of her esprit as well as of her
literary style, I
copy it in full, though it has been made already
familiar to the English
reader by George Eliot, in her admirable review of
Cousin's "Life of
Mme. De Sable."

Mlle de Chalais (Dame de compagnie to the Marquise) will
please read
this letter to Mme. la Marquise, out of the wind.

Madame, I cannot begin my treaty with you too early, for
I am sure
that between the first proposition made for me to see
you, and
the conclusion, you will have so many reflections to
make, so many
physicians to consult, and so many fears to overcome,
that I shall have
full leisure to air myself. The conditions which I offer
are, not to
visit you until I have been three days absent from the
Hotel de Conde,

to change all my clothing, to choose a day when it has frozen, not to approach you within four paces, not to sit down upon more than one seat. You might also have a great fire in your room, burn juniper in the four corners, surround yourself with imperial vinegar, rue, and wormwood. If you can feel safe under these conditions, without my cutting off my hair, I swear to you to execute them religiously; and if you need examples to fortify you, I will tell you that the Queen saw M. de Chaudebonne when he came from Mlle. de Bourbon's room, and that Mme. d'Aiguillon, who has good taste and is beyond criticism on such points, has just sent me word that if I did not go to see her, she should come after me.

Mme. de Sable retorts in a satirical vein, that her friend is too well instructed in the needed precautions, to be quite free from the charge of timidity, adding the hope that since she understands the danger, she will take better care of herself in the future.

This calls forth another letter, in which Mlle. de Rambouillet says, "One never fears to see those whom one loves. I would have given much, for your sake, if this had not occurred." She closes this spicy correspondence, however, with a very affectionate letter which calms the ruffled temper of her sensitive companion.

Mme. de Sable has another friend, Mlle. d'Attichy, who figures quite prominently in the social life of a later period, as the Comtesse de Maure. This lady was just leaving Paris to visit her in

the country,
when she learned that Mme. de Sable had written to Mme.
de Rambouillet
that she could conceive of no greater happiness than to
pass her life
alone with Julie d'Angennes. This touches her
sensibilities so keenly
that she changes her plans, and refuses to visit one who
could find
her pleasure away from her. Mme. de Sable tries in vain
to appease her
exacting friend, who replies to her explanations by a
long letter in
which she recalls their tender and inviolable
friendship, and closes
with these words:

Malheureuse est l'ignorance,
Et plus malheureux le savoir.

Having thus lost a confidence which alone rendered life
supportable to
me, I cannot dream of taking the journey so much talked
of; for there
would be no propriety in traveling sixty leagues at this
season, in
order to burden you with a person so uninteresting to
you, that after
years of a passion without parallel you cannot help
thinking that the
greatest pleasure would consist in passing life without
her. I return
then into my solitude, to examine the faults which cause
me so much
unhappiness, and unless I can correct them, I should
have less joy than
confusion in seeing you. I kiss your hands very humbly.

How this affair was adjusted does not appear, but as
they remained
devoted friends through life, unable to live apart, or
pass a day
happily without seeing each other, it evidently did not
end in a serious
alienation. It suggests, however, a delicacy and an

exaltation of
feeling which we are apt to accord only to love, and
which go far toward
disproving the verdict of Mongaigne, that "the soul of a
woman is not
firm enough for so durable a tie as friendship."

We like to dwell upon these inner phases of a famous and
powerful
coterie, not only because they bring before us so
vividly the living,
moving, thinking, loving women who composed it, letting
us into their
intimate life with its quiet shadings, its fantastic
humors, and its
wayward caprices, but because they lead us to the
fountain head of a
new form of literary expression. We have seen that the
formal letters of
Balzac were among the early entertainments of the Hotel
de Rambouillet,
and that Voiture had a witty or sentimental note for
every occasion.
Mlle. de Scudery held a ready pen, and was in the habit
of noting down
in her letters to absent friends the conversation, which
ran over a
great variety of topics, from the gossip of the moment
to the gravest
questions. There was no morning journal with its columns
of daily news,
no magazine with its sketches of contemporary life, and
these private
letters were passed from one to another to be read and
discussed. The
craze for clever letters spread. Conversations literally
overflowed upon
paper. A romantic adventure, a bit of scandal, a drawing
room incident,
or a personal pique, was a fruitful theme. Everybody
aimed to excel in
an art which brought a certain prestige. These letters,
most of which
had their brief day, were often gathered into little
volumes. Many have

long since disappeared, or found burial in the dust of old libraries from which they are occasionally exhumed to throw fresh light upon some forgotten nook and by way of an age whose habits and manners, virtues and follies, they so faithfully record. A few, charged with the vitality of genius, retain their freshness and live among the enduring monuments of the society that gave them birth. The finest outcome of this prevailing taste was Mme. de Sevigne, who still reigns as the queen of graceful letter writers. Although her maturity belongs to a later period, she was familiar with the Rambouillet circle in her youth, and inherited its best spirit.

The charm of this literature is its spontaneity. It has no ulterior aim, but delights in simple expression. These people write because they like to write. They are original because they sketch from life. There is something naive and fresh in their vivid pictures. They give us all the accessories. They tell us how they lived, how they dressed, how they thought, how they acted. They talk of their plans, their loves, and their private piques, with the same ingenuous frankness. They condense for us their worldly philosophy, their sentiments, and their experience. The style of these letters is sometimes heavy and stilted, the wit is often strained and far-fetched, but many of them are written with an easy grace and a lightness of touch as fascinating as inimitable.

The marriage of Julie d'Angennes, in 1645, deprived the Hotel de

Rambouillet of one of its chief attractions. It was only through the earnest wish of her family that, after a delay of thirteen years, she yielded at last to the persevering suit of the Marquis, afterwards the Duc de Montausier, and became his wife. She was then thirty-eight, and he three years younger. The famous "Guirlande de Julie," which he dedicated and presented to her, still exists, as the unique memorial of his patient and enduring love. This beautiful volume, richly bound, decorated with a flower exquisitely painted on each of the twenty-nine leaves and accompanied by a madrigal written by the Marquis himself or by some of the poets who frequented her house, was a remarkable tribute to the graces of the woman whose praises were so delicately sung. The faithful lover, who was a Protestant, gave a crowning proof of his devotion, in changing his religion. So much adoration could hardly fail to touch the most capricious and obdurate of hearts.

We cannot dismiss this woman, whom Cousin regards as the most accomplished type of the society she adorned, without a word more. Though her ambition was gratified by the honors that fell upon her husband, who after holding many high positions was finally entrusted with the education of the Dauphin; and though her own appointment of dame d'honneur to the Queen gave her an envied place at court, we trace with regret the close of her brilliant career. As has been already indicated, she added to much esprit a character of great sweetness, and manners facile, gracious, even caressing. With less

elevation, less
independence, and less firmness than her mother, she had
more of the
sympathetic quality, the frank unreserve, that wins the
heart. No one
had so many adorers; no one scattered so many hopeless
passions; no one
so gently tempered these into friendships. She knew
always how to say
the fitting word, to charm away the clouds of ill humor,
to conciliate
opposing interests. But this spirit of complaisance
which, however
charming it may be, is never many degrees removed from
the spirit of the
courtier, proved to be the misfortune of her later life.
Too amiable,
perhaps too diplomatic, to frown openly upon the King's
irregularities,
she was accused, whether justly or otherwise, of tacitly
favoring his
relations with Mme. De Montespan. The husband of this
lady took his
wife's infidelity very much to heart, and, failing to
find any redress,
forced himself one day into the presence of Madam de
Montausier, and
made a violent scene which so affected her that she fell
into a profound
melancholy and an illness from which she never rallied.
There is always
an air of mystery thrown about this affair, and it is
difficult to
fathom the exact truth; but the results were
sufficiently tragical to
the woman who was quoted by her age as a model of virtue
and decorum.

In 1648, the troubles of the Fronde, which divided
friends and added
fuel to petty social rivalries, scattered the most noted
guests of the
Hotel de Rambouillet. Voiture was dead; Angelique Paulet
died two years
later. The young Marquis de Pisani, the only son and the

hope of his family, had fallen with many brave comrades on the field of Nordlingen. Of the five daughters, three were abbesses of convents. The health of the Marquise, which had always been delicate, was still further enfeebled by the successive griefs which darkened her closing years. Her husband, of whom we know little save that he was sent on various foreign missions, and "loved his wife always as a lover," died in 1652. She survived him thirteen years, living to see the death of her youngest daughter, Angelique, wife of the Comte de Grignan who was afterwards the son-in-law of Mme. de Sevigne. She witnessed the elevation of her favorite Julie, but was spared the grief of her death which occurred five or six years after her own. The aged Marquise, true to her early tastes, continued to receive her friends in her ruelle, and her salon had a brief revival when the Duchesse de Montausier returned from the provinces, after the second Fronde; but its freshness had faded with its draperies of blue and gold. The brilliant company that made it so famous was dispersed, and the glory of the Salon Bleu was gone.

There is something infinitely pathetic in the epitaph this much-loved and successful woman wrote for herself when she felt that the end was near:

Ici git Arthenice, exempte des rigueurs
Don't la rigueur du sort l'a toujours poursuivie.
Et si tu veux, passant, compter tous ses malheurs,
Tu n'aura qu'a, compter les moments de sa vie.

The spirit of unrest is there beneath the calm exterior.

It may be some hidden wound; it may be only the old, old weariness, the inevitable burden of the race. "Mon Dieu!" wrote Mme. de Maintenon, in the height of her worldly success, "how sad life is! I pass my days without other consolation than the thought that death will end it all."

Mme. de Rambouillet had worked unconsciously toward a very important end. She found a language crude and inelegant, manners coarse and licentious, morals dissolute and vicious. Her influence was at its height in the age of Corneille and Descartes, and she lived almost to the culmination of the era of Racine and Moliere, of Boileau and La Bruyere, of Bossuet and Fenelon, the era of simple and purified language, of refined and stately manners, and of at least outward respect for morality. To these results she largely contributed. Her salon was the social and literary power of the first half of the century. In an age of political espionage, it maintained its position and its dignity. It sustained Corneille against the persecutions of Richelieu, and numbered among its habitues the founders of the Academie Francaise, who continued the critical reforms begun there.

As a school of politeness, it has left permanent traces. This woman of fine ideals and exalted standards exacted of others the purity of character, delicacy of thought, and urbanity of manner, which she possessed in so eminent a degree herself. Her code was founded upon the

best instincts of humanity, and whatever modifications of form time has wrought its essential spirit remains unchanged. "Politeness does not always inspire goodness, equity, complaisance, gratitude," says La Bruyere, "but it gives at least the appearance of these qualities, and makes man seem externally what he ought to be internally."

It was in this salon, too, that the modern art of conversation, which has played so conspicuous a part in French life, may be said to have had its birth. Men and women met on a footing of equality, with similar tastes and similar interests. Different ranks and conditions were represented, giving a certain cosmopolitan character to a society which had hitherto been narrow in its scope and limited in its aims. Naturally conversation assumed a new importance, and was subject to new laws. To quote again from La Bruyere, who has so profoundly penetrated the secrets of human nature: "The esprit of conversation consists much less in displaying itself than in drawing out the wit of others... Men do not like to admire you, they wish to please; they seek less to be instructed or even to be entertained, than to be appreciated and applauded, and the most delicate pleasure is to make that of others." "To please others," says La Rochefoucauld, "one must speak of the things they love and which concern them, avoid disputes upon indifferent matters, ask questions rarely, and never let them think that one is more in the right than themselves."

Many among the great writers of the age touch in the same tone upon the philosophy underlying the various rules of manners and conversation which were first discussed at the Hotel de Rambouillet, and which have passed into permanent though unwritten laws-- unfortunately a little out of fashion in the present generation.

It is difficult to estimate the impulse given to intelligence and literary taste by this breaking up of old social crystallizations. What the savant had learned in his closet passed more or less into current coin. Conversation gave point to thought, clearness to expression, simplicity to language. Women of rank and recognized ability imposed the laws of good taste, and their vivid imaginations changed lifeless abstractions into something concrete and artistic. Men of letters, who had held an inferior and dependent position, were penetrated with the spirit of a refined society, while men of the world, in a circle where wit and literary skill were distinctions, began to aspire to the role of a bel esprit, to pride themselves upon some intellectual gift and the power to write without labor and without pedantry, as became their rank. Many of them lacked seriousness, dealing mainly with delicate fancies and trivial incidents, but pleasures of the intellect and taste became the fashion. Burlesques and chansons disputed the palm with madrigals and sonnets. A neatly turned epigram or a clever letter made a social success.

Perhaps it was not a school for genius of the first

order. Society favors graces of form and expression rather than profound and serious thought. No Homer, nor Aeschylus, nor Milton, nor Dante is the outgrowth of such a soil. The prophet or seer shines by the light of his own soul. He deals with problems and emotions that lie deep in the pulsing heart of humanity, but he does not best interpret his generation. It is the man living upon the level of his time, and finding his inspiration in the world of events, who reflects its life, marks its currents, and registers its changes. Matthew Arnold has aptly said that "the qualities of genius are less transferable than the qualities of intelligence, less can be immediately learned and appropriated from their product; they are less direct and stringent intellectual agencies, though they may be more beautiful and divine." It was this quality of intelligence that eminently characterized the literature of the seventeenth century. It was a mirror of social conditions, or their natural outcome. The spirit of its social life penetrated its thought, colored its language, and molded its forms. We trace it in the letters and vers de societe which were the pastime of the Hotel de Rambouillet and the Samedis of Mlle. de Scudery, as well as in the romances which reflected their sentiments and pictured their manners. We trace it in the literary portraits which were the diversion of the coterie of Mademoiselle, at the Luxembourg, and in the voluminous memoirs and chronicles which grew out of it. We trace it also in the "Maxims" and "Thoughts" which were polished and perfected in

the convent salon of Mme. de Sable, and were the direct fruits of a wide experience and observation of the great world. It would be unfair to say that anything so complex as the growth of a new literature was wholly due to any single influence, but the intellectual drift of the time seems to have found its impulse in the salons. They were the alembics in which thought was fused and crystallized. They were the schools in which the French mind cultivated its extraordinary clearness and flexibility.

As the century advanced, the higher literature was tinged and modified by the same spirit. Society, with its follies and affectations, inspired the mocking laughter of Moliere, but its unwritten laws tempered his language and refined his wit. Its fine urbanity was reflected in the harmony and delicacy of Racine, as well as in the critical decorum of Boileau. The artistic sentiment rules in letters, as in social life. It was not only the thought that counted, but the setting of the thought. The majestic periods of Bossuet, the tender persuasiveness of Fenelon, gave even truth a double force. The moment came when this critical refinement, this devotion to form, passed its limits, and the inevitable reaction followed. The great literary wave of the seventeenth century reached its brilliant climax and broke upon the shores of a new era. But the seeds of thought had been scattered, to spring up in the great literature of humanity that marked the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER III. MADEMOISELLE DE SCUDERY AND THE SAMEDIS

Salons of the Noblesse--"The Illustrious Sappho"--Her Romances--The Samedis--Bon Mots of Mme. Cornuel--Estimate of Mlle. de Scudery

There were a few contemporary salons among the noblesse, modeled more or less after the Hotel de Rambouillet, but none of their leaders had the happy art of conciliating so many elements. They had a literary flavor, and patronized men of letters, often doubtless, because it was the fashion and the name of a well-known litterateur gave them a certain eclat; but they were not cosmopolitan, and have left no marked traces.

One of the most important of these was the Hotel de Conde, over which the beautiful Charlotte de Montmorency presided with such dignity and grace, during the youth of her daughter, the Duchesse de Longueville.

Another was the Hotel de Nevers, where the gifted Marie de Gonzague, afterward Queen of Poland, and her charming sister, the Princesse

Palatine, were the central attractions of a brilliant and intellectual society. Richelieu, recognizing the power of the Rambouillet circle,

wished to transfer it to the salon of his niece at the Petit Luxembourg.

We have a glimpse of the young and still worldly Pascal, explaining

here his discoveries in mathematics and his experiments in physics. The

tastes of this courtly company were evidently rather serious, as we

find another celebrity, of less enduring fame, discoursing upon the

immortality of the soul. But the rank, talent, and masterful character of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon did not suffice to give her salon the wide influence of its model; it was tainted by her own questionable character, and always hampered by the suspicion of political intrigues.

There were smaller coteries, however, which inherited the spirit and continued the traditions of the Hotel de Rambouillet. Prominent among these was that of Madeleine de Scudery, who held her Samedis in modest fashion in the Marais. These famous reunions lacked the prestige and the fine tone of their model, but they had a definite position, and a wide though not altogether favorable influence. As the forerunner of Mme. de La Fayette and Mme. de Sevigne, and one of the most eminent literary women of the century with which her life ran parallel, Mlle. de Scudery has a distinct interest for us and it is to her keen observation and facile pen that we are indebted for the most complete and vivid picture of the social life of the period.

The "illustrious Sappho," as she was pleased to be called, certainly did not possess the beauty popularly accorded to her namesake and prototype. She was tall and thin, with a long, dark, and not at all regular face; Mme. Cornuel said that one could see clearly "she was destined by Providence to blacken paper, as she sweat ink from every pore." But, if we may credit her admirers, who were numerous, she had fine eyes, a pleasing expression, and an agreeable address. She evidently did

not overestimate her personal attractions, as will be seen from the following quatrain, which she wrote upon a portrait made by one of her friends.

Nanteuil, en faisant mon image,
A de son art divin signale le pouvoir;
Je hais mes yeux dans mon miroir,
Je les aime dans son ouvrage.

She had her share, however, of small but harmless vanities, and spoke of her impoverished family, says Tallemant, "as one might speak of the overthrow of the Greek empire." Her father belonged to an old and noble house of Provence, but removed to Normandy, where he married and died, leaving two children with a heritage of talent and poverty. A trace of the Provencal spirit always clung to Madeleine, who was born in 1607, and lived until the first year of the following century. After losing her mother, who is said to have been a woman of some distinction, she was carefully educated by an uncle in all the accomplishments of the age, as well as in the serious studies which were then unusual. According to her friend Conrart she was a veritable encyclopedia of knowledge both useful and ornamental. "She had a prodigious imagination," he writes, "an excellent memory, an exquisite judgment, a lively temper, and a natural disposition to understand everything curious which she saw done, and everything laudable which she heard talked of. She learned the things that concern agriculture, gardening, housekeeping, cooking, and a life in the country; also the causes and

effects of maladies, the composition of an infinite number of remedies, perfumes, scented waters and distillations useful or agreeable. She wished to play the lute, and took some lessons with success." In addition to all this, she mastered Spanish and Italian, read extensively and conversed brilliantly. At the death of her uncle and in the freshness of her youth, she went to Paris with her brother who had some pretension as a poet and dramatic writer. He even posed as a rival of Corneille, and was sustained by Richelieu, but time has long since relegated him to comparative oblivion. His sister, who was a victim of his selfish tyranny, is credited with much of the prose which appeared under his name; indeed, her first romances were thus disguised. Her love for conversation was so absorbing, that he is said to have locked her in her room, and refused her to her friends until a certain amount of writing was done. But, in spite of this surveillance, her life was so largely in the world that it was a mystery when she did her voluminous work.

Of winning temper and pleasing address, with this full equipment of knowledge and imagination, versatility and ambition, she was at an early period domesticated in the family of Mme. de Rambouillet as the friend and companion of Julie d'Angennes. Her graces of mind and her amiability made her a favorite with those who frequented the house, and she was thus brought into close contact with the best society of her time. She has painted it carefully and minutely in the "Grand

Cyrus," a romantic allegory in which she transfers the French aristocracy and French manners of the seventeenth century to an oriental court. The Hotel de Rambouillet plays an important part as the Hotel Cleomire. When we consider that the central figures were the Prince de Conde and his lovely sister the Duchesse de Longueville, also that the most distinguished men and women of the age saw their own portraits, somewhat idealized but quite recognizable through the thin disguise of Persians, Greeks, Armenians, or Egyptians, it is easy to imagine that the ten volumes of rather exalted sentiment were eagerly sought and read. She lacked incident and constructive power, but excelled in vivid portraits, subtle analysis, and fine conversations. She made no attempt at local color; her plots were strained and unnatural, her style heavy and involved. But her penetrating intellect was thoroughly tinged with the romantic spirit, and she had the art of throwing a certain glamour over everything she touched. Cousin, who has rescued the memory of Mlle. de Scudery from many unjust aspersions, says that she was the "creator of the psychological romance." Unquestionably her skill in character painting set the fashion for the pen portraits which became a mania a few years later.

She depicts herself as Sappho, whose opinions may be supposed to reflect her own. In these days, when the position of women is discussed from every possible point of view, it may be interesting to know how it

was regarded by one who represented the thoughtful side of the age in which their social power was first distinctly asserted. She classes her critics and enemies under several heads. Among them are the "light and coquettish women whose only occupation is to adorn their persons and pass their lives in fetes and amusements--women who think that scrupulous virtue requires them to know nothing but to be the wife of a husband, the mother of children, and the mistress of a family; and men who regard women as upper servants, and forbid their daughters to read anything but their prayer books."

"One does not wish women to be coquettes," she writes again, "but permits them to learn carefully all that fits them for gallantry, without teaching them anything which can fortify their virtue or occupy their minds. They devote ten or a dozen years to learning to appear well, to dress in good style, to dance and sing, for five or six; but this same person, who requires judgment all her life and must talk until her last sigh, learns nothing which can make her converse more agreeably, or act with more wisdom."

But she does not like a femme savante, and ridicules, under the name of Damophile, a character which might have been the model for Moliere's Philaminte. This woman has five or six masters, of whom the least learned teaches astrology. She poses as a Muse, and is always surrounded with books, pencils, and mathematical instruments, while she uses large words in a grave and imperious tone, although she speaks

only of little things. After many long conversations about her, Sappho concludes thus:
"I wish it to be said of a woman that she knows a hundred things of which she does not boast, that she has a well-informed mind, is familiar with fine works, speaks well, writes correctly, and knows the world; but I do not wish it to be said of her that she is a femme savante. The two characters have no resemblance." She evidently recognized the fact that when knowledge has penetrated the soul, it does not need to be worn on the outside, as it shines through the entire personality.

After some further discussion, to the effect that the wise woman will conceal superfluous learning and especially avoid pedantry, she defines the limit to which a woman may safely go in knowledge without losing her right to be regarded as the "ornament of the world, made to be served and adored."

One may know some foreign languages and confess to reading Homer, Hesiod, and the works of the illustrious Aristee (Chapelain), without being too learned. One may express an opinion so modestly that, without offending the propriety of her sex, she may permit it to be seen that she has wit, knowledge, and judgment. That which I wish principally to teach women is not to speak too much of that which they know well, never to speak of that which they do not know at all, and to speak reasonably.

We note always a half-apologetic tone, a spirit of compromise between

her conscious intelligence and the traditional prejudice which had in no wise diminished since Martial included, in his picture of a domestic menage, "a wife not too learned..." She is not willing to lose a woman's birthright of love and devotion, but is not quite sure how far it might be affected by her ability to detect a solecism. Hence, she offers a great deal of subtle flattery to masculine self-love. With curious naivete she says:

Whoever should write all that was said by fifteen or twenty women together would make the worst book in the world, even if some of them were women of intelligence. But if a man should enter, a single one, and not even a man of distinction, the same conversation would suddenly become more spirituelle and more agreeable. The conversation of men is doubtless less sprightly when there are no women present; but ordinarily, although it may be more serious, it is still rational, and they can do without us more easily than we can do without them.

She attaches great importance to conversation as "the bond of society, the greatest pleasure of well-bred people, and the best means of introducing, not only politeness into the world, but a purer morality." She dwells always upon the necessity of "a spirit of urbanity, which banishes all bitter railleries, as well as everything that can offend the taste," also of a certain "esprit de joie."

We find here the code which ruled the Hotel de Rambouillet, and the very

well-defined character of the precieuse. But it may be noted that Mlle. de Scudery, who was among the avant-coureurs of the modern movement for the advancement of women, always preserved the forms of the old traditions, while violating their spirit. True to her Gallic instincts, she presented her innovations sugar-coated. She had the fine sense of fitness which is the conscience of her race, and which gave so much power to the women who really revolutionized society without antagonizing it.

Her conversations, which were full of wise suggestions and showed a remarkable insight into human character, were afterwards published in detached form and had a great success. Mme. de Sevigne writes to her daughter: "Mlle. De Scudery has just sent me two little volumes of conversations; it is impossible that they should not be good, when they are not drowned in a great romance."

When the Hotel de Rambouillet was closed, Mlle. de Scudery tried to replace its pleasant reunions by receiving her friends on Saturdays. These informal receptions were frequented by a few men and women of rank, but the prevailing tone was literary and slightly bourgeois. We find there, from time to time, Mme. de Sable, the Duc and Duchesse de Montausier, and others of the old circle who were her lifelong friends. La Rochefoucauld is there occasionally, also Mme. de La Fayette, Mme. de Sevigne, and the young Mme. Scarron whose brilliant future is hardly yet in her dreams. Among those less known today, but of

note in their
age, were the Comtesse de la Suze, a favorite writer of
elegies, who
changed her faith and became a Catholic, as she said,
that she "might
not meet her husband in this world or the next;" the
versatile Mlle.
Cheron who had some celebrity as a poet, musician, and
painter; Mlle.
de la Vigne and Mme. Deshoulieres, also poets; Mlle.
Descartes, niece
of the great philosopher; and, at rare intervals, the
clever Abbess de
Rohan who tempered her piety with a little sage
worldliness. One of the
most brilliant lights in this galaxy of talent was Mme.
Cornuel, whose
bons mots sparkle from so many pages in the chronicles
of the period.
A woman of high bourgeois birth and of the best
associations, she had a
swift vision, a penetrating sense, and a clear intellect
prompt to seize
the heart of a situation. Mlle. De Scudery said that she
could paint
a grand satire in four words. Mme. de Sevigne found her
admirable, and
even the grave Pomponne begged his friend not to forget
to send him all
her witticisms. Of the agreeable but rather light
Comtesse de Fiesque,
she said: "What preserves her beauty is that it is
salted in folly."
Of James II of England, she remarked, "The Holy Spirit
has eaten up
his understanding." The saying that the eight generals
appointed at the
death of Turenne were "the small change for Turenne" has
been attributed
to her. It is certainly not to a woman of such keen
insight and ready
wit that one can attach any of the affectations which
later crept into
the Samedis.

The poet Sarasin is the Voiture of this salon. Conrart, to whose house may be traced the first meetings of the little circle of lettered men which formed the nucleus of the Academie Francaise, is its secretary; Pellisson, another of the founders and the historian of the same learned body, is its chronicler. Chapelain is quite at home here, and we find also numerous minor authors and artists whose names have small significance today. The Samedis follow closely in the footsteps of the Hotel de Rambouillet. It is the aim there to speak simply and naturally upon all subjects grave or gay, to preserve always the spirit of delicacy and urbanity, and to avoid vulgar intrigues. There is a superabundance of sentiment, some affectation, and plenty of esprit.

They converse upon all the topics of the day, from fashion to politics, from literature and the arts to the last item of gossip. They read their works, talk about them, criticize them, and vie with one another in improvising verses. Pellisson takes notes and leaves us a multitude of madrigals, sonnets, chansons and letters of varied merit. He says there reigned a sort of epidemic of little poems. "The secret influence began to fall with the dew. Here one recites four verses; there, one writes a dozen. All this is done gaily and without effort. No one bites his nails, or stops laughing and talking. There are challenges, responses, repetitions, attacks, repartees. The pen passes from hand to hand, and the hand does not keep pace with the mind. One makes verses for every

lady present." Many of these verses were certainly not of the best quality, but it would be difficult, in any age, to find a company of people clever enough to divert themselves by throwing off such poetic trifles on the spur of the moment.

In the end, the Samedis came to have something of the character of a modern literary club, and were held at different houses. The company was less choice, and the bourgeois coloring more pronounced. These reunions very clearly illustrated the fact that no society can sustain itself above the average of its members. They increased in size, but decreased in quality, with the inevitable result of affectation and pretension. Intelligence, taste, and politeness were in fashion. Those who did not possess them put on their semblance, and, affecting an intellectual tone, fell into the pedantry which is sure to grow out of the effort to speak above one's altitude. The fine-spun theories of Mlle. de Scudery also reached a sentimental climax in "Clelie," which did not fail of its effect. Platonic love and the ton galant were the texts for innumerable follies which finally reacted upon the Samedis. After a few years, they lost their influence and were discontinued. But Mlle. de Scudery retained the position which her brilliant gifts and literary fame had given her, and was the center of a choice circle of friends until a short time before her death at the ripe age of ninety-four. Even Tallemant, writing of the decline of these reunions, says, "Mlle. De Scudery is more considered than ever." At sixty-four she

received the first Prix D'Eloquence from the Academie Francaise, for an essay on Glory. This prize was founded by Balzac, and the subject was specified. Thus the long procession of laureates was led by a woman.

In spite of her subtle analysis of love, and her exact map of the Empire of Tenderness, the sentiment of the "Illustrious Sappho" seems to have been rather ideal. She had numerous adorers, of whom Conrart and Pellisson were among the most devoted. During the long imprisonment of the latter for supposed complicity with Fouquet, she was of great service to him, and the tender friendship ended only with his life, upon which she wrote a touching eulogy at its close. But she never married. She feared to lose her liberty. "I know," she writes, "that there are many estimable men who merit all my esteem and who can retain a part of my friendship, but as soon as I regard them as husbands, I regard them as masters, and so apt to become tyrants that I must hate them from that moment; and I thank the gods for giving me an inclination very much averse to marriage."

It was the misfortune of Mlle. de Scudery to outlive her literary reputation. The interminable romances which had charmed the eloquent Flechier, the Grand Conde in his cell at Vincennes, the ascetic d'Andilly at Port Royal, as well as the dreaming maidens who signed over their fanciful descriptions and impossible adventures, passed their day. The touch of a merciless criticism stripped them of

their already fading
glory. Their subtle analysis and etherealized sentiment
were declared
antiquated, and fashion ran after new literary idols. It
was Boileau who
gave the severest blow. "This Despreaux," said Segrais,
"knows how to do
nothing else but talk of himself and criticize others;
why speak ill of
Mlle. de Scudery as he has done?"

There has been a disposition to credit the founder of
the *Samedis* with
many of the affectations which brought such deserved
ridicule upon
their bourgeois imitators, and to trace in her the
original of Moliere's
"Madelon." But Cousin has relieved her of such reproach,
and does ample
justice to the truth and sincerity of her character, the
purity of her
manners, and the fine quality of her intellect. He calls
her "a sort
of French sister of Addison." Perhaps her resemblance to
one of the
clearest, purest, and simplest of English essayists is
not quite
apparent on the surface; but as a moralist and a
delineator of manners
she may have done a similar work in her own way.

Sainte-Beuve, who has left so many vivid and exquisite
portraits of
his countrywomen, does not paint Mlle. de Scudery with
his usual kindly
touch. He admits her merit, her accomplishments, her
versatility, and
the perfect innocence of her life; but he finds her
didactic, pedantic,
and tiresome as a writer, and without charm or grace as
a woman.
Doubtless one would find it difficult to read her
romances today. She
lacks the genius which has no age and belongs to all
ages. Her literary

life pertains to the first half of the seventeenth century, when style had not reached the Attic purity and elegance of a later period. She was teacher rather than artist; but no one could be farther from a *bas bleu*, or more severe upon pedantry or pretension of any sort. She takes the point of view of her time, and dwells always upon the wisdom of veiling the knowledge she claims for her sex behind the purely feminine graces. How far she practiced her own theories, we can know only from the testimony of her contemporaries. It is not possible to perpetuate so indefinable a thing as personal charm, but we are told repeatedly that she had it in an eminent degree. It is certain that no woman without beauty, fortune, or visible rank, living simply and depending mainly upon her own talents, could have retained such powerful and fastidious friends, during a long life, unless she had had some rare attractions. That she was much loved, much praised, and much sought, we have sufficient evidence among the writers of her own time. She was familiarly spoken of as the tenth Muse, and she counted among her personal friends the greatest men and women of the century. Leibnitz sought her correspondence. The Abbe de Pure, who was not friendly to the *precieuses* and made the first severe attack upon them, thus writes of her: "One may call Mlle. de Scudery the muse of our age and the prodigy of her sex. It is not only her goodness and her sweetness, but her intellect shines with so much modesty, her sentiments are expressed with so much reserve, she speaks with so much discretion, and

all that she says is so fit and reasonable, that one cannot help both admiring and loving her. Comparing what one sees of her, and what one owes to her personally, with what she writes, one prefers, without hesitation, her conversation to her works. Although she has a wonderful mind, her heart outweighs it. It is in the heart of this illustrious woman that one finds true and pure generosity, an immovable constancy, a sincere and solid friendship."

The loyalty of her character was conspicuously shown in her brave devotion to the interests of the Conde family, through all the reverses of the Fronde. In one of her darkest moments Mme. de Longueville received the last volume of the "Grand Cyrus," which was dedicated to her, and immediately sent her own portrait encircled with diamonds, as the only thing she had left worthy of this friend who, without sharing ardently her political prejudices, had never deserted her waning fortunes. The same rare quality was seen in her unwavering friendship for Fouquet, during his long disgrace and imprisonment. Mme. de Sevigne, whose satire was so pitiless toward affectation of any sort, writes to her in terms of exaggerated tenderness.

"In a hundred thousand words, I could tell you but one truth, which reduces itself to assuring you, Mademoiselle, that I shall love you and adore you all my life; it is only this word that can express the idea I have of your extraordinary merit. I am happy to have some part in the

friendship and esteem of such a person. As constancy is a perfection,
I say to myself that you will not change for me; and I dare to pride
myself that I shall never be sufficiently abandoned of God not to be
always yours... I take to my son your conversations. I wish him to be
charmed with them, after being charmed myself."

Mlle. de Scudery is especially interesting to us as marking a transition
point in the history of women; as the author of the first romances of
any note written by her sex; as a moral teacher in an age of laxity;
and as a woman who combined high aspirations, fine ideals, and versatile
talents with a pure and unselfish character. She aimed at universal
accomplishments from the distillation of a perfume to the writing of a
novel, from the preparation of a rare dish to fine conversation,
from playing the lute to the dissection of the human heart. In this
versatility she has been likened to Mme. de Genlis, whom she resembled
also in her moral teaching and her factitious sensibility. She was,
however, more genuine, more amiable, and far superior in true elevation
of character. She was full of theories and loved to air them, hence the
people who move across the pages of her novels are often lost in a cloud
of speculation. But she gave a fresh impulse to literature, adding a
fine quality of grace, tenderness, and pure though often exaggerated
sentiment. Mme. de La Fayette, who had more clearness of mind as well as
a finer artistic sense, gave a better form to the novel and pruned it
of superfluous matter. The sentiment which casts so soft

and delicate
a coloring over her romances was more subtle and
refined. It may be
questioned, however, if she wrote so much that has been
incorporated in
the thought of her time.

CHAPTER IV. LA GRANDE MADEMOISELLE

Her Character--Her Heroic Part in the Fronde--Her
Exile--Literary
Diversions of her Salon--A Romantic Episode

There are certain women preeminently distinguished by
diversity of
gifts, who fail to leave behind them a fame at all
commensurate with
their promise. It may be from a lack of unity, resulting
from a series
of fragmentary efforts, no one of which is of surpassing
excellence;
it may be that the impression of power they give is
quite beyond any
practical manifestation of it; or it may be that talents
in themselves
remarkable are cast into the shade by some exceptional
brilliancy of
position. The success of life is measured by the harmony
between its
ideals and its attainments. It is the symmetry of the
temple that gives
the final word, not the breadth of its foundations nor
the wealth of its
material.

It was this lack of harmony and fine proportion which
marred the
career of a woman who played a very conspicuous part in
the social and
political life of her time, and who belongs to my
subject only through
a single phase of a stormy and eventful history. No

study of the salons
would be complete without that of the Grande
Mademoiselle, but it
was not as the leader of a coterie that she held her
special claim to
recognition. By the accident of birth she stood apart,
subject to many
limitations that modified the character of her salon and
narrowed its
scope, though they emphasized its influence. It was only
an incident
of her life, but through the quality of its habitudes and
their unique
diversions it became the source of an important
literature.

Anne Marie Louise d'Orleans, Duchesse de Montpensier,
has left a very
distinct record of herself in letters, romances, memoirs
and portraits,
written out of an abounding fullness of nature, but with
infinite detail
and royal contempt for precision and orthography. She
talks naively
of her happy childhood, of her small caprices, of the
love of her
grandmother, Marie de Medicis, of her innocent
impressions of the people
about her. She dwells with special pleasure upon a grand
fete at the
Palais Royal, in which she posed as an incipient queen.
She was then
nineteen. "They were three entire days in arranging my
costume," she
writes. "My robe was covered with diamonds, and trimmed
with rose,
black, and white tufts. I wore all the jewels of the
crown and of the
Queen of England, who still had some left. No one could
be better or
more magnificently attired than I was that day, and many
people said
that my beautiful figure, my imposing mien, my fair
complexion, and the
splendor of my blonde hair did not adorn me less than

all the riches
which were upon my person." She sat resplendent upon a
raised dais, with
the proud consciousness of her right and power to grace
a throne. Louis
XIV, than a child, and the Prince of Wales, afterwards
Charles II, were
at her feet. The latter was a devoted suitor. "My heart
as well as my
eyes regarded the prince de haut en bas," she says. "I
had the spirit to
wed an emperor."

There were negotiations for her marriage with the
Emperor of Austria,
and she thought it wise to adapt herself in advance to
his tastes. She
had heard that he was religious, and immediately began
to play the part
of a devotee so seriously, that she was seized with a
violent desire to
become a veritable religieuse and enter the convent of
the Carmelites.
She could neither eat nor sleep, and it was feared that
she would fall
dangerously ill. "I can only say that, during those
eight days, the
empire was nothing to me," she writes. But she confesses
to a certain
feeling of vanity at her own spirit of self-sacrifice,
and the
sensibility which made her weep at the thought of
leaving those she
loved. This access of piety was of short duration,
however, as her
father quickly put to flight all her exalted visions of
a cloister. Her
dreams of an emperor for whom she lost a prospective
king were alike
futile.

"She had beauty, talent, wealth, virtue, and a royal
birth," says Mme.
de Motteville. "Her face was not without defects, and
her intellect was

not one which always pleases. Her vivacity deprived all her actions of the gravity necessary to people of her rank, and her mind was too much carried away by her feelings. As she was fair, had fine eyes, a pleasing mouth, was of good height, and blonde, she had quite the air of a great beauty." But it was beauty of a commanding sort, without delicacy, and dependent largely upon the freshness of youth. The same veracious writer says that "she spoiled all she went about by the eagerness and impatience of her temper. She was always too hasty and pushed things too far." What she may have lacked in grace and charm, she made up by the splendors of rank and position.

A princess by birth, closely related to three kings, and glowing with all the fiery instincts of her race, the Grand Mademoiselle curiously blended the courage of an Amazon with the weakness of a passionate and capricious woman. As she was born in 1627, the most brilliant days of her youth were passed amid the excitements of the Fronde. She casts a romantic light upon these trivial wars, which were ended at last by her prompt decision and masculine force. We see her at twenty-five, riding victoriously into the city of Orleans at the head of her troops and, later, ordering the cannon at the Bastille turned against the royal forces, and opening the gates of Paris to the exhausted army of Conde. This adventure gives us the key-note to her haughty and imperious character. She would have posed well for the heroine of a great drama; indeed, she posed all her life in real dramas.

At this time she had hopes of marrying the Prince de Conde, whom she regarded as a hero worthy of her. His wife, an amiable woman who was sent to a convent after her marriage to learn to read and write, was dangerously ill, and her illustrious husband did not scruple to make tacit arrangements to supply her place. Unfortunately for these plans, and fortunately perhaps for a certain interesting phase of literature, she recovered. Soon afterwards, Mademoiselle found the reward of her heroic adventures in a sudden exile to her estates at Saint Fargeau. The country life, so foreign to her tastes, pressed upon her very heavily at first, the more so as she was deserted by most of her friends.

"I received more compliments than visits," she writes. "I had made everybody ill. All those who did not dare send me word that they feared to embroil themselves with the court pretended that some malady or accident had befallen them." By degrees, however, she adapted herself to her situation, and in her loneliness and disappointment betook herself to pursuits which offered a strong contrast to the dazzling succession of magnificent fetes and military episodes which had given variety and excitement to her life at the Tuileries. When she grew tired of her parrots, her dogs, her horses, her comedians and her violin, she found solace in literature, beginning the "Memoirs," which were finished thirty years later, and writing romances, after the manner of Mlle. de Scudery. The drift of the first one, "Les Nouvelles Francaises et les

Divertissements de la Princesse Aurelie," is suggested by its title. It was woven from the little stories or adventures which were told to amuse their solitude by the small coterie of women who had followed the clouded fortunes of Mademoiselle. A romance of more pretension was the "Princesse de Paphlagonie," in which the writer pictures her own little court, and introduces many of its members under fictitious names. These romances have small interest for the world today, but the exalted position of their author and their personal character made them much talked of in their time.

It was in quite another fashion, however, that the Grande Mademoiselle made her most important contribution to literature. One day in 1657, while still in the country, she proposed to her friends to make pen portraits of themselves, and set the fashion by writing her own, with a detailed description of her physical, mental, and moral qualities. This was followed by carefully drawn pictures of others, among whom were Louis XIV, Monsieur, and the Grand Conde. All were bound in honor to give the lights and shadows with the same fidelity, though it would be hardly wise to call them to too strict an account on this point. As may be readily imagined, the result was something piquant and original. That the amusement was a popular one goes without saying. People like to talk of themselves, not only because the subject is interesting, but because it gives them an opportunity of setting in relief their virtues and tempering their foibles. They like also to know what

others think of them--at least, what others say of them. It is too much to expect of human nature, least of all, of French human nature, that an agreeable modicum of subtle flattery should not be added under such conditions.

When Mademoiselle opened her salon in the Luxembourg, on her return from exile, these portraits formed one of its most marked features. The salon was limited mainly to the nobility, with the addition of a few men of letters. Among those who frequented it on intimate terms were the Marquise de Sable, the Comtesse de Maure, the beautiful and pure-hearted Mme. de Hautefort, the dame d'honneur of Anne of Austria, so hopelessly adored by Louis XIII, and Mme. de Choisy, the witty wife of the chancellor of the Duc d'Orleans. Its most brilliant lights were Mme. de Sevigne, Mme. de La Fayette, and La Rochefoucauld. It was here that Mme. de La Fayette made the vivid portrait of her friend Mme. de Sevigne. "It flatters me," said the latter long afterwards, "but those who loved me sixteen years ago may have thought it true." The beautiful Comtesse de Bregy, who was called one of the muses of the time, portrayed the Princess Henrietta and the irrepressible Queen Christine of Sweden. Mme. de Chatillon, known later as the Duchesse de Mecklenbourg, who was mingled with all the intrigues of this period, traces a very agreeable sketch of herself, which may serve as a specimen of this interesting diversion. After minutely describing her person, which she evidently regards with much complacence, she continues:

"I have a temper naturally cheerful and a little given to raillery; but I correct this inclination, for fear of displeasing. I have much esprit, and enter agreeably into conversation. I have a pleasant voice and a modest air. I am very sincere and do not fail my friends. I have not a trifling mind, nor do I cherish a thousand small malices against my neighbor. I love glory and fine actions. I have heart and ambition. I am very sensitive to good and ill, but I never avenge myself for the ill that has been done me, although I might have the inclination; I am restrained by self-love. I have a sweet disposition, take pleasure in serving my friends, and fear nothing so much as the petty drawing-room quarrels which usually grow out of little nothings. I find my person and my temper constructed something after this fashion; and I am so satisfied with both, that I envy no one. I leave to my friends or to my enemies the care of seeking my faults."

It was under this stimulating influence that La Rochefoucauld made the well-known pen-portrait of himself. "I will lack neither boldness to speak as freely as I can of my good qualities," he writes, "nor sincerity to avow frankly that I have faults." After describing his person, temper, abilities, passions, and tastes, he adds with curious candor: "I am but little given to pity, and do not wish to be so at all. Nevertheless there is nothing I would not do for an afflicted person; and I sincerely believe one should do all one can to show sympathy for

misfortune, as miserable people are so foolish that this does them the greatest good in the world; but I also hold that we should be content with expressing sympathy, and carefully avoid having any. It is a passion that is wholly worthless in a well-regulated mind, that only serves to weaken the heart, and should be left to people, who, never doing anything from reason, have need of passion to stimulate their actions. I love my friends; and I love them to such an extent that I would not for a moment weigh my interest against theirs. I condescend to them, I patiently endure their bad temper. But I do not make much of their caresses, and I do not feel great uneasiness at their absence."

It would be interesting to quote in full this sample of the close and not always flattering self-analysis so much in fashion, but its length forbids. Its revelation of the hidden springs of character is at least unique.

The poet Segrais, who was attached to Mademoiselle's household, collected these graphic pictures for private circulation, but they were so much in demand that they were soon printed for the public under the title of "Divers Portraits." They served the double purpose of furnishing to the world faithful delineations of many more or less distinguished people and of setting a literary fashion. The taste for pen-portraits, which originated in the romances of Mlle. de Scudery, and received a fresh impulse from this novel and personal application,

spread rapidly among all classes. It was taken up by men of letters and men of the world, the nobility, and the bourgeoisie. There were portraits of every grade of excellence and every variety of people, until they culminated, some years later in "Les Caracteres" of La Bruyere, who dropped personalities and gave them the form of permanent types. It is a literature peculiarly adapted to the flexibility and fine perception of the French mind, and one in which it has been preeminent, from the analytic but diffuse Mlle. de Scudery, and the clear, terse, spirited Cardinal de Retz, to the fine, penetrating, and exquisitely finished Sainte-Beuve, the prince of modern critics and literary artists. It was this skill in vivid delineation that gave such point and piquancy to the memoirs of the period, which are little more than a series of brilliant and vigorous sketches of people outlined upon a shifting background of events. In this rapid characterization the French have no rivals. It is the charm of their fiction as well as of their memoirs. Balzac, Victor Hugo, and Daudet, are the natural successors of La Bruyere and Saint-Simon.

The marriage of Louis XIV shattered one of the most brilliant illusions of the Grande Mademoiselle, and it was about this time that she wrote a characteristic letter to Mme. de Motteville, picturing an Arcadia in some beautiful forest, where people are free to do as they like. The most ardent apostle of socialism could hardly dream of an existence more democratic or more Utopian. These favored men and women

lead a simple,
pastoral life. They take care of the house and the
garden, milk the
cows, make cheese and cakes, and tend sheep on pleasant
days. But this
rustic community must have its civilized amusements.
They visit, drive,
ride on horseback, paint, design, play on the lute or
clavecin, and have
all the new books sent to them. After reading the lives
of heroes and
philosophers, the princess is convinced that no one is
perfectly happy,
and that Christianity is desirable, as it gives hope for
the future.
Her platonic and Christian republic is composed of
"amiable and perfect
people," but it is quite free from the entanglements of
love and the
"vulgar institution of marriage." Mme. de Motteville
replies very
gracefully, accepting many of these ideas, but as it is
difficult to
repress love altogether, she thinks "one will be obliged
to permit that
error which an old custom has rendered legitimate, and
which is called
marriage." This curious correspondence takes its color
from the Spanish
pastorals which tinged the romantic literature of the
time as well as
its social life. The long letters, carefully written on
large and heavy
sheets yellow with age, have a peculiarly old-time
flavor, and throw
a vivid light upon the woman who could play the role of
a heroine of
Corneille or of a sentimental shepherdess, as the
caprice seized her.

A tragical bit of romance colored the mature life of the
Grande
Mademoiselle. She had always professed a great aversion
to love,
regarding it as "unworthy of a well-ordered soul." She

even went so far
as to say that it was better to marry from reason or any
other thing
imaginable, dislike included, than from passion that
was, in any case,
short-lived. But this princess of intrepid spirit,
versatile gifts,
ideal fancies, and platonic theories, who had aimed at
an emperor and
missed a throne; this amazon, with her penchant for
glory and contempt
for love, forgot all her sage precepts, and at forty-two
fell a victim
to a violent passion for the Comte de Lauzun. She has
traced its course
to the finest shades of sentiment. Her pride, her
infatuation, her
scruples, her new-born humility--we are made familiar
with them
all, even to the finesse of her respectful adorer, and
the reluctant
confession of love which his discreet silence wrings
from her at last..
Her royal cousin, after much persuasion, consented to
the unequal union.
The impression this affair made upon the world is
vividly shown in a
letter written by Mme. de Sevigne to her daughter:

I am going to tell you a thing the most astonishing, the
most
surprising, the most marvelous, the most miraculous, the
most
triumphant, the most astounding, the most unheard of,
the most singular,
the most extraordinary, the most incredible, the most
unexpected, the
grandest, the smallest, the rarest, the most common, the
most dazzling,
the most secret even until today, the most brilliant,
the most worthy of
envy.... a thing in fine which is to be done Sunday,
when those who see
it will believe themselves dazed; a thing which is to be
done Sunday

and which will not perhaps have been done Monday... M.
de Lauzun marries
Sunday, at the Louvre--guess whom?... He marries Sunday
at the Louvre,
with the permission of the King, Mademoiselle,
Mademoiselle de,
Mademoiselle; guess the name; he marries Mademoiselle,
MA FOI, PAR MA
FOI, MA FOI JUREE, Mademoiselle, la grande Mademoiselle,
Mademoiselle,
daughter of the late Monsieur, Mademoiselle, grand-
daughter of Henry IV,
Mademoiselle d'Eu, Mademoiselle de Dombes, Mademoiselle
de Montpensier,
Mademoiselle d'Orleans, Mademoiselle, cousin of the
king, Mademoiselle,
destined to the throne, Mademoiselle, the only parti in
France worthy of
Monsieur. VOILA a fine subject for conversation. If you
cry out, if you
are beside yourself, if you say that we have deceived
you, that it is
false, that one trifles with you, that it is a fine bit
of raillery,
that it is very stupid to imagine, if, in fine, you
abuse us, we shall
find that you are right; we have done as much ourselves.

In spite of the prudent warnings of her friends, the
happy princess
could not forego the eclat of a grand wedding, and
before the hasty
arrangements were concluded, the permission was
withdrawn. Her tears,
her entreaties, her cries, her rage, and her despair,
were of no avail.
Louis XIV took her in his arms, and mingled his tears
with hers,
even reproaching her for the two or three days of delay;
but he was
inexorable. Ten years of loyal devotion to her lover,
shortly afterward
imprisoned at Pignerol, and of untiring efforts for his
release which
was at last secured at the cost of half her vast

estates, ended in a brief reunion. A secret marriage, a swift discovery that her idol was of very common clay, abuse so violent that she was obliged to forbid him forever her presence, and the disenchantment was complete. The sad remnant of her existence was devoted to literature and to conversation; the latter she regarded as "the greatest pleasure in life, and almost the only one." When she died, the Count de Lauzun wore the deepest mourning, had portraits of her everywhere, and adopted permanently the subdued colors that would fitly express the inconsolable nature of his grief.

Without tact or fine discrimination, the Grande Mademoiselle was a woman of generous though undisciplined impulses, loyal disposition, and pure character; but her egotism was colossal. Under different conditions, one might readily imagine her a second Joan of Arc, or a heroine of the Revolution. She says of herself: "I know not what it is to be a heroine; I am of a birth to do nothing that is not grand or elevated. One may call that what one likes. As for myself, I call it to follow my own inclination and to go my own way. I am not born to take that of others." She lacked the measure, the form, the delicacy of the typical precieuse; but her quick, restless intellect and ardent imagination were swift to catch the spirit of the Hotel de Rambouillet, and to apply it in an original fashion. Though many subjects were interdicted in her salon, and many people were excluded, it gives us interesting glimpses into

the life of the literary noblesse, and furnishes a complete gallery of pen-portraits of more or less noted men and women. With all the brilliant possibilities of her life, it was through the diversion of her idle hours that this princess, author, amazon, prospective queen, and disappointed woman has left the most permanent trace upon the world.

CHAPTER V. A LITERARY SALON AT PORT ROYAL

Mme. de Sable--Her Worldly Life--Her Retreat--Her Friends--Pascal--The Maxims of La Rochefoucauld--Last Days of the Marquise

The transition from the restless character and stormy experiences of the Grande Mademoiselle, to the gentler nature and the convent salon of her friend and literary confidante, Mme. de Sable, is a pleasant one. Perhaps no one better represents the true precieuse of the seventeenth century, the happy blending of social savoir-faire with an amiable temper and a cultivated intellect. Without the genius of Mme. de Sevigne or Mme. de La Fayette, without the force or the rare attractions of Mme. de Longueville, without the well-poised character and catholic sympathies of Mme. de Rambouillet, she played an important part in the life of her time, through her fine insight and her consummate tact in bringing together the choicest spirits, and turning their thoughts into channels that were fresh and unworn. Born in 1599, Madeleine de Souvre passed her childhood in Touraine, of which province her

father was
governor. In the brilliancy of her youth, we find her in
Paris among the
early favorites of the Hotel de Rambouillet, and on
terms of lifelong
intimacy with its hostess and her daughter Julie.
Beautiful, versatile,
generous, but fastidious and exacting in her
friendships, with a dash
of coquetry--inevitable when a woman is fascinating and
French--she
repeated the oft-played role of a mariage de convenance
at sixteen, a
few brilliant years of social triumphs marred by
domestic neglect
and suffering, a period of enforced seclusion after the
death of her
unworthy husband, a brief return to the world, and an
old age of mild
and comfortable devotion.

"The Marquise de Sable," writes Mme. de Motteville, "was
one of those
whose beauty made the most sensation when the Queen
(Anne of Austria)
came into France. But if she was amiable, she desired
still more to
appear so. Her self-love rendered her a little too
sensible to that
which men professed for her. There was still in France
some remnant of
the politeness which Catherine de Medicis had brought
from Italy, and
Mme. de Sable found so much delicacy in the new dramas,
as well as
in other works, in prose and verse, which came from
Madrid, that she
conceived a high idea of the gallantry which the
Spaniards had learned
from the Moors. She was persuaded that men may without
wrong have tender
sentiments for women; that the desire of pleasing them
leads men to the
greatest and finest actions, arouses their spirit, and
inspires them

with liberality and all sorts of virtues; but that, on the other side, women, who are the ornaments of the world, and made to be served and adored, ought to permit only respectful attentions. This lady, having sustained her views with much talent and great beauty, gave them authority in her time."

The same writer says that she has "much light and sincerity," with "penetration enough to unfold all the secrets of one's heart."

Mlle. de Scudery introduces her in the "Grand Cyrus," as Parthenie, "a tall and graceful woman, with fine eyes, the most beautiful throat in the world, a lovely complexion, blonde hair, and a pleasant mouth, with a charming air, and a fine and eloquent smile, which expresses the sweetness or the bitterness of her soul." She dwells upon her surprising and changeful beauty, upon the charm of her conversation, the variety of her knowledge, the delicacy of her tact, and the generosity of her tender and passionate heart. One may suspect this portrait of being idealized, but it seems to have been in the main correct.

Of her husband we know very little, excepting that he belonged to the family of Montmorency, passed from violent love to heart-breaking indifference, and died about 1640, leaving her with four children and shattered fortunes. To recruit her failing health, and to hide her chagrin and sorrow at seeing herself supplanted by unworthy rivals, she had lived for some time in the country, where she had

leisure for the reading and reflection which fitted her for her later life. But after the death of her husband she was obliged to sell her estates, and we find her established in the Place Royale with her devoted friend, the Comtesse de Maure, and continuing the traditions of the Hotel de Rambouillet. Her tastes had been formed in this circle, and she had also been under the instruction of the Chevalier de Mere, a litterateur and courtier who had great vogue, was something of an oracle, and molded the character and manners of divers women of this period, among others the future Mme. de Maintenon. His confidence in his own power of bringing talent out of mediocrity was certainly refreshing. Among his pupils was the Duchesse de Lesdiguieres, who said to him one day, "I wish to have esprit."--"Eh bien, Madame," replied the complaisant chevalier, "you shall have it."

How much Mme. de Sable may have been indebted to this modest bel esprit we do not know, but her finished manner, fine taste, exquisite tact, cultivated intellect, and great experience of the world made her an authority in social matters. To be received in her salon was to be received everywhere. Cardinal Mazarin watched her influence with a jealous eye. "Mme. de Longueville is very intimate with the Marquise de Sable," he writes in his private note book. "She is visited constantly by D'Andilly, the Princesse de Guemene, d'Enghien and his sister, Nemours, and many others. They speak freely of all the world. It is

necessary to have some one who will advise us of all that passes there."

But the death of her favorite son--a young man distinguished for graces of person, mind, heart, and character, who lost his life in one of the battles of his friend and comrade, the Prince de Conde--together with the loss of her fortune and the fading of her beauty, turned the thoughts of the Marquise to spiritual things. We find many traces of the state of mind which led her first into a mild form of devotion, serious but not too ascetic, and later into pronounced Jansenism. In a note to a friend who had neglected her, she dwells upon "the misery and nothingness of the world," recalls the strength of their long friendship, the depth of her own affection, and tries to account for the disloyalty to herself, by the inherent weakness and emptiness of human nature, which renders it impossible for even the most perfect to do anything that is not defective. All this is very charitable, to say the least, as well as a little abstract. Time has given a strange humility and forgivingness to the woman who broke with her dearest friend, the unfortunate Duc de Montmorency, because he presumed to lift his eyes to the Queen, saying that she "could not receive pleasantly the regards which she had to share with the greatest princess in the world."

The fashion of the period furnished a peaceful and dignified refuge for women, when their beauty waned and the "terrible forties" ended their illusions. To go into brief retreat for penitence and

prayer was at all times a graceful thing to do, besides making for safety. It was only a step further to retire altogether from the scenes of pleasure which had begun to pall. The convent offered a haven of repose to the bruised heart, a fresh aim for drooping energies, a needed outlet for devouring emotions, and a comfortable sense of security, not only for this world, but for the next. It was the next world which was beginning to trouble Mme. de Sable. She had great fear of death, and after many penitential retreats to Port Royal, she finally obtained permission to build a suite of apartments within its precincts, and retired there about 1655 to prepare for that unpleasant event which she put off as long as possible by the most assiduous care of her health. "If she was not devoted, she had the idea of becoming so," said Mademoiselle. But her devotion was in quite a mundane fashion. Her pleasant rooms were separate and independent, thus enabling her to give herself not only to the care of her health and her soul, but to a select society, to literature, and to conversation. She never practiced the severe asceticism of her friend, Mme. de Longueville. With a great deal of abstract piety, the iron girdle and the hair shirt were not included. She did not even forego her delicate and fastidious tastes. Her elegant dinners and her dainty comfitures were as famous as ever. "Will the anger of the Marquise go so far, in your opinion, as to refuse me her recipe for salad?" writes Mme. de Choisy at the close of a letter to the Comtesse de Maure, in which

she has ridiculed her friend's Jansenist tendencies; "If so, it will be a great inhumanity, for which she will be punished in this world and the other." She had great skill in delicate cooking, and was in the habit of sending cakes, jellies, and other dainties, prepared by herself, to her intimate friends. La Rochefoucauld says, "If I could hope for two dishes of those preserves, which I did not deserve to eat before, I should be indebted to you all my life." Mme. de Longueville, who is about to visit her, begs her not to give a feast as she has "scruples about such indulgence."

This spice of worldliness very much tempered the austerity of her retreat, and lent an added luster to its intellectual attractions. But the Marquise had many conflicts between her luxurious tastes and her desire to be devout. Her dainty and epicurean habits, her extraordinary anxiety about her health, and her capricious humors were the subject of much light badinage among her friends. The Grande Mademoiselle sketches these traits with a satiric touch in the "Princesse de Paphlagonie," where she introduces her with the Comtesse de Maure. "There are no hours when they do not confer together upon the means of preventing themselves from dying, and upon the art of rendering themselves immortal," she writes. "Their conferences are not like those of other people; the fear of breathing an air too cold or too hot, the apprehension that the wind may be too dry or too damp, a fancy that the weather is not as moderate as they judge necessary for the preservation of their

health--these are sufficient reasons for writing from one room to another...." If one could find this correspondence, one might derive great advantages in every way; for they were princesses who had nothing mortal, except the knowledge of being so... Of Mme. de Sable she adds: "The Princess Parthenie had a taste as dainty as her mind; nothing equaled the magnificence of her entertainments; all the viands were exquisite, and her elegance was beyond anything that one could imagine." The fastidious Marquise suffered, with all the world, from the defects of her qualities. Her extreme delicacy and sensibility appear under many forms and verge often upon weakness; but it is an amiable weakness that does not detract greatly from her fascination. She was not cast in a heroic mold, and her faults are those which the world is pleased to call essentially feminine.

The records of her life were preserved by Conrart, also by her friend and physician, Valant. They give us a clear picture of her character, with its graces and its foibles, as well as of her pleasant intercourse and correspondence with many noted men and women. They give us, too, interesting glimpses of her salon. We find there the celebrated Jansenists Nicole and Arnauld, the eminent lawyer Domat, Esprit, sometimes Pascal, with his sister, Mme. Perier; the Prince and Princesse de Conti, the Grand Conde, La Rochefoucauld, the penitent Mme. de Longueville, Mme. de La Fayette, and many others among the cultivated

noblesse, who are attracted by its tone of bel esprit and graceful, but by no means severe, devotion. The Duc d'Orleans and the lovely but unfortunate Madame were intimate and frequent visitors.

In this little world, in which religion, literature, and fashion are curiously blended, they talk of theology, morals, physics, Cartesianism, friendship, and love. The youth and gaiety of the Hotel de Rambouillet have given place to more serious thoughts and graver topics. The current which had its source there is divided. At the Samedis, in the Marais, they are amusing themselves about the same time with letters and Vers de Societe. At the Luxembourg, a more exclusive coterie is exercising its mature talent in sketching portraits. These salons touch at many points, but each has a channel of its own. The reflective nature of Mme. de Sable turns to more serious and elevated subjects, and her friends take the same tone. They make scientific experiments, discuss Calvinism, read the ancient moralists, and indulge in dissertations upon a great variety of topics. Mme. de Bregy, poet, dame d'honneur and femme d'esprit, who amused the little court of Mademoiselle with so many discreetly flattering pen-portraits, has left two badly written and curiously spelled notes upon the merits of Socrates and Epictetus, which throw a ray of light upon the tastes of this aristocratic and rather speculative circle. Mme. de Sable writes an essay upon the education of children, which is very much talked about, also a characteristic paper upon friendship. The latter is little more than a series of

detached
sentences, but it indicates the drift of her thought,
and might have
served as an antidote to the selfish philosophy of La
Rochefoucauld. It
calls out an appreciative letter from d'Andilly, who, in
his anchorite's
cell, continues to follow the sayings and doings of his
friends in the
little salon at Port Royal.

"Friendship," she writes, "is a kind of virtue which can
only be founded
upon the esteem of people whom one loves--that is to
say, upon qualities
of the soul, such as fidelity, generosity, discretion,
and upon fine
qualities of mind."

After insisting that it must be reciprocal,
disinterested, and
based upon virtue, she continues: "One ought not to give
the name of
friendship to natural inclinations because they do not
depend upon
our will or our choice; and, though they render our
friendships more
agreeable, they should not be the foundation of them.
The union which
is founded upon the same pleasures and the same
occupations does not
deserve the name of friendship because it usually comes
from a certain
egotism which causes us to love that which is similar to
ourselves,
however imperfect we may be." She dwells also upon the
mutual offices
and permanent nature of true friendship, adding, "He who
loves his
friend more than reason and justice, will on some other
occasion love
his own pleasure and profit more than his friend."

The Abbe Esprit, Jansenist and academician, wrote an
essay upon "Des

Amities en Apparence les Plus Saints des Hommes avec les Femmes," which was doubtless suggested by the conversations in this salon, where the subject was freely discussed. The days of chivalry were not so far distant, and the subtle blending of exalted sentiment with thoughtful companionship, which revived their spirit in a new form, was too marked a feature of the time to be overlooked. These friendships, half intellectual, half poetic, and quite platonic, were mostly formed in mature life, on a basis of mental sympathy. "There is a taste in pure friendship which those who are born mediocre do not reach," said La Gruyere. Mme. de Lambert speaks of it as "the product of a perfect social culture, and, of all affections, that which has most charm."

The well-known friendship of Mme. de La Fayette and La Rochefoucauld, which illustrates the mutual influence of a critical man of intellect and a deep-hearted, thoughtful woman who has passed the age of romance, began in this salon. Its nature was foreshadowed in the tribute La Rochefoucauld paid to women in his portrait of himself. "Where their intellect is cultivated," he writes, "I prefer their society to that of men. One finds there a gentleness one does not meet with among ourselves; and it seems to me, beyond this, that they express themselves with more neatness, and give a more agreeable turn to the things they talk about."

Mme. de Sable was herself, in less exclusive fashion, the intimate

friend and adviser of Esprit, d'Andilly, and La Rochefoucauld. The letters of these men show clearly their warm regard as well as the value they attached to her opinions. "Indeed," wrote Voiture to her many years before, "those who decry you on the side of tenderness must confess that if you are not the most loving person in the world, you are at least the most obliging. True friendship knows no more sweetness than there is in your words." Her character, so delicately shaded and so averse to all violent passions, seems to have been peculiarly fitted for this calm and enduring sentiment which cast a soft radiance, as of Indian summer, over her closing years.

At a later period, the sacred name of friendship was unfortunately used to veil relations that had lost all the purity and delicacy of their primitive character. This fact has sometimes been rather illogically cited, as an argument not only against the moral influence of the salons but against the intellectual development of women. There is neither excuse nor palliation to be offered for the Italian manners and the recognized system of amis intimes, which disgraced the French society the next century. But, while it is greatly to be deplored that the moral sense has not always kept pace with the cultivation of the intellect, there is no reason for believing that license of manners is in any degree the result of it. There is striking evidence to the contrary, in the incredible ignorance and laxity that found its reaction in the early salons; also in the dissolute lives of many

distinguished women of rank
who had no pretension to wit or education. The
fluctuation of morals,
which has always existed, must be traced to quite other
causes. Virtue
has not invariably accompanied intelligence, but it has
been still less
the companion of ignorance.

It was Mme. de Sable who set the fashion of condensing
the thoughts and
experiences of life into maxims and epigrams. This was
her specific
gift to literature; but her influence was felt through
what she inspired
others to do rather than through what she did herself.
It was her good
fortune to be brought into contact with the genius of a
Pascal and a
La Rochefoucauld,--men who reared immortal works upon
the pastime of
an idle hour. One or two of her own maxims will suffice
to indicate her
style as well as to show the estimate she placed upon
form and measure
in the conduct of life:

A bad manner spoils everything, even justice and reason.
The HOW
constitutes the best part of things, and the air which
one gives them
gilds, modifies, and softens the most disagreeable.

There is a certain command in the manner of speaking and
acting, which
makes itself felt everywhere, and which gains, in
advance, consideration
and respect.

We find here the spirit that underlies French manners,
in which form
counts for so much.

There is another, which suggests the delicate flavor of
sentiment then

in vogue:

Wherever it is, love is always the master. It seems truly that it is to the soul of the one who loves, what the soul is to the body it animates.

Among the eminent men who lent so much brilliancy to this salon was the great jurist Domat. He adds his contribution and falls into the moralizing vein:

A little fine weather, a good word, a praise, a caress, draws me from a profound sadness from which I could not draw myself by any effort of meditation. What a machine is my soul, what an abyss of misery and weakness!

Here is one by the Abbe d'Ailly, which foreshadows the thought of the next century:

Too great submission to books, and to the opinions of the ancients, as to the eternal truths revealed of God, spoils the head and makes pedants.

The finest and most vigorous of these choice spirits was Pascal, who frequented more or less the salon of Mme. de Sable previous to his final retirement to the gloom and austerity of the cloister. His delicate platonism and refined spirituality go far towards offsetting the cold cynicism of La Rochefoucauld. Each gives us a different phase of life as reflected in a clear and luminous intelligence. The one led to Port Royal, the other turned an electric light upon the selfish corruption of

courts. Many of the pensees of Pascal were preserved among the records of this salon, and Cousin finds reason for believing that they were first suggested and discussed here; he even thinks it possible, if not probable, that the "Discours sur les Passions de L'amour," which pertains to his mundane life, and presents the grave and ascetic recluse in a new light, had a like origin.

But the presiding genius was La Rochefoucauld. He complains that the mode of relaxation is fatiguing, and that the mania for sentences troubles his repose. The subjects were suggested for conversation, and the thoughts were condensed and reduced to writing at leisure. "Here are all the maxims I have," he writes to Mme. de Sable; "but as one gives nothing for nothing, I demand a potage aux carottes, un ragout de mouton, etc."

"When La Rochefoucauld had composed his sentences," says Cousin, "he talked them over before or after dinner, or he sent them at the end of a letter. They were discussed, examined, and observations were made, by which he profited. One could lessen their faults, but one could lend them no beauty. There was not a delicate and rare turn, a fine and keen touch, which did not come from him."

After availing himself of the general judgment in this way, he took a novel method of forestalling criticism before committing himself to publication. Mme. de Sable sent a collection of the maxims to her friends, asking for a written opinion. One is tempted to

make long
extracts from their replies. The men usually indorse the
worldly
sentiments, the women rarely. The Princesse de Guemene,
who, in the
decline of her beauty, was growing devout, and also had
apartments for
penitential retreat at Port Royal, responds: "I was just
going to write
to beg you to send me your carriage as soon as you had
dined. I have yet
seen only the first maxims, as I had a headache
yesterday; but those I
have read appear to me to be founded more upon the
disposition of
the author than upon the truth, for he believes neither
in generosity
without interest, nor in pity; that is, he judges every
one by himself.
For the greater number of people, he is right; but
surely there are
those who desire only to do good." The Countesse de
Maure, who does not
believe in the absolute depravity of human nature, and
is inclined to an
elevated Christian philosophy quite opposed to
Jansenism, writes with
so much severity that she begs her friend not to show
her letter to the
author. Mme. de Hautefort expresses her disapproval of a
theory which
drives honor and goodness out of the world. After many
clever and
well-turned criticisms, she says: "But the maxim which
is quite new to
me, and which I admire, is that idleness, languid as it
is, destroys all
the passions. It is true, and he had searched his heart
well to find a
sentiment so hidden, but so just... I think one ought,
at present, to
esteem idleness as the only virtue in the world, since
it is that which
uproots all the vices. As I have always had much respect
for it, I

am glad it has so much merit." But she adds wisely: "If I were of the opinion of the author, I would not bring to the light those mysteries which will forever deprive him of all the confidence one might have in him."

There is one letter, written by the clever and beautiful Eleonore de Rohan, Abbess de Malnoue, and addressed to the author, which deserves to be read for its fine and just sentiments. In closing she says:

The maxim upon humility appears to me perfectly beautiful; but I have been so surprised to find it there, that I had the greatest difficulty in recognizing it in the midst of all that precedes and follows it. It is assuredly to make this virtue practiced among your own sex, that you have written maxims in which their self-love is so little flattered. I should be very much humiliated on my own part, if I did not say to myself what I have already said to you in this note, that you judge better the hearts of men than those of women, and that perhaps you do not know yourself the true motive which makes you esteem them less. If you had always met those whose temperament had been submitted to virtue, and in whom the senses were less strong than reason, you would think better of a certain number who distinguish themselves always from the multitude; and it seems to me that Mme. de La Fayette and myself deserve that you should have a better opinion of the sex in general.

Mme. de La Fayette writes to the Marquise: "All people

of good sense are not so persuaded of the general corruption as is M. de La Rochefoucauld. I return to you a thousand thanks for all you have done for this gentleman."--At a later period she said: "La Rochefoucauld stimulated my intellect, but I reformed his heart." It is to be regretted that he had not known her sooner.

At his request Mme. de Sable wrote a review of the maxims, which she submitted to him for approval. It seems to have been a fair presentation of both sides, but he thought it too severe, and she kindly gave him permission to change it to suit himself. He took her at her word, dropped the adverse criticisms, retained the eulogies, and published it in the "Journal des Savants" as he wished it to go to the world. The diplomatic Marquise saved her conscience and kept her friend.

The maxims of La Rochefoucauld, which are familiar to all, have extended into a literature. That he generalized from his own point of view, and applied to universal humanity the motives of a class bent upon favor and precedence, is certainly true. But whatever we may think of his sentiments, which were those of a man of the world whose observations were largely in the atmosphere of courts, we are compelled to admit his unrivaled finish and perfection of form. Similar theories of human nature run through the maxims of Esprit and Saint Evremond, without the exquisite turn which makes each one of La Rochefoucauld's a gem in itself. His tone was that of a disappointed courtier,

with a vein of
sadness only half disguised by cold philosophy and
bitter cynicism. La
Bruyere, with a broader outlook upon humanity, had much
of the same fine
analysis, with less conciseness and elegance of
expression. Vauvenargues
and Joubert were his legitimate successors. But how far
removed in
spirit!

"The body has graces," writes Vauvenargues, "the mind
has talents; has
the heart only vices? And man capable of reason, shall
he be incapable
of virtue?"

With a fine and delicate touch, Joubert says: "Virtue is
the health of
the soul. It gives a flavor to the smallest leaves of
life."

These sentiments are in the vein of Pascal, who
represents the most
spiritual element of the little coterie which has left
such a legacy of
condensed thought to the world.

The crowning act of the life of Mme. de Sable was her
defense of Port
Royal. She united with Mme. de Longueville in protecting
the persecuted
Jansenists, Nicole and Arnauld, but she had neither the
courage, the
heroism, nor the partisan spirit of her more ardent
companion. With all
her devotion she was something of a sybarite and liked
repose. She had
the tact, during all the troubles which scattered her
little circle, to
retain her friends, of whatever religious color, though
not without a
few temporary clouds. Her diplomatic moderation did not
quite please the
religieuses of Port Royal, and chilled a little her

pleasant relations
with d'Andilly.

Toward the close of her life, the Marquise was in the habit of secluding herself for days together, and declining to see even her dearest friends. The Abbe de la Victoire, piqued at not being received, spoke of her one day as "the late Mme. la Marquise de Sable."

La Rochefoucauld writes to her, "I know no more inventions for entering your house; I am refused at the door every day." Mme. de La Fayette declares herself offended, and cites this as a proof of her attachment, saying, "There are very few people who could displease me by not wishing to see me." But the friends of the Marquise are disposed to treat her caprices very leniently. As the years went by and the interests of life receded, Mme. de Sable became reconciled to the thought that had inspired her with so much dread. When she died at the advanced age of seventy-nine, the longed-for transition was only the quiet passing from fevered dreams to peaceful sleep.

It is a singular fact that this refined, exclusive, fastidious woman, in whom the artistic nature was always dominant to the extent of weakness, should have left a request to be buried, without ceremony, in the parish cemetery with the people, remote alike from the tombs of her family and the saints of Port Royal.

_Her Genius--Her Youth--Her unworthy Husband--Her
impertinent Cousin--Her
love for her Daughter--Her Letters--Hotel de Carnavalet--
-Mme. Duiplessis
Guenegaud--Mme. de Coulanges--The Curtain Falls_

Among the brilliant French women of the seventeenth century, no one is so well-known today as Mme. de Sevigne. She has not only been sung by poets and portrayed by historians, but she has left us a complete record of her own life and her own character. Her letters reflect every shade of her many-sided nature, as well as the events, even the trifling incidents, of the world in which she lived; the lineaments, the experiences, the virtues, and the follies of the people whom she knew. We catch the changeful tints of her mind that readily takes the complexion of those about her, while retaining its independence; we are made familiar with her small joys and sorrows, we laugh with her at her own harmless weaknesses, we feel the inspiration of her sympathy, we hear the innermost throbbings of her heart. No one was ever less consciously a woman of letters. No one would have been more surprised than herself at her own fame. One is instinctively sure that she would never have seated herself deliberately to write a book of any sort whatever. While she was planning a form for her thoughts, they would have flown. She was essentially a woman of the great world, for which she was fitted by her position, her temperament, her esprit, her tastes, and her character. She loved its variety, its movement, its gaiety;

she judged leniently even its faults and its frailties.
If they often
furnished a target for her wit, behind her sharpest
epigrams one detects
an indulgent smile.

The natural outlet for her full mind and heart was in
conversation.
When she was alone, they found vent in conversation of
another sort. She
talks on paper. Her letters have the unstudied freedom,
the rapidity,
the shades, the inflections of spoken words. She gives
her thoughts
their own course, "with reins upon the neck," as she was
fond of saying,
and without knowing where they will lead her. But it is
the personal
element that inspires her. Let her heart be piqued, or
touched by a
profound affection, and her mind is illuminated; her pen
flies.

Her nature unveils itself, her emotions chase one
another in quick
succession, her thoughts crystallize with wonderful
brilliance, and the
world is reflected in a thousand varying colors. The
sparkling wit,
the swift judgment, the subtle insight, the lightness of
touch, the
indefinable charm of style--these belong to her
temperament and her
genius. But the clearness, the justness of expression,
the precision,
the simplicity that was never banal--such qualities
nature does
not bestow. One must find their source in careful
training, in wise
criticism, in early familiarity with good models.

Living from 1626 to 1696, Mme. de Sevigne was en rapport
with the best
life of the great century of French letters. She was the
granddaughter
of the mystical Mme. de Chantal, who was too much

occupied with her
convents and her devotions to give much attention to the
little Marie,
left an orphan at the age of six years. The child did
not inherit much
of her grandmother's spirit of reverence, and at a later
period was wont
to indulge in many harmless pleasantries about her pious
ancestress and
"our grandfather, St. Francois de Sales." Deprived so
early of the
care of a mother, she was brought up by an uncle, the
good Abbe de
Coulanges--the "Bien-Bon"--whose life was devoted to her
interests.
Though born in the Place Royale, that long-faded center
of so much that
was brilliant and fascinating two centuries ago, much of
her youth was
passed in the family chateau at Livry, where she was
carefully educated
in a far more solid fashion than was usual among the
women of her time.
She had an early introduction to the Hotel de
Rambouillet, and readily
caught its intellectual tastes, though she always
retained a certain
bold freedom of speech and manners, quite opposed to its
spirit.

Her instructors were Chapelain and Menage, both honored
habitués of that
famous salon. The first was a dull poet, a profound
scholar, somewhat of
a pedant, and notoriously careless in his dress--le
vieux Chapelain,
his irreverent pupil used to call him. When he died of
apoplexy, years
afterwards, she wrote to her daughter: "He confesses by
pressing the
hand; he is like a statue in his chair. So God confounds
the pride of
philosophers." But he taught her Latin, Spanish, and
Italian, made her
familiar with the beauties of Virgil and Tasso, and gave

her a critical
taste for letters.

Menage was younger, and aspired to be a man of the world as well as a savant. Repeating one day the remark of a friend, that out of ten things he knew he had learned nine in conversation, he added, "I could say about the same thing myself"--a confession that savors more of the salon than of the library. He had a good deal of learning, but much pretension, and Moliere has given him an undesirable immortality as Vadius in "Les Femmes Savantes," in company with his deadly enemy, the Abbe Cotin, who figures as "Trissotin." It appears that the susceptible savant lost his heart to his lively pupil, and sighed not only in secret but quite openly. He wrote her bad verses in several languages, loaded her with eulogies, and followed her persistently. "The name of Mme. de Sevigne," said the Bishop of Laon, "is in the works of Menage what Bassan's dog is in his portraits. He cannot help putting it there." She treated him in a sisterly fashion that put to flight all sentimental illusions, but she had often to pacify his wounded vanity. One day, in the presence of several friends, she gave him a greeting rather more cordial than dignified. Noticing the looks of surprise, she turned away laughing and said, "So they kissed in the primitive church." But the wide knowledge and scholarly criticism of Menage were of great value to the versatile woman, who speedily surpassed her master in style if not in learning. Evidently she appreciated him, since she addressed him in

one of her letters as "friend of all friends, the best."

At eighteen the gay and unconventional Marie de Rabutin-Chantal was married to the Marquis de Sevigne; but her period of happiness was a short one. The husband, who was rich, handsome, and agreeable, proved weak and faithless. He was one of the temporary caprices of the dangerous Ninon, led a dashing, irresponsible life, spent his fortune recklessly, and left his pretty young wife to weep alone at a convenient distance, under the somber skies of Brittany. Fortunately for her and for posterity, his career was rapid and brief. For some trifling affair of so-called honor--a quality of which, from our point of view, he does not seem to have possessed enough to be worth the trouble of defending--he had the kindness to get himself killed in a duel, after seven years of marriage. His spirited wife had loved him sincerely, and first illusions die slowly. She shed many bitter and natural tears, but she never showed any disposition to repeat the experiment. Perhaps she was of the opinion of another young widow who thought it "a fine thing to bear the name of a man who can commit no more follies." But it is useless to speculate upon the reasons why a woman does or does not marry. It is certain that the love of her two children filled the heart of Mme. de Sevigne; her future life was devoted to their training, and to repairing a fortune upon which her husband's extravagance had made heavy inroads.

But the fascinating widow of twenty-five had a dangerous

path to
tread. That she lived in a society so lax and corrupt,
unprotected and
surrounded by distinguished admirers, without a shadow
of suspicion
having fallen upon her fair reputation is a strong proof
of her good
judgment and her discretion. She was not a great beauty,
though the
flattering verses of her poet friends might lead one to
think so. A
complexion fresh and fair, eyes of remarkable
brilliance, an abundance
of blond hair, a face mobile and animated, and a fine
figure--these were
her visible attractions. She danced well, sang well,
talked well, and
had abounding health. Mme. de La Fayette made a pen-
portrait of her,
which was thought to be strikingly true. It was in the
form of a letter
from an unknown man. A few extracts will serve to bring
her more vividly
before us.

"Your mind so adorns and embellishes your person, that
there is no one
in the world so fascinating when you are animated by a
conversation from
which constraint is banished. All that you say has such
a charm, and
becomes you so well, that the words attract the Smiles
and the Graces
around you; the brilliance of your intellect gives such
luster to your
complexion and your eyes, that although it seems that
wit should touch
only the ears, yours dazzles the sight.

"Your soul is great and elevated. You are sensitive to
glory and to
ambition, and not less so to pleasures; you were born
for them and they
seem to have been made for you... In a word, joy is the
true state of

your soul, and grief is as contrary to it as possible. You are naturally tender and impassioned; there was never a heart so generous, so noble, so faithful... You are the most courteous and amiable person that ever lived, and the sweet, frank air which is seen in all your actions makes the simplest compliments of politeness seem from your lips protestations of friendship."

Mlle. de Scudery sketches her as the Princesse Clarinte in "Clelie," concluding with these words: "I have never seen together so many attractions, so much gaiety, so much coquetry, so much light, so much innocence and virtue. No one ever understood better the art of having grace without affectation, raillery without malice, gaiety without folly, propriety without constraint, and virtue without severity."

Her malicious cousin, Bussy-Rabutin, who was piqued by her indifference, and basely wished to avenge himself, said that her "warmth was in her intellect;" that for a woman of quality she was too badine, too economical, too keenly alive to her own interests; that she made too much account of a few trifling words from the queen, and was too evidently flattered when the king danced with her. This opinion of a vain and jealous man is not entitled to great consideration, especially when we recall that he had already spoken of her as "the delight of mankind," and said that antiquity would have dressed altars for her and she would "surely have been goddess of something." The most

incomprehensible page in her history is her complaisance towards the persistent impertinences of this perfidious friend. The only solution of it seems to lie in the strength of family ties, and in her unwillingness to be on bad terms with one of her very few near relatives.

Bussy-Rabutin was handsome, witty, brilliant, a bel esprit, a member of the Academie Francaise, and very much in love with his charming cousin, who clearly appreciated his talents, if not his character. "You are the fagot of my intellect," she says to him; but she forbids him to talk of love. Unfortunately for himself, his vanity got the better of his discretion. He wrote the "Histoire Amoureuse des Gauls," and raised such a storm about his head by his attack upon many fair reputations, that, after a few months of lonely meditation in the Bastille, he was exiled from Paris for seventeen years. Long afterwards he repented the unkind blow he had given to Mme. de Sevigne, confessed its injustice, apologized, and made his peace. But the world is less forgiving, and wastes little sympathy upon the base but clever and ambitious man who was doomed to wear his restless life away in the uncongenial solitude of his chateau.

Among the numerous adorers of Mme. de Sevigne were the Prince de Conti, the witty Comte de Lude, the poet Segrais, Fouquet, and Turenne. Her friendship for the last two seems to have been the most lively and permanent. We owe to her sympathetic pen the best account of the death of Turenne. Her devotion to the interests of Fouquet and

his family
lasted though the many years of imprisonment that ended
only with his
life. There was nothing of the spirit of the courtier in
her generous
affection for the friends who were out of favor. The
loyalty of her
character was notably displayed in her unwavering
attachment to Cardinal
de Retz, during his long period of exile and misfortune,
after the
Fronde.

But one must go outside the ordinary channels to find
the veritable
romance of Mme. de Sevigne's life. Her sensibility lent
itself with
great facility to impressions, and her gracious manners,
her amiable
character, her inexhaustible fund of gaiety could not
fail to bring her
a host of admirers. She had doubtless a vein of harmless
coquetry, but
it was little more than the natural and variable grace
of a frank and
sympathetic woman who likes to please, and who scatters
about her the
flowers of a rich mind and heart, without taking violent
passions too
seriously, if, indeed, she heeds them at all.
Friendship, too, has
its shades, its subtleties, its half-perceptible and
quite unconscious
coquetries. But the supreme passion of Mme. de Sevigne
was her love
for her daughter. It was the exaltation of her mystical
grandmother,
in another form. "To love as I love you makes all other
friendships
frivolous," she writes. Whatever her gifts and
attractions may have
been, she is known to the world mainly through this
affection and the
letters which have immortalized it. Nowhere in
literature has maternal

love found such complete and perfect expression. Nowhere do we find a character so clearly self-revealed. Others have professed to unveil their innermost lives, but there is always a suspicion of posing in deliberate revelations. Mme. De Sevigne has portrayed herself unconsciously. It is the experience of yesterday, the thought of today, the hope of tomorrow, the love that is at once the joy and sorrow of all the days, that are woven into a thousand varying but living forms. One naturally seeks in the character of the daughter a key to the absorbing sentiment which is the inspiration and soul of these letters; but one does not find it there. More beautiful than her mother, more learned, more accomplished, she lacked her sympathetic charm. Cold, reserved, timid, and haughty, without vivacity and apparently without fine sensibility, she was much admired but little loved by the world in which she lived. "When you choose, you are adorable," wrote her mother; but evidently she did not always so choose. Bussy-Rabutin says of her, "This woman has esprit, but it is esprit soured and of insupportable egotism. She will make as many enemies as her mother makes friends and adorers." He did not like her, and one must again take his opinion with reserve; but she says of herself that she is "of a temperament little communicative." In her mature life she naively writes: "At first people thought me amiable enough, but when they knew me better they loved me no more." "The prettiest girl in France," whose beauty was expected to "set the world on fire," created a mild sensation at court;

was noticed by the king, who danced with her, received her share of adulation, and finally became the third wife of the Comte de Grignan, who carried her off to Provence, to the lasting grief of her adoring mother, and to the great advantage of posterity, which owes to this fact the series of incomparable letters that made the fame of their writer, and threw so direct and vivid a light upon an entire generation.

The world has been inclined to regard the son of Mme. de Sevigne as the more lovable of her two children, but she doubtless recognized in his light and inconsequent character many of the qualities of her husband which had given her so much sorrow during the brief years of her marriage. Amiable, affectionate, and not without talent, he was nevertheless the source of many anxieties and little pride. He followed in the footsteps of his father, and became a willing victim to the fascinations of Ninon; he frequented the society of Champmesle, where he met habitually Boileau and Racine. He recited well, had a fine literary taste, much sensibility, and a gracious ease of manner that made him many friends. "He was almost as much loved as I am," remarked the brilliant Mme. de Coulanges, after accompanying him on a visit to Versailles. He appealed to Mme. de La Fayette to use her influence with his mother to induce her to pay his numerous debts. There is a touch of satire in the closing line of the note in which she intercedes for him. "The great friendship you have for Mme. de Grignan," she writes, "makes

it necessary to show some for her brother."--But we have glimpses of his weakness and instability in many of his mother's intimate letters. In the end, however, having exhausted the pleasures of life and felt the bitterness of its disappointments, he took refuge in devotion, and died in the odor of sanctity, after the example of his devout ancestress.

Mme. de Grignan certainly offered a more solid foundation for her mother's confidence and affection. It is quite possible, too, that her reserve concealed graces of character only apparent on a close intimacy. But love does not wait for reasons, and this one had all the shades and intensities of a passion, with few of its exactions. D'Andilly called the mother a "pretty pagan," because she made such an idol of her daughter. She sometimes has her own misgivings on the score of religion. "I make this a little Trappe," she wrote from Livry, after the separation. "I wish to pray to God and make a thousand reflections; but, Ma pauvre chere, what I do better than all that is to think of you. .. I see you, you are present to me, I think and think again of everything; my head and my mind are racked; but I turn in vain, I seek in vain; the dear child whom I love with so much passion is two hundred leagues away. I have her no more. Then I weep without the power to help myself." She rings the changes upon this inexhaustible theme. A responsive word delights her; a brief silence terrifies her; a slight coldness plunges her into despair. "I have an imagination so lively that uncertainty

makes me die," she writes. If a shadow of grief touches her idol, her sympathies are overflowing. "You weep, my very dear child; it is an affair for you; it is not the same thing for me, it is my temperament."

But though this love pulses and throbs behind all her letters, it does not make up the substance of them. To amuse her daughter she gathers all the gossip of the court, all the news of her friends; she keeps her au courant with the most trifling as well as the most important events. Now she entertains her with a witty description of a scene at Versailles, a tragical adventure, a gracious word about Mme. Scarron, "who sups with me every evening," a tender message from Mme. de La Fayette; now it is a serious reflection upon the death of Turenne, a vivid picture of her own life, a bit of philosophy, a spicy anecdote about a dying man who takes forty cups of tea every morning, and is cured. A few touches lay bare a character or sketch a vivid scene. It is this infinite variety of detail that gives such historic value to her letters. In a correspondence so intimate she has no interest to conciliate, no ends to gain. She is simply a mirror in which the world about her is reflected.

But the most interesting thing we read in her letters is the life and nature of the woman herself. She has a taste for society and for seclusion, for gaiety and for thought, for friendship and for books. For the moment each one seems dominant. "I am always of the opinion of the one heard last," she says, laughing at her own

impressibility. It is an amiable admission, but she has very fine and rational ideas of her own, notwithstanding. In books, for which she had always a passion, she found unfailing consolation. Corneille and La Fontaine were her favorite traveling companions. "I am well satisfied to be a substance that thinks and reads," she says, finding her good uncle a trifle dull for a *compagnon de voyage*. Her tastes were catholic. She read *Astree* with delight, loved Petrarch, Ariosto, and Montaigne; Rabelais made her "die of laughter," she found Plutarch admirable, enjoyed Tacitus as keenly as did Mme. Roland a century later, read Josephus and Lucian, dipped into the history of the crusades and of the iconoclasts, of the holy fathers and of the saints. She preferred the history of France to that of Rome because she had "neither relatives nor friends in the latter place." She finds the music of Lulli celestial and the preaching of Bourdaloue divine. Racine she did not quite appreciate. In his youth, she said he wrote tragedies for Champmesle and not for posterity. Later she modified her opinion, but Corneille held always the first place in her affection. She had a great love for books on morals, read and reread the essays of Nicole, which she found a perpetual resource against the ills of life--even rain and bad weather. St. Augustine she reads with pleasure, and she is charmed with Bossuet and Pascal; but she is not very devout, though she often tries to be. There is a serious naivete in all her efforts in this direction. She seems to have always one eye upon the

world while she prays, and she mourns over her own lack of devotion.

"I wish my heart were for God as it is for you," she writes to her daughter. "I am neither of God nor of the devil," she says again; "that state troubles me though, between ourselves, I find it the most natural in the world." Her reason quickly pierces to the heart of superstition; sometimes she cannot help a touch of sarcasm. "I fear that this trappe, which wishes to pass humanity, may become a lunatic asylum," she says. She believes little in saints and processions. Over the high altar of her chapel she writes SOLI DEO HONOR ET GLORIA. "It is the way to make no one jealous," she remarks.

She was rather inclined toward Jansenism, but she could not fathom all the subtleties of her friends the Port Royalists, and begged them to "have the kindness, out of pity for her, to thicken their religion a little as it evaporated in so much reasoning." As she grows older the tone of seriousness is more perceptible. "If I could only live two hundred years," she writes, "it seems to me that I might be an admirable person." The rationalistic tendencies of Mme. de Grignan give her some anxiety, and she rallies her often upon the doubtful philosophy of her PERE DESCARTES. She could not admit a theory which pretended to prove that her dog Marphise had no soul, and she insisted that if the Cartesians had any desire to go to heaven, it was out of curiosity. "Talk to the Cardinal (de Retz) a little of your MACHINES; machines that love, machines that have a choice for some one,

machines that are
jealous, machines that fear. ALLEZ, ALLEZ, you are
jesting! Descartes
never intended to make us believe all that."

In her youth Mme. de Sevigne did not like the country
because it was
windy and spoiled her beautiful complexion; perhaps,
too, because it
was lonely. But with her happy gift of adaptation she
came to love
its tranquillity. She went often to the solitary old
family chateau in
Brittany to make economies and to retrieve the fortune
which suffered
successively from the reckless extravagance of her
husband and son,
and from the expensive tastes of the Comte de Grignan,
who was acting
governor of Provence, and lived in a state much too
magnificent for
his resources. Of her life at The Rocks she has left us
many exquisite
pictures. "I go out into the pleasant avenues; I have a
footman who
follows me; I have books, I change place, I vary the
direction of my
promenade; a book of devotion, a book of history; one
changes from one
to the other; that gives diversion; one dreams a little
of God, of his
providence; one possesses one's soul, one thinks of the
future."

She embellishes her park, superintends the planting of
trees, and "a
labyrinth from which one could not extricate one's self
without the
thread of Ariadne;" she fills her garden with orange
trees and jessamine
until the air is so perfumed that she imagines herself
in Provence. She
sits in the shade and embroiders while her son "reads
trifles, comedies
which he plays like Moliere, verses, romances, tales; he

is very
amusing, he has esprit, he is appreciative, he
entertains us." She notes
the changing color of the leaves, the budding of the
springtime. "It
seems to me that in case of need I should know very well
how to make a
spring," she writes. She loves too the "fine, crystal
days of autumn."
Sometimes, in the evening, she has "gray-brown thoughts
which grow black
at night," but she never dwells upon these. Her
"habitual thought--that
which one must have for God, if one does his duty"--is
for her daughter.
"My dear child," she writes, "it is only you that I
prefer to the
tranquil repose I enjoy here."

If her own soul is open to us in all its variable and
charming moods, we
also catch in her letters many unconscious reflections
of her daughter's
character. She offers her a little needed worldly
advice. "Try, my
child," she says, "to adjust yourself to the manners and
customs of the
people with whom you live; adapt yourself to that which
is not bad; do
not be disgusted with that which is only mediocre; make
a pleasure
of that which is not ridiculous." She entreats her to
love the little
Pauline and not to scold her, nor send her away to the
convent as she
did her sister Marie-Blanche. With what infinite
tenderness she always
speaks of this child, smiling at her small outbursts of
temper, soothing
her little griefs, and giving wise counsels about her
education.
Evidently she doubted the patience of the mother. "You
do not yet too
well comprehend maternal love," she writes; "so much the
better, my

child; it is violent."

Unfortunately this adoring mother could not get on very well with her daughter when they were together. She drowned her with affection, she fatigued her with care for her health, she was hurt by her ungracious manner, she was frozen by her indifference in short, they killed each other. It is not a rare thing to make a cult of a distant idol, and to find one's self unequal to the perpetual shock of the small collisions which diversities of taste and temperament render inevitable in daily intercourse. In this instance, one can readily imagine that a love so interwoven with every fiber of the mother's life, must have been a little over-sensitive, a little exacting, a trifle too demonstrative for the colder nature of the daughter; but that it was the less genuine and profound, no one who has at all studied the character of Mme. de Sevigne can for a moment imagine. How she suffers when it becomes necessary for Mme. de Grignan to go back to Provence! How the tears flow! How readily she forgives all, even to denying that there is anything to forgive. "A word, a sweetness, a return, a caress, a tenderness, disarms me, cures me in a moment," she writes. And again: "Would to God, my daughter, that I might see you once more at the Hotel de Carnavalet, not for eight days, nor to make there a penitence, but to embrace you and to make you see clearly that I cannot be happy without you, and that the chagrins which my friendship for you might give me are more agreeable than all the false peace of a wearisome absence." In spite of

these little
clouds, the old love is never dimmed; we are constantly
bewildered with
the inexhaustible riches of a heart which gives so
lavishly and really
asks so little for itself.

The Hotel de Carnavalet was one of the social centers of
the latter part
of the century, but it was the source of no special
literature and of no
new diversions. Mme. de Sevigne was herself luminous,
and her fame
owes none of its luster to the reflection from those
about her. She was
original and spontaneous. She read because she liked to
read, and not
because she wished to be learned. She wrote as she
talked, from the
impulse of the moment, without method or aim excepting
to follow where
her rapid thought led her. Her taste for society was of
the same order.
Her variable and sparkling genius would have broken
loose from the
formal conversations and rather studied brilliancy that
had charmed her
youth at the Hotel de Rambouillet. The onerous duties of
a perpetual
hostess would not have suited her temperament, which
demanded its hours
of solitude and repose. But she was devoted to her
friends, and there
was a delightful freedom in all her intercourse with
them. She has not
chronicled her salon, but she has chronicled her world,
and we gather
from her letters the quality of her guests. She liked to
pass an evening
in the literary coterie at the Luxembourg; to drop in
familiarily upon
Mme. de La Fayette, where she found La Rochefoucauld,
Cardinal de Retz,
sometimes Segrais, Huet, La Fontaine, Moliere, and other
wits of the

time; to sup with Mme. de Coulanges and Mme. Scarron. She is a constant visitor at the old Hotel de Nevers, where Marie de Gonzague and the Princesse Palatine had charmed an earlier generation, and where Mme. Duplessis Guenegaud, a woman of brilliant intellect, heroic courage, large heart, and pure character, whom d'Andilly calls one of the great souls, presided over a new circle of young poets and men of letters, reviving the fading memories of the Hotel de Rambouillet. Mme. De Sevigne, who had fine dramatic talent, acted here in little comedies. She heard Boileau read his satires and Racine his tragedies. She met the witty Chevalier de Chatillon, who asked eight days to make an impromptu, and Pomponne, who wrote to his father that the great world he found in this salon did not prevent him from appearing in a gray habit. In a letter from the country house of Mme. Duplessis, at Fresnes, to the same Pomponne, then ambassador to Sweden, Mme. de Sevigne says: "I have M. d'Andilly at my left, that is, on the side of my heart; I have Mme. de La Fayette at my right; Mme. Duplessis before me, daubing little pictures; Mme. De Motteville a little further off, who dreams profoundly; our uncle de Cessac, whom I fear because I do not know him very well."

It is this life of charming informality; this society of lettered tastes, of wit, of talent, of distinction, that she transfers to her own salon. Its continuity is often broken by her long absences in the country or in Provence, but her irresistible magnetism

quickly draws the world around her, on her return. In addition to her intimate friends and to men of letters like Racine, Boileau, Benserade, one meets representatives of the most distinguished of the old families of France. Conde, Richelieu, Colberg, Louvois, and Sully are a few among the great names, of which the list might be indefinitely extended. We have many interesting glimpses of the Grande Mademoiselle, the "adorable" Duchesse de Chaulnes, the Duc and Duchesse de Rohan, who were "Germans in the art of savoir-vivre," the Abbess de Fontevrault, so celebrated for her esprit and her virtue, and a host of others too numerous to mention. The sculptured portals and time-stained walls of the Hotel de Carnavalet are still alive with the memories of these brilliant reunions and the famous people who shone there two hundred years ago.

Among those who exercised the most important influence upon the life of Mme. de Sevigne was Corbinelli, the wise counselor, who, with a soul untouched by the storms of adversity through which he had passed, devoted his life to letters and the interests of his friends. No one had a finer appreciation of her gifts and her character. Her compared her letters to those of Cicero, but he always sought to temper her ardor, and to turn her thoughts toward an elevated Christian philosophy. "In him," said Mme. de Sevigne, "I defend one who does not cease to celebrate the perfections and the existence of God; who never judges his neighbor, who excuses him always; who is insensible to the pleasures and

delights of life, and entirely submissive to the will of Providence;
in fine, I sustain the faithful admirer of Sainte Therese, and of my grandmother, Sainte Chantal." This gentle, learned, and disinterested man, whose friendship deepened with years, was an unyielding resource. In her troubles and perplexities she seeks his advice; in her intellectual tastes she is sustained by his sympathy. She speaks often of the happy days in Provence, when, together with her daughter, they translate Tacitus, read Tasso, and get entangled in endless discussions upon Descartes. Even Mme. de Grignan, who rarely likes her mother's friends, in the end gives due consideration to this loyal confidant, though she does not hesitate to ridicule the mysticism into which he finally drifted.

After Mme. de La Fayette, the woman whose relations with Mme. de Sevigne were the most intimate was Mme. de Coulanges, who merits here more than a passing word. Her wit was proverbial, her popularity universal. The Leaf, the Fly, the Sylph, the Goddess, her friend calls her in turn, with many a light thrust at her volatile but loyal character. This brilliant, spirituelle, caustic woman was the wife of a cousin of the Marquis de Sevigne, who was as witty as herself and more inconsequent. Both were amiable, both sparkled with bons mots and epigrams, but they failed to entertain each other. The husband goes to Italy or Germany or passes his time in various chateaux, where he is sure of a warm welcome and good cheer. The wife goes to Versailles, visits her

cousin Louvois,
the Duchesse de Richelieu, and Mme. de Maintenon, who
loves her much; or
presides at home over a salon that is always well
filled. "Ah, Madame,"
said M. de Barillon, "how much your house pleases me! I
shall come here
very evening when I am tired of my family." "Monsieur,"
she replied, "I
expect you tomorrow." When she was ill and likely to
die, her husband
had a sudden access of affection, and nursed her with
great tenderness.
Mme. de Coulanges dying and her husband in grief, seemed
somehow out
of the order of things. "A dead vivacity, a weeping
gaiety, these are
prodigies," wrote Mme. de Sevigne. When the wife
recovered, however,
they took their separate ways as before.

"Your letters are delicious," she wrote once to Mme. de
Sevigne, "and
you are as delicious as your letters." Her own were as
much sought in
her time, but she had no profound affection to
consecrate them and no
children to collect them, so that only a few have been
preserved. There
is a curious vein of philosophy in one she wrote to her
husband, when
the pleasures of life began to fade. "As for myself, I
care little for
the world; I find it no longer suited to my age; I have
no engagements,
thank God, to retain me there. I have seen all there is
to see. I have
only an old face to present to it, nothing new to show
nor to discover
there. Ah! What avails it to recommence every day the
visits, to trouble
one's self always about things that do not concern us?
.... My dear sir,
we must think of something more solid." She disappears
from the scene

shortly after the death of Mme. De Sevigne. Long years of silence and seclusion, and another generation heard one day that she had lived and that she was dead.

The friends of Mme. de Sevigne slip away one after another; La Rochefoucauld, De Retz, Mme. de La Fayette are gone. "Alas!" she writes, "how this death goes running about and striking on all sides." The thought troubles her. "I am embarked in life without my consent," she says; "I must go out of it--that overwhelms me. And how shall I go? Whence: By what door? When will it be? In what disposition: How shall I be with God? What have I to present to him? What can I hope?--Am I worthy of paradise? Am I worthy of hell? What an alternative! What a complication! I would like better to have died in the arms of my nurse."

The end came to her in the one spot where she would most have wished it. She died while on a visit to her daughter in Provence. Strength and resignation came with the moment, and she faced with calmness and courage the final mystery. To the last she retained her wit, her vivacity, and that eternal youth of the spirit which is one of the rarest of God's gifts to man. "There are no more friends left to me," said Mme. de Coulanges; and later she wrote to Mme. de Grignan, "The grief of seeing her no longer is always fresh to me. I miss too many things at the Hotel de Carnavalet."

The curtain falls upon this little world which the magical pen of Mme.

de Sevigne has made us know so well. The familiar faces retreat into the darkness, to be seen no more. But the picture lives, and the woman who has outlined it so clearly, and colored it so vividly and so tenderly, smiles upon us still, out of the shadows of the past, crowned with the white radiance of immortal genius and immortal love.

CHAPTER VII. MADAME DE LA FAYETTE

Her Friendship with Mme. de Sevigne--Her Education--Her Devotion to the Princess Henrietta--Her Salon--La Rochefoucauld--Talent as a Diplomatist--Comparison with Mme. de Maintenon Her Literary Work--Sadness of her Last Days--Woman in Literature

"Believe me, my dearest, you are the person in the world whom I have most truly loved," wrote Mme. de La Fayette to Mme. de Sevigne a short time before her death. This friendship of more than forty years, which Mme. de Sevigne said had never suffered the least cloud, was a living tribute to the mind and heart of both women. It may also be cited for the benefit of the cynically disposed who declare that feminine friendships are simply "pretty bows of ribbon" and nothing more. These women were fundamentally unlike, but they supplemented each other. The character of Mme. de La Fayette was of firmer and more serious texture. She had greater precision of thought, more delicacy of sentiment, and affections not less deep. But her temperament was less sunny, her

genius less impulsive, her wit less sparkling, and her manner less demonstrative. "She has never been without that divine reason which was her dominant trait," wrote her friend. No praise pleased her so much as to be told that her judgment was superior to her intellect, and that she loved truth in all things. "She would not have accorded the least favor to any one, if she had not been convinced it was merited," said Segrais; "this is why she was sometimes called hard, though she was really tender." As an evidence of her candor, he thinks it worth while to record that "she did not even conceal her age, but told freely in what year and place she was born." But she combined to an eminent degree sweetness with strength, sensibility with reason, and it was the blending of such diverse qualities that gave so rare a flavor to her character. In this, too, lies the secret of the vast capacity for friendship which was one of her most salient points. It is through the records which these friendships have left, through the literary work that formed the solace of so many hours of sadness and suffering, and through the letters of Mme. de Sevigne, that we are able to trace the classic outlines of this fine and complex nature, so noble, so poetic, so sweet, and yet so strong.

Mme. de La Fayette was eight years younger than Mme. de Sevigne, and died three years earlier; hence they traversed together the brilliant world of the second half of the century of which they are among the most illustrious representatives. The young Marie-

Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne had inherited a taste for letters and was carefully instructed by her father, who was a field-marshal and the governor of Havre, where he died when she was only fifteen. She had not passed the first flush of youth when her mother contracted a second marriage with the Chevalier Renaud de Sevigne, whose name figures among the frondeurs as the ardent friend of Cardinal de Retz, and later among the devout Port Royalists. It is a fact of more interest to us that he was an uncle of the Marquis de Sevigne, and the best result of the marriage to the young girl, who was not at all pleased and whose fortunes it clouded a little, was to bring her into close relations with the woman to whom we owe the most intimate details of her life.

The rare natural gifts of Mlle. De La Vergne were not left without due cultivation. Rapin and Menage taught her Latin. "That tiresome Menage," as she lightly called him, did not fail, according to his custom, to lose his susceptible heart to the remarkable pupil who, after three months of study, translated Virgil and Horace better than her masters. He put this amiable weakness on record in many Latin and Italian verses, in which he addresses her as Laverna, a name more musical than flattering, if one recalls its Latin significance. She received an education of another sort, in the salon of her mother, a woman of much intelligence, as well as a good deal of vanity, who posed a little as a patroness of letters, gathering about her a circle of beaux esprits,

and in other ways signaling the taste which was a heritage from her Provencal ancestry. One can readily imagine the rapidity with which the young girl developed in such an atmosphere. The abbe Costar, "most gallant of pedants and most pedantic of gallants," who had an equal taste for literature and good dinners, calls her "the incomparable," sends her his books, corresponds with her, and expresses his delight at finding her "so beautiful, so spirituelle, so full of reason." The poet Scarron speaks of her as "toute lumineuse, toute precieuse."

The circle she met in the salon of her godmother, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, had no less influence in determining her future fortunes. With her rare reputation for beauty and esprit, as well as learning, she took her place early in this brilliant and distinguished society in which she was to play so graceful and honored a part. She was sought and admired not only by the men of letters who were so cordially welcomed by the favorite niece of Richelieu, but by the gay world that habitually assembled at the Petit Luxembourg. It was here that she perfected the tone of natural elegance which always distinguished her and made her conspicuous even at court, where she passed so many years of her life.

She was not far from twenty-one when she became the wife of the Comte de La Fayette, of whom little is known save that he died early, leaving her with two sons. He is the most shadowy of figures, and whether he made her life happy or sad does not definitely appear, though

there is a
vague impression that he left something to be desired in
the way of
devotion. A certain interest attaches to him as the
brother of the
beautiful Louise de La Fayette, maid of honor to Anne of
Austria, who
fled from the compromising infatuation of Louis XIII, to
hide her youth
and fascinations in the cloister, under the black robe
and the cherished
name of Mere Angélique de Chaillet.

The young, brilliant, and gifted comtesse goes to the
convent to visit
her gently austere sister-in-law, and meets there the
Princess Henrietta
of England, then a child of eleven years. The attraction
is mutual
and ripens into a deep and lasting friendship. When this
graceful and
light-hearted girl becomes the Duchesse d'Orléans, and
sister-in-law
of the king, she attaches her friend to her court and
makes her the
confidante of her romantic experiences. "Do you not
think," she said
to her one day, "that if all which has happened to me,
and the things
relating to it, were told it would make a fine story?
You write well;
write; I will furnish you good materials." The
interesting memorial,
to which madame herself contributes many pages, is
interrupted by
the mysterious death of the gay and charming woman who
had found so
sympathetic and so faithful a chronicler. She breathed
her last sigh in
the arms of this friend. "It is one of those sorrows for
which one never
consoles one's self, and which leave a shadow over the
rest of one's
life," wrote Mme. de La Fayette. She had no heart to
finish the history,

and added only the few simple lines that record the touching incidents which left upon her so melancholy and lasting an impression. She did not care to remain longer at court, where she was constantly reminded of her grief, and retired permanently from its gaieties; but in these years of intimacy with one of its central figures, she had gained an insight into its spirit and its intrigues, which was of inestimable value in the memoirs and romances of her later years.

The natural place of Mme. de La Fayette was in a society of more serious tone and more lettered tastes. In her youth she had been taken by her mother to the Hotel de Rambouillet, and she always retained much of its spirit, without any of its affectations. We find her sometimes at the Samedis, and she belonged to the exclusive coterie of the Grande Mademoiselle, at the Luxembourg, where her facile pen was in demand for the portraits so much in vogue. She was also a frequent visitor in the literary salon of Mme. de Sable, at Port Royal. It was here that her friendship with La Rochefoucauld glided imperceptibly into the intimacy which became so important a feature in her life. This intimacy was naturally a matter of some speculation, but the world made up its mind of its perfectly irreproachable character. "It appears to be only friendship," writes Mme. de Scudery to Bussy-Rabutin; "in short the fear of God on both sides, and perhaps policy, have cut the wings of love. She is his favorite and his first friend." "I do not believe he has ever been what one calls in love," writes Mme. de

Sevigne. But this friendship was a veritable romance, without any of the storms or vexations or jealousies of a passionate love. "You may imagine the sweetness and charm of an intercourse full of all the friendship and confidence possible between two people whose merit is not ordinary," she says again; "add to this the circumstance of their bad health, which rendered them almost necessary to each other, and gave them the leisure not to be found in other relations, to enjoy each other's good qualities. It seems to me that at court people have no time for affection; the whirlpool which is so stormy for others was peaceful for them, and left ample time for the pleasures of a friendship so delicious. I do not believe that any passion can surpass the strength of such a tie."

In the earlier stages of this intimacy, Mme. de La Fayette was a little sensitive as to how the world might regard it, as may be seen in a note to Mme. de Sable, in which she asks her to explain it to the young Comte de Saint-Paul, a son of Mme. de Longueville.

"I beg of you to speak of the matter in such a way as to put out of his head the idea that it is anything serious," she writes. "I am not sufficiently sure what you think of it yourself to feel certain that you will say the right thing, and it may be necessary to begin by convincing my ambassador. However, I must trust to your tact, which is superior to ordinary rules. Only convince him. I dislike mortally that people of his

age should imagine that I have affairs of gallantry. It seems to them that every one older than themselves is a hundred, and they are astonished that such should be regarded of any account. Besides, he would believe these things of M. de La Rochefoucauld more readily than of any one else. In fine, I do not want him to think anything about it except that the gentleman is one of my friends."

The picture we have of La Rochefoucauld from the pen of Mme. de Sevigne has small resemblance to the ideal that one forms of the cynical author of the Maxims. He had come out of the storms of the Fronde a sad and disappointed man. The fires of his nature seem to have burned out with the passions of his youth, if they had ever burned with great intensity. "I have seen love nowhere except in romances," he says, and even his devotion to Mme. de Longueville savors more of the ambitious courtier than of the lover. His nature was one that recoiled from all violent commotions of the soul. The cold philosophy of the Maxims marked perhaps the reaction of his intellect against the disenchanting experiences of his life. In the tranquil atmosphere of Mme. de Sable he found a certain mental equilibrium; but his character was finally tempered and softened by the gentle influence of Mme. de La Fayette, whose exquisite poise and delicacy were singularly in harmony with a nature that liked nothing in exaggeration. "I have seen him weep with a tenderness that made me adore him," writes Mme. de Sevigne, after the death of his mother. "The heart of M. de La Rochefoucauld for his family is a thing

incomparable." When
the news came that his favorite grandson had been killed
in battle, she
says again: "I have seen his heart laid bare in this
cruel misfortune;
he ranks first among all I have ever known for courage,
fortitude,
tenderness, and reason; I count for nothing his esprit
and his charm."
In all the confidences of the two women, La
Rochefoucauld makes a third.
He seems always to be looking over the shoulder of Mme.
de La Fayette
while she writes to the one who "satisfies his idea of
friendship in all
its circumstances and dependences"; adding usually a
message, a line
or a pretty compliment to Mme. de Grignan that is more
amiable than
sincere, because he knows it will gladden the heart of
her adoring
mother.

The side of Mme. de La Fayette which has the most
fascination for us
is this intimate life of which Mme. de Sevigne gives
such charming
glimpses. For a moment it was her ambition to establish
a popular
salon, a role for which she had every requisite of
position, talent, and
influence. "She presumed very much upon her esprit,"
says Gourville,
who did not like her, "and proposed to fill the place of
the Marquise
de Sable, to whom all the young people were in the habit
of paying great
deference, because, after she had fashioned them a
little, it was a
passport for entering the world; but this plan did not
succeed, as Mme.
de La Fayette was not willing to give her time to a
thing so futile."
One can readily understand that it would not have suited
her tastes or

her temperament. Besides, her health was too delicate, and her moods were too variable. "You know how she is weary sometimes of the same thing," wrote Mme. de Sevigne. But she had her coterie, which was brilliant in quality if not in numbers. The fine house with its pretty garden, which may be seen today opposite the Petit Luxembourg, was a favorite meeting place for a distinguished circle. The central figure was La Rochefoucauld. Every day he came in and seated himself in the fauteuil reserved for him. One is reminded of the little salon in the Abbaye-aux-Bois, where more than a century later Chateaubriand found the pleasure and the consolation of his last days in the society of Mme. Recamier. They talk, they write, they criticize each other, they receive their friends. The Cardinal de Retz comes in, and they recall the fatal souvenirs of the Fronde. Perhaps he thinks of the time when he found the young Mlle. De LaVergne pretty and amiable, and she did not smile upon him. The Prince de Conde is there sometimes, and honors her with his confidence, which Mme. de Sevigne thinks very flattering, as he does not often pay such consideration to women. Segrais has transferred his allegiance from the Grande Mademoiselle to Mme. de La Fayette, and is her literary counselor as well as a constant visitor. La Fontaine, "so well known by his fables and tales, and sometimes so heavy in conversation," may be found there. Mme. de Sevigne comes almost every day with her sunny face and her witty story. "The Mist" she calls Mme. de La Fayette, who is so often ill and sad. She

might have called
herself The Sunbeam, though she, too, has her hours when
she can only
dine tete-a-tete with her friend, because she is "so
gloomy that
she cannot support four people together." Mme. de
Coulanges adds her
graceful, vivacious, and sparkling presence. Mme.
Scarron, before her
days of grandeur, is frequently of the company, and has
lost none of the
charm which made the salon of her poet-husband so
attractive during his
later years. "She has an amiable and marvelously just
mind," says Mme.
de Sevigne... "It is pleasant to hear her talk. These
conversations
often lead us very far, from morality to morality,
sometimes Christian,
sometimes political." This circle was not limited
however to a few
friends, and included from time to time the learning,
the elegance and
the aristocracy of Paris.

But Mme. de La Fayette herself is the magnet that
quietly draws together
this fascinating world. In her youth she had much life
and vivacity,
perhaps a spice of discreet coquetry, but at this period
she was
serious, and her fresh beauty had given place to the
assured and
captivating grace of maturity. She had a face that might
have been
severe in its strength but for the sensibility expressed
in the slight
droop of the head to one side, the tender curve of the
full lips, and
the variable light of the dark, thoughtful eyes. In her
last years, when
her stately figure had grown attenuated, and her face
was pallid
with long suffering, the underlying force of her
character was more

distinctly defined in the clear and noble outlines of her features. Her nature was full of subtle shades. Over her reserved strength, her calm judgment, her wise penetration played the delicate light of a lively imagination, the shifting tints of a tender sensibility. Her sympathy found ready expression in tears, and she could not even bear the emotion of saying good-by to Mme. de Sevigne when she was going away to Provence. But her accents were always tempered, and her manners had the gracious and tranquil ease of a woman superior to circumstances. Her extreme frankness lent her at times a certain sharpness, and she deals many light blows at the small vanities and affectations that come under her notice. "Mon Dieu," said the frivolous Mme. de Marans to her one day, "I must have my hair cut." "Mon Dieu," replied Mme. de La Fayette simply, "do not have it done; that is becoming only to young persons." Gourville said she was imperious and over-bearing, scolding those she loved best, as well as those she did not love. But this valet-de-chambre of La Rochefoucauld, who amassed a fortune and became a man of some note, was jealous of her influence over his former master, and his opinions should be taken with reservation. Her delicate satire may have been sometimes a formidable weapon, but it was directed only against follies, and rarely, if ever, used unkindly. She was a woman for intimacies, and it is to those who knew her best that we must look for a just estimate of her qualities. "You would love her as soon as you had time to be with her, and to become familiar with her

esprit and her wisdom," wrote Mme. de Sevigne to her daughter, who was disposed to be critical; "the better one knows her, the more one is attached to her."

One must also take into consideration her bad health. People thought her selfish or indifferent when she was only sad and suffering. For more than twenty years she was ill, consumed by a slow fever which permitted her to go out only at intervals. La Rochefoucauld had the gout, and they consoled each other. Mme. de Sevigne thought it better not to have the genius of a Pascal, than to have so many ailments. "Mme. De La Fayette is always languishing, M. de La Rochefoucauld always lame," she writes; "we have conversations so sad that it seems as if there were nothing more to do but to bury us; the garden of Mme. de La Fayette is the prettiest spot in the world, everything blooming, everything perfumed; we pass there many evenings, for the poor woman does not dare go out in a carriage." "Her health is never good," she writes again, "nevertheless she sends you word that she should not like death better; AU CONTRAIRE." There are times when she can no longer "think, or speak, or answer, or listen; she is tired of saying good morning and good evening." Then she goes away to Meudon for a few days, leaving La Rochefoucauld "incredibly sad." She speaks for herself in a letter from the country house which Gourville has placed at her disposal.

"I am at Saint Maur; I have left all my affairs and all my husbands; I have my children and the fine weather; that suffices. I

take the waters
of Forges; I look after my health, I see no one. I do
not mind at all
the privation; every one seems to me so attached to
pleasures which
depend entirely upon others, that I find my disposition
a gift of the
fairies.

"I do not know but Mme de Coulanges has already sent you
word of our
after-dinner conversations at Gourville's about people
who have taste
above or below their intelligence. Mme. Scarron and the
Abbe Tetu were
there; we lost ourselves in subtleties until we no
longer understood
anything. If the air of Provence, which subtilizes
things still more,
magnifies for you our visions, you will be in the
clouds. You have taste
below your intelligence; so has M. de La Rochefoucauld;
and myself also,
but not so much as you two. VOILA an example which will
guide you."

She disliked writing letters, and usually limited
herself to a few plain
facts, often in her late years to a simple bulletin of
her health. This
negligence was the subject of many passages-at-arms
between herself and
Mme. de Sevigne. "If I had a lover who wished my letters
every morning,
I would break with him," she writes. "Do not measure our
friendship by
our letters. I shall love you as much in writing you
only a page in a
month, as you me in writing ten in eight days." Again
she replies to
some reproach: "Make up your mind, ma belle, to see me
sustain, all my
life, with the whole force of my eloquence, that I love
you still more
than you love me. I will make Corbinelli agree with me

in a quarter of
an hour; your distrust is your sole defect, and the only
thing in you
that can displease me."

But in spite of a certain apparent indolence, and her
constant ill
health, there were many threads that connected with the
outside world
the pleasant room in which Mme. de La Fayette spent so
many days of
suffering. "She finds herself rich in friends from all
sides and all
conditions," writes Mme. de Sevigne; "she has a hundred
arms; she
reaches everywhere. Her children appreciate all this,
and thank her
every day for possessing a spirit so engaging." She goes
to Versailles,
on one of her best days, to thank the king for a
pension, and receives
so many kind words that it "suggests more favors to
come." He orders
a carriage and accompanies her with other ladies through
the park,
directing his conversation to her, and seeming greatly
pleased with
her judicious praise. She spends a few days at
Chantilly, where she is
invited to all the fetes, and regrets that Mme. de
Sevigne could not be
with her in that charming spot, which she is "fitted
better than anyone
else to enjoy." No one understands so well the extent of
her influence
and her credit as this devoted friend, who often quotes
her to Mme.
de Grignan as a model. "Never did any one accomplish so
much without
leaving her place," she says.

But there was one phase in the life of Mme. de La
Fayette which was not
fully confided even to Mme. de Sevigne. It concerns a
chapter of obscure

political history which it is needless to dwell upon here, but which throws much light upon her capacity for managing intricate affairs. Her connection with it was long involved in mystery, and was only unveiled in a correspondence given to the world at a comparatively recent date. It was in the salon of the Grande Mademoiselle that she was thrown into frequent relations with the two daughters of Charles Amedee de Savoie, Duc de Nemours, one of whom became Queen of Portugal, the other Duchesse de Savoie and, later, Regent during the minority of her son. These relations resulted in one of the ardent friendships which played so important a part in her career. Her intercourse with the beautiful but vain, intriguing, and imperious Duchesse de Savoie assumed the proportion of a delicate diplomatic mission. "Her salon," says Lescure, "was, for the affairs of Savoy, a center of information much more important in the eyes of shrewd politicians than that of the ambassador." She not only looked after the personal matters of Mme. Royale, but was practically entrusted with the entire management of her interests in Paris. From affairs of state and affairs of the heart to the daintiest articles of the toilette her versatile talent is called into requisition. Now it is a message to Louvois or the king, now a turn to be adroitly given to public opinion, now the selection of a perfume or a pair of gloves. "She watches everything, thinks of everything, combines, visits, talks, writes, sends counsels, procures advice, baffles intrigues, is always in the breach, and renders

more service
by her single efforts than all the envoys avowed or
secret whom
the Duchesse keeps in France." Nor is the value of these
services
unrecognized. "Have I told you," wrote Mme. de Sevigne
to her daughter,
"that Mme. de Savoie has sent a hundred ells of the
finest velvet in the
world to Mme. de La Fayette, and a hundred ells of satin
to line it,
and two days ago her portrait, surrounded with diamonds,
which is worth
three hundred louis?"

The practical side of Mme. de La Fayette's character was
remarkable in
a woman of so fine a sensibility and so rare a genius.
Her friends
often sought her counsel; and it was through her
familiarity with legal
technicalities that La Rochefoucauld was enabled to save
his fortune,
which he was at one time in danger of losing. In clear
insight, profound
judgment, and knowledge of affairs, she was scarcely, if
at all,
surpassed by Mme. de Maintenon, the feminine diplomatist
par excellence
of her time, though her field of action was less broad
and conspicuous.
But her love of consideration was not so dominant and
her ambition not
so active. It was one of her theories that people should
live without
ambition as well as without passion. "It is sufficient
to exist," she
said. Her energy when occasion called for it does not
quite accord with
this passive philosophy, and suggests at least a vast
reserved force;
but if she directed her efforts toward definite ends it
was usually to
serve other interests than her own. She had been trained
in a different

school from Mme. de Maintenon, her temperament was modified by her frail health, and the prizes of life had come to her apparently without special exertion. She was a woman, too, of more sentiment and imagination. Her fastidious delicacy and luxurious tastes were the subject of critical comment on the part of this austere censor, who condemned the gilded decorations of her bed as a useless extravagance, giving the characteristic reason that "the pleasure they afforded was not worth the ridicule they excited." The old friendship that had existed when Mme. Scarron was living in such elegant and mysterious seclusion, devoting herself to the king's children, and finding her main diversion in the little suppers enlivened by the wit of Mme. de Sevigne and Mme. de Coulanges, and the more serious, but not less agreeable, conversation of Mme. de La Fayette, had evidently grown cool. They had their trifling disagreements. "Mme. de La Fayette puts too high a price upon her friendship," wrote Mme. de Maintenon, who had once attached such value to a few approving words from her. In her turn Mme. de La Fayette indulged in a little light satire. Referring to the comedy of Esther, which Racine had written by command for the pupils at Saint Cyr, she said, "It represents the fall of Mme. de Montespan and the rise of Mme. de Maintenon; all the difference is that Esther was rather younger, and less of a precieuse in the matter of piety." There was certainly less of the ascetic in Mme. de La Fayette. She had more color and also more sincerity. In symmetry of character, in a certain

feminine quality
of taste and tenderness, she was superior, and she seems
to me to
have been of more intrinsic value as a woman. Whether
under the same
conditions she would have attained the same power may be
a question.
If not, I think it would have been because she was
unwilling to pay the
price, not because she lacked the grasp, the tact, or
the diplomacy.

It is mainly as a woman of letters that Mme. de La
Fayette is known
today, and it was through her literary work that she
made the strongest
impression upon her time. Boileau said that she had a
finer intellect
and wrote better than any other woman in France. But she
wrote only for
the amusement of idle or lonely hours, and always
avoided any display of
learning, in order not to attract jealousy as well as
from instinctive
delicacy of taste. "He who puts himself above others,"
she said,
"whatever talent he may possess, puts himself below his
talent." But
her natural atmosphere was an intellectual one, and the
friend of La
Rochefoucauld, who would have "liked Montaigne for a
neighbor," had her
own message for the world. Her mind was clear and
vigorous, her taste
critical and severe, and her style had a flexible
quality that readily
took the tone of her subject. In concise expression she
doubtless
profited much from the author of the MAXIMS, who rewrote
many of his
sentences at least thirty times. "A phrase cut out of a
book is worth a
louis d'or," she said, "and every word twenty sous."
Unfortunately her
"Memoires de la Cour de France" is fragmentary, as her

son carelessly
lent the manuscripts, and many of them were lost. But
the part that
remains gives ample evidence of the breadth of her
intelligence, the
penetrating, lucid quality of her mind, and her talent
for seizing the
salient traits of the life about her. In her romances,
which were first
published under the name of Segrais, one finds the touch
of an artist,
and the subtle intuitions of a woman. In the rapid
evolution of modern
taste and the hopeless piling up of books, these works
have fallen
somewhat into the shade, but they are written with a
vivid naturalness
of style, a truth of portraiture, and a delicacy of
sentiment, that
commend them still to all lovers of imaginative
literature. Fontenelle
read the "Princesse de Cleves" four times when it
appeared. La Harpe
said it was "the first romance that offered reasonable
adventures
written with interest and elegance." It marked an era in
the history of
the novel. "Before Mme. de La Fayette," said Voltaire,
"people wrote
in a stilted style of improbable things." We have the
rare privilege of
reading her own criticism in a letter to the secretary
of the Duchesse
de Savoie, in which she disowns the authorship, and adds
a few lines of
discreet eulogy.

"As for myself," she writes, "I am flattered at being
suspected of it.
I believe I should acknowledge the book, if I were
assured the author
would never appear to claim it. I find it very agreeable
and well
written without being excessively polished, full of
things of admirable

delicacy, which should be read more than once; above all, it seems to be a perfect presentation of the world of the court and the manner of living there. It is not romantic or ambitious; indeed it is not a romance; properly speaking, it is a book of memoirs, and that I am told was its title, but it was changed. VOILA, monsieur, my judgment upon Mme. De Cleves; I ask yours, for people are divided upon this book to the point of devouring each other. Some condemn what others admire; whatever you may say, do not fear to be alone in your opinion."

Sainte-Beuve, whose portrait of Mme. de La Fayette is so delightful as to make all others seem superfluous, has devoted some exquisite lines to this book. "It is touching to think," he writes, "of the peculiar situation which gave birth to these beings so charming, so pure, these characters so noble and so spotless, these sentiments so fresh, so faultless, so tender;" how Mme. de La Fayette put into it all that her loving, poetic soul retained of its first, ever-cherished dreams, and how M. de La Rochefoucauld was pleased doubtless to find once more in "M. De Nemours" that brilliant flower of chivalry which he had too much misused--a sort of flattering mirror in which he lived again his youth. Thus these two old friends renewed in imagination the pristine beauty of that age when they had not known each other, hence could not love each other. The blush so characteristic of Mme. De Cleves, and which at first is almost her only language, indicates well the design of the author,

which is to paint love in its freshest, purest, vaguest,
most adorable,
most disturbing, most irresistible--in a word, in its
own color. It is
constantly a question of that joy which youth joined to
beauty gives, of
the trouble and embarrassment that love causes in the
innocence of early
years, in short, of all that is farthest from herself
and her friend in
their late tie."

But whatever tints her tender and delicate imaginings
may have taken
from her own soul, Mme. de La Fayette has caught the
eternal beauty of
a pure and loyal spirit rising above the mists of sense
into the serene
air of a lofty Christian renunciation.

The sad but triumphant close of her romance foreshadowed
the swift
breaking up of her own pleasant life. In 1680, not long
after the
appearance of the "Princesse de Cleves," La
Rochefoucauld died, and
the song of her heart was changed to a miserere. "Mme.
de La Fayette has
fallen from the clouds," says Mme. de Sevigne. "Where
can she find
such a friend, such society, a like sweetness, charm,
confidence,
consideration for her and her son?" A little later she
writes from
The Rocks, "Mme. de La Fayette sends me word that she is
more deeply
affected than she herself believed, being occupied with
her health
and her children; but these cares have only rendered
more sensible the
veritable sadness of her heart. She is alone in the
world... The poor
woman cannot close the ranks so as to fill this place."

The records of the thirteen years that remain to Mme. de

La Fayette are
somber and melancholy. "Nothing can replace the
blessings I have lost,"
she says. Restlessly she seeks diversion in new plans.
She enlarges her
house as her horizon diminishes; she finds occupation in
the affairs of
Mme. Royale and interests herself in the marriage of the
daughter of
her never-forgotten friend, the Princess Henrietta, with
the heir to the
throne of Savoy. She writes a romance without the old
vigor, occupies
herself with historic reminiscences, and takes a passing
refuge in an
ardent affection for the young Mme. de Schomberg, which
excites the
jealousy of some older friends. But the strongest link
that binds her
to the world is the son whose career opens so
brilliantly as a young
officer and for whom she secures an ample fortune and a
fine marriage.
In this son and the establishment of a family centered
all her hopes
and ambitions. She was spared the pain of seeing them
vanish like the
"baseless fabric of a vision." The object of so many
cares survived
her less than two years; her remaining son and the only
person left to
represent her was the abbe who had so little care for
her manuscripts
and her literary fame. A century later, through a
collateral branch
of the family, the glory of the name was revived by the
distinguished
general so dear to the American heart. It was in the
less tangible realm
of the intellect that Mme. de La Fayette was destined to
an unlooked-for
immortality.

But in spite of these interests, the sense of loneliness
and desolation

is always present. Her few letters give us occasional flashes of the old spirit, but the burden of them is inexpressibly sad. Her sympathies and associations led her toward a mild form of Jansenism, and as the evening shadows darkened, her thoughts turned to fresh speculations upon the destiny of the soul. She went with Mme. de Coulanges to visit Mme. de La Sabliere, who was expiating the errors and follies of her life in austere penitence at the Incurables. The devotion of this once gay and brilliant woman, who had been so deeply tinged with the philosophy of Descartes, touched her profoundly, and suggested a source of consolation which she had never found. She sought the counsels of her confessor, who did not spare her, and though she was never sustained by the ardor and exaltation of the religieuse, her last days were not without peace and a tranquil hope. To the end she remained a gracious, thoughtful, self-poised, calmly-judging woman whose illusions never blinded her to the simple facts of existence, though sometimes throwing over them a transparent veil woven from the tender colors of her own heart. Above the weariness and resignation of her last words written to Mme. de Sevigne sounds the refrain of a life that counts among its crowning gifts and graces a genius for friendship.

"Alas, ma belle, all I have to tell you of my health is very bad; in a word, I have repose neither night nor day, neither in body nor in mind.

I am no more a person either by one or the other. I perish visibly.

I must end when it pleases God, and I am submissive.

BELIEVE ME, MY
DEAREST, YOU ARE THE PERSON IN THE WORLD WHOM I HAVE
MOST TRULY LOVED."

Mme. de La Fayette represents better than any other woman the social and literary life of the last half of the seventeenth century. Mme. de Sevigne had an individual genius that might have made itself equally felt in any other period. Mme. de Maintenon, whom Roederer regards as the true successor of Mme. de Rambouillet, was narrowed by personal ambition, and by the limitations of her early life. Born in a prison, reared in poverty, wife in name, but practically secretary and nurse of a crippled, witty, and licentious poet over whose salon she presided brilliantly; discreet and penniless widow, governess of the illegitimate children of the king, adviser and finally wife of that king, friend of Ninon, model of virtue, femme d'esprit, politician, diplomatist, and devote--no fairy tale can furnish more improbable adventures and more striking contrasts. But she was the product of exceptional circumstances joined to an exceptional nature. It is true she put a final touch upon the purity of manners which was so marked a feature of the Hotel de Rambouillet, and for a long period gave a serious tone to the social life of France. But she ruled through repression, and one is inclined to accept the opinion of Sainte-Beuve that she does not represent the distinctive social current of the time. In Mme. de La Fayette we find its delicacy, its courtesy, its elegance, its intelligence, its critical spirit, and its charm.

In considering the great centers in which the fashionable, artistic, literary, and scientific Paris of the seventeenth century found its meeting ground, one is struck with the practical training given to its versatile, flexible feminine minds. Women entered intelligently and sympathetically into the interests of men, who, in turn, did not reserve their best thoughts for the club or an after-dinner talk among themselves. There was stimulus as well as diversity in the two modes of thinking and being. Men became more courteous and refined, women more comprehensive and clear. But conversation is the spontaneous overflow of full minds, and the light play of the intellect is only possible on a high level, when the current thought has become a part of the daily life, so that a word suggests infinite perspectives to the swift intelligence. It is not what we know, but the flavor of what we know, that adds "sweetness and light" to social intercourse. With their rapid intuition and instinctive love of pleasing, these French women were quick to see the value of a ready comprehension of the subjects in which clever men are most interested. It was this keen understanding, added to the habit of utilizing what they thought and read, their ready facility in grasping the salient points presented to them, a natural gift of graceful expression, with a delicacy of taste and an exquisite politeness which prevented them from being aggressive, that gave them their unquestioned supremacy in the salons which made Paris for so long

a period the social capital of Europe. It was impossible that intellects so plastic should not expand in such an atmosphere, and the result is not difficult to divine. From Mme. de Rambouillet to Mme. de La Fayette and Mme. de Sevigne, from these to Mme. de Stael and George Sand, there is a logical sequence. The Saxon temperament, with a vein of La Bruyere, gives us George Eliot.

This new introduction of the feminine element into literature, which is directly traceable to the salons of the seventeenth century, suggests a point of special interest to the moralist. It may be assumed that, whether through nature or a long process of evolution, the minds of women as a class have a different coloring from the minds of men as a class. Perhaps the best evidence of this lies in the literature of the last two centuries, in which women have been an important factor, not only through what they have done themselves, but through their reflex influence. The books written by them have rapidly multiplied. Doubtless, the excess of feeling is often unbalanced by mental or artistic training; but even in the crude productions, which are by no means confined to one sex, it may be remarked that women deal more with pure affections and men with the coarser passions. A feminine Zola of any grade of ability has not yet appeared.

It is not, however, in literature of pure sentiment that the influence of women has been most felt. It is true that, as a rule, they look at the world from a more emotional standpoint than men,

but both have
written of love, and for one Sappho there have been many
Anacreons.

Mlle. de Scudery and Mme. de La Fayette did not
monopolize the sentiment
of their time, but they refined and exalted it. The
tender and exquisite
coloring of Mme. de Stael and George Sand had a worthy
counterpart in
that of Chateaubriand or Lamartine. But it is in the
moral purity, the
touch of human sympathy, the divine quality of
compassion, the swift
insight into the soul pressed down by

The heavy and weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,

that we trace the minds of women attuned to finer
spiritual issues. This
broad humanity has vitalized modern literature. It is
the penetrating
spirit of our century, which has been aptly called the
Woman's Century.
We do not find it in the great literatures of the past.
The Greek poets
give us types of tragic passions, of heroic virtues, of
motherly and
wifely devotion, but woman is not recognized as a
profound spiritual
force. This masculine literature, so perfect in form and
plastic beauty,
so vigorous, so statuesque, so calm, and withal so cold,
shines across
the centuries side by side with the feminine Christian
ideal--twin
lights which have met in the world of today. It may be
that from the
blending of the two, the crowning of a man's vigor with
a woman's finer
insight, will spring the perfected flower of human
thought.

Robert Browning in his poem "By the Fireside" has said a
fitting word:

Oh, I must feel your brain prompt mine,
Your heart anticipate my heart.
You must be just before, in fine,
See and make me see, for your part,
New depths of the Divine!

CHAPTER VIII. SALONS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

_Characteristics of the Eighteenth Century--Its
Epicurean
Philosophy--Anecdote of Mme. du Deffand--the Salon an
Engine of
Political Power--Great Influence of Women--Salons
Defined Literary
Dinners--Etiquette of the Salons--An Exotic on American
Soil._

The traits which strike us most forcibly in the lives
and characters of
the women of the early salons, which colored their
minds, ran through
their literary pastimes, and gave a distinctive flavor
to their
conversation, are delicacy and sensibility. It was these
qualities,
added to a decided taste for pleasures of the intellect,
and an innate
social genius, that led them to revolt from the gross
sensualism of
the court, and form, upon a new basis, a society that
has given another
complexion to the last two centuries. The natural result
was, at first,
a reign of sentiment that was often over-strained, but
which represented
on the whole a reaction of morality and refinement. The
wits and
beauties of the Salon Bleu may have committed a thousand
follies, but
their chivalrous codes of honor and of manners, their
fastidious tastes,

even their prudish affectations, were open though sometimes rather bizarre tributes to the virtues that lie at the very foundation of a well-ordered society. They had exalted ideas of the dignity of womanhood, of purity, of loyalty, of devotion. The heroines of Mlle. de Scudery, with their endless discourses upon the metaphysics of love, were no doubt tiresome sometimes to the blase courtiers, as well as to the critics; but they had their originals in living women who reversed the common traditions of a Gabrielle and a Marion Delorme, who combined with the intellectual brilliancy and fine courtesy of the Greek Aspasia the moral graces that give so poetic a fascination to the Christian and medieval types. Mme. de la Fayette painted with rare delicacy the old struggle between passion and duty, but character triumphs over passion, and duty is the final victor. In spite of the low standards of the age, the ideal woman of society, as of literature, was noble, tender, modest, pure, and loyal.

But the eighteenth century brings new types to the surface. The precieuses, with their sentimental theories and naive reserves, have had their day. It is no longer the world of Mme. de Rambouillet that confronts us with its chivalrous models, its refined platonism, and its flavor of literature, but rather that of the epicurean Ninon, brilliant, versatile, free, lax, skeptical, full of intrigue and wit, but without moral sense of spiritual aspiration. Literary portraits and ethical maxims have given place to a spicy mixture of scandal

and philosophy,
humanitarian speculations and equivocal bons mots. It is
piquant
and amusing, this light play of intellect, seasoned with
clever and
sparkling wit, but the note of delicacy and sensibility
is quite gone.
Society has divested itself of many crudities and
affectations perhaps,
but it has grown as artificial and self-conscious as its
rouged and
befeathered leaders.

The woman who presided over these centers of fashion and
intelligence
represent to us the genius of social sovereignty. We
fall under the
glamour of the luminous but factitious atmosphere that
surrounded them.
We are dazzled by the subtlety and clearness of their
intellect, the
brilliancy of their wit. Their faults are veiled by the
smoke of the
incense we burn before them, or lost in the dim
perspective. It is
fortunate, perhaps, for many of our illusions, that the
golden age,
which is always receding, is seen at such long range
that only the
softly colored outlines are visible. Men and women are
transfigured in
the rosy light that rests on historic heights as on far-
off mountain
tops. But if we bring them into closer view, and turn on
the pitiless
light of truth, the aureole vanishes, a thousand hidden
defects are
exposed, and our idol stands out hard and bare, too
often divested of
its divinity and its charm.

To do justice to these women, we must take the point of
view of an age
that was corrupt to the core. It is needless to discuss
here the merits

of the stormy, disenchanting eighteenth century, which was the mother of our own, and upon which the world is likely to remain hopelessly divided. But whatever we may think of its final outcome, it can hardly be denied that this period, which in France was so powerful in ideas, so active in thought, so teeming with intelligence, so rich in philosophy, was poor in faith, bankrupt in morals, without religion, without poetry, and without imagination. The divine ideals of virtue and renunciation were drowned in a sea of selfishness and materialism. The austere devotion of Pascal was out of fashion. The spiritual teachings of Bossuet and Fenelon represented the out-worn creeds of an age that was dead. It was Voltaire who gave the tone, and even Voltaire was not radical enough for many of these iconoclasts. "He is a bigot and a deist," exclaimed a feminine disciple of d'Holbach's atheism. The gay, witty, pleasure-loving abbe, who derided piety, defied morality, was the pet of the salon, and figured in the worst scandals, was a fair representative of the fashionable clergy who had no attribute of priesthood but the name, and clearly justified the sneers of the philosophers. Tradition had given place to private judgment and in its first reaction private judgment knew no law but its own caprices. The watchword of intellectual freedom was made to cover universal license, and clever sophists constructed theories to justify the mad carnival of vice and frivolity. "As soon as one does a bad action, one never fails to make a bad maxim," said the clever Marquise de

Crequi. "As soon as a school boy has his love affairs, he wishes no more to say his prayers; and when a woman wrongs her husband, she tries to believe no more in God."

The fact that this brilliant but heartless and epicurean world was tempered with intellect and taste changed its color but not its moral quality. Talent turned to intrigue, and character was the toy of the scheming and flexible brain. The maxims of La Rochefoucauld were the rule of life. Wit counted for everything, the heart for nothing. The only sins that could not be pardoned were stupidity and awkwardness. "Bah! He has only revealed every one's secret," said Mme. du Defand to an acquaintance who censured Helvetius for making selfishness the basis of all human actions. To some one who met this typical woman of her time, in the gay salon of Mme. de Marchais, and condoled with her upon the death of her lifelong friend and lover, Pont de Veyle, she quietly replied, "Alas! He died this evening at six o'clock; otherwise you would not see me here." "My friend fell ill, I attended him; he died, and I dissected him" was the remark of a wit on reading her satirical pen portrait of the Marquise du Chatelet. This cold skepticism, keen analysis, and undisguised heartlessness strike the keynote of the century which was socially so brilliant, intellectually so fruitful, and morally so weak.

The liberty and complaisance of the domestic relations were complete. It

is true there were examples of conjugal devotion, for the gentle human affections never quite disappear in any atmosphere; but the fact that they were considered worthy of note sufficiently indicates the drift of the age. In the world of fashion and of form there was not even a pretense of preserving the sanctity of marriage, if the chronicles of the time are to be credited. It was simply a commercial affair which united names and fortunes, continued the glory of the families, replenished exhausted purses, and gave freedom to women. If love entered into it at all, it was by accident. This superfluous sentiment was ridiculed, or relegated to the bourgeoisie, to whom it was left to preserve the tradition of household virtues. Every one seems to have accepted the philosophy of the irrepressible Ninon, who "returned thanks to God every evening for her esprit, and prayed him every morning to be preserved from follies of the heart." If a young wife was modest or shy, she was the object of unflattering persiflage. If she betrayed her innocent love for her husband, she was not of the charmed circle of wit and good tone which frowned upon so vulgar a weakness, and laughed at inconvenient scruples.

"Indeed," says a typical husband of the period, "I cannot conceive how, in the barbarous ages, one had the courage to wed. The ties of marriage were a chain. Today you see kindness, liberty, peace reign in the bosom of families. If husband and wife love each other, very well; they live together; they are happy. If they cease to love, they

say so honestly,
and return to each other the promise of fidelity. They
cease to be
lovers; they are friends. That is what I call social
manners, gentle
manners." This reign of the senses is aptly illustrated
by the epitaph
which the gay, voluptuous, and spirituelle Marquise de
Boufflers wrote
for herself:

Ci-git dans une paix profonde
Cette Dame de Volupte
Qui, pour plus grande surete,
Fit son paradis de ce monde.

"Courte et bonne," said the favorite daughter of the
Regent, in the same
spirit.

It is against such a background that the women who
figure so prominently
in the salons are outlined. Such was the air they
breathed, the spirit
they imbibed. That it was fatal to the finer graces of
character goes
without saying. Doubtless, in quiet and secluded nooks,
there were
many human wild flowers that had not lost their
primitive freshness and
delicacy, but they did not flourish in the withering
atmosphere of
the great world. The type in vogue savored of the
hothouse. With its
striking beauty of form and tropical richness of color,
it had no
sweetness, no fragrance. Many of these women we can only
consider on the
worldly and intellectual side. Sydney Smith has aptly
characterized them
as "women who violated the common duties of life, and
gave very pleasant
little suppers." But standing on the level of a time in
which their
faults were mildly censured, if at all, their

characteristic gifts shine
out with marvelous splendor. It is from this standpoint
alone that we
can present them, drawing the friendly mantle of silence
over grave
weaknesses and fatal errors.

In this century, in which women have so much wider
scope, when they may
paint, carve, act, sing, write, enter professional life,
or do whatever
talent and inclination dictate, without loss of dignity
or prestige,
unless they do it ill,--and perhaps even this exception
is a trifle
superfluous,--it is difficult to understand fully, or
estimate
correctly, a society in which the best feminine
intellect was centered
upon the art of entertaining and of wielding an indirect
power through
the minds of men. These Frenchwomen had all the vanity
that lies at
the bottom of the Gallic character, but when the
triumphs of youth were
over, the only legitimate path to individual distinction
was that of
social influence. This was attained through personal
charm, supplemented
by more or less cleverness, or through the gift of
creating a society
that cast about them an illusion of talent of which they
were often only
the reflection. To these two classes belong the queens
of the salons.
But the most famous of them only carried to the point of
genius a talent
that was universal.

In its best estate a brilliant social life is
essentially an external
one. Its charm lies largely in the superficial graces,
in the facile and
winning manners, the ready tact, the quick intelligence,
the rare and

perishable gifts of conversation--in the nameless trifles which are elusive as shadows and potent as light. It is the way of putting things that tells, rather than the value of the things themselves. This world of draperies and amenities, of dinners and conversaciones, of epigrams, coquetries, and sparkling trivialities in the Frenchwoman's milieu. It has little in common with the inner world that surges forever behind and beneath it; little sympathy with inconvenient ideals and exalted sentiments. The serious and earnest soul to which divine messages have been whispered in hours of solitude finds its treasures unheeded, its language unspoken here. The cares, the burdens, the griefs that weigh so heavily on the great heart of humanity are banished from this social Eden. The Frenchman has as little love for the somber side of life as the Athenian, who veiled every expression of suffering. "Joy marks the force of the intellect," said the pleasure-loving Ninon. It is this peculiar gift of projecting themselves into a joyous atmosphere, of treating even serious subjects in a piquant and lively fashion, of dwelling upon the pleasant surface of things, that has made the French the artists, above all others, of social life. The Parisienne selects her company, as a skillful leader forms his orchestra, with a fine instinct of harmony; no single instrument dominates, but every member is an artist in his way, adding his touch of melody or color in the fitting place. She aims, perhaps unconsciously, at a poetic ideal which shall express the best in life and thought, divested of

the rude and commonplace, untouched by sorrow or passion, and free from personality.

But the representative salons, which have left a permanent mark upon their time, and a memory that does not seem likely to die, were no longer simply centers of refined and intellectual amusement. The moral and literary reaction of the seventeenth century was one of the great social and political forces of the eighteenth. The salon had become a vast engine of power, an organ of public opinion, like the modern press. Clever and ambitious women had found their instrument and their opportunity. They had long since learned that the homage paid to weakness is illusory; that the power of beauty is short-lived. With none of the devotion which had made the convent the time-honored refuge of tender and exalted souls, finding little solace in the domestic affections which played so small a role in their lives, they turned the whole force of their clear and flexible minds to this new species of sovereignty. Their keenness of vision, their consummate skill in the adaptation of means to ends, their knowledge of the world, their practical intelligence, their instinct of pleasing, all fitted them for the part they assumed. They distinctly illustrated the truth that "our ideal is not out of ourselves, but in ourselves wisely modified." The intellect of these women was rarely the dupe of the emotions. Their clearness was not befogged by sentiment, nor, it may be added, were their characters enriched by it. "The women of the

eighteenth century
loved with their minds and not with their hearts," said
the Abbe
Galiani. The very absence of the qualities so essential
to the highest
womanly character, according to the old poetic types,
added to their
success. To be simple and true is to forget often to
consider effects.
Spontaneity is not apt to be discriminating, and the
emotions are not
safe guides to worldly distinction. It is not the artist
who feels the
most keenly, who sways men the most powerfully; it is
the one who has
most perfectly mastered the art of swaying men. Self-
sacrifice and a
lofty sense of duty find their rewards in the intangible
realm of
the spirit, but they do not find them in a brilliant
society whose
foundations are laid in vanity and sensualism. "The
virtues, though
superior to the sentiments, are not so agreeable," said
Mme. du Deffand;
and she echoed the spirit of an age of which she was one
of the most
striking representatives. To be agreeable was the
cardinal aim in the
lives of these women. To this end they knew how to use
their talents,
and they studied, to the minutest shade, their own
limitations. They
had the gift of the general who marshals his forces with
a swift eye
for combination and availability. To this quality was
added more or less
mental brilliancy, or, what is equally essential, the
faculty of calling
out the brilliancy of others; but their education was
rarely profound
or even accurate. To an abbe who wished to dedicate a
grammar to Mme.
Geoffrin she replied: "To me? Dedicate a grammar to me?
Why, I do not

even know how to spell." Even Mme. du Deffand, whom Sainte Beuve ranks next to Voltaire as the purest classic of the epoch in prose, says of herself, "I do not know a word of grammar; my manner of expressing myself is always the result of chance, independent of all rule and all art."

But it is not to be supposed that women who were the daily and lifelong companions and confidantes of men like Fontenelle, d'Alembert, Montesquieu, Helvetius, and Marmontel were deficient in a knowledge of books, though this was always subservient to a knowledge of life. It was a means, not an end. When the salon was at the height of its power, it was not yet time for Mme. de Stael; and, with rare exceptions, those who wrote were not marked, or their literary talent was so overshadowed by their social gifts as to be unnoted. Their writings were no measure of their abilities. Those who wrote for amusement were careful to disclaim the title of *bel esprit*, and their works usually reached the public through accidental channels. Mme. de Lambert herself had too keen an eye for consideration to pose as an author, but it is with an accent of regret at the popular prejudice that she says of Mme. Dacier, "She knows how to associate learning with the amenities; for at present modesty is out of fashion; there is no more shame for vices, and women blush only for knowledge."

But if they did not write, they presided over the mint in which books were coined. They were familiar with theories and ideas

at their fountain source. Indeed the whole literature of the period pays its tribute to their intelligence and critical taste. "He who will write with precision, energy, and vigor only," said Marmontel, "may live with men alone; but he who wishes for suppleness in his style, for amenity, and for that something which charms and enchants, will, I believe, do well to live with women. When I read that Pericles sacrificed every morning to the Graces, I understand by it that every day Pericles breakfasted with Aspasia." This same author was in the habit of reading his tales in the salon, and noting their effect. He found a happy inspiration in "the most beautiful eyes in the world, swimming in tears;" but he adds, "I well perceived the cold and feeble passages, which they passed over in silence, as well as those where I had mistaken the word, the tone of nature, or the just shade of truth." He refers to the beautiful, witty, but erring and unfortunate Mme. de la Popelinere, to whom he read his tragedy, as the best of all his critics. "Her corrections," he said, "struck me as so many rays of light." "A point of morals will be no better discussed in a society of philosophers than in that of a pretty woman of Paris," said Rousseau. This constant habit of reducing thoughts to a clear and salient form was the best school for aptness and ready expression. To talk wittily and well, or to lead others to talk wittily and well, was the crowning gift of these women. This evanescent art was the life and soul of the salons, the magnet

which attracted the most brilliant of the French men of letters, who were glad to discuss safely and at their ease many subjects which the public censorship made it impossible to write about. They found companions and advisers in women, consulted their tastes, sought their criticism, courted their patronage, and established a sort of intellectual comradeship that exists to the same extent in no country outside of France. Its model may be found in the limited circle that gathered about Aspasia in the old Athenian days.

It is perhaps this habit of intellectual companionship that, more than any other single thing, accounts for the practical cleverness of the Frenchwomen and the conspicuous part they have played in the political as well as social life of France. Nowhere else are women linked to the same degree with the success of men. There are few distinguished Frenchmen with whose fame some more or less gifted woman is not closely allied. Montaigne and Mlle. de Gournay, La Rochefoucauld and Mme. de La Fayette, d'Alembert and Mlle. de Lespinasse, Chateaubriand and Mme. Recamier, Joubert and Mme. de Beaumont--these are only a few of the well-known and unsullied friendships that suggest themselves out of a list that might be extended indefinitely. The social instincts of the French, and the fact that men and women met on a common plane of intellectual life, made these friendships natural; that they excited little comment and less criticism made them possible.

The result was that from the quiet and thoughtful

Marquise de Lambert,
who was admitted to have made half of the Academicians,
to the clever
but less scrupulous Mme. de Pompadour, who had to be
reckoned with in
every political change in Europe, women were everywhere
the power behind
the throne. No movement was carried through without
them. "They form a
kind of republic," said Montesquieu, "whose members,
always active, aid
and serve one another. It is a new state within a state;
and whoever
observes the action of those in power, if he does not
know the women who
govern them, is like a man who sees the action of a
machine but does not
know its secret springs." Mme. de Tenein advised
Marmontel, before all
things, to cultivate the society of women, if he wished
to succeed. It
is said that both Diderot and Thomas, two of the most
brilliant thinkers
of their time, failed of the fame they merited, through
their neglect
to court the favor of women. Bolingbroke, then an exile
in Paris, with
a few others, formed a club of men for the discussion of
literary and
political questions. While it lasted it was never
mentioned by women.
It was quietly ignored. Cardinal Fleury considered it
dangerous to the
State, and suppressed it. At the same time, in the salon
of Mme. de
Tenein, the leaders of French thought were safely
maturing the theories
which Montesquieu set forth in his "Esprit des Lois,"
the first open
attack on absolute monarchy, the forerunner of Rousseau,
and the germ of
the Revolution. -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- --
- - - -

But the salons were far from being centers of "plain

living and high
thinking." "Supper is one of the four ends of man," said
Mme. du
Deffand; and it must be admitted that the great doctrine
of human
equality was rather luxuriously cradled. The supreme
science of the
Frenchwomen was a knowledge of men. Understanding their
tastes, their
ambitions, their interests, their vanities, and their
weaknesses, they
played upon this complicated human instrument with the
skill of an
artist who knows how to touch the lightest note, to give
the finest
shade of expression, to bring out the fullest harmony.
In their efforts
to raise social life to the most perfect and symmetrical
proportions,
the pleasures of sense and the delicate illusions of
color were not
forgotten. They were as noted for their good cheer, for
their attention
to the elegances that strike the eye, the accessories
that charm the
taste, as for their intelligence, their tact, and their
conversation.

But one must look for the power and the fascination of
the French salons
in their essential spirit and the characteristics of the
Gallic race,
rather than in any definite and tangible form. The word
simply suggests
habitual and informal gatherings of men and women of
intelligence and
good breeding in the drawing-room, for conversation and
amusement. The
hostess who opened her house for these assemblies
selected her guests
with discrimination, and those who had once gained an
entree were always
welcome. In studying the character of the noted salons,
one is struck
with a certain unity that could result only from natural

growth about
a nucleus of people bound together by many ties of
congeniality and
friendship. Society, in its best sense, does not signify
a multitude,
nor can a salon be created on commercial principles.
This spirit of
commercialism, so fatal to modern social life, was here
conspicuously
absent. It was not at all a question of debit and
credit, of formal
invitations to be given and returned. Personal values
were regarded.
The distinctions of wealth were ignored and talent,
combined with the
requisite tact, was, to a certain point, the equivalent
of rank. If
rivalries existed, they were based upon the quality of
the guests rather
than upon material display. But the modes of
entertainment were as
varied as the tastes and abilities of the women who
presided. Many of
the well-known salons were open daily. Sometimes there
were suppers,
which came very much into vogue after the petits soupers
of the regent.
The Duchesse de Choiseul, during the ministry of her
husband, gave a
supper every evening excepting on Friday and Sunday. At
a quarter before
ten the steward glanced through the crowded rooms, and
prepared the
table for all who were present. The Monday suppers at
the Temple were
thronged. On other days a more intimate circle gathered
round the
tables, and the ladies served tea after the English
fashion. A few women
of rank and fortune imitated these princely
hospitalities, but it was
the smaller coteries which presented the most charming
and distinctive
side of French society. It was not the luxurious salon
of the Duchesse

du Maine, with its whirl of festivities and passion for esprit, nor that of the Temple, with its brilliant and courtly, but more or less intellectual, atmosphere; nor that of the clever and critical Marechale de Luxembourg, so elegant, so witty, so noted in its day--which left the most permanent traces and the widest fame. It was those who presided over by women of lesser rank and more catholic sympathies, of whom Voltaire aptly said that "the decline of their beauty revealed the dawn of their intellect;" women who had the talent, tact, and address to gather about them a circle of distinguished men who have crowned them with a luminous ray from their own immortality. The names of Mme. de Lambert, Mme. de Tencin, Mme. Geoffrin, Mme. du Deffand, Mme. Necker, Mme. de Stael, and others of lesser note, call up visions of a society which the world is not likely to see repeated.

Not the least among the attractions of this society was its charming informality. A favorite custom in the literary and philosophical salons was to give dinners, at an early hour, two or three times a week. In the evening a larger company assembled without ceremony. A popular man of letters, so inclined, might dine Monday and Wednesday with Mme. Geoffrin, Tuesday with Mme. Helvetius, Friday with Mme. Necker, Sunday and Thursday with Mme. d'Holbach, and have ample time to drop into other salons afterward, passing an hour or so, perhaps, before going to the theater, in the brilliant company that surrounded Mlle. de Lespinasse, and, very likely, supping elsewhere later. At many of

these gatherings
he would be certain to find readings, recitations,
comedies, music,
games, or some other form of extemporized amusement. The
popular mania
for esprit, for literary lions, for intellectual
diversions ran through
the social world, as the craze for clubs and culture,
poets and parlor
readings, musicales and amateur theatricals, runs
through the society of
today. It had numberless shades and gradations, with the
usual train of
pretentious follies which in every age furnish ample
material for
the pen of the satirist, but it was a spontaneous
expression of the
marvelously quickened taste for things of the intellect.
The woman who
improvised a witty verse, invented a proverb, narrated a
story, sang
a popular air, or acted a part in a comedy entered with
the same easy
grace into the discussion of the last political problem,
or listened
with the subtlest flattery to the new poem, essay, or
tale of the
aspiring young author, whose fame and fortune perhaps
hung upon her
smile. In the musical and artistic salon of Mme. de la
Popelinier
the succession of fetes, concerts, and receptions seems
to have been
continuous. On Sunday there was a mass in the morning,
afterward a grand
dinner, at five o'clock a light repast, at nine a
supper, and later a
musical. One is inclined to wonder if there was ever
any retirement,
any domesticity in this life so full of movement and
variety.

But it was really the freedom, wit, and brilliancy of
the conversation
that constituted the chief attraction of the salons. Men

were in the habit of making the daily round of certain drawing rooms, just as they drop into clubs in our time, sure of more or less pleasant discussion on whatever subject was uppermost at the moment, whether it was literature, philosophy, art, politics, music, the latest play, or the latest word of their friends. The talk was simple, natural, without heat, without aggressive egotism, animated with wit and repartee, glancing upon the surface of many things, and treating all topics, grave or gay, with the lightness of touch, the quick responsiveness that make the charm of social intercourse.

The unwritten laws that governed this brilliant world were drawn from the old ideas of chivalry, upon which the etiquette of the early salons was founded. The fine morality and gentle virtues which were the bases of these laws had lost their force in the eighteenth century, but the manners which grew out of them had passed into a tradition. If morals were in reality not pure, nor principles severe, there was at least the vanity of posing as models of good breeding. Honor was a religion; politeness and courtesy were the current, though by no means always genuine, coin of unselfishness and amiability; the amenities stood in the place of an ethical code. Egotism, ill temper, disloyalty, ingratitude, and scandal were sins against taste, and spoiled the general harmony. Evil passions might exist, but it was agreeable to hide them, and enmities slept under a gracious smile. noblesse OBLIGE was the

motto of these censors of manners; and as it is perhaps
a Gallic trait
to attach greater importance to reputation than to
character, this
sentiment was far more potent than conscience. Vice in
many veiled forms
might be tolerated, but that which called itself good
society barred
its doors against those who violated the canons of good
taste, which
recognize at least the outward semblance of many amiable
virtues.
Sincerity certainly was not one of these virtues; but no
one was
deceived, as it was perfectly well understood that
courteous forms
meant little more than the dress which may or may not
conceal a physical
defect, but is fit and becoming. It was not best to
inquire too closely
into character and motives, so long as appearances were
fair and
decorous. How far the individual may be affected by
putting on the garb
of qualities and feelings that do not exist may be a
question for the
moralist; but this conventional untruth has its
advantages, not only in
reducing to a minimum the friction of social machinery,
and subjecting
the impulses to the control of the will, but in the
subtle influence
of an ideal that is good and true, however far one may
in reality fall
short of it.

Imagine a society composed of a leisure class with more
or less
intellectual tastes; men eminent in science and letters;
men less
eminent, whose success depended largely upon their
social gifts, and
clever women supremely versed in the art of pleasing,
who were the
intelligent complements of these men; add a universal

talent for conversation, a genius for the amenities of social life, habits of daily intercourse, and manners formed upon an ideal of generosity, amiability, loyalty, and urbanity; consider, also, the fact that the journals and the magazines, which are so conspicuous a feature of modern life, were practically unknown; that the salons were centers in which the affairs of the world were discussed, its passing events noted--and the power of these salons may be to some extent comprehended.

The reason, too, why it is idle to dream of reproducing them today on American soil will be readily seen. The forms may be repeated, but the vitalizing spirit is not there. We have no leisure class that finds its occupation in this pleasant daily converse. Our feverish civilization has not time for it. We sit in our libraries and scan the news of the world, instead of gathering it in the drawing rooms of our friends. Perhaps we read and think more, but we talk less, and conversation is a relaxation rather than an art. The ability to think aloud, easily and gracefully, is not eminently an Anglo-Saxon gift, though there are many individual exceptions to this limitation. Our social life is largely a form, a whirl, a commercial relation, a display, a duty, the result of external accretion, not of internal growth. It is not in any sense a unity, nor an expression of our best intellectual life; this seeks other channels. Men are immersed in business and politics, and prefer the easy, less exacting atmosphere of the club. The woman who aspires to

hold a salon is confronted at the outset by this formidable rival. She is a queen without a kingdom, presiding over a fluctuating circle without homogeneity, and composed largely of women--a fact in itself fatal to the true esprit de societe. It is true we have our literary coteries, but they are apt to savor too much of the library; we take them too seriously, and bring into them too strong a flavor of personality. We find in them, as a rule, little trace of the spontaneity, the variety, the wit, the originality, the urbanity, the polish, that distinguished the French literary salons of the last century. Even in their own native atmosphere, the salons exist no longer as recognized institutions. This perfected flower of a past civilization has faded and fallen, as have all others. The salon in its widest sense, and in some modified form, may always constitute a feature of French life, but the type has changed, and its old glory has forever departed. In a foreign air, even in its best days, it could only have been an exotic, flourishing feebly, and lacking both color and fragrance. As a copy of past models it is still less likely to be a living force. Society, like government, takes its spirit and its vitality from its own soil.

CHAPTER IX. AN ANTECHAMBER OF THE ACADEMIE FRANCAISE

The Marquise de Lambert--Her "Bureau d'Esprit"--
Fontenelle--Advice

to her Son--Wise Thoughts on the Education of Women--Her
love of
Consideration--Her Generosity--Influence of Women upon
the Academy._

While the gay suppers of the regent were giving a new
but by no means
desirable tone to the great world of Paris, and chasing
away the last
vestiges of the stately decorum that marked the closing
days of Louis
XIV, and Mme. de Maintenon, there was one quiet drawing
room which still
preserved the old traditions. The Marquise de Lambert
forms a connecting
link between the salons of the seventeenth and
eighteenth centuries,
leaning to the side of the latter, intellectually, but
retaining much of
the finer morality that distinguished the best life of
the former. Her
attitude towards the disorders of the regency was
similar to that which
Mme. de Rambouillet had held towards the profligate
court of Henry IV,
though her salon never attained the vogue of its model.
It lacked a
certain charm of youth and freshness perhaps, but it was
one of the few
in which gambling was not permitted, and in which
conversation had not
lost its serious and critical flavor.

If Mme. de Lambert were living today she would doubtless
figure openly
as an author. Her early tastes pointed clearly in that
direction. She
was inclined to withdraw from the amusements of her age,
and to pass her
time in reading, or in noting down the thoughts that
pleased her. The
natural bent of her mind was towards moral reflections.
In this quality
she resembled Mme. de Sable, but she was a woman of
greater breadth and

originality, though less fine and exclusive. She wrote much in later life on educational themes, for the benefit of her children and for her own diversion; but she yielded to the prejudices of her age against the woman author, and her works were given to the world only through the medium of friends to whom she had read or lent them. "Women," she said, "should have towards the sciences a modesty almost as sensitive as towards vices." But in spite of her studied observance of the conventional limits which tradition still assigned to her sex, her writings suggest much more care than is usually bestowed upon the amusement of an idle hour. If, like many other women of her time, she wrote only for her friends, she evidently doubted their discretion in the matter of secrecy.

As the child who inherited the rather formidable name of Anne Theresa de Marguenat de Coucelles was born during the last days of the Hotel de Rambouillet, she doubtless cherished many illusions regarding this famous salon. Its influence was more or less apparent when the time came to open one of her own. Her father was a man of feeble intellect, who died early; but her mother, a woman more noted for beauty than for decorum, was afterward married to Bachaumont, a well-known bel esprit, who appreciated the gifts of the young girl, and brought her within a circle of wits who did far more towards forming her impressible mind than her light and frivolous mother had done. She was still very young when she became the wife of the Marquis de Lambert, an

officer of
distinction, to whose interests she devoted her talents
and her ample
fortune. The exquisitely decorated Hotel Lambert, on the
Ile Saint
Louis, still retains much of its old splendor, though
the finest
masterpieces of Lebrun and Lesueur which ornamented its
walls have found
their way to the Louvre. "It is a home made for a
sovereign who would
be a philosopher," wrote Voltaire to Frederick the
Great. In these
magnificent salons, Mme. de Lambert, surrounded by every
luxury that
wealth and taste could furnish, entertained a
distinguished company. She
carried her lavish hospitalities also to Luxembourg,
where she adorned
the position of her husband, who was governor of that
province for
a short period before his death in 1686. After this
event, she was
absorbed for some years in settling his affairs, which
were left in
great disorder, and in protecting the fortunes of her
two children.
This involved her in long and vexatious lawsuits which
she seems to have
conducted with admirable ability. "There are so few
great fortunes that
are innocent," she writes to her son, "that I pardon
your ancestors
for not leaving you one. I have done what I could to put
in order our
affairs, in which there is left to women only the glory
of economy." It
was not until the closing years of her life, from 1710
to 1733, that her
social influence was at its height. She was past sixty,
at an age when
the powers of most women are on the wane, when her real
career began.
She fitted up luxurious apartments in the Palais
Mazarin, employing

artists like Watteau upon the decorations, and expending money as lavishly as if she had been in the full springtide of life, instead of the golden autumn. Then she gathered about her a choice and lettered society, which seemed to be a world apart, a last revival of the genius of the seventeenth century, and quite out of the main drift of the period. "She was born with much talent," writes one of her friends; "she cultivated it by assiduous reading; but the most beautiful flower in her crown was a noble and luminous simplicity, of which, at sixty years, she took it into her head to divest herself. She lent herself to the public, associated with the Academicians, and established at her house a bureau d'esprit." Twice a week she gave dinners, which were as noted for the cuisine as for the company, and included, among others, the best of the forty Immortals. Here new works were read or discussed, authors talked of their plans, and candidates were proposed for vacant chairs in the Academy. "The learned and the lettered formed the dominant element," says a critic of the time. "They dined at noon, and the rest of the day was passed in conversations, in readings, in literary and scientific discussions. No card tables; it was in ready wit that each one paid his contribution." Ennui never came to shed its torpors over these reunions, of which the Academy furnished the most distinguished guests, in company with grands seigneurs eager to show themselves as worthy by intelligence as by rank to play a role in these gatherings of the intellectual elite. Fontenelle was the presiding genius of this salon, and

added to its
critical and literary spirit a tinge of philosophy. This
gallant savant,
who was adored in society as "a man of rare and
exquisite conversation,"
has left many traces of himself here. No one was so
sparkling in
epigram; no one talked so beautifully of love, of which
he knew nothing;
and no one talked so delightfully of science, of which
he knew a great
deal. But he thought that knowledge needed a seasoning
of sentiment to
make it palatable to women. In his "Pluralite des
Mondes," a singular
melange of science and sentiment, which he had written
some years before
and dedicated to a daughter of the gay and learned Mme.
de La Sabliere,
he talks about the stars, to la belle marquise, like a
lover; but his
delicate flatteries are the seasoning of serious truths.
It was the
first attempt to offer science sugar-coated, and
suggests the character
of this coterie, which prided itself upon a discreet
mingling of
elevated thought with decorous gaiety. The world moves.
Imagine a female
undergraduate of Harvard or Columbia taking her
astronomy diluted with
sentiment!

President Henault, the life-long friend of Mme. du
Deffand, whose light
criticism of a pure-minded woman might be regarded as
rather flattering
than otherwise, says: "It was apparent that Mme. de
Lambert touched upon
the time of the Hotel de Rambouillet; she was a little
affected, and had
not the force to overstep the limits of the prude and
the precieuse. Her
salon was the rendezvous of celebrated men.... In the
evening the scenery

changed as well as the actors. A more elegant world assembled at the suppers. The Marquise took pleasure in receiving people who were agreeable to each other. Her tone, however, did not vary, and she preached la belle galanterie to some who went a little beyond it. I was of the two parties; I dogmatized in the morning and sang in the evening." The two eminent Greek Scholars, La Motte and Mme. Dacier, held spirited discussions on the merits of Homer, which came near ending in permanent ill-feeling, but the amiable hostess gave a dinner for them, "they drank to the health of the poet, and all was forgotten." The war between the partizans of the old and the new was as lively then as it is today. "La Motte and Fontenelle prefer the moderns," said the caustic Mme. du Deffand; "but the ancients are dead, and the moderns are themselves." The names of Sainte-Aulaire, de Sacy, Mairan, President Henault, and others equally scholarly and witty, suffice to indicate the quality of the conversation, which treated lightly and gracefully of the most serious things. The Duchesse du Maine and her clever companion, Mlle. de Launay were often among the guests; also the beautiful and brilliant Mme. de Caylus, a niece of Mme. de Maintenon, whom some poetical critic has styled "the last flower of the seventeenth century." Sainte-Aulaire, tired of the perpetual excitement at Sceaux, characterized this salon by a witty quatrain:

Je suis las de l'esprit, il me met en courroux,
Il me renverse la cervelle;
Lambert, je viens chercher un asile chez vous,

Entre La Motte et Fontenelle.

The wits of the day launched many a shaft of satire against it, as they had against the Hotel de Rambouillet a century earlier; but it was an intellectual center of great influence, and was regarded as the sanctuary of old manners as well as the asylum of new liberties. Its decorous character gave it the epithet of "very respectable;" but this eminently respectable company, which represented the purest taste of the time, often included Adrienne Lecouvreur, who was much more remarkable for talent than for respectability. We have a direct glimpse of it through the pen of d'Artenson:

"I have just met with a very grievous loss in the death of the Marquise de Lambert" (he writes in 1733). "For fifteen years I have been one of her special friends, and she has done me the favor of inviting me to her house, where it is an honor to be received. I dined there regularly on Wednesday, which was one of her days.... She was rich, and made a good and amiable use of her wealth, for the benefit of her friends, and above all for the unfortunate. A pupil of Bachaumont, having frequented only the society of people of the world, and of the highest intelligence, she knew no other passion than a constant and platonic tenderness."

The quality of character and intellect which gave Mme. de Lambert so marked an influence, we find in her own thoughts on a great variety of subjects. She gives us the impression of a woman altogether sensible

and judicious, but not without a certain artificial tone. Her well-considered philosophy of life had an evident groundwork of ambition and worldly wisdom, which appears always in her advice to her children. She counsels her son to aim high and believe himself capable of great things. "Too much modesty," she says, "is a languor of the soul, which prevents it from taking flight and carrying itself rapidly towards glory"--a suggestion that would be rather superfluous in this generation. Again, she advises him to seek the society of his superiors, in order to accustom himself to respect and politeness. "With equals one grows negligent; the mind falls asleep." But she does not regard superiority as an external thing, and says very wisely, "It is merit which should separate you from people, not dignity or pride." By "people" she indicates all those who think meanly and commonly. "The court is full of them," she adds. Her standards of honor are high, and her sentiments of humanity quite in the vein of the coming age. She urges her daughter to treat her servants with kindness. "One of the ancients says they should be regarded as unfortunate friends. Think that humanity and Christianity equalize all."

Her criticisms on the education of women are of especial interest.

Behind her conventional tastes and her love of consideration she has a clear perception of facts and an appreciation of unfashionable truths. She recognizes the superiority of her sex in matters of taste and in the enjoyment of "serious pleasures which make only the MIND

LAUGH and
do not trouble the heart" She reproaches men with
"spoiling the
dispositions nature has given to women, neglecting their
education,
filling their minds with nothing solid, and destining
them solely to
please, and to please only by their graces or their
vices." But she had
not always the courage of her convictions, and it was
doubtless quite as
much her dislike of giving voice to unpopular opinions
as her aversion
to the publicity of authorship, that led her to buy the
entire edition
of her "Reflexions sur les Femmes," which was published
without her
consent.

One of her marked traits was moderation. "The taste is
spoiled by
amusements," she writes. "One becomes so accustomed to
ardent pleasures
that one cannot fall back upon simple ones. We should
fear great
commotions of the soul, which prepare ennui and
disgust." This wise
thought suggests the influence of Fontenelle, who
impressed himself
strongly upon the salons of the first half of the
century. His calm
philosophy is distinctly reflected in the character of
Mme. de Lambert,
also in that of Mme. Geoffrin, with whom he was on very
intimate terms.
It is said that this poet, critic, bel esprit, and
courtly favorite,
whom Rousseau calls "the daintiest pedant in the world,"
was never
swayed by any emotion whatever. He never laughed, only
smiled; never
wept; never praised warmly, though he did say pretty
things to women;
never hurried; was never angry; never suffered, and was
never moved by

suffering. "He had the gout," says one of his critics, "but no pain; only a foot wrapped in cotton. He put it on a footstool; that was all."

It is perhaps fair to present, as the other side of the medallion, the portrait drawn by the friendly hand of Adrienne LeCouvreur. "The charms of his intellect often veiled its essential qualities. Unique of his kind, he combines all that wins regard and respect. Integrity, rectitude, equity compose his character; an imagination lively and brilliant, turns fine and delicate, expressions new and always happy ornament it. A heart pure, actions clear, conduct uniform, and everywhere principles.... Exact in friendship, scrupulous in love; nowhere failing in the attributes of a gentleman. Suited to intercourse the most delicate, though the delight of savants; modest in his conversation, simple in his actions, his superiority is evident, but he never makes one feel it." He lived a century, apparently because it was too much trouble to die. When the weight of years made it too much trouble to live, he simply stopped. "I do not suffer, my friends, but I feel a certain difficulty in existing," were his last words. With this model of serene tranquillity, who analyzed the emotions as he would a problem in mathematics, and reduced life to a debit and credit account, it is easy to understand the worldly philosophy of the women who came under his influence.

But while Mme. de Lambert had a calm and equable temperament, and loved to surround herself with an atmosphere of repose, she

was not without a fine quality of sentiment. "I exhort you much more to cultivate your heart," she writes to her son, "than to perfect your mind; the true greatness of the man is in the heart." "She was not only eager to serve her friends without waiting for their prayers or the humiliating exposure of their needs," said Fontenelle, "but a good action to be done in favor of indifferent people always tempted her warmly.... The ill success of some acts of generosity did not correct the habit; she was always equally ready to do a kindness." She has written very delicately and beautifully of friendships between men and women; and she had her own intimacies that verged upon tenderness, but were free from any shadow of reproach. Long after her death, d'Alembert, in his academic eulogy upon de Sacy, refers touchingly to the devoted friendship that linked this elegant savant with Mme. de Lambert. "It is believed," says President Henault, "that she was married to the Marquis de Sainte-Aulaire. He was a man of esprit, who only bethought himself, after more than sixty years, of his talent for poetry; and Mme. de Lambert, whose house was filled with Academicians, gained him entrance into the Academy, not without strong opposition on the part of Boileau and some others." Whether the report of this alliance was true or not, the families were closely united, as the daughter of Mme. de Lambert was married to a son of Sainte-Aulaire; it is certain that the enduring affection of this ancient friend lighted the closing years of her life.

Though tinged with the new philosophy, Mme. de Lambert regarded religion as a part of a respectable, well-ordered life. "Devotion is a becoming sentiment in women, and befitting in both sexes," she writes. But she clearly looked upon it as an external form, rather than an internal flame. When about to die, at the age of eighty-six, she declined the services of a friendly confessor, and sent for an abbe who had a great reputation for esprit. Perhaps she thought he would give her a more brilliant introduction into the next world; this points to one of her weaknesses, which was a love of consideration that carried her sometimes to the verge of affectation. It savors a little of the hypercritical spirit that is very well illustrated by an anecdote of the witty Duchesse de Luxembourg. One morning she took up a prayer book that was lying upon the table and began to criticize severely the bad taste of the prayers. A friend ventured to remark that if they were said reverently and piously, God surely would pay no attention to their good or bad form. "Indeed," exclaimed the fastidious Marechale, whose religion was evidently a becoming phase of estheticism, "do not believe that."

The thoughts of Mme. de Lambert, so elevated in tone, so fine in moral quality, so rich in worldly wisdom, and often so felicitous in expression, tempt one to multiply quotations, especially as they show us an intimate side of her life, of which otherwise we know very

little. Her personality is veiled. Her human experiences, her loves, her antipathies, her mistakes, and her errors are a sealed book to us, excepting as they may be dimly revealed in the complexion of her mind. Of her influence we need no better evidence than the fact that her salon was called the antechamber to the Academie Francaise.

The precise effect of this influence of women over the most powerful critical body of the century, or of any century, perhaps, we can hardly measure. In the fact that the Academy became for a time philosophical rather than critical, and dealt with theories rather than with pure literature, we trace the finger of the more radical thinkers who made themselves so strongly felt in the salons. Sainte=Beuve tells us that Fontenelle, with other friends of Mme. de Lambert, first gave it this tendency; but his mission was apparently an unconscious one, and strikingly illustrates the accidental character of the sources of the intellectual currents which sometimes change the face of the world. "If I had a handful of truths, I should take good care not to open it," said this sybarite, who would do nothing that was likely to cause him trouble. But the truths escaped in spite of him, and these first words of the new philosophy were perhaps the more dangerous because veiled and insidious. "You have written the 'Histoire des Oracles,'" said a philosopher to him, after he had been appointed the royal censor, "and you refuse me your approbation." "Monsieur," replied Fontenelle, "if I had been censor when I wrote the 'Histoire des Oracles,'

I should have carefully avoided giving it my approbation." But if the philosophers finally determined the drift of this learned body, it was undoubtedly the tact and diplomacy of women which constituted the most potent factor in the elections which placed them there. The mantle of authority, so gracefully worn by Mme. de Lambert, fell upon her successors, Mme. Geoffrin and Mlle. de Lespinasse, losing none of its prestige. As a rule, the best men in France were sooner or later enrolled among the Academicians. If a few missed the honor through failure to enlist the favor of women, as has been said, and a few better courtiers of less merit attained it, the modern press has not proved a more judicious tribunal.

CHAPTER X. THE DUCHESS DU MAINE

Her Capricious Character--Her Esprit--Mlle. de Launay--Clever Portrait of Her Mistress--Perpetual Fetes at Sceaux--Voltaire and the "Divine Emilie"--Dilettante Character of this Salon.

The life of the eighteenth century, with its restlessness, its love of amusements, its ferment of activities, and its essential frivolity, finds a more fitting representative in the Duchesse du Maine, granddaughter of the Grand Conde, and wife of the favorite son of Louis XIV, and Mme. de Montespan. The transition from the serene and thoughtful atmosphere which surrounded Mme. de

Lambert, to the tumultuous whirl of existence at Sceaux, was like passing from the soft light and tranquillity of a summer evening to the glare and confusion of perpetual fireworks. Of all the unique figures of a masquerading age this small and ambitious princess was perhaps the most striking, the most pervading. It was by no means her aim to take her place in the world as queen of a salon. Louise-Benedicte de Bourbon belonged to the royal race, and this was by far the most vivid fact in her life. She was but a few steps from the throne, and political intrigues played a conspicuous part in her singular career. But while she waited for the supreme power to which she aspired, and later, when the feverish dream of her life was ended, she must be amused, and her diversions must have an intellectual and imaginative flavor. Wits, artists, literary men, and savants were alike welcome at Sceaux, if they amused her and entertained her guests. "One lived there by esprit, and esprit is my God," said Mme. du Deffand, who was among the brightest ornaments of this circle.

Born in 1676, the Duchesse du Maine lived through the first half of the next century, of which her little court was one of the most notable features. Scarcely above the stature of a child of ten years, slightly deformed, with a fair face lighted by fine eyes; classically though superficially educated; gifted in conversation, witty, brilliant, adoring talent, but cherishing all the prejudices of the old noblesse--she represented in a superlative degree the

passion for esprit
which lent such exceptional brilliancy to the social
life of the time.

In character the duchess was capricious and passionate.
"If she were as
good as she is wicked," said the sharp-tongued Palatine,
"there would be
nothing to say against her. She is tranquil during the
day and passes it
playing at cards, but at its close the extravagances and
fits of passion
begin; she torments her husband, her children, her
servants, to such
a point that they do not know which way to turn." Her
will brooked no
opposition. When forced to leave the Tuileries after the
collapse of her
little bubble of political power, she deliberately broke
every article
of value in her apartments, consigning mirrors, vases,
statues,
porcelains alike to a common ruin, that no one else
might enjoy them
after her. This fiery scion of a powerful family, who
had inherited its
pride, its ambition, its uncontrollable passions, and
its colossal will,
had little patience with the serene temperament and
dilettante tastes of
her amiable husband, and it is said she did not scruple
to make him
feel the force of her small hands. "You will waken some
morning to find
yourself in the Academie Francaise, and the Duc
d'Orleans regent," she
said to him one day when he showed her a song he had
translated. Her
device was a bee, with this motto: "I am small, but I
make deep wounds."
Doubtless its fitness was fully realized by those who
belonged to the
Ordre de la Mouche-a-miel which she had instituted, and
whose members
were obliged to swear, by Mount Hymettus, fidelity and

obedience
to their perpetual dictator. But what pains and chagrins
were not
compensated by the bit of lemon-colored ribbon and its
small meed of
distinction!

The little princess worked valiantly for political
power, but she worked
in vain. The conspiracy against the regent, which seemed
to threaten
another Fronde, came to nothing, and this ardent
instrigante, who had
the disposition to "set the four corners of the kingdom
on fire" to
attain her ends, found her party dispersed and herself
in prison. But
this was only an episode, and though it gave a death
blow to her dreams
of power, it did not quench her irrepressible ardor. If
she could not
rule in one way, she would in another. As soon as she
regained her
freedom, her little court was again her kingdom, and no
sovereign ever
reigned more imperiously. "I am fond of company," she
said, "for I
listen to no one, and every one listens to me." It was
an incessant
thirst for power, a perpetual need of the sweet incense
of flattery,
that was at the bottom of this "passion for a
multitude." "She believed
in herself," writes Mlle. de Launay, afterward Baronne
de Staal, "as
she believed in God or Descartes, without examination
and without
discussion."

This lady's maid, who loved mathematics and anatomy, was
familiar with
Malebranche and Descartes, and left some literary
reputation as a writer
of gossipy memoirs, was a prominent figure in the lively
court at Sceaux

for more than forty years, and has given us some vivid pictures of her capricious mistress. A young girl of clear intellect and good education, but without rank, friends, or fortune, she was forced to accept the humiliating position of femme de chambre with the Duchesse du Maine, who had been attracted by her talents. She was brought into notice through a letter to Fontenelle, which was thought witty enough to be copied and circulated. If she had taken this cool dissector of human motives as a model, she certainly did credit to his teaching. Her curiously analytical mind is aptly illustrated by her novel method of measuring her lover's passion. He was in the habit of accompanying her home from the house of a friend. When he began to cross the square, instead of going round it, she concluded that his love had diminished in the exact proportion of two sides of a square to the diagonal. Promoted to the position of a companion, she devoted herself to the interests of her restless mistress, read to her, talked with her, wrote plays for her, and was the animating spirit of the famous Nuits Blanches. While the duchess was in exile she shared her disgrace, refused to betray her, and was sent to the Bastille for her loyalty. She resigned herself to her imprisonment with admirable philosophy, amused herself in the study of Latin, in watching the gambols of a cat and kitten, and in carrying on a safe and sentimental flirtation with the fascinating Duc de Richelieu, who occupied an adjoining cell and passed the hours in singing with her popular airs from Iphigenie. "Sentimental" is hardly a

fitting word to
apply to the coquetries of this remarkably clear and
calculating young
woman. She returned with her patroness to Sceaux, found
many admirers,
but married finally with an eye to her best worldly
interests, and,
it appears, in the main happily--at least, not
unhappily. The shade of
difference implies much. She had a keen, penetrating
intellect which
nothing escaped, and as it had the peculiar clearness in
which people
and events are reflected as in a mirror, her
observations are of great
value. "Aside from the prose of Voltaire, I know of none
more agreeable
than that of Mme. de Staal de Launay," said Grimm. Her
portrait of her
mistress serves to paint herself as well.

"Mme. la Duchesse du Maine, at the age of sixty years,
has yet learned
nothing from experience; she is a child of much talent;
she has
its defects and its charms. Curious and credulous, she
wishes to be
instructed in all the different branches of knowledge;
but she is
contented with their surface. The decisions of those who
educated her
have become for her principles and rules upon which her
mind has never
formed the least doubt; she submits once for all. Her
provision for
ideas is made; she rejects the best demonstrated truths
and resists the
best reasonings, if they are contrary to the first
impressions she has
received. All examination is impossible to her
lightness, and doubt is
a state which her weakness cannot support. Her catechism
and the
philosophy of Descartes are two systems which she
understands equally

well.... Her mirror cannot make her doubt the charms of her face; the testimony of her eyes is more questionable than the judgment of those who have decided that she is beautiful and well-formed. Her vanity is of a singular kind, but seems the less offensive because it is not reflective, though in reality it is the more ridiculous, Intercourse with her is a slavery; her tyranny is open; she does not deign to color it with the appearance of friendship. She says frankly that she has the misfortune of not being able to do without people for whom she does not care. She proves it effectually. One sees her learn with indifference the death of those who would call forth torrents of tears if they were a quarter of an hour too late for a card party or a promenade."

But this vain and self-willed woman read Virgil and Terence in the original, was devoted to Greek tragedies, dipped into philosophy, traversed the surface of many sciences, turned a madrigal with facility, and talked brilliantly. "The language is perfect only when you speak it or when one speaks of you," wrote Mme. de Lambert, in a tone of discreet flattery. "No one has ever spoken with more correctness, clearness, and rapidity, neither in a manner more noble or more natural," said Mlle. de Launay.

Through this feminine La Bruyere, as Sainte-Beuve has styled her, we are introduced to the life at Sceaux. It was the habit of the guests to assemble at eight, listen to music or plays, improvise verses for

popular airs, relate racy anecdotes, or amuse themselves with proverbs.

"Write verses for me," said the insatiable duchess when ill; "I feel that verses only can give me relief." The quality does not seem to have been essential, provided they were sufficiently flattering.

Sainte-Aulaire wrote madrigals for her. Malezieu, the learned and versatile preceptor of the Duc du Maine, read Sophocles and Euripides.

Mme. du Maine herself acted the roles of Athalie and Iphigenie with the famous Baron. They played at science, contemplated the heavens through a telescope and the earth through a microscope. In their eager search for novelty they improvised fetes that rivaled in magnificence the Arabian Nights; they posed as gods and goddesses, or, affecting simplicity, assumed rustic and pastoral characters, even to their small economies and romantic platitudes. Mythology, the chivalry of the Middle Ages, costumes, illuminations, scenic effects, the triumphs of the artists, the wit of the bel esprit--all that ingenuity could devise or money could buy was brought into service. It was the life that Watteau painted, with its quaint and grotesque fancies, its sylvan divinities, and its sighing lovers wandering in endless masquerade, or whispering tender nothings on banks of soft verdure, amid the rustle of leaves, the sparkle of fountains, the glitter of lights, and the perfume of innumerable flowers. It was a perpetual carnival, inspired by imagination, animated by genius, and combining everything that could charm the taste, distract the mind, and intoxicate the

senses. The
presiding genius of this fairy scene was the
irrepressible duchess, who
reigned as a goddess and demanded the homage due to one.
Well might the
weary courtiers cry out against les galeres du bel
esprit.

But this fantastic princess who carried on a sentimental
correspondence
with the blind La Motte, and posed as the tender
shepherdess of the
adoring but octogenarian Sainte-Aulaire, had no really
democratic
notions. There was no question in her mind of the divine
right of kings
or of princesses. She welcomed Voltaire because he
flattered her vanity
and amused her guests, but she was far enough from the
theories which
were slowly fanning the sparks of the Revolution. Her
rather imperious
patronage of literary and scientific men set a fashion
which all her
world tried to follow. It added doubtless to the
prestige of those who
were insidiously preparing the destruction of the very
foundations on
which this luxurious and pleasure-loving society rested.
But, after all,
the bond between this restless, frivolous, heartless
coterie and the
genuine men of letters was very slight. There was no
seriousness, no
earnestness, no sincerity, no solid foundation.

The literary men, however, who figured most
conspicuously in the
intimate circle of the Duchesse du Maine were not of the
first order.
Malezieu was learned, a member of two Academies, faintly
eulogized by
Fontenelle, warmly so by Voltaire, and not at all by
Mlle. de Launay;
but twenty-five years devoted to humoring the caprices

and flattering
the tastes of a vain and exacting patroness were not
likely to develop
his highest possibilities. There is a point where the
stimulating
atmosphere of the salon begins to enervate. His clever
assistant,
the Abbe Genest, poet and Academician, was a sort of
Voiture, witty,
versatile, and available. He tried to put Descartes into
verse, which
suggests the quality of his poetry. Sainte-Aulaire, who,
like his friend
Fontenelle, lived a century, frequented this society
more or less for
forty years, but his poems are sufficiently light, if
one may judge from
a few samples, and his genius doubtless caught more
reflections in
the salon than in a larger world. He owed his admission
to the Academy
partly to a tender quatrain which he improvised in
praise of his lively
patroness. It is true we have occasional glimpses of
Voltaire. Once
he sought an asylum here for two months, after one of
his numerous
indiscretions, writing tales during the day, which he
read to the
duchess at night. Again he came with his "divine
Emilie," the learned
Marquise du Chatelet, who upset the household with her
eccentric ways.
"Our ghosts do not show themselves by day," writes Mlle.
de Launay;
"they appeared yesterday at ten o'clock in the evening.
I do not think
we shall see them earlier today; one is writing high
facts, the other,
comments upon Newton. They wish neither to play nor to
promenade; they
are very useless in a society where their learned
writings are of no
account." But Voltaire was a courtier, and, in spite of
his frequent

revolts against patronage, was not at all averse to the
incense of the
salons and the favors of the great. It was another round
in the ladder
that led him towards glory.

The cleverest women in France were found at Sceaux, but
the dominant
spirit was the princess herself. It was amusement she
wanted, and even
men of talent were valued far less for what they were
intrinsically than
for what they could contribute to her vanity or to her
diversion. "She
is a predestined soul," wrote Voltaire. "She will love
comedy to the
last moment, and when she is ill I counsel you to
administer some
beautiful poem in the place of extreme unction. One dies
as one has
lived."

Mme. du Maine represented the conservative side of
French society in
spite of the fact that her abounding mental vitality
often broke through
the stiff boundaries of old traditions. It was not
because she did not
still respect them, but she had the defiant attitude of
a princess whose
will is an unwritten law superior to all traditions. The
tone of her
salon was in the main dilettante, as is apt to be the
case with
any circle that plumes itself most upon something quite
apart from
intellectual distinction. It reflected the spirit of an
old aristocracy,
with its pride, its exclusiveness, its worship of forms,
but faintly
tinged with the new thought that was rapidly but
unconsciously
encroaching upon time-honored institutions. Beyond the
clever pastimes
of a brilliant coterie, it had no marked literary

influence. This ferment of intellectual life was one of the signs of the times, but it led to no more definite and tangible results than the turning of a madrigal or the sparkle of an epigram.

CHAPTER XI. MADAME DE TENCIN AND MADAME DU CHATELET

An Intriguing Chanoinesse--Her Singular Fascination--Her Salon--Its Philosophical Character--Mlle. Aisse--Romances of Mme. de Tencin--D'Alembert--La Belle Emilie--Voltaire--The Two Women Compared

It was not in the restless searchings of an old society for new sensations, new diversions, nor in the fleeting expressions of individual taste or caprice, which were often little more than the play of small vanities, that the most potent forces in the political as well as in the intellectual life of France were found. It was in the coteries which attracted the best representatives of modern thought, men and women who took the world on a more serious side, and mingled more or less of earnestness even in their amusements. While the Duchesse du Maine was playing her little comedy, which began and ended in herself, another woman, of far different type, and without rank or riches, was scheming for her friends, and nursing the germs of the philosophic party in one of the most notable salons of the first half of the century. Mme. de Tencin is not an interesting figure to contemplate from a moral

standpoint. "She was born with the most fascinating qualities and the most abominable defects that God ever gave to one of his creatures," said Mme. du Deffand, who was far from being able to pose, herself, as a model of virtue or decorum. But sin has its degrees, and the woman who errs within the limits of conventionality considers herself entitled to sit in judgment upon her sister who wanders outside of the fold. Measured even by the complaisant standards of her own time, there can be but one verdict upon the character of Mme. de Tencin, though it is to be hoped that the scandal-loving chroniclers have painted her more darkly than she deserved. But whatever her faults may have been, her talent and her influence were unquestioned. She posed in turn as a saint, an intrigante, and a femme d'esprit, with marked success in every one of these roles. But it was not a comedy she was playing for the amusement of the hour. Beneath the velvet softness of her manner there was a definite aim, an inflexible purpose. With the tact and facility of a Frenchwoman, she had a strong, active intellect, boundless ambition, indomitable energy, and the subtlety of an Italian.

An incident of her early life, related by Mme. du Deffand, furnishes a key to her complex character, and reveals one secret of her influence. Born of a poor and proud family in Grenoble, in 1681, Claudine Alexandrine Guerin de Tencin was destined from childhood for the cloister. Her strong aversion to the life of a nun was unavailing, and she was sent to a convent at Montfleury. This prison

does not seem to have been a very austere one, and the discipline was far from rigid. The young novice was so devout that the archbishop prophesied a new light for the church, and she easily persuaded him of the necessity of occupying the minds of the religieuses by suitable diversions. Though not yet sixteen, this pretty, attractive, vivacious girl was fertile in resources, and won her way so far into the good graces of her superiors as to be permitted to organize reunions, and to have little comedies played which called together the provincial society. She transformed the convent, but her secret disaffection was unchanged. She took the final vows under the compulsion of her inflexible father, then continued her role of devote to admirable purpose. By the zeal of her piety, the severity of her penance, and the ardor of her prayers, she gained the full sympathy of her ascetic young confessor, to whom she confided her feeling of unfitness for a religious life, and her earnest desire to be freed from the vows which sat so uneasily upon her sensitive conscience. He exhorted her to steadfastness, but finally she wrote him a letter in which she confessed her hopeless struggle against a consuming passion, and urged the necessity of immediate release. The conclusion was obvious. The Abbe Fleuret was horrified by the conviction that this pretty young nun was in love with himself, and used his influence to secure her transference to a secular order at Neuville, where as chanoinesse, she had many privileges and few restrictions. Here she

became at once a favorite, as before, charming by her modest devotion, and amusing by her brilliant wit. Artfully, and by degrees, she convinced those in authority of the need of a representative in Paris. This office she was chosen to fill. Playing her pious part to the last, protesting with tears her pain at leaving a life she loved, and her unfitness for so great an honor she set out upon her easy mission. There are many tales of a scandalous life behind all this sanctity and humility, but her new position gave her consideration, influence, and a good revenue. "Young, beautiful, clever, with an adorable talent," this "nun unhooded" fascinated the regent, and was his favorite for a few days. But her ambition got the better of her prudence. She ventured upon political ground, and he saw her no more. With his minister, the infamous Dubois, she was more successful, and he served her purpose admirably well. Through her notorious relations with him she enriched her brother and secured him a cardinal's hat. The intrigues of this unscrupulous trio form an important episode in the history of the period. When Dubois died, within a few months of the regent, she wept, as she said, "that fools might believe she regretted him."

Her clear, incisive intellect and conversational charm would have assured the success of any woman at a time when these things counted for so much. "At thirty-six," wrote Mme. du Deffand, "she was beautiful and fresh as a woman of twenty; her eyes sparkled, her lips had a smile

at the same time sweet and perfidious; she wished to be good, and gave herself great trouble to seem so, without succeeding." Indolent and languid with flashes of witty vivacity, insinuating and facile, unconscious of herself, interested in everyone with whom she talked, she combined the tact, the finesse, the subtle penetration of a woman with the grasp, the comprehensiveness, and the knowledge of political machinery which are traditionally accorded to a man. "If she wanted to poison you, she would use the mildest poison," said the Abbe Trublet.

"I cannot express the illusion which her air of nonchalance and easy grace left with me," says Marmontel. "Mme. de Tencin, the woman in the kingdom who moved the most political springs, both in the city and at court, was for me only an indolente. Ah, what finesse, what suppleness, what activity were concealed beneath this naive air, this appearance of calm and leisure!" But he confesses that she aided him greatly with her counsel, and that he owed to her much of his knowledge of the world.

"Unhappy those who depend upon the pen," she said to him; "nothing is more chimerical. The man who makes shoes is sure of his wages; the man who makes a book or a tragedy is never sure of anything." She advises him to make friends of women rather than of men. "By means of women, one attains all that one wishes from men, of whom some are too pleasure-loving, others too much preoccupied with their personal interests not to neglect yours; whereas women think of

you, if only from
idleness. Speak this evening to one of them of some
affair that concerns
you; tomorrow at her wheel, at her tapestry, you will
find her dreaming
of it, and searching in her head for some means of
serving you."

Prominent among her friends were Bolingbroke and
Fontenelle. "It is not
a heart which you have there," she said to the latter,
laying her hand
on the spot usually occupied by that organ, "but a
second brain." She
had enlisted what stood in the place of it, however, and
he interested
himself so far as to procure her final release from her
vows, through
Benedict XIV, who, as Cardinal Lambertini, had
frequented her salon,
and who sent her his portrait as a souvenir, after his
election to the
papacy.

Through her intimacy with the Duc de Richelieu, Mme. de
Tencin made
herself felt even in the secret councils of Louis XV.
Her practical mind
comprehended more clearly than many of the statesmen the
forces at work
and the weakness that coped with them. "Unless God
visibly interferes,"
she said, "it is physically impossible that the state
should not fall in
pieces." It was her influence that inspired Mme. de
Chateauroux with
the idea of sending her royal lover to revive the
spirits of the army
in Flanders. "It is not, between ourselves, that he is
in a state to
command a company of grenadiers," she wrote to her
brother, "but his
presence will avail much. The troops will do their duty
better, and the
generals will not dare to fail them so openly... A king,

whatever he may
be, is for the soldiers and people what the ark of the
covenant was for
the Hebrews; his presence alone promises success."

Her devotion to her friends was the single redeeming
trait in her
character, and she hesitated at nothing to advance the
interests of her
brother, over whose house she gracefully presided. But
she failed in her
ultimate ambition to elevate him to the ministry, and
her intrigues were
so much feared that Cardinal Fleury sent her away from
Paris for a short
time. Her disappointments, which it is not the purpose
to trace here,
left her one of the disaffected party, and on her return
her drawing
room became a rallying point for the radical thinkers of
France.

Such was the woman who courted, flattered, petted, and
patronized the
literary and scientific men of Paris, called them her
menagerie, put
them into a sort of uniform, gave them two suppers a
week, and sent
them two ells of velvet for small clothes at New Year's.
Of her salon,
Marmontel gives us an interesting glimpse. He had been
invited to read
one of his tragedies, and it was his first introduction.

"I saw assembled there Montesquieu, Fontenelle, Mairan,
Marivaux, the
young Helvetius, Astruc, and others, all men of science
or letters,
and, in the midst of them, a woman of brilliant
intellect and profound
judgment, who, with her kind and simple exterior, had
rather the
appearance of the housekeeper than the mistress. This
was Mme. de
Tencin.... I soon perceived that the guests came there

prepared to play
their parts, and that their wish to shine did not leave
the conversation
always free to follow its easy and natural course. Every
one tried
to seize quickly and on the wing the moment to bring in
his word,
his story, his anecdote, his maxim, or to add his dash
of light and
sparkling wit; and, in order to do this opportunely, it
was often rather
far-fetched. In Marivaux, the impatience to display his
finesse and
sagacity was quite apparent. Montesquieu, with more
calmness, waited for
the ball to come to him, but he waited. Mairan watched
his opportunity.
Astruc did not deign to wait. Fontenelle alone let it
come to him
without seeking it, and he used so discreetly the
attention given him,
that his witty sayings and his clever stories never
occupied more than a
moment. Alert and reserved, Helvetius listened and
gathered material for
the future."

Mme. de Tencin loved literature and philosophy for their
own sake, and
received men of letters at their intrinsic value. She
encouraged,
too, the freedom of thought and expression at that time
so rare and
so dangerous. It was her influence that gave its first
impulse to the
success of Montesquieu's esprit DES LOIS, of which she
personally bought
and distributed many copies. If she talked well, she
knew also how to
listen, to attract by her sympathy, to aid by her
generosity, to inspire
by her intelligence, to charm by her versatility.

Another figure flits in and out of this salon, whose
fine qualities

of soul shine so brightly in this morally stifling atmosphere that one forgets her errors in a mastering impulse of love and pity. There is no more pathetic history in this arid and heartless age than that of Mlle. Aisse, the beautiful Circassian, with the lustrous, dark, Oriental eyes, who was brought from Constantinople in infancy by the French envoy, and left as a precious heritage to Mme. de Ferriol, the intriguing sister of Mme. de Tencin, and her worthy counterpart, if not in talent, in the faults that darkened their common womanhood. This delicate young girl, surrounded by worldly and profligate friends, and drawn in spite of herself into the errors of her time, redeemed her character by her romantic heroism, her unselfish devotion, and her final revolt against what seemed to be an inexorable fate. The struggle between her self-forgetful love for the knightly Chevalier d'Aydie and her sensitive conscience, her refusal to cloud his future by a portionless marriage, and her firmness in severing an unholy tie, knowing that the sacrifice would cost her life, as it did, form an episode as rare as it is tragical. But her exquisite personality, her rich gifts of mind and soul, her fine intelligence, her passionate love, almost consecrated by her pious but fatal renunciation, call up one of the loveliest visions of the century--a vision that lingers in the memory like a medieval poem.

Mme. de Tencin amused her later years by writing sentimental tales, which were found among her papers after her death. These were

classed with the romances of Mme. de La Fayette. Speaking of the latter, La Harpe said, "Only one other woman succeeded, a century later, in painting with equal power the struggles of love and virtue." It is one of the curious inconsistencies of her character, that her creations contained an element which her life seems wholly to have lacked. Behind all her faults of conduct there was clearly an ideal of purity and goodness. Her stories are marked by a vividness and an ardor of passion rarely found in the insipid and colorless romances of the preceding age. Her pictures of love and intrigue and crime are touched with the religious enthusiasm of the cloister, the poetry of devotion, the heroism of self-sacrifice. Perhaps the dark and mysterious facts of her own history shaped themselves in her imagination. Did the tragedy of La Fresnaye, the despairing lover who blew out his brains at her feet, leaving the shadow of a crime hanging over her, with haunting memories of the Bastille, recall the innocence of her own early convent days? Did she remember some long-buried love, and the child left to perish upon the steps of St. Jean le Rond, but grown up to be her secret pride in the person of the great mathematician and philosopher d'Alembert? What was the subtle link between this worldly woman and the eternal passion, the tender self-sacrifice of Adelaide, the loyal heroine who breathes out her solitary and devoted soul on the ashes of La Trappe, unknown to her faithful and monastic lover, until the last sigh? The fate of Adelaide

has become a legend. It has furnished a theme for the poet and the artist, an inspiration for the divine strains of Beethoven, another leaf in the annals of pure and heroic love. But the woman who conceived it toyed with the human heart as with a beautiful flower, to be tossed aside when its first fragrance was gone. She apparently knew neither the virtue, nor the honor, nor the purity, nor the truth of which she had so exquisite a perception in the realm of the imagination. Or were some of the episodes which darken the story of her life simply the myths of a gossiping age, born of the incidents of an idle tale, to live forever on the pages of history?

But it was not as a literary woman that Mme. de Tencin held her position and won her fame. Her gifts were eminently those of her age and race, and it may be of interest to compare her with a woman of larger talent of a purely intellectual order, who belonged more or less to the world of the salons, without aspiring to leadership, and who, though much younger, died in the same year. Mme. du Chatelet was essentially a woman of letters. She loved the exact sciences, expounded Leibnitz, translated Newton, gave valuable aid to Voltaire in introducing English thought into France, and was one of the first women among the nobility to accept the principles of philosophic deism. "I confess that she is tyrannical," said Voltaire; "one must talk about metaphysics, when the temptation is to talk of love. Ovid was formerly my master; it is now the turn of Locke." She has been clearly but by no means pleasantly

painted for us
in the familiar letters of Mme. de Graffigny, in the
rather malicious
sketches of the Marquise de Crequi, and in the still
more strongly
outlined portrait of Mme. du Deffand, as a veritable bas
bleu, learned,
pedantic, eccentric, and without grace or beauty.
"Imagine a woman tall
and hard, with florid complexion, face sharp, nose
pointed--VOILA
LA BELLE EMILIE," writes the latter; "a face with which
she was so
contented that she spared nothing to set it off; curls,
topknots,
precious stones, all are in profusion... She was born
with much esprit;
the desire of appearing to have more made her prefer the
study of the
abstract sciences to agreeable branches of knowledge;
she thought
by this singularity to attain a greater reputation and a
decided
superiority over all other women. Madame worked with so
much care to
seem what she was not, that no one knew exactly what she
was; even
her defects were not natural." "She talks like an
angel"--"she sings
divinely"--"our sex ought to erect altars to her," wrote
Mme. de
Graffigny during a visit at her chateau. A few weeks
later her tone
changed. They had quarreled. Of such stuff is history
made. But she had
already given a charming picture of the life at Cirey.

Mme. du Chatelet plunged into abstractions during the
day. In the
evening she was no more the savante, but gave herself up
to the
pleasures of society with the ardor of a nature that was
extreme in
everything. Voltaire read his poetry and his dramas,
told stories that

made them weep and then laugh at their tears, improvised verses, and amused them with marionettes, or the magic lantern. La belle Emilie criticized the poems, sang, and played prominent parts in the comedies and tragedies of the philosopher poet, which were first given in her little private theater. Among the guests were the eminent scientist, Maupertuis, her life-long friend and teacher; the Italian savant, Algarotti, President Henault, Helvetius, the poet, Saint-Lambert, and many others of equal distinction. "Of what do we not talk!" writes Mme. de Graffigny. "Poetry, science, art, everything, in a tone of graceful badinage. I should like to be able to send you these charming conversations, these enchanting conversations, but it is not in me."

Mme. du Chatelet owned for several years the celebrated Hotel Lambert, and a choice company of savants assembled there as in the days when Mme. de Lambert presided in those stately apartments. But this learned salon had only a limited vogue. The thinking was high, but the dinners were too plain. The real life of Mme. du Chatelet was an intimate one. "I confess that in love and friendship lies all my happiness," said this astronomer, metaphysician, and mathematician, who wrote against revelation and went to mass with her free-thinking lover. Her learning and eccentricities made her the target for many shafts of ridicule, but she counted for much with Voltaire, and her chief title to fame lies in his long and devoted friendship. He found the "sublime and respectable

Emilie" the incarnation of all the virtues, though a trifle ill-tempered. The contrast between his kindly portrait and those of her feminine friends is striking and rather suggestive.

"She joined to the taste for glory a simplicity which does not always accompany it, but which is often the fruit of serious studies. No woman was ever so learned, and no one deserves less to be called a femme savante. Born with a singular eloquence, this eloquence manifested itself only when she found subjects worthy of it... The fitting word, precision, justness, and force were the characteristics of her style. She would rather write like Pascal and Nicole than like Mme. de Sevigne; but this severe strength and this vigorous temper of her mind did not render her inaccessible to the beauties of sentiment. The charms of poetry and eloquence penetrated her, and no one was ever more sensitive to harmony... She gave herself to the great world as to study. Everything that occupies society was in her province except scandal. She was never known to repeat an idle story. She had neither time nor disposition to give attention to such things, and when told that some one had done her an injustice, she replied that she did not wish to hear about it."

"She led him a life a little hard," said Mme. de Graffigny, after her quarrel; but he seems to have found it agreeable, and broke his heart--for a short time--when she died. "I have lost half of my being," he wrote--"a soul for which mine was made." To Marmontel

he says: "Come
and share my sorrow. I have lost my illustrious friend.
I am in despair.
I am inconsolable." One cannot believe that so clear-
sighted a man, even
though a poet, could live for twenty years under the
spell of a pure
illusion. What heart revelations, what pictures of
contemporary life,
were lost in the eight large volumes of his letters
which were destroyed
at her death!

While Mme. de Tencin studied men and affairs, Mme. du
Chatelet studied
books. One was mistress of the arts of diplomacy, gentle
but intriguing,
ambitious, always courting society and shunning
solitude. The other
was violent and imperious, hated finesse, and preferred
burying herself
among the rare treasures of her library at Cirey.

The influence of Mme. de Tencin was felt, not only in
the social and
intellectual, but in the political life of the century.
The traditions
of her salon lingered in those which followed, modified
by the changes
that time and personal taste always bring. Mme. du
Chatelet was more
learned, but she lacked the tact and charm which give
wide personal
ascendancy. Her influence was largely individual, and
her books have
been mostly forgotten. These women were alike defiant of
morality, but
taken all in all, the character of Mme. Chatelet has
more redeeming
points, though little respect can be accorded to either.
With the wily
intellect of a Talleyrand, Mme. de Tencin represents the
social genius,
the intelligence, the esprit, and the worst vices of the
century on

which she has left such conspicuous traces.

"She knew my tastes and always offered me those dishes I preferred,"

said Fontenelle when she died in 1740. "It is an irreparable loss."

Perhaps his hundred years should excuse his not going to her funeral for fear of catching cold.

CHAPTER XII. MADAME GEOFFRIN AND THE PHILOSOPHERS

Cradles of the New Philosophy--Noted Salons of this Period--

Character of Mme. Geoffrin--Her Practical Education--Anecdotes of her

Husband--Composition of her Salon--Its Insidious Influence--Her Journey to Warsaw--Her Death_

During the latter half of the eighteenth century the center of social life was no longer the court, but the salons. They had multiplied indefinitely, and, representing every shade of taste and thought, had reached the climax of their power as schools of public opinion, as well as their highest perfection in the arts and amenities of a brilliant and complex society. There was a slight reaction from the reckless vices and follies of the regency. If morals were not much better, manners were a trifle more decorous. Though the great world did not take the tone of stately elegance and rigid propriety which it had assumed under the rule of Mme. de Maintenon, it was superficially polished, and a note of thoughtfulness was added. Affairs in France had taken too serious an

aspect to be ignored, and the theories of the philosophers were among the staple topics of conversation; indeed, it was the great vogue of the philosophers that gave many of the most noted social centers their prestige and their fame. It is not the salons of the high nobility that suggest themselves as the typical ones of this age. It is those which were animated by the habitual presence of the radical leaders of French thought. Economic questions and the rights of man were discussed as earnestly in these brilliant coteries as matters of faith and sentiment, of etiquette and morals, had been a hundred years before. Such subjects were forced upon them by the inexorable logic of events; and fashion, which must needs adapt itself in some measure to the world over which it rules, took them up. If the drawing rooms of the seventeenth century were the cradles of refined manners and a new literature, those of the eighteenth were literally the cradles of a new philosophy.

The practical growth and spread of French philosophy was too closely interwoven with the history of the salons not to call for a word here. Its innovations were faintly prefigured in the coterie of Mme. de Lambert, where it colored almost imperceptibly the literary and critical discussions. But its foundations were more firmly laid in the drawing room of Mme. de Tencin, where the brilliant wit and radical theories of Montesquieu, as well as the pronounced materialism of Helvetius, found a congenial atmosphere. Though the mingled romance and satire of the

"Persian Letters," with their covert attack upon the state and society, raised a storm of antagonism, they called out a burst of admiration as well. The original and aggressive thought of men like Voltaire, Rousseau, d'Alembert, and Diderot, with its diversity of shading, but with the cardinal doctrine of freedom and equality pervading it all, had found a rapidly growing audience. It no longer needed careful nursing, in the second half of the century. It had invaded the salons of the haute noblesse, and was discussed even in the anterooms of the court. Mme. de Pompadour herself stole away from her tiresome lover-king to the freethinking coterie that met in her physician's apartments in the Entresol at Versailles, and included the greatest iconoclasts of the age. If she had any misgivings as to the outcome of these discussions, they were fearlessly cast aside with "Apres Nous le Deluge." "In the depth of her heart she was with us," said Voltaire when she died.

There were clairvoyant spirits who traced the new theories to their logical results. Mme. du Deffand speaks with prophetic vision of the reasoners and beaux esprits "who direct the age and lead it to its ruin." There were conservative women, too, who used their powerful influence against them. It was in the salon of the delicate but ardent young Princesse de Robecq that Palissot was inspired to write the satirical comedy of "The Philosophers," in which Rousseau was represented as entering on all fours, browsing a lettuce, and the

Encyclopedists were so mercilessly ridiculed. This spirited and heroic daughter-in-law of the Duchesse de Luxembourg, the powerful patroness of Rousseau, was hopelessly ill at the time, and, in a caustic reply to the clever satire, the abbe Morellet did not spare the beautiful invalid who desired for her final consolation only to see its first performance and be able to say, "Now, Lord, thou lettest thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen vengeance." The cruel attack was thought to have hastened her death, and the witty abbe was sent to the Bastille; but he came out in two months, went away for a time, and returned a greater hero than ever. There is a picture, full of pathetic significance, which represents the dying princess on her pillow, crowned with a halo of sanctity, as she devotes her last hours to the defense of the faith she loves. One is reminded of the sweet and earnest souls of Port Royal; but her vigorous protest, which furnished only a momentary target for the wit of the philosophers, was lost in the oncoming wave of skepticism.

The vogue of these men received its final stamp in the admiring patronage of the greatest sovereigns in Europe. Voltaire had his well-known day of power at the court of Frederick the Great. Grimm and Diderot, too, were honored guests of that most liberal of despots, and discussed their novel theories in familiar fashion with Catherine II, at St. Petersburg. The reply of this astute and clear-sighted empress to the eloquent plea of Diderot may be commended for its wisdom to the

dreamers and theorists of today.

"I have heard, with the greatest pleasure, all that your brilliant intellect has inspired you to say; but with all your grand principles, which I comprehend very well, one makes fine books and bad business. You forget in all your plans of reform the difference of our two positions. You work only on paper, which permits everything; it is quite smooth and pliant, and opposes no obstacles to your imagination nor to your pen; while I, poor empress, I work upon the human cuticle, which is quite sensitive and irritable."

It is needless to say that the men so honored by sovereigns were petted in the salons, in spite of their disfavor with the Government. They dined, talked, posed as lions or as martyrs, and calmly bided their time. The persecution of the Encyclopedists availed little more than satire had done, in stemming the slowly rising tide of public opinion. Utopian theories took form in the ultra circles, were insidiously disseminated in the moderate ones, and were lightly discussed in the fashionable ones. Men who talked, and women who added enthusiasm, were alike unconscious of the dynamic force of the material with which they were playing.

Of the salons which at this period had a European reputation, the most noted were those of Mme. du Deffand, Mlle. de Lespinasse, and Mme. Geoffrin. The first was the resort of the more intellectual of the noblesse, as well as the more famous of the men of

letters. The two worlds mingled here; the tone was spiced with wit and animated with thought, but it was essentially aristocratic. The second was the rallying point of the Encyclopedists and much frequented by political reformers, but the rare gifts of its hostess attracted many from the great world. The last was moderate in tone, though philosophical and thoroughly cosmopolitan. Sainte-Beuve pronounced it "the most complete, the best organized, and best conducted of its time; the best established since the foundation of the salons; that is, since the Hotel de Rambouillet."

"Do you know why La Geoffrin comes here? It is to see what she can gather from my inventory," remarked Mme. de Tencin on her death bed. She understood thoroughly her world, and knew that her friend wished to capture the celebrities who were in the habit of meeting in her salon. But she does not seem to have borne her any ill will for her rather premature schemes, as she gave her a characteristic piece of advice: "Never refuse any advance of friendship," she said; "for, if nine out of ten bring you nothing, one alone may repay you. Everything is of service in a menage if one knows how to use his tools." Mme. Geoffrin was an apt pupil in the arts of diplomacy, and the key to her remarkable social success may be found in her ready assimilation of the worldly wisdom of her sage counselor. But to this she added a far kinder heart and a more estimable character.

Of all the women who presided over famous salons, Mme. Geoffrin had perhaps the least claim to intellectual preeminence. The secret of her power must have lain in some intangible quality that has failed to be perpetuated in any of her sayings or doings. A few commonplace and ill-spelled letters, a few wise or witty words, are all the direct record she has left of herself. Without rank, beauty, youth, education, or remarkable mental gifts of a sort that leave permanent traces, she was the best representative of the women of her time who held their place in the world solely through their skill in organizing and conducting a salon. She was in no sense a luminary; and conscious that she could not shine by her own light, she was bent upon shining by that of others. But, in a social era so brilliant, even this implied talent of a high order. A letter to the Empress of Russia, in reply to a question concerning her early education, throws a ray of light upon her youth and her peculiar training.

"I lost my father and mother," she writes, "in the cradle. I was brought up by an aged grandmother, who had much intelligence and a well-balanced head. She had very little education; but her mind was so clear, so ready, so active, that it never failed her; it served always in the place of knowledge. She spoke so agreeably of the things she did not know that no one wished her to understand them better; and when her ignorance was too visible, she got out of it by pleasantries which baffled the pedants who tried to humiliate her. She was

so contented
with her lot that she looked upon knowledge as a very
useless thing for
a woman. She said: 'I have done without it so well that
I have never
felt the need of it. If my granddaughter is stupid,
learning will make
her conceited and insupportable; if she has talent and
sensibility, she
will do as I have done--supply by address and with
sentiment what she
does not know; when she becomes more reasonable, she
will learn that for
which she has the most aptitude, and she will learn it
very quickly.'
She taught me in my childhood simply to read, but she
made me read much;
she taught me to think by making me reason; she taught
me to know men
by making me say what I thought of them, and telling me
also the opinion
she had formed. She required me to render her an account
of all my
movements and all my feelings, correcting them with so
much sweetness
and grace that I never concealed from her anything that
I thought or
felt; my internal life was as visible as my external. My
education was
continual."

The daughter of a valet de chambre of the Duchess of
Burgundy, who gave
her a handsome dowry, Marie Therese Rodet became, at
fourteen, the wife
of a lieutenant-colonel of the National Guard and a rich
manufacturer of
glass. Her husband did not count for much among the
distinguished guests
who in later years frequented her salon, and his part in
her life seems
to have consisted mainly in furnishing the money so
essential to her
success, and in looking carefully after the interests of
the menage. It

is related that some one gave him a history to read, and when he called for the successive volumes the same one was always returned to him. Not observing this, he found the work interesting, but "thought the author repeated a little." He read across the page a book printed in two columns, remarking that "it seemed to be very good, but a trifle abstract." One day a visitor inquired for the white-haired old gentleman who was in the habit of sitting at the head of the table. "That was my husband," replied Mme. Geoffrin; "he is dead."

But if her marriage was not an ideal one, it does not appear that it was unhappy. Perhaps her bourgeois birth and associations saved her youth from the domestic complications which were so far the rule in the great world as to have, in a measure, its sanction. At all events her life was apparently free from the shadows that rested upon many of her contemporaries.

"Her character was a singular one," writes Marmontel, who lived for ten years in her house, "and difficult to understand or paint, because it was all in half-tints and shades; very decided nevertheless, but without the striking traits by which one's nature distinguishes and defines itself. She was kind, but had little sensibility; charitable, without any of the charms of benevolence; eager to aid the unhappy, but without seeing them, for fear of being moved; a sure, faithful, even officious friend, but timid and anxious in serving others, lest she should compromise her credit or her repose. She was simple in

her taste, her dress, and her furniture, but choice in her simplicity, having the refinements and delicacies of luxury, but nothing of its ostentation nor its vanity; modest in her air, carriage, and manners, but with a touch of pride, and even a little vainglory. Nothing flattered her more than her intercourse with the great. At their houses she rarely saw them,--indeed she was not at her ease there,--but she knew how to attract them to her own by a coquetry subtly flattering; and in the easy, natural, half-respectful and half-familiar air with which she received them, I thought I saw remarkable address."

In a woman of less tact and penetration, this curious vein of hidden vanity would have led to pretension. But Mme. Geoffrin was preeminently gifted with that fine social sense which is apt to be only the fruit of generations of culture. With her it was innate genius. She was mistress of the amiable art of suppressing herself, and her vanity assumed the form of a gracious modesty. "I remain humble, but with dignity," she writes to a friend; "that is, in depreciating myself I do not suffer others to depreciate me." She had the instinct of the artist who knows how to offset the lack of brilliant gifts by the perfection of details, the modesty that disarms criticism, and a rare facility in the art of pleasing.

There was an air of refinement and simple elegance in her personality that commanded respect. Tall and dignified, with her silvery hair

concealed by her coif, she combined a noble presence with great kindness of manner. She usually wore somber colors and fine laces, for which she had great fondness. Her youth was long past when she came before the world, and that sense of fitness which always distinguished her led her to accept her age seriously and to put on its hues. The "dead-leaf mantle" of Mme. de Maintenon was worn less severely perhaps, but it was worn without affectation. Diderot gives us a pleasant glimpse of her at Grandval, where they were dining with Baron d'Holbach. "Mme. Geoffrin was admirable," he wrote to Mlle. Volland. "I remark always the noble and quiet taste with which this woman dresses. She wore today a simple stuff of austere color, with large sleeves, the smoothest and finest linen, and the most elegant simplicity throughout."

In her equanimity and her love of repose she was a worthy disciple of Fontenelle. She carefully avoided all violent passions and all controversies. To her lawyer, who was conducting a suit that worried her, she said, "Wind up my case. Do they want my money? I have some, and what can I do with money better than to buy tranquillity with it?" This aversion to annoyance often reached the proportions of a very amiable selfishness. "She has the habit of detesting those who are unhappy," said the witty Abbe Galiani, "for she does not wish to be so, even by the sight of the unhappiness of others. She has an impressionable heart; she is old; she is well; she wishes to preserve her health and her

tranquillity. As soon as she learns that I am happy she will love me to folly."

But her generosity was exceptional. "Donner et pardonner" was her device. Many anecdotes are related of her charitable temper. She had ordered two marble vases of Bouchardon. One was broken before reaching her. Learning that the man who broke it would lose his place if it were known, and that he had a family of four children, she immediately sent word to the atelier that the sculptor was not to be told of the loss, adding a gift of twelve francs to console the culprit for his fright. She often surprised her impecunious friends with the present of some bit of furniture she thought they needed, or an annuity delicately bestowed. "I have assigned to you fifteen thousand francs," she said one day to the Abbe Morellet; "do not speak of it and do not thank me." "Economy is the source of independence and liberty" was one of her mottoes, and she denied herself the luxuries of life that she might have more to spend in charities. But she never permitted any one to compromise her, and often withheld her approbation where she was free with her purse. To do all the good possible and to respect all the convenances were her cardinal principles. Marmontel was sent to the Bastille under circumstances that were rather creditable than otherwise; but it was a false note, and she was never quite the same to him afterwards. She wept at her own injustice, schemed for his election to the Academy, and scolded him for his lack of diplomacy; but the little cloud was there.

When the Sorbonne
censured his Belisarius her friendship could no longer
bear the strain,
and, though still received at her dinners, he ceased to
live in her
house.

Her dominant passion seems to have been love of
consideration, if a calm
and serene, but steadily persistent, purpose can be
called a passion. No
trained diplomatist ever understood better the world
with which he had
to deal, or managed more adroitly to avoid small
antagonisms. It was
her maxim not to create jealousy by praising people, nor
irritation by
defending them. If she wished to say a kind word, she
dwelt upon good
qualities that were not contested. She prided herself
upon ruling her
life by reason. Sainte-Beuve calls her the Fontenelle of
women, but it
was Fontenelle tempered with a heart.

This "foster-mother of philosophers" evidently wished to
make sure of
her own safety, however matters might turn out in the
next world. She
had a devotional vein, went to mass privately, had a
seat at the Church
of the Capucins, and an apartment for retreat in a
convent. During her
last illness the Marquise de la Ferte-Imbault, who did
not love her
mother's freethinking friends, excluded them, and sent
for a confessor.
Mme. Geoffrin submitted amiably, and said, smiling, "My
daughter is like
Godfrey of Bouillon; she wishes to defend my tomb
against the infidels."

Into the composition of her salon she brought the talent
of an artist.
We have a glimpse of her in 1748 through a letter from

Montesquieu.

She was then about fifty, and had gathered about her a more or less distinguished company, which was enlarged after the death of Mme. de Tencin, in the following year. She gave dinners twice a week--one on Monday for artists, among whom were Vanloo, Vernet, and Boucher; and one on Wednesday for men of letters. As she believed that women were apt to distract the conversation, only one was usually invited to dine with them. Mlle. de Lespinasse, the intellectual peer and friend of these men, sat opposite her, and aided in conducting the conversation into agreeable channels. The talent of Mme. Geoffrin seems to have consisted in telling a story well, in a profound knowledge of people, ready tact, and the happy art of putting every one at ease. She did not like heated discussions nor a too pronounced expression of opinion. "She was willing that the philosophers should remodel the world," says one of her critics, "on condition that the kingdom of Diderot should come without disorder or confusion." But though she liked and admired this very free and eloquent Diderot, he was too bold and outspoken to have a place at her table. Helvetius, too, fell into disfavor after the censure which his atheistic *DE L'esprit* brought upon him; and Baron d'Holbach was too apt to overstep the limits at which the hostess interfered with her inevitable "*Voila qui est bien.*" Indeed, she assumed the privilege of her years to scold her guests if they interfered with the general harmony or forgot any of the amenities. But her scoldings were very

graciously received as a slight penalty for her favor,
and more or
less a measure of her friendship. She graded her
courtesies with fine
discrimination, and her friends found the reflection of
their success
or failure in her manner of receiving them. Her keen,
practical mind
pierced every illusion with merciless precision. She
defined a popular
abbe who posed for a bel esprit, as a "fool rubbed all
over with wit."
Rulhiere had read in her salon a work on Russia, which
she feared might
compromise him, and she offered him a large sum of money
to throw it
into the fire. The author was indignant at such a
reflection upon
his courage and honor, and grew warmly eloquent upon the
subject. She
listened until he had finished, then said quietly, "How
much more do you
want, M. Rulhiere?"

The serene poise of a character without enthusiasms and
without
illusions is very well illustrated by a letter to Mme.
Necker. After
playfully charging her with being always infatuated,
never cool and
reserved, she continues:

"Do you know, my pretty one, that your exaggerated
praises confound
me, instead of pleasing and flattering me? I am always
afraid that your
giddiness will evaporate. You will then judge me to be
so different from
your preconceived opinion that you will punish me for
your own mistake,
and allow me no merit at all. I have my virtues and my
good qualities,
but I have also many faults. Of these I am perfectly
well aware, and
every day I try to correct them.

"My dear friend, I beg of you to lessen your excessive admiration.
I assure you that you humiliate me; and that is certainly not your intention. The angels think very little about me, and I do not trouble myself about them. Their praise or their blame is indifferent to me, for I shall not come in their way; but what I do desire is that you should love me, and that you should take me as you find me."

Again she assumes her position of mentor and writes:
"How is it possible not to answer the kind and charming letter I have received from you?
But still I reply only to tell you that it made me a little angry. I see that it is impossible to change anything in your uneasy, restless, and at the same time weak character."

Horace Walpole, who met her during his first visit to Paris, and before his intimacy with Mme. du Deffand had colored his opinions, has left a valuable pen-portrait of Mme. Geoffrin. In a letter to Gray, in 1766, he writes:

"Mme. Geoffrin, of whom you have heard much, is an extraordinary woman, with more common sense than I almost ever met with, great quickness in discovering characters, penetrating and going to the bottom of them, and a pencil that never fails in a likeness, seldom a favorable one. She exacts and preserves, spite of her birth and their nonsensical prejudices about nobility, great court and attention. This she acquires by a thousand little arts and offices of friendship, and by a freedom

and severity which seem to be her sole end for drawing a
concourse to
her. She has little taste and less knowledge, but
protects artisans
and authors, and courts a few people to have the credit
of serving her
dependents. In short, she is an epitome of empire,
subsisting by rewards
and punishments."

Later, when he was less disinterested, perhaps, he
writes to another
friend: "Mme. du Deffand hates the philosophers, so you
must give them
up to her. She and Mme. Geoffrin are no friends; so if
you go thither,
don't tell her of it--Indeed you would be sick of that
house whither
all the pretended beaux esprits and false savants go,
and where they are
very impertinent and dogmatic."

The real power of this woman may be difficult to define,
but a glance
at her society reveals, at least partly, its secret.
Nowhere has the
glamour of a great name more influence than at Paris. A
few celebrities
form a nucleus of sufficient attraction to draw all the
world, if
they are selected with taste and discrimination. After
the death of
Fontenelle, d'Alembert, always witty, vivacious, and
original, in spite
of the serious and exact nature of his scientific
studies, was perhaps
the leading spirit of this salon. Among its constant
habitués were
Helvetius, who put his selfishness into his books,
reserving for his
friends the most amiable and generous of tempers;
Marivaux, the novelist
and dramatist, whose vanity rivaled his genius, but who
represented only
the literary spirit, and did not hesitate to ridicule

his companions the
philosophers; the caustic but brilliant and accomplished
Abbe Morellet,
who had "his heart in his head and his head in his
heart;" the severe
and cheerful Mairan, mathematician, astronomer,
physician, musical
amateur, and member of two academies, whose versatile
gifts and courtly
manners gave him as cordial a welcome in the exclusive
salon at the
Temple as among his philosophical friends; the gay young
Marmontel, who
has left so clear and simple a picture of this famous
circle and
its gentle hostess; Grimm, who combined the SAVANT and
the courtier;
Saint-Lambert, the delicate and scholarly poet; Thomas,
grave and
thoughtful, shining by his character and intellect, but
forgetting the
graces which were at that time so essential to brilliant
success; the
eloquent Abbe Raynal; and the Chevalier de Chastellux,
so genial, so
sympathetic, and so animated. To these we may add
Galiani, the smallest,
the wittiest, and the most delightful of abbés, whose
piercing insight
and Machiavellian subtlety lent a piquant charm to the
stories with
which for hours he used to enliven this choice company;
Caraccioli,
gay, simple, ingenuous, full of Neapolitan humor, rich
in knowledge and
observation, luminous with intelligence and sparkling
with wit; and the
Comte de Crentz, the learned and versatile Swedish
minister, to whom
nature had "granted the gift of expressing and painting
in touches of
fire all that had struck his imagination or vividly
seized his soul."
Hume, Gibbon, Walpole, indeed every foreigner of
distinction who visited

Paris, lent to this salon the eclat of their fame, the charm of their wit, or the prestige of their rank. It was such men as these who gave it so rare a fascination and so lasting a fame.

A strong vein of philosophy was inevitable, though in this circle of diplomats and litterateurs there were many counter-currents of opinion. It was her consummate skill in blending these diverse but powerful elements, and holding them within harmonious limits, that made the reputation of the autocratic hostess. The friend of savants and philosophers, she had neither read nor studied books, but she had studied life to good purpose. Though superficial herself, she had the delicate art of putting every one in the most advantageous light by a few simple questions or words. It was one of her maxims that "the way not to get tired of people is to talk to them of themselves; at the same time, it is the best way to prevent them from getting tired of you." Perhaps Mme. Necker was thinking of her when she compared certain women in conversation to "light layers of cotton wool in a box packed with porcelain; we do not pay much attention to them, but if they were taken away everything would be broken."

Mme. Geoffrin was always at home in the evening, and there were simple little suppers to which a few women were invited. The fare was usually little more than "a chicken, some spinach, and omelet." Among the most frequent guests were the charming, witty, and spirituelle Comtesse d'Egmont, daughter of the Duc de Richelieu, who added to

the vivacious
and elegant manners of her father an indefinable grace
of her own, and a
vein of sentiment that was doubtless deepened by her sad
little romance;
the Marquise de Duras, more dignified and discreet; and
the beautiful
Comtesse de Brionne, "a Venus who resembled Minerva."
These women, with
others who came there, were intellectual complements of
the men; some
of them gay and not without serious faults, but adding
beauty, rank,
elegance, and the delicate tone of esprit which made
this circle so
famous that it was thought worth while to have its
sayings and doings
chronicled at Berlin and St. Petersburg. Perhaps its
influence was the
more insidious and far reaching because of its polished
moderation. The
"let us be agreeable" of Mme. Geoffrin was a potent
talisman.

Among the guests at one time was Stanislas Poniatowski,
afterwards King
of Poland. Hearing that he was about to be imprisoned by
his creditors,
Mme. Geoffrin came forward and paid his debts. "When I
make a statue
of friendship, I shall give it your features," he said
to her; "this
divinity is the mother of charity." On his elevation to
the throne he
wrote to her, "Maman, your son is king. Come and see
him." This led to
her famous journey when nearly seventy years of age. It
was a series of
triumphs at which no one was more surprised than
herself, and they were
all due, she modestly says, "to a few mediocre dinners
and some petits
soupers." One can readily pardon her for feeling
flattered, when the
emperor alights from his carriage on the public

promenade at Vienna and pays her some pretty compliments, "just as if he had been at one of our little Wednesday suppers." There is a charm in the simple naivete with which she tells her friends how cordially Maria Theresa receives her at Schonbrunn, and she does not forget to add that the empress said she had the most beautiful complexion in the world. She repeats quite naturally, and with a slight touch of vanity perhaps, the fine speeches made to her by the "adorable Prince Galitzin" and Prince Kaunitz, "the first minister in Europe," both of whom entertained her. But she would have been more than a woman to have met all this honor with indifference. No wonder she believes herself to be dreaming. "I am known here much better than in the Rue St. Honore," she writes, "and in a fashion the most flattering. My journey has made an incredible sensation for the last fifteen days." To be sure, she spells badly for a woman who poses as the friend of litterateurs and savants, and says very little about anything that does not concern her own fame and glory. But she does not cease to remember her friends, whom she "loves, if possible, better than ever." Nor does she forget to send a thousand caresses to her kitten.

A messenger from Warsaw meets her with everything imaginable that can add to the comfort and luxury of her journey, and on reaching there she finds a room fitted up for her like her own boudoir in the Rue St. Honore. She accepts all this consideration with great modesty and admirable good sense. "This tour finished," she writes

to d'Alembert,
"I feel that I shall have seen enough of men and things
to be convinced
that they are everywhere about the same. I have my
storehouse of
reflections and comparisons well furnished for the rest
of my life. All
that I have seen since leaving my Penates makes me thank
God for having
been born French and a private person."

The peculiar charm which attracted such rare and marked
attentions to
a woman not received at her own court, and at a time
when social
distinctions were very sharply defined, eludes analysis,
but it seems
to have lain largely in her exquisite sense of fitness,
her excellent
judgment, her administrative talent, the fine tact and
penetration which
enabled her to avoid antagonism, an instinctive
knowledge of the art of
pleasing, and a kind but not too sensitive heart. These
qualities are
not those which appeal to the imagination or inspire
enthusiasm. We
find in her no spark of that celestial flame which gives
intellectual
distinction. In her amiability there seems to be a
certain languor of
the heart. Her kindness has a trace of calculation, and
her friendship
of self-consciousness. Of spontaneity she has none. "She
loved nothing
passionately, not even virtue," says one of her critics.
There was a
certain method in her simplicity. She carried to
perfection the art of
savoir vivre, and though she claimed freedom of thought
and action, it
was always strictly within conventional limits.

She suffered the fate of all celebrities in being
occasionally attacked.

The role assigned to her in the comedy of "The Philosophers" was not a flattering one, and some criticisms of Montesquieu wounded her so deeply that she succeeded in having them suppressed. She did not escape the shafts of envy, nor the sneers of the grandes dames who did not relish her popularity. But these were only spots on the surface of a singularly brilliant career. Calm, reposeful, charitable, without affectation or pretension, but not untouched by ennui, the malady of her time, she held her position to the end of a long life which closed in 1777.

"Alas," said d'Alembert, who had been in the habit of spending his mornings with Mlle. de Lespinasse until her death, and his evenings with Mme. Geoffrin, "I have neither evenings nor mornings left."

"She has made for fifty years the charm of her society," said the Abbe Morellet. "She has been constantly, habitually virtuous and benevolent." Her salon brought authors and artists into direct relation with distinguished patrons, especially foreigners, and thus contributed largely to the spread of French art and letters. It was counted among "the institutions of the eighteenth century."

CHAPTER XIII. ULTRA-PHILOSOPHICAL SALONS--MADAME D'EPINAY

_Mme. de Graffigny--Baron d'Holbach--Mme. d'Epina's
Portrait of
Herself--Mlle. Quinault--Rousseau--La Chevrette--Grimm--

Diderot--The
Abbe Galiani--Estimate of Mme. d'Epinay_

A few of the more radical and earnest of the philosophers rarely, if ever, appeared at the table of Mme. Geoffrin. They would have brought too much heat to this company, which discussed everything in a light and agreeable fashion. Perhaps, too, these free and brilliant spirits objected to the leading-strings which there held every one within prescribed limits. They could talk more at their ease at the weekly dinners of Baron d'Holbach, in the salons of Mme. Helvetius, Mme. de Marchais, or Mme. de Graffigny, in the Encyclopedist coterie of Mlle. de Lespinasse, or in the liberal drawing room of Mme. d'Epinay, who held a more questionable place in the social world, but received much good company, Mme. Geoffrin herself included.

Mme. de Graffigny is known mainly as a woman of letters whose life had in it many elements of tragedy. Her youth was passed in the brilliant society of the little court at Luneville. She was distantly related to Mme. du Chatelet, and finally took refuge from the cruelties of a violent and brutal husband in the "terrestrial paradise" at Cirey. La belle Emilie was moved to sympathy, and Voltaire wept at the tale of her sorrows. A little later she became a victim to the poet's sensitive vanity. He accused her of sending to a friend a copy of his "Pucello," an unfinished poem which was kept under triple lock, though parts of it had been read to her. Her letters were opened, her innocent praises were

turned against her, there was a scene, and Cirey was a paradise no more. She came to Paris, ill, sad, and penniless. She wrote "Les Lettres d'une Peruvienne" and found herself famous. She wrote "Cenie," which was played at the Comedie Francaise, and her success was established. Then she wrote another drama. "She read it to me," says one of her friends; "I found it bad; she found me ill-natured. It was played; the public died of ennui and the author of chagrin." "I am convinced that misfortune will follow me into paradise," she said. At all events, it seems to have followed her to the entrance.

Her salon was more or less celebrated. The freedom of the conversations may be inferred from the fact that Helvetius gathered there the materials for his "De l'Esprit," a book condemned by the Pope, the Parliament, and the Sorbonne. It was here also that he found his charming wife, a niece of Mme. de Graffigny, and the light of her house as afterwards of his own.

A more permanent interest is attached to the famous dinners of Baron d'Holbach, where twice a week men like Diderot, Helvetius, Grimm, Marmontel, Duclos, the Abbe Galiani and for a time Buffon and Rousseau, met in an informal way to enjoy the good cheer and good wines of this "maitre d'hotel of philosophy," and discuss the affairs of the universe. The learned and free-thinking baron was agreeable, kind, rich, and lavish in his hospitality, but without pretension. "He was a man simply simple," said Mme. Geoffrin. We have many pleasant

glimpses of his
country place at Grandval, with its rich and rare
collections, its
library, its pictures, its designs, and of the beautiful
wife who turned
the heads of some of the philosophers, whom, as a rule,
she did not like
overmuch, though she received them so graciously. "We
dine well and a
long time," wrote Diderot. "We talk of art, of poetry,
of philosophy,
and of love, of the greatness and vanity of our own
enterprises... Of
gods and kings, of space and time, of death and of
life."

"They say things to make a thunderbolt strike the house
a hundred times,
if it struck for that," said the Abbe Morellet.

Among the few women admitted to these dinners was Mme.
d'Epinay, for
whom d'Holbach, as well as his amiable wife, always
entertained the
warmest friendship. This woman, whose position was not
assured enough
to make people overlook her peculiar and unfortunate
domestic
complications, has told the story of her own life in her
long and
confidential correspondence with Grimm, Galiani, and
Voltaire. The
senseless follies of a cruel and worthless husband, who
plunged her from
great wealth into extreme poverty, and of whom Diderot
said that "he
had squandered two millions without saying a good word
or doing a good
action," threw her into intimate relations with Grimm;
this brought her
into the center of a famous circle. Her letters give us
a clear but far
from flattering reflection of the manners of the time.
She unveils the
bare and hard facts of her own experience, the secret

workings of
her own soul. The picture is not a pleasant one, but it
is full
of significance to the moralist, and furnishes abundant
matter for
psychological study.

The young girl, who had entered upon the scene about
1725, under the
name of Louise Florence Petronille-Tardieu
d'Esclavelles, was married at
twenty to her cousin. It seems to have been really a
marriage of love;
but the weak and faithless M. d'Epinay was clearly
incapable of truth or
honor, and the torturing process by which the confiding
young wife was
disillusioned, the insidious counsel of a false and
profligate friend,
with the final betrayal of a tender and desolate heart,
form a chapter
as revolting as it is pathetic. The fresh, lively, pure-
minded,
sensitive girl, whose intellect had been fed on Rollin's
history and
books of devotion, who feared the dissipations of the
gay world and
shrank with horror from the rouge which her frivolous
husband compelled
her to put on, learned her lesson rapidly in the school
of suffering.

At thirty she writes of herself, after the fashion of
the pen portraits
of the previous century:

"I am not pretty; yet I am not plain. I am small, thin,
very well
formed. I have the air of youth, without freshness, but
noble, sweet,
lively, spirituelle, and interesting. My imagination is
tranquil. My
mind is slow, just, reflective, and inconsequent. I have
vivacity,
courage, firmness, elevation, and excessive timidity. I

am true without being frank. Timidity often gives me the appearance of dissimulation and duplicity; but I have always had the courage to confess my weakness, in order to destroy the suspicion of a vice which I have not. I have the finesse to attain my end and to remove obstacles; but I have none to penetrate the purposes of others. I was born tender and sensible, constant and no coquette. I love retirement, a life simple and private; nevertheless I have almost always led one contrary to my taste. Bad health, and sorrows sharp and repeated, have given a serious cast to my character, which is naturally very gay."

Her first entrance into the world in which wit reigned supreme was in the free but elegant salon of Mlle. Quinault, an actress of the Comedie Francaise, who had left the stage, and taking the role of a femme d'esprit, had gathered around her a distinguished and fashionable coterie. This woman, who had received a decoration for a fine motet she had composed for the queen's chapel, who was loved and consulted by Voltaire, and who was the best friend of d'Alembert after the death of Mlle. de Lespinasse, represented the genius of esprit and finesse. She was the companion of princes, the adoration of princesses, the oracle of artists and litterateurs, the model of elegance, and the embodiment of social success. It did not matter much that the tone of her salon was lax; it was fashionable. "It distilled dignity, la convenance, and formality," says the Marquise de Crequi, who relates an anecdote that

aptly illustrates the glamour which surrounded talent at that time. She was taken by her grandmother to see Mlle. Quinault, and by some chance mistook her for Mlle. de Vertus, who was so much flattered by her innocent error that she left her forty thousand francs, when she died a few months later.

Mme. d'Epinay was delighted to find herself in so brilliant a world, and was greatly fascinated by its wit, though she was not sure that those who met there did not "feel too much the obligation of having it." But she caught the spirit, and transferred it, in some degree, to her own salon, which was more literary than fashionable. Here Francueil presents "a sorry devil of an author who is as poor as Job, but has wit and vanity enough for four." This is Rousseau, the most conspicuous figure in the famous coterie. "He is a man to whom one should raise altars," wrote Mme. d'Epinay. "And the simplicity with which he relates his misfortunes! I have still a pitying soul. It is frightful to imagine such a man in misery." She fitted up for him the Hermitage, and did a thousand kind things which entitled her to a better return than he gave. There is a pleasant moment when we find him the center of an admiring circle at La Chevrette, falling madly in love with her clever and beautiful sister-in-law the Comtesse d'Houdetot, writing "La Nouvelle Heloise" under the inspiration of this passion, and dreaming in the lovely promenades at Montmorency, quite at peace with the world. But the weeping philosopher, who said such fine things and did

such base ones,
turned against his benefactress and friend for some
imaginary offense,
and revenged himself by false and malicious attacks upon
her character.
The final result was a violent quarrel with the whole
circle of
philosophers, who espoused the cause of Mme. d'Epinay.
This little
history is interesting, as it throws so much light upon
the intimate
relations of some of the greatest men of the century.
Behind the
perpetual round of comedies, readings, dinners, music,
and conversation,
there is a real comedy of passion, intrigue, jealousy,
and hidden misery
that destroys many illusions.

Mme. d'Epinay has been made familiar to us by Grimm,
Galiani, Diderot,
Rousseau, and Voltaire. Perhaps, on the whole, Voltaire
has given us
the most agreeable impression. She was ill of grief and
trouble, and had
gone to Geneva to consult the famous Tronchin when she
was thrown into
more or less intimacy with the Sage of Ferney. He
invited her to dinner
immediately upon her arrival. "I was much fatigued,
besides having
confessed and received communion the evening before. I
did not find it
fitting to dine with Voltaire two days afterward,"
writes this curiously
sensitive friend of the free-thinkers. He addresses her
as ma belle
philosophe, speaks of her as "an eagle in a cage of
gauze," and praises
in verse her philosophy, her esprit, her heart, and her
"two great black
eyes." He weeps at her departure, tells her she is
"adored at Delices,
adored at Paris, adored present and absent." But "the
tears of a poet do

not always signify grief," says Mme. d'Epinay.

There is a second period in her life, when she introduces us again to the old friends who always sustained her, and to many new ones. The world that meets in her salon later is much the same as that which dines with Baron d'Holbach. To measure its attractions one must recall the brilliancy and eloquence of Diderot; the wit, the taste, the learning, the courtly accomplishments of Grimm; the gaiety and originality of d'Holbach, who had "read everything and forgotten nothing interesting;" the sparkling conversation of the most finished and scholarly diplomats in Europe, many of whom we have already met at the dinners of Mme. Geoffrin. They discuss economic questions, politics, religion, art, literature, with equal freedom and ardor. They are as much divided on the merits of Gluck's "Armida" and Piccini's "Roland" as upon taxes, grains, and the policy of the government. The gay little Abbe Galiani brings perennial sunshine with the inexhaustible wit and vivacity that lights his clear and subtle intellect. "He is a treasure on rainy days," says Diderot. "If they made him at the toy shops everybody would want one for the country." "He was the nicest little harlequin that Italy has produced," says Marmontel, "but upon the shoulders of this harlequin was the head of a Machiavelli. Epicurean in his philosophy and with a melancholy soul, seeing everything on the ridiculous side, there was nothing either in politics or morals apropos of which he had not a good story to tell, and these stories were always apt and had

the salt of an unexpected and ingenious allusion." He did not accept the theories of his friends, which he believed would "cause the bankruptcy of knowledge, of pleasure, and of the human intellect." "Messieurs les philosophes, you go too fast," he said. "I begin by saying that if I were pope I would put you in the Inquisition, and if I were king of France, into the Bastille." He saw the drift of events; but if he reasoned like a philosopher he laughed like a Neapolitan. What matters tomorrow if we are happy today!

The familiar notes and letters of these clever people picture for us a little world with its small interests, its piques, its loves, its friendships, its quarrels, and its hatreds. Diderot, who refused for a long time to meet Mme. d'Epinay, but finally became an intimate and lasting friend, touches often, in his letters to Sophie, upon the pleasant informality of La Chevrette, with its curious social episodes and its emotional undercurrents. He does not forget even the pigeons, the geese, the ducks, and the chickens, which he calls his own. Pouf, the dog, has his place here too, and flits often across the scene, a tiny bit of reflected immortality. These letters represent the bold iconoclast on his best side, kind, simple in his tastes, and loyal to his friends. He was never at home in the great world. He was seen sometimes in the salons of Mme. Geoffrin, Mme. Necker, and others, but he made his stay as brief as possible. Mme. d'Epinay succeeded better

in attaching him to her coterie. There was more freedom, and he probably had a more sympathetic audience. "Four lines of this man make me dram more and occupy me more," she said, "than a complete work of our pretended beaux esprits." Grimm, too, was a central figure here, and Grimm was his friend. But over his genius, as over that of Rousseau, there was the trail of the serpent. The breadth of his thought, the brilliancy of his criticisms, the eloquence of his style were clouded with sensualism. "When you see on his forehead the reflection of a ray from Plato," says Sainte-Beuve, "do not trust it; look well, there is always the foot of a satyr."

It was to the clear and penetrating intellect of Grimm, with its vein of German romanticism, that Mme. d'Epina y was indebted for the finest appreciation and the most genuine sympathy. "Bon Dieu," he writes to Diderot, "how this woman is to be pitied! I should not be troubled about her if she were as strong as she is courageous. She is sweet and trusting; she is peaceful, and loves repose above all; but her situation exacts unceasingly a conduct forced and out of her character; nothing so wears and destroys a machine naturally frail." She aided him in his correspondance litteraire; wrote a treatise on education, which had the honor of being crowned by the Academy; and, among other things of more or less value, a novel, which was not published until long after her death. With many gifts and attractions, kind, amiable, forgiving, and essentially emotional, Mme. d'Epina y seems to have been

a woman of weak
and undecided character, without sufficient strength of
moral fiber to
sustain herself with dignity under the unfortunate
circumstances which
surrounded her. "It depends only upon yourself," said
Grimm, "to be the
happiest and most adorable creature in the world,
provided that you do
not put the opinions of others before your own, and that
you know how to
suffice for yourself." Her education had not given her
the worldly tact
and address of Mme. Geoffrin, and her salon never had a
wide celebrity;
but it was a meeting place of brilliant and radical
thinkers, of the men
who have perhaps done the most to change the face of the
modern world.
In a quiet and intimate way, it was one among the
numberless forces
which were gathering and gaining momentum to culminate
in the
great tragedy of the century. Mme. d'Epinaÿ did not live
to see the
catastrophe. Worn out by a life of suffering and ill
health, she died in
1783.

Whatever her faults and weaknesses may have been, the
woman who could
retain the devoted affection of so brilliant and
versatile a man
as Grimm for twenty-seven years, who was the lifelong
friend and
correspondent of Galiani and Voltaire, and the valued
confidante
of Diderot, must have had some rare attractions of mind,
heart, or
character.

La Marechale de Luxembourg--The Temple--Comtesse de Boufflers-- Mme. du Deffand--Her Convent Salon--Rupture with Mlle. de Lespinasse--Her Friendship with Horace Walpole--Her brilliancy and Her Ennui

While the group of iconoclasts who formed the nucleus of the philosophical salons was airing its theories and enjoying its increasing vogue, there was another circle which played with the new ideas more or less as a sort of intellectual pastime, but was aristocratic au fond, and carefully preserved all the traditions of the old noblesse. One met here the philosophers and men of letters, but they did not dominate; they simply flavored these coteries of rank and fashion. In this age of esprit no salon was complete without its sprinkling of literary men. We meet the shy and awkward Rousseau even in the exclusive drawing room of the clever and witty but critical Marechale de Luxembourg, who presides over a world in which the graces rule--a world of elegant manners, of etiquette, and of forms. This model of the amenities, whose gay and faulty youth ripened into a pious and charitable age, was at the head of that tribunal which pronounced judgment upon all matters relating to society. She was learned in genealogy, analyzed and traced to their source the laws of etiquette, possessed a remarkable memory, and without profound education, had learned much from conversation with the savants and illustrious men who frequented her house. Her wit was proverbial, and she was never at a loss for a ready repartee or a

spicy anecdote.

She gave two grand suppers a week. Mme. de Genlis, who was often there, took notes, according to her custom, and has left an interesting record of conversations that were remarkable not only for brilliancy, but for the thoughtful wisdom of the comments upon men and things. La Harpe read a great part of his works in this salon. Rousseau entertained the princely guests at Montmorency with "La Nouvelle Heloise" and "Emile," and though never quite at ease, his democratic theories did not prevent him from feeling greatly honored by their friendly courtesies; indeed, he loses his usual bitterness when speaking of this noble patroness. He says that her conversation was marked by an exquisite delicacy that always pleased, and her flatteries were intoxicating because they were simple and seemed to escape without intention.

Mme. de Luxembourg was an autocrat, and did not hesitate to punish errors in taste by social ostracism. "Erase the name of Monsieur -- -- from my list," she said, as a gentleman left after relating a scandalous story reflecting upon some one's honor. It was one of her theories that "society should punish what the law cannot attack." She maintained that good manners are based upon noble and delicate sentiments, that mutual consideration, deference, politeness, gentleness, and respect to age are essential to civilization. The disloyal, the ungrateful bad sons, bad brothers, bad husbands, and bad wives, whose offenses were serious enough to be made public, she

banished from that circle which called itself la bonne compagnie. It must be admitted, however, that it was les convenances rather than morality which she guarded.

A rival of this brilliant salon, and among the most celebrated of its day, was the one at the Temple. The animating spirit here was the amiable and vivacious Comtesse de Boufflers, celebrated in youth for her charms, and later for her talent. She was dame d'honneur to the Princesse de Conti, wife of the Duc d'Orleans, who was noted for her caustic wit, as well as for her beauty. It was in the salon of his clever and rather capricious sister that the learned Prince de Conti met her and formed the intimacy that ended only with his life. She was called the idole of the Temple, and her taste for letters gave her also the title of Minerve savante. She wrote a tragedy which was said to be good, though she would never let it go out of her hands, and has been immortalized by Rousseau, with whom she corresponded for sixteen years. Hume also exchanged frequent letters with her, and she tried in vain to reconcile these two friends after their quarrel. President Henault said he had never met a woman of so much esprit, adding that "outside all her charms she had character." For society she had a veritable passion. She said that when she loved England the best she could not think of staying there without "taking twenty-four or twenty-five intimate friends, and sixty or eighty others who were absolutely necessary to her." Her conversation was full of fire and brilliancy, and her

gaiety of heart,
her gracious manners, and her frank appreciation of the
talent of others
added greatly to her piquant fascination. She delighted
in original
turns of expression, which were sometimes far-fetched
and artificial.
One of her friends said that "she made herself the
victim of
consideration, and lost it by running after it." Her
rule of life may
be offered as a model. "In conduct, simplicity and
reason; in manners,
propriety and decorum; in actions, justice and
generosity; in the use
of wealth, economy and liberality; in conversation,
clearness, truth,
precision; in adversity, courage and pride; in
prosperity, modesty
and moderation." Unfortunately she did not put all this
wisdom into
practice, if we judge her by present standards. We have
a glimpse of the
famous circle over which she presided in an interesting
picture formerly
at Versailles, now at the Louvre. The figures are
supposed to be
portraits. Among others are Mme. de Luxembourg, the
Comtesse de
Boufflers, and the lovely but ill-fated young
stepdaughter, Amelie,
Comtesse de Lauzun, to whom she is so devoted; the
beautiful Comtesse
d'Egmont, Mme. de Beauvan, President Henault, the witty
Pont de Veyle,
Mairan, the versatile scientist, and the Prince de
Conti. In the midst
of this group the little Mozart, whose genius was then
delighting
Europe, sits at the harpsichord. The chronicles of the
time give us
pleasant descriptions of the literary diversions of this
society, which
met by turns at the Temple and Ile-Adam. But the Prince
as well as

the clever Comtesse had a strong leaning towards philosophy, and the amusements were interspersed with much conversation of a serious character that has a peculiar interest today when read by the light of after events.

Among the numerous salons of the noblesse there was one which calls for more than a passing word, both on account of its world-wide fame and the exceptional brilliancy of its hostess. Though far less democratic and cosmopolitan than that of Mme. Geoffrin, with which it was contemporary, its character was equally distinct and original. Linked by birth with the oldest of the nobility, allied by intellect with the most distinguished in the world of letters, Mme. du Deffand appropriated the best in thought, while retaining the spirit of an elegant and refined social life. She was exclusive by nature and instinct, as well as by tradition, and could not dispense with the arts and amenities which are the fruit of generations of ease; but the energy and force of her intellect could as little tolerate shallowness and pretension, however disguised beneath the graceful tyranny of forms. Her salon offers a sort of compromise between the freedom of the philosophical coteries and the frivolities of the purely fashionable ones. It included the most noted of the men of letters--those who belonged to the old aristocracy and a few to whom nature had given a prescriptive title of nobility--as well as the flower of the great world. Her sarcastic wit, her clear intelligence, and her rare conversational gifts added a

tone of
individuality that placed her salon at the head of the
social centers
of the time in brilliancy and in esprit. In this group
of wits,
LITTERATEURS, philosophers, statesmen, churchmen,
diplomats, and men of
rank, Mme. du Deffand herself is always the most
striking figure. The
art of self-suppression she clearly did not possess. But
the art of so
blending a choice society that her own vivid personality
was a pervading
note of harmony she had to an eminent degree. She could
easily have
made a mark upon her time through her intellectual gifts
without the
factitious aid of the men with whom her name is
associated. But society
was her passion society animated by intellect, sparkling
with wit, and
expressing in all its forms the art instincts of her
race. She never
aspired to authorship, but she has left a voluminous
correspondence in
which one reads the varying phases of a singularly
capricious character.
In her old age she found refuge from a devouring ennui
in writing her
own memoirs. Merciless to herself as to others, she
veils nothing,
revealing her frailties with a freedom that reminds one
of Rousseau.

It is not the portrait of an estimable woman that we can
paint from
these records; but in her intellectual force, her social
gifts, and her
moral weakness she is one of the best exponents of an
age that trampled
upon the finest flowers of the soul in the blind pursuit
of pleasure and
the cynical worship of a hard and unpitying realism.
Living from 1697
to 1780, she saw the train laid for the Revolution, and

died in time to
escape its horrors. She traversed the whole experience
of the women
of her world with the independence and abandon of a
nature that was
moderate in nothing. It is true she felt the emptiness
of this arid
existence, and had an intellectual perception of its
errors, but she saw
nothing better. "All conditions appear to me equally
unhappy, from the
angel to the oyster," is the burden of her hopeless
refrain.

She reveals herself to us as two distinct characters.
The one best known
is hard, bitter, coldly analytic, and mocks at
everything bordering upon
sentiment or feeling. The other, which underlies this,
and of which
we have rare glimpses, is frank, tender, loving even to
weakness, and
forever at war with the barrenness of a period whose
worst faults
she seems to have embodied, and whose keenest penalties
she certainly
suffered.

Voltaire, the lifelong friend whom she loved, but
critically measured,
was three years old when she was born; Mme. de Sevigne
had been dead
nearly a year. Of a noble family in Burgundy, Marie de
Vichy-Chamrond
was brought to Paris at six years of age and placed in
the convent of
St. Madeleine de Traisnel, where she was educated after
the superficial
fashion which she so much regrets in later years. She
speaks of herself
as a romantic, imaginative child, but she began very
early to shock
the pious sisters by her dawning skepticism. One of the
nuns had a wax
figure of the infant Jesus, which she discovered to have

been a doll
formerly dressed to represent the Spanish fashions to
Anne of Austria.
This was the first blow to her illusions, and had a very
perceptible
influence upon her life. She pronounced it a deception.
Eight days of
solitude with a diet of bread and water failed to
restore her reverence.
"It does not depend upon me to believe or disbelieve,"
she said. The
eloquent and insinuating Massillon was called in to talk
with her.
"She is charming," was his remark, as he left her after
two hours of
conversation; adding thoughtfully, "Give her a five-cent
catechism."

Skeptical by nature and saturated with the free-thinking
spirit of
the time, she reasoned that all religion was au fond,
only paganism
disguised. In later years, when her isolated soul longed
for some
tangible support, she spoke regretfully of the
philosophic age which
destroyed beliefs by explaining and analyzing
everything.

But a beautiful, clever, high-spirited girl of sixteen
is apt to feel
her youth all suffering. It is certain that she had no
inclination
towards the life of a religieuse, and the country
quickly became
insupportable after her return to its provincial
society. Ennui took
possession of her. She was glad even to go to
confessional, for the sake
of telling her thoughts to some one. She complained
bitterly that
the life of women compelled dependence upon the conduct
of others,
submission to all ills and all consequences. Long
afterwards she said

that she would have married the devil if he had been clothed as a gentleman and assured her a moderate life. But a husband was at last found for her, and merely to escape the monotony of her secluded existence, she was glad, at twenty-one, to become the wife of the Marquis du Deffand--a good but uninteresting man, much older than herself.

Brilliant, fascinating, restless, eager to see and to learn, she felt herself in her element in the gay world of Paris. She confessed that, for the moment, she almost loved her husband for bringing her there. But the moment was a short one. They did not even settle down to what a witty Frenchman calls the "politeness of two indifferences." It is a curious commentary upon the times, that the beautiful but notorious Mme. de Parabere, who introduced her at once into her own unscrupulous world and the petits soupers of the Regent, condoled with the young bride upon her marriage, regretting that she had not taken the easy vows of a chanoinesse, as Mme. de Tencin had done. "In that case," she said, "you would have been free; well placed everywhere; with the stability of a married woman; a revenue which permits one to live and accept aid from others; the independence of a widow, without the ties which a family imposes; unquestioned rank, which you would owe to no one; indulgence, and impunity. For these advantages there is only the trouble of wearing a cross, which is becoming; black or gray habits, which can be made as magnificent as one likes; a little imperceptible veil,

and a knitting
sheath."

Under such teaching she was not long in taking her own free and independent course, which was reckless even in that age of laxity. At her first supper at the Palais Royal she met Voltaire and fascinated the Regent, though her reign lasted but a few days. The counsels of her aunt, the dignified Duchesse de Luynes, availed nothing. Her husband was speedily sent off on some mission to the provinces and she plunged into the current. Once afterwards, in a fit of ennui, she recalled him, frankly stating her position. But she quickly wearied of him again, grew dull, silent, lost her vivacity, and fell into a profound melancholy. Her friend Mme. de Parabere took it upon herself to explain to him the facts, and he kindly relieved her forever of his presence, leaving a touching and pathetic letter which gave her a moment of remorse in spite of her lightened heart. This sin against good taste the Parisian world could not forgive, and even her friends turned against her for a time. But the Duchesse due Maine came to her aid with an all-powerful influence, and restored her finally to her old position. For some years she passed the greater part of her time at Sceaux, and was a favorite at this lively little court.

It is needless to trace here the details of a career which gives us little to admire and much to condemn. It was about 1740 when her salon became noted as a center for the fashionable and literary world of

Paris. Montesquieu and d'Alembert were then among her intimate friends. Of the latter she says: "The simplicity of his manners, the purity of his morals, the air of youth, the frankness of character, joined to all his talents, astonished at first those who saw him." It is said to have been through her zeal that he was admitted to the Academy so young. Among others who formed her familiar circle were her devoted friend Pont de Veyle; the Chevalier d'Aydie; Formont, the "spirituel idler and amiable egotist," who was one of the three whom she confesses really to have loved; and President Henault, who brought always a fund of lively anecdote and agreeable conversation. This world of fashion and letters, slightly seasoned with philosophy, is also the world of Mme. de Luxembourg, of the brilliant Mme. de Mirepoix, of the Prince and Princesse de Beauvau, and of the lovely Duchesse de Choiseul, a femme d'esprit and "mistress of all the elegances," whose gentle virtues fall like a ray of sunlight across the dark pages of this period. It is the world of elegant forms, the world in which a sin against taste is worse than a sin against morals, the world which hedges itself in by a thousand unwritten laws that save it from boredom.

After the death of the Duchesse du Maine, Mme. du Deffand retired to the little convent of St. Joseph, where, after the manner of many women of rank with small fortunes, she had her menage and received her friends. "I have a very pretty apartment," she writes to Voltaire; "very convenient; I only go out for supper. I do not sleep

elsewhere, and I
make no visits. My society is not numerous, but I am
sure it will please
you; and if you were here you would make it yours. I
have seen for some
time many savants and men of letters; I have not found
their society
delightful." The good nuns objected a little to Voltaire
at first, but
seem to have been finally reconciled to the visits of
the arch-heretic.
At this time Mme. du Deffand had supposedly reformed her
conduct, if not
her belief.

She continued to entertain the flower of the nobility
and the stars of
the literary and scientific world. But while the most
famous of the men
of letters were welcome in her salon, the tone was far
from pedantic
or even earnest. It was a society of conventional
people, the elite of
fashion and intelligence, who amused themselves in an
intellectual but
not too serious way. Montesquieu, who liked those houses
in which he
could pass with his every-day wit, said, "I love this
woman with all my
heart; she pleases and amuses me; it is impossible to
feel a moment's
ennui in her company." Mme. de Genlis, who did not love
her expressed
her surprise at finding her so natural and so kindly.
Her conversation
was simple and without pretension. When she was pleased,
her manners
were even affectionate. She never entered into a
discussion, confessing
that she was not sufficiently attached to any opinion to
defend it. She
disliked the enthusiasm of the philosophers unless it
was hidden behind
the arts of the courtier, as in Voltaire, whose delicate
satire charmed

her. Diderot came once, "eyed her epicurean friends,"
and came no more.
The air was not free enough. When at home she had three
or four at
supper every day, often a dozen, and, once a week, a
grand supper. All
the intellectual fashions of the time are found here. La
Harpe reads a
translation from Sophocles and his own tragedy. Clairon,
the actress in
vogue, recites the roles of Phedre and Agrippine, Lekain
reads Voltaire,
and Goldoni a comedy of his own, which the hostess finds
tiresome.
New books, new plays, the last song, the latest word of
the
philosophers--all are talked about, eulogized, or
dismissed with a
sarcasm. The wit of Mme. du Deffand is feared, but it
fascinates. She
delights in clever repartees and sparkling epigrams. A
shaft of wit
silences the most complacent of monologues. "What
tiresome book are you
reading?" she said one day to a friend who talked too
earnestly and too
long--saving herself from the charge of rudeness by an
easy refuge in
her blindness.

Her criticisms are always severe. "There are only two
pleasures for me
in the world--society and reading," she writes. "What
society does one
find? Imbeciles, who utter only commonplaces, who know
nothing, feel
nothing, think nothing; a few people of talent, full of
themselves,
jealous, envious, wicked, whom one must hate or scorn."
To some one who
was eulogizing a mediocre man, adding that all the world
was of the
same opinion, she replied, "I make small account of the
world, Monsieur,
since I perceive that one can divide it into three

parts, les trompeurs,
les trompes, et les trompettes." Still it is life alone
that interests
her. Though she is not satisfied with people, she has
always the hope
that she will be. In literature she likes only letters
and memoirs,
because they are purely human; but the age has nothing
that pleases her.
"It is cynical or pedantic," she writes to Voltaire;
"there is no grace,
no facility, no imagination. Everything is a la glace,
hardness without
force, license without gaiety; no talent, much
presumption."

As age came on, and she felt the approach of blindness,
she found a
companion in Mlle. de Lespinasse, a young girl of
remarkable gifts, who
had an obscure and unacknowledged connection with her
family. For
ten years the young woman was a slave to the caprices of
her exacting
mistress, reading to her through long nights of wakeful
restlessness,
and assisting to entertain her guests. The one thing
upon which Mme. du
Deffand most prided herself was frankness. She hated
finesse, and had
stipulated that she would not tolerate artifice in any
form. It was
her habit to lie awake all night and sleep all day, and
as she did not
receive her guests until six o'clock, Mlle. de
Lespinasse, whose amiable
character and conversational charm had endeared her at
once to the
circle of her patroness, arranged to see her personal
friends--among
whom were d'Alembert, Turgot, Chastellux, and Marmontel--
-in her own
apartments for an hour before the marquise appeared.
When this came to
the knowledge of the latter, she fell into a violent

rage at what she chose to regard as a treachery to herself, and dismissed her companion at once. The result was the opening of a rival salon which carried off many of her favorite guests, notably d'Alembert, to whom she was much attached. "If she had died fifteen years earlier, I should not have lost d'Alembert," was her sympathetic remark when she heard of the death of Mlle. de Lespinasse.

But the most striking point in the career of this worldly woman was her friendship for Horace Walpole. When they first met she was nearly seventy, blind, ill-tempered, bitter, and hopelessly ennuyee. He was not yet fifty, a brilliant, versatile man of the world, and saw her only at long intervals. Their curious correspondence extends over a period of fifteen years, ending only with her death.

In a letter to Grayson, after meeting her, he writes: "Mme. du Deffand is now very old and stone blind, but retains all her vivacity, wit, memory, judgment, passion, and agreeableness. She goes to operas, plays, suppers, Versailles; gives supper twice a week; has everything new read to her; makes new songs and epigrams--aye, admirably--and remembers every one that has been made these fourscore years. She corresponds with Voltaire, dictates charming letters to him, contradicts him, is no bigot to him or anybody, and laughs both at the clergy and the philosophers. In a dispute, into which she easily falls, she is very warm, and yet scarce ever in the wrong; her judgment on every subject is as just as

possible; on every point of conduct as wrong as possible; for she is all love and hatred, passionate for her friends to enthusiasm, still anxious to be loved--I don't mean by lovers--and a vehement enemy openly."

The acquaintance thus begun quickly drilled into an intimacy. Friendship she calls this absorbing sentiment, but it has all the caprices and inconsistencies of love. Fed by the imagination, and prevented by separation from wearing itself out, it became the most permanent interest of her life. There is something curiously pathetic in the submissive attitude of this blind, aged, but spirited woman--who scoffs at sentiment and confesses that she could never love anything--towards the man who criticizes her, scolds her, crushes back her too ardent feeling, yet calls her his dear old friend, writes her a weekly letter, and modestly declares that she "loves him better than all France together."

The spirit of this correspondence greatly modifies the impression which her own words, as well as the facts of her career, would naturally give us. We find in the letters of this period little of the freshness and spontaneity that lent such a charm to the letters of Mme. de Sevigne and her contemporaries. Women still write of the incidents of their lives, the people they meet, their jealousies, their rivalries, their loves, and their follies; but they think, where they formerly mirrored the world about them. They analyze, they compare, they criticize, they

formulate their own emotions, they add opinions to facts. The gaiety, the sparkle, the wit, the play of feeling, is not there. Occasionally there is the tone of passion, as in the letters of Mlle. Aisse and Mlle. de Lespinasse, but this is rare. Even passion has grown sophisticated and deals with phrases. There is more or less artificiality in the exchange of written thoughts. Mme. du Deffand thinks while she writes, and what she sees takes always the color of her own intelligence. She complains of her inability to catch the elusive quality, the clearness, the flexibility of Mme. de Sevigne, whom she longs to rival because Walpole so admires her. But if she lacks the vivacity, the simplicity, the poetic grace of her model, she has qualities not less striking, though less lovable. Her keen insight is unflinching. With masterly penetration she grasps the essence of things. No one has portrayed so concisely and so vividly the men and women of her time. No one has discriminated between the shades of character with such nicety. No one has so clearly fathomed the underlying motives of action. No one has forecast the outcome of theories and events with such prophetic vision. The note of bitterness and cynicism is always there. The nature of the woman reveals itself in every line: keen, dry, critical, with clear ideals which she can never hope to attain. But we feel that she has stripped off the rags of pretension and brought us face to face with realities. "All that I can do is to love you with all my heart, as I have done for about fifty years," wrote Voltaire. "How

could I fail to
love you? Your soul seeks always the true; it is a
quality as rare as
truth itself." So far does she carry her hatred of
insincerity that one
is often tempted to believe she affects a freedom from
affectation. "I
am so fatigued with the vanity of others that I avoid
the occasion of
having any myself," she writes. Is there not here a
trace of the quality
she so despises?

But beneath all this runs the swift undercurrent of an
absorbing
passion. A passion of friendship it may be, but it
forces itself through
the arid shells of conventionalism; it is at once the
agony and the
consolation of a despairing soul. Heartless, Mme. du
Deffand is called,
and her life seems to prove the truth of the verdict;
but these letters
throb and palpitate with feeling which she laughs at,
but cannot still.
It is the cry of the soul for what it has not; what the
world cannot
give; what it has somehow missed out of a cold, hard,
restless, and
superficial existence. With a need of loving, she is
satisfied with no
one. There is something wanting; even in the affection
of her friends.
"Ma grand'maman," she says to the gentle Duchesse de
Choiseul, "you KNOW
that you love me, but you do not FEEL it."

Devouring herself in solitude, she despises the society
she cannot do
without. "Men and women appear to me puppets who go,
come, talk, laugh,
without thinking, without reflecting, without feeling,"
she writes.
She confesses that she has a thousand troubles in
assembling a choice

company of people who bore her to death. "One sees only masks, one hears only lies," is her constant refrain. She does not want to live, but is afraid to die; she says she is not made for this world, but does not know that there is any other. She tries devotion, but has no taste for it. Of the light that shines from within upon so many darkened and weary souls she has no knowledge. Her vision is bounded by the tangible, which offers only a rigid barrier, against which her life flutters itself away. She dies as she has lived, with a deepened conviction of the nothingness of existence. "Spare me three things," she said to her confessor in her last moments; "let me have no questions, no reasons, and no sermons." Seeing Wiart, her faithful servitor, in tears, she remarks pathetically, as if surprised, "You love me then?" "Divert yourself as much as you can," was her final message to Walpole. "You will regret me, because one is very glad to know that one is loved." She commends to his care and affection Tonton, her little dog.

Strong but not gentle, brilliant but not tender, too penetrating for any illusions, with a nature forever at war with itself, its surroundings, and its limitations, no one better points the moral of an age without faith, without ideals, without the inner light that reveals to hope what is denied to sense.

The influence of such a woman with her gifts, her energy, her power, and her social prestige, can hardly be estimated. It was not in the

direction of the new drift of thought. "I am not a fanatic as to liberty," she said; "I believe it is an error to pretend that it exists in a democracy. One has a thousand tyrants in place of one." She had no breadth of sympathy, and her interests were largely personal; but in matters of style and form her taste was unerring. Pitiless in her criticisms, she held firmly to her ideals of clear, elegant, and concise expression, both in literature and in conversation. She tolerated no latitudes, no pretension, and left behind her the traditions of a society that blended, more perfectly, perhaps, than any other of her time, the best intellectual life with courtly manners and a strict observance of les convenances.

CHAPTER XV. MADEMOISELLE DE LESPINASSE

A Romantic Career--Companion of Mme. du Deffand--Rival Salons--
Association with the Encyclopedists--D'Alembert--A Heart Tragedy--Impassioned Letters--A Type Unique in her Age_

Inseparably connected with the name of Mme. du Deffand is that of her companion and rival, Mlle. de Lespinasse, the gifted, charming, tender and loving woman who presided over one of the most noted of the philosophical salons; who was the chosen friend and confidante of the Encyclopedists; and who died in her prime of a broken heart, leaving the world a legacy of letters that rival those of Heloise or the poems of Sappho, as "immortal pictures of passion." The memory of

her social triumphs, remarkable as they were, pales before the singular romances of her life. In the midst of a cold, critical, and heartless society, that adored talent and ridiculed sentiment, she became the victim of a passion so profound, so ardent, so hopeless, that her powerful intellect bent before it like a reed before a storm. She died of that unsuspected passion, and years afterwards these letters found the light and told the tale.

The contrast between the two women so closely linked together is complete. Mme. du Deffand belonged to the age of Voltaire by every fiber of her hard and cynical nature. What she called love was a fire of the intellect which consumed without warming. It was a violent and fierce prejudice in favor of those who reflected something of herself. The tenderness of self-sacrifice was not there. Mlle. de Lespinasse was of the later era of Rousseau; the era of exaggerated feeling, of emotional delirium, of romantic dreams; the era whose heroine was the loving and sentimental "Julie," for whose portrait she might have sat, with a shade or so less of intellect and brilliancy. But it was more than a romantic dream that shadowed and shortened the life of Mlle. de Lespinasse. She had a veritable heart of flame, that consumed not only itself but its frail tenement as well.

Julie-Jeanne-Eleonore de Lespinasse, who was born at Lyons in 1732, had a birthright of sorrow. Her mother, the Comtesse d'Albon, could not

acknowledge this fugitive and nameless daughter, but after the death of her husband she received her on an inferior footing, had her carefully educated, and secretly gave her love and care. Left alone and without resources at fifteen, Julie was taken, as governess and companion, into the family of a sister who was the wife of Mme. du Deffand's brother. Here the marquise met her on one of her visits and heard the story of her sorrows. Tearful, sad, and worn out by humiliations, the young girl had decided to enter a convent. "There is no misfortune that I have not experienced," she wrote to Guibert many years afterwards. "Some day, my friend, I will relate to you things not to be found in the romances of Prevost nor of Richardson... I ought naturally to devote myself to hating; I have well fulfilled my destiny; I have loved much and hated very little. Mon Dieu, my friend, I am a hundred years old." Mme. du Deffand was struck with her talent and a certain indefinable fascination of manner which afterwards became so potent. "You have gaiety," she wrote to her, "you are capable of sentiment; with these qualities you will be charming so long as you are natural and without pretension." After a negotiation of some months, Mlle. de Lespinasse went to Paris to live with her new friend. The history of this affair has been already related.

Parisian society was divided into two factions on the merits of the quarrel--those who censured the ingratitude of the younger woman, and those who accused the marquise of cruelty and injustice.

But many of the oldest friends of the latter aided her rival. The Marechale de Luxembourg furnished her apartments in the Rue de Belle-Chasse. The Duc de Choiseul procured her a pension, and Mme. Geoffrin gave her an annuity. She carried with her a strong following of eminent men from the salon of Mme. du Deffand, among whom was d'Alembert, who remained faithful and devoted to the end. It is said that President Henault even offered to marry her, but how, under these circumstances, he managed to continue in the good graces of his lifelong friend, the unforgiving marquise, does not appear. A letter which he wrote to Mlle. de Lespinasse throws a direct light upon her character, after making due allowance for the exaggeration of French gallantry.

"You are cosmopolitan; you adapt yourself to all situations. The world pleases you; you love solitude. Society amuses you, but it does not seduce you. Your heart does not give itself easily. Strong passions are necessary to you, and it is better so, for they will not return often. Nature, in placing you in an ordinary position, has given you something to relieve it. Your soul is noble and elevated, and you will never remain in a crowd. It is the same with your person. It is distinguished and attracts attention, without being beautiful. There is something piquante about you... You have two things which do not often go together: you are sweet and strong; your gaiety adorns you and relaxes your nerves, which are too tense... You are extremely refined; you have

divined the world."

The age of portraits was not quite passed, and the privilege of seeing one's self in the eyes of one's friends was still accorded, a fact to which we owe many striking if sometimes rather highly colored pictures. A few words from d'Alembert are of twofold interest. He writes some years later:

"The regard one has for you does not depend alone upon your external charms; it depends, above all, upon your intellect and your character. That which distinguishes you in society is the art of saying to every one the fitting word and that art is very simple with you; it consists in never speaking of yourself to others, and much of themselves. It is an infallible means of pleasing; thus you please every one, though it happens that all the world pleases you; you know even how to avoid repelling those who are least agreeable."

This epitome of the art of pleasing may be commended for its wisdom, aside from the very delightful picture it gives of an amiable and attractive woman. Again he writes:

"The excellence of your tone would not be a distinction for one reared in a court, and speaking only the language she has learned. In you it is a merit very real and very rare. You have brought it from the seclusion of a province, where you met no one who could teach you. You were, in this regard, as perfect the day after your arrival at Paris as you are today. You found yourself, from the first, as free, as

little out of
place in the most brilliant and most critical society as
if you had
passed your life there; you have felt its usages before
knowing them,
which implies a justness and fineness of tact very
unusual, an exquisite
knowledge of les convenances."

It was her innate tact and social instinct, combined
with rare gifts of
intellect and great conversational charm, that gave this
woman without
name, beauty, or fortune so exceptional a position, and
her salon so
distinguished a place among the brilliant centers of
Paris. As she was
not rich and could not give costly dinners, she saw her
friends daily
from five to nine, in the interval between other
engagements. This
society was her chief interest, and she rarely went out.
"If she made an
exception to this rule, all Paris was apprised of it in
advance," says
Grimm. The most illustrious men of the State, the
Church, the Court, and
the Army, as well as celebrated foreigners and men of
letters, were
sure to be found there. "Nowhere was conversation more
lively, more
brilliant, or better regulated," writes Marmontel.. .
"It was not
with fashionable nonsense and vanity that every day
during four hours,
without languor or pause, she knew how to make herself
interesting to a
circle of sensible people." Caraccioli went from her
salon one evening
to sup with Mme. du Deffand. "He was intoxicated with
all the fine works
he had heard read there," writes the latter. "There was
a eulogy of
one named Fontaine by M. de Condorcet. There were
translations of

Theocritus; tales, fables by I know not whom. And then some eulogies of Helvetius, an extreme admiration of the esprit and the talents of the age; in fine, enough to make one stop the ears. All these judgments false and in the worst taste." A hint of the rivalry between the former friends is given in a letter from Horace Walpole. "There is at Paris," he writes, "a Mlle. de Lespinasse, a pretended bel esprit, who was formerly a humble companion of Mme. du Deffand, and betrayed her and used her very ill. I beg of you not to let any one carry you thither. I dwell upon this because she has some enemies so spiteful as to try to carry off all the English to Mlle. de Lespinasse."

But this "pretended bel esprit" had socially the touch of genius. Her ardent, impulsive nature lent to her conversation a rare eloquence that inspired her listeners, though she never drifted into monologue, and understood the value of discreet silence. "She rendered the marble sensible, and made matter talk," said Guibert. Versatile and suggestive herself, she knew how to draw out the best thoughts of others. Her swift insight caught the weak points of her friends, and her gracious adaptation had all the fascination of a subtle flattery. Sad as her experience had been, she had nevertheless been drawn into the world most congenial to her tastes. "Ah, how I dislike not to love that which is excellent," she wrote later. "How difficult I have become! But is it my fault? Consider the education I have received with Mme. du Deffand. President Henault, Abbe Bon, the Archbishop of Toulouse,

the Archbishop
of Aix, Turgot, d'Alembert, Abbe de Boismont--these are
the men who
have taught me to speak, to think, and who have deigned
to count me for
something."

It was men like these who thronged her own salon,
together with such
women as the Duchesse d'Anville, friend of the
economists, the Duchesse
de Chatillon whom she loved so passionately, and others
well-known in
the world of fashion and letters. But its tone was more
philosophical
than that of Mme. du Deffand. Though far from democratic
by taste or
temperament, she was so from conviction. The griefs and
humiliations of
her life had left her peculiarly open to the new social
and political
theories which were agitating France. She liked free
discussion, and her
own large intelligence, added to her talent for calling
out and giving
point to the ideas of others, went far towards making
the cosmopolitan
circle over which she presided one of the most potent
forces of the
time. Her influence may be traced in the work of the
encyclopedists, in
which she was associated, and which she did more than
any other woman
to aid and encourage. As a power in the making of
reputations and in
the election of members to the Academy she shared with
Mme. Geoffrin
the honor of being a legitimate successor of Mme. de
Lambert. Chastellux
owed his admission largely to her, and on her deathbed
she secured that
of La Harpe.

But the side of her character which strikes us most
forcibly at this

distance of time is the emotional. The personal charm which is always so large a factor in social success is of too subtle a quality to be caught in words. The most vivid portrait leaves a divine something to be supplied by the imagination, and the fascination of eloquence is gone with the flash of the eye, the modulation of the voice, or some fleeting grace of manner. But passion writes itself out in indelible characters, especially when it is a rare and spontaneous overflow from the heart of a man or woman of genius, whose emotions readily crystallize into form.

Her friendship for d'Alembert, loyal and devoted as it was, seems to have been without illusions. It is true she had cast aside every other consideration to nurse him through a dangerous illness, and as soon as he was able to be removed, he had taken an apartment in the house where she lived, which he retained until her death. But he was not rich, and marriage was not to be thought of. On this point we have his own testimony. "The one to whom they marry me in the gazettes is indeed a person respectable in character, and fitted by the sweetness and charm of her society to render a husband happy," he writes to Voltaire; "but she is worthy of an establishment better than mine, and there is between us neither marriage nor love, but mutual esteem, and all the sweetness of friendship. I live actually in the same house with her, where there are besides ten other tenants; this is what has given rise to the rumor." His devotion through so many years, and his profound grief at

her loss, as well as his subsequent words, leave some doubt as to the tranquillity of his heart, but the sentiments of Mlle. de Lespinasse seem never to have passed the calm measure of an exalted and sympathetic friendship. It was remarked that he lost much of his prestige, and that his society which had been so brilliant, became infinitely more miscellaneous and infinitely less agreeable after the death of the friend whose tact and finesse had so well served his ambition.

Not long after leaving Mme. du Deffand she met the Marquis de Mora, a son of the Spanish ambassador, who became a constant habitue of her salon. Of distinguished family and large fortune, brilliant, courtly, popular, and only twenty-four, he captivated at once the fiery heart of this attractive woman of thirty-five. It seems to have been a mutual passion, as during one brief absence of ten days he wrote her twenty-two letters. But his family became alarmed and made his delicate health a pretext for recalling him to Spain. Her grief at the separation enlisted the sympathy of d'Alembert. At her request he procured from his physician a statement that the climate of Madrid would prove fatal to M. de Mora, whose health had steadily failed since his return home, and that if his friends wished to save him they must lose no time in sending him back to Paris. The young man was permitted to leave at once, but he died en route at Bordeaux.

In the meantime Mlle. de Lespinasse, sad and inconsolable, had met M.

Guibert, a man of great versatility and many accomplishments, whose genius seems to have borne no adequate fruit. We hear of him later through the passing enthusiasm of Mme. de Stael, who in her youth, made a pen-portrait of him, sufficiently flattering to account in some degree for the singular passion of which he became the object. Mlle. de Lespinasse was forty. He was twenty-nine, had competed for the Academie Francaise, written a work on military science, also a national tragedy which was still unpublished. She was dazzled by his brilliancy, and when she fathomed his shallow nature, as she finally did, it was too late to disentangle her heart. He was a man of gallantry, and was flattered by the preference of a woman much in vogue, who had powerful friends, influence at the Academy, and the ability to advance his interest in many ways. He clearly condescended to be loved, but his own professions have little of the true ring.

Distracted by this new passion on one side, and by remorse for her disloyalty to the old one, on the other, the health of Mlle. de Lespinasse, naturally delicate and already undermined, began to succumb to the hidden struggle. The death of M. de Mora solved one problem; the other remained. Mr. Guibert wished to advance his fortune by a brilliant marriage without losing the friend who might still be of service to him. She sat in judgment upon her own fate, counseled him, aided him in his choice, even praised the woman who became his wife, hoping still, perhaps, for some repose in that exaltation of

friendship which is often
the last consolation of passionate souls. But she was on
a path that led
to no haven of peace. There was only a blank wall before
her, and the
lightning impulses of her own heart were forced back to
shatter her
frail life. The world was ignorant of this fresh
experience; and,
believing her crushed by the death of M. de Mora,
sympathized with
her sorrow and praised her fidelity. She tried to
sustain a double
role--smiles and gaiety for her friends, tears and agony
for the long
hours of solitude. The tension was too much for her. She
died shortly
afterwards at the age of forty-three. "If to think, to
love, and to
suffer is that which constitutes life, she lived in
these few years many
ages," said one who knew her well.

It was not until many years later, when those most
interested were gone,
that the letters to Guibert, which form her chief title
to fame, were
collected, and, curiously enough, by his widow. Then for
the first
time the true drama of her life was unveiled. It is
impossible in a few
extracts to convey an adequate idea of the passion and
devotion that
runs through these letters. They touch the entire gamut
of emotion, from
the tender melancholy of a lonely soul, the
inexpressible sweetness of
self-forgetful love, to the tragic notes of agony and
despair. There are
many brilliant passages in them, many flashes of
profound thought, many
vivid traits of the people about her; but they are,
before all, the
record of a soul that is rapidly burning out its casket.

"I prefer my misery to all that the world calls happiness or pleasure," she writes. "I shall die of it, perhaps, but that is better than never to have lived."

"I have no more the strength to love," she says again; "my soul fatigues me, torments me; I am no more sustained by anything. I have every day a fever; and my physician, who is not the most skillful of men, repeats to me without ceasing that I am consumed by chagrin, that my pulse, my respiration, announce an active grief, and he always goes out saying, 'We have no cure for the soul.'"

"Adieu, my friend," were her last words to him. "If I ever return to life I shall still love to employ it in loving you; but there is no more time."

One could almost wish that these letters had never come to light. A single grand passion has always a strong hold upon the imagination and the sympathies, but two passions contending for the mastery verge upon something quite the reverse of heroic. The note of heart-breaking despair is tragic enough, but there is a touch of comedy behind it. Though her words have the fire, the devotion, the abandon of Heloise, they leave a certain sense of disproportion. One is inclined to wonder if they do not overtop the feeling.

D'Alembert was her truest mourner, and fell into a profound melancholy after her death. "Yes," he said to Marmontel, "she was changed, but I was not; she no longer lived for me, but I ever lived

for her. Since she
is no more, I know not why I exist. Ah! Why have I not
still to suffer
those moments of bitterness that she knew so well how to
sweeten and
make me forget? Do you remember the happy evenings we
passed together?
Now what have I left? I return home, and instead of
herself I find only
her shade. This lodging at the Louvre is itself a tomb,
which I never
enter but with horror." To this "shade" he wrote two
expressive and
well-considered eulogies, which paint in pathetic words
the perfections
of his friend and his own desolation. "Adieu, adieu, my
dear Julie,"
says the heartbroken philosopher; "for these eyes which
I should like to
close forever fill with tears in tracing these last
lines, and I see
no more the paper on which I write." His grief called
out a sympathetic
letter from Frederick the Great which shows the
philosophic warrior and
king in a new light. There is a touch of bitter irony in
the inflated
eulogy of Guibert, who gave the too-loving woman a death
blow in
furthering his ambition, then exhausted his vocabulary
in laments and
praises. Perhaps he hoped to borrow from this friendship
a fresh ray of
immortality.

Whatever we may think of the strange inconsistencies of
Mlle. de
Lespinasse, she is doubly interesting to us as a type
that contrasts
strongly with that of her age. Her exquisite tact, her
brilliant
intellect, her conversational gifts, her personal charm
made her the
idol of the world in which she lived. Her influence was
courted, her

salon was the resort of the most distinguished men of the century, and while she loved to discuss the great social problems which her friends were trying to solve, she forgot none of the graces. With the intellectual strength and grasp of a man, she preserved always the taste, the delicacy, the tenderness of a woman. Her faults were those of a strong nature. Her thoughts were clear and penetrating, her expression was lively and impassioned. But in her emotional power she reached the proportion of genius. With "the most ardent soul, the liveliest fancy, the most inflammable imagination that has existed since Sappho," she represents the embodied spirit of tragedy outlined against the cold, hard background of a skeptical, mocking, realistic age. "I love in order to live," she said, "and I live to love." This is the key-note of her life.

CHAPTER XVI. THE SALON HELVETIQUE

The Swiss Pastor's Daughter--Her Social Ambition--Her Friends--Mme. de Marchais--Mme. d'Houdetot--Duchesse de Lauzun--Character of Mme. Necker--Death at Coppet--Close of the most Brilliant Period of the Salons.

There was one woman who held a very prominent place in the society of this period, and who has a double interest for us, though she was not French, and never quite caught the spirit of the eighteenth-century life

whose attractive forms she loved so well. Mme. Necker, whose history has been made so familiar through the interesting memoirs of the Comte d'Haussonville, owes her fame to her marked qualities of intellect and character rather than to the brilliancy of her social talents. These found an admirable setting in the surroundings which her husband's fortune and political career gave her. The Salon Helvetique had a distinctive color of its own, and was always tinged with the strong convictions and exalted ideals of the Swiss pastor's daughter, who passed through this world of intellectual affluence and moral laxity like a white angel of purity--in it, but not of it. The center of a choice and lettered circle which included the most noted men and women of her time, she brought into it not only rare gifts, a fine taste, and genuine literary enthusiasm, but the fresh charm of a noble character and a beautiful family life, with the instincts of duty and right conduct which she inherited from her simple Protestant ancestry. She lacked a little, however, in the tact, the ease, the grace, the spontaneity, which were the essential charm of the French women. Her social talents were a trifle theoretical. "She studied society," says one of her critics, "as she would a literary question." She had a theory of conducting a salon, as she had of life in general, and believed that study would attain everything. But the ability to do a thing superlatively well is by no means always implied in the knowledge of how it ought to be done. Social genius is as purely a

gift of nature
as poetry or music; and, of all others, it is the most
subtle and
indefinable. It was a long step from the primitive
simplicity in which
Suzanne Curchod passed her childhood on the borders of
Lake Lemman to the
complex life of a Parisian salon; and the provincial
beauty, whose
fair face, soft blue eyes, dignified but slightly
coquettish manner,
brilliant intellect, and sparkling though sometimes
rather learned
conversation had made her a local queen, was quick to
see her own
shortcomings. She confessed that she had a new language
to learn, and
she never fully mastered it. "Mme. Necker has talent,
but it is in
a sphere too elevated for one to communicate with her,"
said Mme.
du Deffand, though she was glad to go once a week to her
suppers at
Saint-Ouen, and admitted that in spite of a certain
stiffness and
coldness she was better fitted for society than most of
the grandes
dames. The salon of Mme. Necker marks a transition point
between two
periods, and had two quite distinct phases. One likes
best to recall her
in the freshness of her early enthusiasm, when she gave
Friday dinners,
modeled after those of Mme. Geoffrin, to men of letters,
and received
a larger world in the evening; when her guests were
enlivened by
the satire of Diderot, the anecdotes of Marmontel, the
brilliance or
learning of Grimm, d'Alembert, Thomas, Suard, Buffon,
the Abbe Raynal,
and other wits of the day; when they discussed the
affairs of the
Academy and decided the fate of candidates; when they
listened to the

recitations of Mlle. Clairon, and the works of many authors known and unknown. It is interesting to recall that "Paul and Virginia" was first read here. But there was apt to be a shade of stiffness, and the conversation had sometimes too strong a flavor of pedantry. "No one knows better or feels more sensibly than you, my dear and very amiable friend," wrote Mme. Geoffrin, "the charm of friendship and its sweetness; no one makes others experience them more fully. But you will never attain that facility, that ease, and that liberty which give to society its perfect enjoyment." The Abbe Morellet complained of the austerity that always held the conversation within certain limits, and the gay little Abbe Galiani found fault with Mme. Necker's coldness and reserve, though he addresses her as his "Divinity" after his return to Naples, and his racy letters give us vivid and amusing pictures of these Fridays, which in his memory are wholly charming.

In spite of her firm religious convictions, Mme. Necker cordially welcomed the most extreme of the philosophers. "I have atheistic friends," she said. "Why not? They are unfortunate friends." But her admiration for their talents by no means extended to their opinions, and she did not permit the discussion of religious questions. It was at one of her own dinners that she started the subscription for a statue of Voltaire, for whom she entertained the warmest friendship. One may note here, as elsewhere, a fine mental poise, a justness of spirit, and a discrimination that was superior to natural prejudices.

Sometimes her frank simplicity was misunderstood. "There is a Mme. Necker here, a pretty woman and a bel esprit, who is infatuated with me; she persecutes me to have me at her house," wrote Diderot to Mlle. Volland, with an evident incapacity to comprehend the innocent appreciation of a pure-hearted woman. When he knew her better, he expressed his regret that he had not known her sooner. "You would certainly have inspired me with a taste for purity and for delicacy," he says, "which would have passed from my soul into my works." He refers to her again as "a woman who possesses all that the purity of an angelic soul adds to an exquisite taste."

Among the many distinguished foreigners who found their way into this pleasant circle was her early lover, Gibbon. The old days were far away when she presided over the literary coterie at Lausanne, speculated upon the mystery of love, talked of the possibility of tender and platonic friendships between men and women, after the fashion of the precieuses, and wept bitter tears over the faithlessness of the embryo historian. The memory of her grief had long been lost in the fullness of subsequent happiness, and one readily pardons her natural complacency in the brilliancy of a position which took little added luster from the fame of the man who had wooed and so easily forgotten her.

This period of Mme. Necker's career shows her character on a very engaging side. Loving her husband with a devotion that verged upon

idolatry, she was rich in the friendship of men like Thomas, Buffon, Grimm, Diderot, and Voltaire, whose respectful tone was the highest tribute to her dignity and her delicacy. But the true nature of a woman is best seen in her relations with her own sex. There are a thousand fine reserves in her relations with men that, in a measure, veil her personality. They doubtless call out the most brilliant qualities of her intellect, and reveal her character, in some points, on its best and most lovable side; but the rare shades of generous and unselfish feeling are more clearly seen in the intimate friendships, free from petty vanities and jealous rivalries, rich in cordial appreciation and disinterested affection, which we often find among women of the finest type. It is impossible that one so serious and so earnest as Mme. Necker should have cherished such passionate friendships for her own sex, if she had been as cold or as calculating as she has been sometimes represented. Her intimacy with Mme. de Marchais, of which we have so many pleasant details, furnishes a case in point.

This graceful and vivacious woman, who talked so eloquently upon philosophical, political, and economic questions, was the center of a circle noted for its liberal tendencies. A friend of Mme. de Pompadour, at whose suppers she often sang; gifted, witty, and, in spite of a certain seriousness, retaining always the taste, the elegance, the charming manners which were her native heritage, she attracted to her salon not only a distinguished literary company, but

many men and women
from the great world of which she only touched the
borders. Mme. Necker
had sought the aid and advice of Mme. de Marchais in the
formation of
her own salon, and had taken for her one of those ardent
attachments so
characteristic of earnest and susceptible natures. She
confided to her
all the secrets of her heart; she felt a double pleasure
when her joys
and her little troubles were shared with this
sympathetic companion. "I
had for her a passionate affection," she says. "When I
first saw her my
whole soul was captivated. I thought her one of those
enchancing fairies
who combine all the gifts of nature and of magic. I
loved her; or,
rather, I idolized her." So pure, so confiding, so far
above reproach
herself, she refuses to see the faults of one she loves
so tenderly. Her
letters glow with exalted sentiment. "Adieu, my
charming, my beautiful,
my sweet friend," she writes. "I embrace you. I press
you to my bosom;
or, rather, to my soul, for it seems to me that no
interval can separate
yours from mine."

But the character of Mme. de Marchais was evidently not
equal to her
fascination. Her vanity was wounded by the success of
her friend. She
took offense at a trifling incident that touched her
self-love. "The
great ladies have disgusted me with friendship," she
wrote, in reply to
Mme. Necker's efforts to repair the breach. They
returned to each other
the letters so full of vows of eternal fidelity, and
were friends no
more. Apparently without any fault of her own, Mme.
Necker was left with

an illusion the less, and the world has another example to cite of the frail texture of feminine friendships.

She was not always, however, so unfortunate in her choice. She found a more amiable and constant object for her affections in Mme. d'Houdetot, a charming woman who, in spite of her errors, held a very warm place in the hearts of her cotemporaries. We have met her before in the philosophical circles of La Chevrette, and in the beautiful promenades of the valley of Montmorency, where Rousseau offered her the incense of a passionate and poetic love. She was facile and witty, graceful and gay, said wise and thoughtful things, wrote pleasant verses which were the exhalations of her own heart, and was the center of a limited though distinguished circle; but her chief attraction was the magic of a sunny temper and a loving spirit. "He only is unhappy who can neither love, nor work, nor die," she writes. Though more or less linked with the literary coteries of her time, Mme. d'Houdetot seems to have been singularly free from the small vanities and vulgar ambitions so often met there. She loved simple pleasures and the peaceful scenes of the country. "What more have we to desire when we can enjoy the pleasures of friendship and of nature?" she writes. "We may then pass lightly over the small troubles of life." She counsels repose to her more restless friend, and her warm expressions of affection have always the ring of sincerity, which contrasts agreeably with the artificial tone of the time. Mme. d'Houdetot lived to a great age, preserving

always her
youthfulness of spirit and sweet serenity of temper, in
spite of sharp
domestic sorrows. She took refuge from these in the
life-long friendship
of Saint-Lambert, for whom Mme. Necker has usually a
gracious message.
It is a curious commentary upon the manners of the age
that one so rigid
and severe should have chosen for her intimate
companionship two women
whose lives were so far removed from her own ideal of
reserved decorum.
But she thought it best to ignore errors which her world
did not regard
as grave, if she was conscious of them at all.

One finds greater pleasure in recalling her ardent and
romantic
attachment to the granddaughter of the Marechale de
Luxembourg, the
lovely Amelie de Boufflers, Duchesse de Lauzun, whose
pen-portrait she
sketched so gracefully and so tenderly; whose gentle
sweetness and shy
delicacy, in the rather oppressive glare of her
surroundings, suggest
a modest wild flower astray among the pretentious
beauties of the
hothouse, and whose untimely death on the scaffold has
left her fragrant
memory entwined with a garland of cypress. But we cannot
dwell upon the
intimate phases of this friendship, whose fine quality
is shown in the
few scattered leaves of a correspondence overflowing
with the wealth of
two rare though unequally gifted natures.

At a later period her husband's position in the
ministry, and the
pronounced opinions of her brilliant daughter, gave to
the salon of
Mme. Necker a marked political and semi-revolutionary
coloring. Her

inclinations always led her to literary diversions, rather than to the discussion of economic questions, but as Mme. de Stael gradually took the scepter that was falling from her hand, she found it difficult to guide the conversation into its old channels. Her pale, thoughtful face, her gentle manner, her soft and penetrating voice, all indicated an exquisitely feminine quality quite in unison with the spirit of urbanity and politeness that was even then going out of fashion. Her quiet and earnest though interesting conversation was somewhat overshadowed by the impetuous eloquence of Mme. de Stael, who gave the tone to every circle into which she came. "I am more and more convinced that I am not made for the great world," she said to the Duchesse de Lauzun, with an accent of regret. "It is Germaine who should shine there and who should love it, for she possesses all the qualities which put her in a position to be at once feared and sought."

If she was allied to the past, however, by her tastes and her sympathies, she belonged to the future by her convictions, and her many-sided intellect touched upon every question of the day. Profoundly religious herself, she was broadly tolerant; always delicate in health, she found time amid her numerous social duties to aid the poor and suffering, and to establish the hospital that still bears her name. Her letters and literary records reveal a woman of liberal thought and fine insight, as well as scholarly tastes. If she lacked a little in the facile graces of the French women, she had to an eminent

degree the
qualities of character that were far rarer in her age
and sphere. Though
she was cold and reserved in manner, beneath the light
snow which she
brought from her native hills beat a heart of warm and
tender, even
passionate, impulses. Devoted wife, loyal friend,
careful mother,
large-minded and large-souled woman, she stands
conspicuous, in a period
of lax domestic relations, for the virtues that grace
the fireside as
well as for the talents that shine in the salon.

But she was not exempt from the sorrows of a nature that
exacts from
life more than life can give, and finds its illusions
vanish before
the cold touch of experience. She had her hours of
darkness and of
suffering. Even the love that was the source of her
keenest happiness
was also the source of her sharpest griefs. In the days
of her husband's
power she missed the exclusive attention she craved.
There were moments
when she doubted the depth of his affection, and felt
anew that her
"eyes were wedded to eternal tears." She could not see
without pain his
extreme devotion to her daughter, whose rich nature, so
spontaneous,
so original, so foreign to her own, gave rise to many
anxieties and
occasional antagonisms. This touches the weak point in
her character.
She was not wholly free from a certain egotism and
intellectual vanity,
without the imagination to comprehend fully an
individuality quite
remote from all her preconceived ideas. She was slow to
accept the fact
that her system of education was at fault, and her
failure to mold

her daughter after her own models was long a source of grief and disappointment. She was ambitious too, and had not won her position without many secret wounds. When misfortunes came, the blows that fell upon her husband struck with double force into her own heart. She was destined to share with him the chill of censure and neglect, the bitter sting of ingratitude, the lonely isolation of one fallen from a high place, whose friendship and whose favors count no more.

In the solitude of Coppet, where she died at fifty-seven, during the last and darkest days of the Revolution, perhaps she realized in the tireless devotion of her husband and the loving care of Mme. de Stael the repose of heart which the brilliant world of Paris never gave her.

With all her gifts, which have left many records that may be read, and in spite of a few shadows that fall more or less upon all earthly relations, not the least of her legacies to posterity was the beautiful example, rarer then than now, of that true and sympathetic family life in which lies the complete harmony of existence, a safeguard against the storms of passion, a perennial fount of love that keeps the spirit young, the tranquility out of which spring the purest flowers of human happiness and human endeavor.

There were many salons of lesser note which have left agreeable memories. It would be pleasant to recall other clever and beautiful women whose names one meets so often in the chronicles of the time, and

whose faces, conspicuous for their clear, strong outlines, still look out upon us from the galleries that perpetuate its life; but the list is too long and would lead us too far. From the moving procession of social leaders who made the age preceding the Revolution so brilliant I have chosen only the few who were most widely known, and who best represent its dominant types and its special phases.

The most remarkable period of the literary salons was really closed with the death of Mme. du Deffand, in 1780. Mme. Geoffrin had already been dead three years, and Mlle. de Lespinasse, four. Some of the most noted of the philosophers and men of letters were also gone, others were past the age of forming fresh ties, the young men belonged to another generation, and no new drawing rooms exactly replaced the old ones. Mme. Necker still received the world that was wont to assemble in the great salons, Mme. de Condorcet presided over a rival coterie, and there were numerous small and intimate circles; but the element of politics was beginning to intrude, and with it a degree of heat which disturbed the usual harmony. The reign of esprit, the perpetual play of wit had begun to pall upon the tastes of people who found themselves face to face with problems so grave and issues so vital. There was a slight reaction towards nature and simplicity. "They may be growing wiser," said Walpole, "but the intermediate change is dullness." For nearly half a century learned men and clever women had been amusing themselves with utopian theories, a few through conviction, the

majority through
fashion, or egotism, or the vanity of saying new things,
just as the
world is doing today. The doctrines put forth by
Montesquieu, vivified
by Voltaire, and carried to the popular heart by
Rousseau had been
freely discussed in the salons, not only by philosophers
and statesmen,
but by men of the world, poets, artists, and pretty
women. The sparks
of thought with which they played so lightly filtered
slowly through the
social strata. The talk of the drawing room at last
reached the street.
But the torch of truth which, held aloft, serves as a
beacon star to
guide the world towards some longed for ideal becomes
often a deadly
explosive when it falls among the poisonous vapors of
inflammable
human passions. Liberty, equality, fraternity assumed a
new and fatal
significance in the minds of the hungry and restless
masses who,
embittered by centuries of wrong, were ready to carry
these phrases to
their immediate and living conclusions. They had found
their watchwords
and their hour. The train was already laid beneath this
complex social
structure, and the tragedy that followed carried to a
common ruin court
and salon, philosophers and beaux esprits, innocent
women and dreaming
men.

That the salons were unconscious instruments in
hastening the
catastrophe, which was sooner or later inevitable, is
undoubtedly true.
Their influence in the dissemination of thought was
immense. The part
they played was, to a limited extent, precisely that of
the modern

press, with an added personal element. They moved in the drift of their time, directed its intelligence, and reflected its average morality. As centers of serious conversation they were distinctly stimulating. It is quite possible that they stimulated the intellect to the exclusion of the more solid qualities of character, and that they were the source of a vast amount of affectation. It was the fashion to have esprit, and those who were deficient in an article so essential to success were naturally disposed to borrow it, or to put on the semblance of it. But no phase of life is without its reverse side, and the present generation cannot claim freedom from pretension of the same sort. It is not unlikely that in expanding the intelligence they established new standards of distinction, which in a measure weakened the old ones. But if they precipitated the downfall of the court they began by rivaling, it was in the logical course of events, which few were wise enough to foresee, much less to determine.

It is worthy of remark that this reign of women, in which the manners and forms of modern society found their initiative and their models, was not a reign of youth, or beauty, though these qualities are never likely to lose their own peculiar fascination. It was, before all things, a reign of intelligence, and ascendancy of women who had put on the hues of age without laying aside the permanent charm of a fully developed personality. It was intelligence blended with practical knowledge of the world and with the graceful amenities that

heightened while half
disguising its power. The women of the present have
different aims. They
are no longer content with the role of inspirer. Their
methods are more
direct. They depend less upon finesse, more upon
inherent right and
strength. But it is to the women who shone so
conspicuously in France
for more than two hundred years that we may trace the
broadened
intellectual life, the unfettered activities, the wide
and beneficent
influence of the women of today.

CHAPTER XVII. SALONS OF THE REVOLUTION--MADAME ROLAND

_Change in the Character of the Salons--Mme. de
Condorcet--Mme. Roland's
Story of Her Own Life--A Marriage of Reason--Enthusiasm
for the
Revolution--Her Modest Salon--Her Tragical Fate_

The salons of the Revolution were no longer simply the
fountains of
literary and artistic criticism, the centers of wit,
intelligence,
knowledge, philosophy, and good manners, but the
rallying points of
parties. They took the tone of the time and assumed the
character of
political clubs. The salon of 1790 was not the salon of
1770. A new
generation had arisen, with new ideals and a new spirit
that made for
itself other forms or greatly modified the old ones. It
was not led by
philosophers and beaux esprits who evolved theories and
turned them over
as an intellectual diversion, but by men of action,
ready to test
these theories and force them to their logical

conclusions. Mirabeau, Vergniaud, and Robespierre had succeeded Voltaire, Diderot, and d'Alembert. Impelled towards one end, by vanity, ambition, love of glory, or genuine conviction, these men and their colleagues turned the salon, which had so long been the school of public opinion, into an engine of revolution. The exquisite flower of the eighteenth century had blossomed, matured, and fallen. Perhaps it was followed by a plant of sturdier growth, but the rare quality of its beauty was not repeated. The time was past when the gentle touch of women could temper the violence of clashing opinions, or subject the discussion of vital questions to the inflexible laws of taste. No tactful hostess could hold in leading strings these fiery spirits. The voices that had charmed the old generation were silent. Of the women who had made the social life of the century so powerful and so famous, many were quietly asleep before the storm broke; many were languishing in prison cells, with no outlook but the scaffold; some were pining in the loneliness of exile; and a few were buried in a seclusion which was their only safeguard.

But nature has always in reserve fresh types that come to the surface in a great crisis. The women who made themselves felt and heard above the din of revolution, though by no means deficient in the graces, were mainly distinguished for quite other qualities than those which shine in a drawing room or lead a coterie. They were either women of rare genius and the courage of their convictions, or women trained

in the stern
school of a bitter experience, who found their true
milieu in the midst
of stirring events. The names of Mme. de Stael, Mme.
Roland, and Mme.
de Condorcet readily suggest themselves as the most
conspicuous
representatives of this stormy period. With different
gifts and in
different measure, each played a prominent role in the
brief drama to
which they lent the inspiration of their genius and
their sympathy,
until they were forced to turn back with horror from
that carnival of
savage passions which they had unconsciously helped to
let loose upon
the world.

The salon of the young, beautiful, and gifted Mme. de
Condorcet had its
roots in the old order of things. During the ministry of
Necker it was
in some degree a rival of the Salon Helvetique, and
included many of the
same guests; later it became a rendezvous for the
revolutionary party.
The Marquis de Condorcet was not only philosopher,
savant, litterateur,
a member of two academies, and among the profoundest
thinkers of his
time, but a man of the world, who inherited the tastes
and habits of the
old noblesse. His wife, whom he had married late in
life, was Sophie de
Grouchy, sister of the Marechal, and was noted for
remarkable talents,
as well as for surpassing beauty. Belonging by birth and
associations to
the aristocracy, and by her pronounced opinions to the
radical side of
the philosophic party, her salon was a center in which
two worlds met.
In its palmy days people were only speculating upon the
borders of an

abyss which had not yet opened visibly before them. The revolutionary spirit ran high, but had not passed the limits of reason and humanity. Mme. de Condorcet, who was deeply tinged with the new doctrines, presided with charming grace, and her youthful beauty lent an added fascination to the brilliancy of her intellect and the rather grave eloquence of her conversation. In her drawing room were gathered men of letters and women of talent, nobles and scientists, philosophers and Beaux Esprits. Turgot and Malesherbes represented its political side; Marmontel, the Abbe Morellet, and Suard lent it some of the wit and vivacity that shone in the old salons. Literature, science, and the arts were discussed here, and there was more or less reading, music, or recitation. But the tendency was towards serious conversation, and the tone was often controversial.

The character of Condorcet was a sincere and elevated one. "He loved much and he loved many people," said Mlle. de Lespinasse. He aimed at enlightening and regenerating the world, not at overturning it; but, like many others, strong souls and true, he was led from practical truth in the pursuit of an ideal one. His wife, who shared his political opinions, united with them a fiery and independent spirit that was not content with theories. Her philosophic tastes led her to translate Adam Smith, and to write a fine analysis of the "Moral Sentiments." But the sympathy of which she spoke so beautifully, and which gave so living a force to the philosophy it illuminated, if not

directed by broad
intelligence and impartial judgment, is often like the
ignis fatuus that
plays over the poisonous marsh and lures the unwary to
destruction. For
a brief day the magical influence of Mme. de Condorcet
was felt more or
less by all who came within her circle. She inspired the
equable temper
of her husband with her own enthusiasm, and urged him on
to extreme
measures from which his gentler soul would have
recoiled. When at last
he turned from those scenes of horror, choosing to be
victim rather than
oppressor, it was too late. Perhaps she recalled the
days of her power
with a pang of regret when her friends had fallen one by
one at the
scaffold, and her husband, hunted and deserted by those
he tried to
serve, had died by his own hand, in a lonely cell, to
escape a sadder
fate; while she was left, after her timely release from
prison, to
struggle alone in poverty and obscurity, for some years
painting
water-color portraits for bread. She was not yet thirty
when the
Revolution ended, and lived far into the present
century; but though the
illusions of her youth had been rudely shattered, she
remained always
devoted to her liberal principles and a broad humanity.

The woman, however, who most fitly represents the spirit
of the
Revolution, who was at once its inspiration, its
heroine, and its
victim, is Mme. Roland. It is not as the leader of a
salon that she
takes her place in the history of her time, but as one
of the foremost
and ablest leaders of a powerful political party. Born
in the ranks

of the bourgeoisie, she had neither the prestige of a name nor the distinction of an aristocratic lineage. Reared in seclusion, she was familiar with the great world by report only. Though brilliant, even eloquent in conversation when her interest was roused, her early training had added to her natural distaste for the spirit, as well as the accessories, of a social life that was inevitably more or less artificial. She would have felt cramped and caged in the conventional atmosphere of a drawing room in which the gravest problems were apt to be forgotten in the flash of an epigram or the turn of a bon mot. The strong and heroic outlines of her character were more clearly defined on the theater of the world. But at a time when the empire of the salon was waning, when vital interests and burning convictions had for the moment thrown into the shade all minor questions of form and convenience, she took up the scepter in a simpler fashion, and, disdaining the arts of a society of which she saw only the fatal and hopeless corruption, held her sway over the daring and ardent men who gathered about her by the unassisted force of her clear and vigorous intellect.

It would be interesting to trace the career of the thoughtful and precocious child known as Manon or Marie Phlipon, who sat in her father's studio with the burin of an engraver in one hand and a book in the other, eagerly absorbing the revolutionary theories which were to prove so fatal to her, but it is not the purpose here to dwell upon the details of her life. In the solitude of a prison

cell and under the
shadow of the scaffold she told her own story. She has
introduced us
to the simple scenes of her childhood, the modest home
on the Quai de
l'Horloge, the wise and tender mother, the weak and
unstable father. We
are made familiar with the tiny recess in which she
studies, reads, and
makes extracts from the books which are such strange
companions for her
years. We seem to see the grave little face as it lights
with emotion
over the inspiring pages of Fenelon or the chivalrous
heroes of Tasso,
and sympathize with the fascination that leads the child
of nine years
to carry her Plutarch to mass instead of her prayer
book. She portrays
for us her convent life with its dreams, its
exaltations, its romantic
friendships, and its ardent enthusiasms. We have vivid
pictures of the
calm and sympathetic Sophie Cannel, to whom she
unburdens all her hopes
and aspirations and sorrows; of the lively sister
Henriette, who years
afterward, in the generous hope of saving her early
friend, proposed to
exchange clothes and take her place in the cells of
Sainte-Pelagie. In
the long and commonplace procession of suitors that
files before us,
one only touches her heart. La Blancherie has a literary
and philosophic
turn, and the young girl's imagination drapes him in its
own glowing
colors. The opposition of her father separates them, but
absence only
lends fuel to this virgin flame. One day she learns that
his views are
mercenary, that he is neither true nor disinterested,
and the charm is
broken. She met him afterward in the Luxembourg gardens
with a feather

in his hat, and the last illusion vanished.

There is an idyllic charm in these pictures so simply and gracefully sketched. She sees with the vision of one lying down to sleep after a life of pain, and dreaming of the green fields, the blue skies, the running brooks, the trees, the flowers, that make so beautiful a background for youthful loves and hopes. Perhaps we could wish sometimes that she were a little less frank. We miss a touch of delicacy in this nature that was so strong and self-poised. We are sorry that she dismissed La Blancherie quite so theatrically. There is a trace too much of consciousness in her fine self-analysis, perhaps a little vanity, and we half suspect that her unchildlike penetration and precocity of motive was sometimes the reflection of an afterthought. But it is to be remembered that, even in childhood, she had lived in such close companionship with the heroes and moralists of the past that their sentiments had become her own. She doubtless posed a little to herself, as well as to the world, but her frankness was a part of that uncompromising truthfulness which scorned disguises of any sort, and led her to paint faults and virtues alike.

Family sorrows--the death of the mother whom she adored, and the unworthiness of her father--combined to change the current of her free and happy life, and to deepen a natural vein of melancholy. In her loneliness of soul the convent seemed to offer itself as the sole haven of peace and rest. The child, who loved Fenelon, and

dreamed over the lives of the saints, had in her much of the stuff out of which mystics and fanatics are made. Her ardent soul was raised to ecstasy by the stately ceremonial of the Church; her imagination was captivated by its majestic music, its mystery, its solemnity, and she was wont to spend hours in rapt meditation. But her strong fund of good sense, her firm reason fortified by wide and solid reading, together with her habits of close observation and analysis, saved her from falling a victim to her own emotional needs, or to chimeras of any sort. She had drawn her mental nourishment too long from Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, the English philosophers, and classic historians, to become permanently a prey to exaggerated sensibilities, though it was the same temperament fired by a sense of human inequality and wrong, that swept her at last along the road that led to the scaffold. At twenty-six the vocation of the religieuse had lost its fascination; the pious fervor of her childhood had vanished before the skepticism of her intellect, its ardent friendships had grown dim, its fleeting loves had proved illusive, and her romantic dreams ended in a cold marriage of reason.

It may be noted here that though Mme. Roland had lost her belief in ecclesiastical systems, and, as she said, continued to go to mass only for the "edification of her neighbors and the good order of society," there was always in her nature a strong undercurrent of religious feeling. Her faith had not survived the full

illumination of her reason,
but her trust in immortality never seriously wavered.
The Invocation
that was among her last written words is the prayer of a
soul that is
conscious of its divine origin and destiny. She
retained, too, the firm
moral basis that was laid in her early teachings, and
which saved her
from the worst errors of her time. She might be shaken
by the storms of
passion, but one feels that she could never be swept
from her moorings.

Tall and finely developed, with dark brown hair; a large
mouth whose
beauty lay in a smile of singular sweetness; dark,
serious eyes with
a changeful expression which no artist could catch; a
fresh complexion
that responded to every emotion of a passionate soul; a
deep,
well-modulated voice; manners gentle, modest, reserved,
sometimes
timid with the consciousness that she was not readily
taken at her true
value--such was the PERSONNELLE of the woman who calmly
weighed the
possibilities of a life which had no longer a pleasant
outlook in any
direction, and, after much hesitation, became the wife
of a grave,
studious, austere man of good family and moderate
fortune, but many
years her senior.

It was this marriage, into which she entered with all
seriousness, and a
devotion that was none the less sincere because it was
of the intellect
rather than the heart, that gave the final tinge to a
character that was
already laid on solid foundations. Strong, clear-
sighted, earnest, and
gifted, her later experience had accented a slightly

ascetic quality
which had been deepened also by her study of antique
models. Her tastes
were grave and severe. But they had a lighter side. As a
child she had
excelled in music, dancing, drawing, and other feminine
accomplishments,
though one feels always that her distinctive talent does
not lie in
these things. She is more at home with her thoughts.
There was a touch
of poetry, too, in her nature, that under different
circumstances might
have lent it a softer and more graceful coloring. She
had a natural love
for the woods and the flowers. The single relief to her
somber life at
La Platiere, after her marriage, was in the long and
lonely rambles in
the country, whose endless variations of hill and vale
and sky and color
she has so tenderly and so vividly noted. In her last
days a piano and
a few flowers lighted the darkness of her prison walls,
and out of
these her imagination reared a world of its own, peopled
with dreams and
fancies that contrasted strangely with the gloom of her
surroundings.
This poetic vein was closely allied to the keen
sensibility that
tempered the seriousness of her character. With the
mental equipment of
a man, she combined the rich sympathy of a woman. Her
devotion to her
mother was passionate in its intensity; her letters to
Sophie throb with
warmth and sentiment. She is tender and loving, as well
as philosophic
and thoughtful. Her emotional ardor was doubtless partly
the glow of
youth and not altogether in the texture of a mind so
eminently rational;
but there were rich possibilities behind it. A shade of
difference in

the mental and moral atmosphere, a trace more or less of sunshine and happiness are important factors in the peculiar combination of qualities that make up a human being. The marriage of Mme. Roland led her into a world that had little color save what she brought into it. Her husband did not smile upon her friends. Sympathy other than that of the intellect she does not seem to have had. But her story is best told in her own words, written in the last days of her life.

"In considering only the happiness of my partner, I soon perceived that something was wanting to my own. I had never, for a single instant, ceased to see in my husband one of the most estimable of men, to whom I felt it an honor to belong; but I have often realized that there was a lack of equality between us, that the ascendancy of an overbearing character, added to that of twenty years more of age, gave him too much superiority. If we lived in solitude, I had many painful hours to pass; if we went into the world, I was loved by men of whom I saw that some might touch me too deeply. I plunged into work with my husband, another excess which had its inconvenience; I gave him the habit of not knowing how to do without me for anything in the world, nor at any moment.

"I honor, I cherish my husband, as a sensible daughter adores a virtuous father to whom she would sacrifice even her lover; but I have found the man who might have been that lover, and remaining faithful to my duties, my frankness has not known how to conceal the feelings which I subjected

to them. My husband, excessively sensitive both in his affections and his self-love, could not support the idea of the least change in his influence; his imagination darkened, his jealousy irritated me; happiness fled; he adored me, I sacrificed myself for him, and we were miserable.

"If I were free, I would follow him everywhere to soften his griefs and console his old age; a soul like mine leaves no sacrifices imperfect. But Roland was embittered by the thought of sacrifice, and the knowledge once acquired that I had made one ruined his happiness; he suffered in accepting it, and could not do without it."

The sequel to this tale is told in allusions and half revelations, in her letters to Buzot, which glow with suppressed feeling; in her touching farewell to one whom she dared not to name, but whom she hoped to meet where it would not be a crime to love; in those final words of her "Last Thoughts"--"Adieu.... No, it is from thee alone that I do not separate; to leave the earth is to approach each other."

Beneath this semi-transparent veil the heart-drama of her life is hidden.

For the sake of those who would be pained by this story, as well as for her own, we would rather it had never been told. We should like to believe that the woman who worked so nobly with and for the man who died by his own hand five days after her death, because he could stay no longer in a world where such crimes were possible, had

lived in the
full perfection of domestic sympathy. But, if she
carried with her an
incurable wound, one cannot help regretting that her
Spartan courage
had not led her to wear the mantle of silence to the
end. Posterity
is curious rather than sympathetic, and the world is
neither wiser nor
better for these needless soul-revelations. There is
always a certain
malady of egotism behind them. But it is often easier to
scale the
heights of human heroism than to still the cry of a
bruised spirit. Mme.
Roland had moments of falling short of her own ideals,
and this was one
of them. Pure, loyal, self-sustained as she was, her
strong sense
of verity did not permit the veil which would have best
served the
interests of the larger truth. It is fair to say that
she thought the
malicious gossip of her enemies rendered this statement
necessary to
the protection of her fame. Perhaps, after all, she
shows here her most
human and lovable if not her strongest side. We should
like Minerva
better if she were not so faultlessly wise.

The outbreak of the Revolution found Mme. Roland at La
Platiere, where
she shared her husband's philosophic and economic
studies, brought
peace into a discordant family, attended to her
household duties and the
training of her child, devoted many hours to generous
care for the sick
and poor, and reserved a little leisure for poetry and
the solitary
rambles she loved so well. The first martial note struck
a responsive
chord in her heart. Her opportunity had come. Embittered
by class

distinctions over which she had long brooded, saturated with the sentiments of Rousseau, and full of untried theories constructed in the closet, with small knowledge of the wide and complex interests with which it was necessary to deal, she centered all the hitherto latent energies of her forceful nature upon the quixotic effort to redress human wrongs. Her birth, her intellect, her character, her temperament, her education, her associations--all led her towards the role she played so heroically. She had a keen appreciation for genuine values, but none whatever for factitious ones. Her inborn hatred of artificial distinctions had grown with her years and colored all her estimates of men and things. When she came to Paris, she noted with a sort of indignation the superior poise and courtesy of the men in the assembly who had been reared in the habit of power. It added fuel to her enmity towards institutions in which reason, knowledge, and integrity paid homage to fine language and distinguished manners. She found even Vergniaud too refined and fastidious in his dress for a successful republican leader. Her old contempt for a "philosopher with a feather" had in no wise abated. With such principles ingrained and fostered, it is not difficult to forecast the part Mme. Roland was destined to play in the coming conflict of classes. Whatever we may think of the wisdom of her attitude towards the Revolution, she represented at least its most sincere side. As she stood white-robed and courageous at the foot of the scaffold, facing the savage populace she had laid

down her life
to befriend, perhaps her perspectives were truer.
Experience had given
her an insight into the characters of men which is not
to be gained in
the library, nor in the worship of dead heroes. If it
had not shaken her
faith in human perfectibility, it had taught her at
least the value of
tradition in chaining brutal human passions.

The tragical fate of Mme. Roland has thrown a strong
light upon the
modest little salon in which the unfortunate Girondists
met four times a
week to discuss the grave problems that confronted them.
A salon in the
old sense it certainly was not. It had little in common
with the famous
centers of conversation and esprit. It was simply the
rallying point of
a party. The only woman present was Mme. Roland herself,
but at first
she assumed no active leadership. She sat at a little
table outside
of the circle, working with her needle, or writing
letters, alive to
everything that was said, venturing sometimes a word of
counsel or
a thoughtful suggestion, and often biting her lips to
repress some
criticism that she feared might not be within her
province. She had
left her quiet home in the country fired with a single
thought--the
regeneration of France. The men who gathered about her
were in full
accord with her generous aims. It was not to such
enthusiasms that the
old salons lost themselves. They had been often the
centers of political
intrigues, as in the days of the Fronde; or of religious
partisanship,
as during the troubles of Port Royal; they had ranged
themselves for and

against rival candidates for literary or artistic honors; but they had preserved, on the whole, a certain cosmopolitan character. All shades of opinion were represented, and social brilliancy was the end sought, not the triumph of special ideas. It is indeed true that earnest convictions were, to some extent, stifled in the salons, where charm and intelligence counted for so much, and the sterling qualities of character for so little. But the etiquette, the urbanity, the measure, which assured the outward harmony of a society that courted distinction of every kind, were quite foreign to the iconoclasts who were bent upon leveling all distinctions. The Revolution which attacked the whole superstructure of society, was antagonistic to its minor forms as well, and it was the revolutionary party alone which was represented in the salon of Mme. Roland. Brissot, Vergniaud, Petion, Guadet, and Buzot were leaders there--men sincere and ardent, though misguided, and unable to cope with the storm they had raised, to be themselves swept away by its pitiless rage. Robespierre, scheming and ambitious, came there, listened, said little, appropriated for his own ends, and bided his time. Mme. Roland had small taste for the light play of intellect and wit that has no outcome beyond the meteoric display of the moment, and she was impatient with the talk in which an evening was often passed among these men without any definite results. As she measured their strength, she became more outspoken. She communicated to them a spark of her own energy. The most daring moves were made at

her bidding. She urged on her timid and conservative husband, she drew up his memorials, she wrote his letters, she was at once his stimulus, and his helper. Weak and vacillating men yielded to her rapid insight, her vigor, her earnestness, and her persuasive eloquence. This was probably the period of her greatest influence. Many of the swift changes of those first months may be traced to her salon. The moves which were made in the Assembly were concocted there, the orators who triumphed found their inspiration there. Still, in spite of her energy, her strength, and her courage, she prides herself upon maintaining always the reserve and decorum of her sex.

If she assumed the favorite role of the French woman for a short time while her husband was in the ministry, it was in a sternly republican fashion. She gave dinners twice a week to her husband's political friends. The fifteen or twenty men who met around her table at five o'clock were linked by political interests only. The service was simple, with no other luxury than a few flowers. There were no women to temper the discussions or to lighten their seriousness. After dinner the guests lingered for an hour or so in the drawing room, but by nine o'clock it was deserted. She received on Friday, but what a contrast to the Fridays of Mme. Necker in those same apartments! It was no longer a brilliant company of wits, savants, and men of letters, enlivened by women of beauty, esprit, rank, and fashion. There was none of the diversity of

taste and thought which lends such a charm to social life. Mme. Roland tells us that she never had an extended circle at any time, and that, while her husband was in power, she made and received no visits, and invited no women to her house. She saw only her husband's colleagues, or those who were interested in his tastes and pursuits, which were also her own. The world of society wearied her. She was absorbed in a single purpose. If she needed recreation, she sought it in serious studies.

It is always difficult to judge what a man or a woman might have been under slightly altered conditions. But for some single circumstance that converged and focused their talent, many a hero would have died unknown and unsuspected. The key that unlocks the treasure house of the soul is not always found, and its wealth is often scattered on unseen shores. But it is clear that the part of Mme. Roland could never have been a distinctively social one. She lived at a time when great events brought out great qualities. Her clear intellect, her positive convictions, her boundless energy, and her ardent enthusiasm, gave her a powerful influence in those early days of the Revolution, that looked towards a world reconstructed but not plunged into the dark depths of chaos, and it is through this that she has left a name among the noted women of France. In more peaceful times her peculiar talent would doubtless have led her towards literature. In her best style she has rare vigor and simplicity. She has moments of eloquent thought. There are flashes of it

in her early letters to Sophie, which she begs her friend not to burn, though she does not hope to rival Mme. de Sevigne, whom she takes for her model. She lacked the grace, the lightness, the wit, the humor of this model, but she had an earnestness, a serious depth of thought, that one does not find in Mme. de Sevigne. She had also a vein of sentiment that was an underlying force in her character, though it was always subject to her masculine intellect. She confesses that she should like to be the annalist of her country, and longs for the pen of Tacitus, for whom she has a veritable passion. When one reads her sharp, incisive pen-portraits, drawn with such profound insight and masterly skill, one feels that her true vocation was in the world of letters. At the close she verges a little upon the theatrical, as sometimes in her young days. But when she wrote her final records she felt her last hours slipping away. Life, with its large possibilities undeveloped and its promises unfulfilled, was behind her. Darkness was all around her, eternal silence before her. And she had lived but thirty-nine years.

Mme. Roland does not really belong to the world of the salons, though she has been included among them by some of her own cotemporaries. She was of quite another genre. She represents a social reaction in which old forms are adapted to new ideas and lose their essential quality by the change. But she foreshadows a type of woman that has had great influence since the salons have lost their prestige. She relied neither

upon the reflected light of a coterie, the arts of the courtier, nor the subtle power of personal attraction; but, firm in her convictions, clear in her purpose, and unselfish in her aims, she laid down her interests, and, in the end, her life, upon the altar of liberty and humanity. She could hardly be regarded, however, as herself a type. She was cast in a rare mold and lived under rare conditions. She was individual, as were Hypatia, Joan of Arc, and Charlotte Corday--a woman fitted for a special mission which brought her little but a martyr's crown and a permanent fame.

CHAPTER XVIII. MADAME DE STAEL

Supremacy of Her Genius--Her Early Training--Her Sensibility--a Mariage de Convenance--Her Salon--Anecdote of Benjamin Constant--Her Exile--Life at Coppet--Secret Marriage--Close of a Stormy Life.

The fame of all other French women is more or less overshadowed by that of one who was not only supreme in her own world, but who stands on a pinnacle so high that time and distance only serve to throw into stronger relief the grand outlines of her many-sided genius. Without the simplicity and naturalness of Mme. de Sevigne, the poise and judgment of Mme. de Lafayette, or the calm foresight and diplomacy of Mme. de Maintenon, Mme. de Stael had a brilliancy of imagination, a force of passion, a grasp of intellect, and a diversity of gifts that belonged

to none of these women. It is not possible within the limits of a brief chapter to touch even lightly upon the various phases of a character so complex and talents so versatile. One can only gather a few scattered traits and indicate a few salient points in a life of which the details are already familiar. As woman, novelist, philosopher, litterateur, and conversationist, she has marked, if not equal, claims upon our attention. To speak of her as simply the leader of a salon is to merge the greater talent into the less, but her brilliant social qualities in a measure brought out and illuminated all the others. It was not the gift of reconciling diverse elements, and of calling out the best thoughts of those who came within her radius, that distinguished her. Her personality was too dominant not to disturb sometimes the measure and harmony which fashion had established. She did not listen well, but her gift was that of the orator, and, taking whatever subject was uppermost into her own hands, she talked with an irresistible eloquence that held her auditors silent and enchained. Living as she did in the world of wit and talent which had so fascinated her mother, she ruled it as an autocrat.

The mental coloring of Mme. de Stael was not taken in the shade, as that of Mme. Roland had been. She was reared in the atmosphere of the great world. That which her eager mind gathered in solitude was subject always to the modification which contact with vigorous living minds is sure to give. The little Germaine Necker who sat on a low stool

at her mother's
side, charming the cleverest men of her time by her
precocious wit; who
wrote extracts from the dramas she heard, and opinions
upon the authors
she read; who made pen-portraits of her friends, and cut
out paper kings
and queens to play in the tragedies she composed; whose
heart was always
overflowing with love for those around her, and who had
supreme need
for an outlet to her sensibilities, was a fresh type in
that age of keen
analysis, cold skepticism, and rigid forms. The serious
utterances of
her childhood were always suffused with feeling. She
loved that which
made her weep. Her sympathies were full and overflowing,
and when her
vigorous and masculine intellect took the ascendancy it
directed them,
but only partly held them in check. It never dulled nor
subdued them.
The source of her power, as also of her weakness, lay
perhaps in
her vast capacity for love. It gave color and force to
her rich and
versatile character. It animated all she did and gave
point to all she
wrote. It found expression in the eloquence of her
conversation, in the
exaltation and passionate intensity of her affections,
in the fervor of
her patriotism, in the self-forgetful generosity that
brought her very
near the verge of the scaffold. Here was the source of
that indefinable
quality we call genius--not genius of the sort which
Buffon has defined
as patience, but the divine flame that crowns with life
the dead
materials which patience has gathered.

It was impossible that a child so eager, so sympathetic,
so full

of intellect and esprit, should not have developed rapidly in the atmosphere of her mother's salon. Whether it was the best school for a young girl may be a question, but a character like that of Mme. de Stael is apt to go its own way in whatever circumstances it finds itself. She was the despair of Mme. Necker, whose educational theories were altogether upset by this precocious daughter who refused to be cast in a mold. But she was habituated to a high altitude of thought. Men like Marmontel, La Harpe, Grimm, Thomas, and the Abbe Raynal delighted in calling out her ready wit, her brilliant repartee, and her precocious ideas. Surrounded thus from childhood with all the appointments as well as the talent and esprit that made the life of the salons so fascinating; inheriting the philosophic insight of her father, the literary gifts of her mother, to which she added a genius all her own; heir also to the spirit of conversation, the facility, the enthusiasm, the love of pleasing which are the Gallic birthright, she took her place in the social world as a queen by virtue of her position, her gifts, and her heritage. Already, before her marriage, she had changed the tone of her mother's salon. She brought into it an element of freshness and originality which the dignified and rather precise character of Mme. Necker had failed to impart. She gave it also a strong political coloring. This influence was more marked after she became the wife of the Swedish ambassador, as she continued for some time to pass her evenings in her mother's drawing room, where she became

more and more
a central figure. Her temperament and her tastes were of
the world in
which she lived, but her reason and her expansive
sympathies led her to
ally herself with the popular cause; hence she was, to
some extent, a
link between two conflicting interests.

It was in 1786 that Mme. de Stael entered the world as a
married woman.
This marriage was arranged for her after the fashion of
the time, and
she accepted it as she would have accepted anything
tolerable that
pleased her idolized father and revered mother. When
only ten years
of age, she observed that they took great pleasure in
the society of
Gibbon, and she gravely proposed to marry him, that they
might always
have this happiness. The full significance of this
singular proposition
is not apparent until one remembers that the learned
historian was not
only rather old, but so short and fat as to call out
from one of his
friends the remark that when he needed a little exercise
he had only to
take a turn of three times around M. Gibbon. The Baron
de Stael had an
exalted position, fine manners, a good figure, and a
handsome face, but
he lacked the one thing that Mme. de Stael most
considered, a commanding
talent. She did not see him through the prism of a
strong affection
which transfigures all things, even the most
commonplace. What this
must have meant to a woman of her genius and temperament
whose ideal of
happiness was a sympathetic marriage, it is not
difficult to divine. It
may account, in some degree, for her restlessness, her
perpetual need of

movement, of excitement, of society. But, whatever her domestic troubles may have been, they were of limited duration. She was quietly separated from her husband in 1798. Four years later she decided to return to Coppet with him, as he was unhappy and longed to see his children. He died en route.

The period of this marriage was one of the most memorable of France, the period when noble and generous spirits rallied in a spontaneous movement for national regeneration. Mme. De Stael was in the flush of hope and enthusiasm, fresh from the study of Rousseau and her own dreams of human perfectibility; radiant, too, with the reflection of her youthful fame. Among those who surrounded her were the Montmorencys, Lafayette, and Count Louis de Narbonne, whose brilliant intellect and charming manners touched her perhaps too deeply for her peace of mind. There were also Barnave, Chenier, Talleyrand, Mirabeau, Vergniaud, and many others of the active leaders of the Revolution. A few women mingled in her more intimate circle, which was still of the old society. Of these were the ill-fated Duchesse de Gramont, Mme. de Lauzun, the Princesse de Poix, and the witty, lovable Marechale de Beauvau. As a rule, though devoted to her friends and kind to those who sought her aid, Mme. de Stael did not like the society of women. Perhaps they did not always respond to her elevated and swiftly flowing thoughts; or it may be that she wounded the vanity of those who were cast into the shade by talents so conspicuous and conversation so eloquent, and who

felt the lack of sympathetic rapport. Society is au fond republican, and is apt to resent autocracy, even the autocracy of genius, when it takes the form of monologue. It is contrary to the social spirit. The salon of Mme. de Stael not only took its tone from herself, but it was a reflection of herself. She was not beautiful, and she dressed badly; indeed, she seems to have been singularly free from that personal consciousness which leads people to give themselves the advantages of an artistic setting, even if the taste is not inborn. She was too intent upon what she thought and felt, to give heed to minor details. But in her conversation, which was a sort of improvisation, her eloquent face was aglow, her dark eyes flashed with inspiration, her superb form and finely poised head seemed to respond to the rhythmic flow of thoughts that were emphasized by the graceful gestures of an exquisitely molded hand, in which she usually held a sprig of laurel. "If I were queen," said Mme. de Tesse, "I would order Mme. de Stael to talk to me always."

But this center in which the more thoughtful spirits of the old regime met the brilliant and active leaders of the new was broken up by the storm which swept away so many of its leaders, and Mme. de Stael, after lingering in the face of dangers to save her friends, barely escaped with her life on the eve of the September massacres of 1792. "She is an excellent woman," said one of her contemporaries, "who drowns all her friends in order to have the pleasure of angling for

them."

Mme. de Stael resumed her place and organized her salon anew in 1795.

But it was her fate to live always in an atmosphere surcharged with storms. She was too republican for the aristocrats, and too aristocratic for the republicans. Distrusted by both parties and feared by the

Directoire, she found it advisable after a few months to retire to

Coppet. Less than two years later she was again in Paris. Her friends

were then in power, notably Talleyrand. "If I remain here another year

I shall die," he had written her from America, and she had generously

secured the repeal of the decree that exiled him, a kindness which

he promptly forgot. Though her enthusiasm for the republic was much

moderated, and though she had been so far dazzled by the genius of

Napoleon as to hail him as a restorer of order, her illusions regarding

him were very short-lived. She had no sympathy with his aims at personal

power. Her drawing room soon became the rallying point for his enemies

and the center of a powerful opposition. But she had a natural love for

all forms of intellectual distinction, and her genius and fame still

attracted a circle more or less cosmopolitan. Ministers of state and

editors of leading journals were among her guests.

Joseph and Lucien

Bonaparte were her devoted friends. The small remnant of the noblesse

that had any inclination to return to a world which had lost its

charm for them found there a trace of the old politeness. Mathieu de

Montmorency, devout and charitable; his brother Adrien,

delicate in spirit and gentle in manners; Narbonne, still devoted and diplomatic, and the Chevalier de Boufflers, gay, witty, and brilliant, were of those who brought into it something of the tone of the past regime. There were also the men of the new generation, men who were saturated with the principles of the Revolution though regretting its methods. Among these were Chebnier, Regnault, and Benjamin Constant.

The influence of Mme. de Stael was at its height during this period.

Her talent, her liberal opinions, and her persuasive eloquence gave her great power over the constitutional leaders. The measures of the Government were freely discussed and criticized in her salon, and men went out with positions well defined and speeches well considered. The Duchesse d'Abrantes relates an incident which aptly illustrates this power and its reaction upon herself. Benjamin Constant had prepared a brilliant address. The evening before it was to be delivered, Mme. de Stael was surrounded by a large and distinguished company. After tea was served he said to her:

"Your salon is filled with people who please you; if I speak tomorrow, it will be deserted. Think of it."

"One must follow one's convictions," she replied, after a moment's hesitation.

She admitted afterward that she would never have refused his offer not to compromise her, if she could have foreseen all that would follow.

The next day she invited her friends to celebrate his triumph. At four o'clock a note of excuse; in an hour, ten. From this time her fortunes waned. Many ceased to visit her salon. Even Talleyrand, who owed her so much, came there no more.

In later years she confessed that the three men she had most loved were Narbonne, Talleyrand, and Mathieu de Montmorency. Her friendship for the first of these reached a passionate exaltation, which had a profound and not altogether wholesome influence upon her life. How completely she was disenchanted is shown in a remark she made long afterward of a loyal and distinguished man: "He has the manners of Narbonne and a heart." It is a character in a sentence. Mathieu de Montmorency was a man of pure motives, who proved a refuge of consolation in many storms, but her regard for him was evidently a gentler flame that never burned to extinction. Whatever illusions she may have had as to Talleyrand--and they seem to have been little more than an enthusiastic appreciation of his talent--were certainly broken by his treacherous desertion in her hour of need. Not the least among her many sorrows was the bitter taste of ingratitude.

But Napoleon, who, like Louis XIV, sought to draw all influences and merge all power in himself, could not tolerate a woman whom he felt to be in some sense a rival. He thought he detected her hand in the address of Benjamin Constant which lost her so many friends. He feared the wit

that flashed in her salon, the satire that wounded the criticism that measured his motives and his actions. He recognized the power of a coterie of brilliant intellects led by a genius so inspiring. His brothers, knowing her vulnerable point and the will with which she had to deal, gave her a word of caution. But the advice and intercession of her friends were alike without avail. The blow which she so much feared fell at last, and she found herself an exile and a wanderer from the scenes she most loved.

We have many pleasant glimpses of her life at Coppet, but a shadow always rests upon it. A few friends still cling to her through the bitter and relentless persecutions that form one of the most singular chapters in history, and offer the most remarkable tribute to her genius and her power. We find here Schlegel, Sismondi, Mathieu de Montmorency, Prince Augustus, Monti, Mme. Recamier, and many other distinguished visitors of various nationalities. The most prominent figure perhaps was Benjamin Constant, brilliant, gifted, eloquent, passionate, vain, and capricious, the torturing consolation and the stormy problem of her saddest years. She revived the old literary diversions. At eleven o'clock, we are told, the guests assembled at breakfast, and the conversations took a high literary tone. They were resumed at dinner, and continued often until midnight. Here, as elsewhere, Mme. de Stael was queen, holding her guests entranced by the magic of her words. "Life is for me like a ball after the music has ceased," said

Sismondi when her voice was silent. She was a veritable Corinne in her esprit, her sentiment, her gift of improvisation, and her underlying melancholy. But in this choice company hers was not the only voice, though it was heard above all the others. Thought and wit flashed and sparkled. Dramas were played--the "Zaire" and "Tancred" of Voltaire, and tragedies written by herself. Mme. Recamier acted the Aricie to Mme. de Stael's Phedre. This life that seems to us so fascinating, has been described too often to need repetition. It had its tumultuous elements, its passionate undercurrents, its romantic episodes. But in spite of its attractions Mme. de Stael fretted under the peaceful shades of Coppet. Its limited horizon pressed upon her. The silence of the snowcapped mountains chilled her. She looked upon their solitary grandeur with "magnificent horror." The repose of nature was an "infernal peace" which plunged her into gloomier depths of ennui and despair. To some one who was admiring the beauties of Lake Lemman she replied; "I should like better the gutters of the Rue du Bac." It was people, always people, who interested her. "French conversation exists only in Paris," she said, "and conversation has been from infancy my greatest pleasure." Restlessly she sought distraction in travel, but wherever she went the iron hand pressed upon her still. Italy fostered her melancholy. She loved its ruins, which her imagination draped with the fading colors of the past and associated with the desolation of a living soul. But its exquisite

variety of landscape and color does not seem to have touched her. "If it were not for the world's opinion," she said, "I would not open my window to see the Bay of Naples for the first time, but I would travel five hundred leagues to talk with a clever man whom I have not met." Germany gave her infinite food for thought, but her "astonishing volubility," her "incessant movement," her constant desire to know, to discuss, to penetrate all things wearied the moderate Germans, as it had already wearied the serious English. "Tell me, Monsieur Fichte," she said one day, "could you in a short time, a quarter of an hour for example, give me a glimpse of your system and explain what you understand by your ME; I find it very obscure." The philosopher was amazed at what he thought her impertinence, but made the attempt through an interpreter. At the end of ten minutes she exclaimed, "That is sufficient, Monsieur Fichte. That is quite sufficient. I comprehend you perfectly. I have seen your system in illustration. It is one of the adventures of Baron Munchhausen." "We are in perpetual mental tension," said the wife of Schiller. Even Schiller himself grew tired. "It seems as if I were relieved of a malady," he said, when she left.

It was this excess of vivacity and her abounding sensibility that constituted at once her fascination and her misfortune. Her beliefs were enthusiasms. Her friendships were passions. "No one has carried the religion of friendship so far as myself," she said. To love, to be loved was the supreme need of her soul; but her love was

a flame that
irradiated her intellect and added brilliancy to the
life it consumed.
She paints in "Corinne" the passions, the struggles, the
penalties, and
the sorrows of a woman of genius. It is a life she had
known, a life
of which she had tasted the sweetest delights and
experienced the most
cruel disenchantments. "Corinne" at the Capitol,
"Corinne" thinking,
analyzing, loving, suffering, triumphing, wearing a
crown of laurel upon
her head and an invisible crown of thorns upon her
heart--it is Mme. de
Stael self-revealed by the light of her own imagination.

It was in a moment of weakness and weariness, when her
idols had one
after another been shattered, and all the pleasant
vistas of her youth
seemed shut out forever, that she met M. de Rocca, a
wounded officer
of good family, but of little more than half her years,
whose gentle,
chivalric character commanded her admiration, whose
suffering touched
her pity, and whose devotion won her affection. "I will
love her so much
that she will end by marrying me," he said, and the
result proved his
penetration. This marriage, which was a secret one, has
shadowed a
little the brilliancy of her fame, but if it was a
weakness to bend from
her high altitude, it was not a sin, though more
creditable to her heart
than to her worldly wisdom. At all events it brought
into her life a
new element of repose, and gave her a tender consolation
in her closing
years.

When at last the relentless autocrat of France found his
rock-bound

limits, and she was free to return to the spot which had been the goal of all her dreams, it was too late. Her health was broken. It is true her friends rallied around her, and her salon, opened once more, retook a little of its ancient glory. Few celebrities who came to Paris failed to seek the drawing room of Mme. de Stael, which was still illuminated with the brilliancy of her genius and the splendor of her fame. But her triumphs were past, and life was receding. Her few remaining days of weakness and suffering, darkened by vain regrets, were passed more and more in the warmth and tenderness of her devoted family, in the noble and elevated thought that rose above the strife of politics into the serene atmosphere of a Christian faith. At her death bed Chateaubriand did her tardy justice. "Bon jour, my dear Francis; I suffer, but that does not prevent me from loving you," she said to one who had been her critic, but never her friend. Her magnanimity was as unflinching as her generosity, and it may be truly said that she never cherished a hatred.

The life of Mme. de Stael was in the world. She embodied the French spirit; she could not conceive of happiness in a secluded existence; a theater and an audience were needed to call out her best talents. She could not even bear her griefs alone. The world was taken into her confidence. She demanded its sympathy. She chanted exquisite requiems over her dead hopes and her lost illusions, but she chanted them in costume, never quite forgetting that her role was a heroic one. She

added, however, to the gifts of an improvisatrice something infinitely higher and deeper. There was no problem with which she was not ready to deal. She felt the pulse beats in the great heart of humanity, and her tongue, her pen, her purse, and her influence were ever at the bidding of the unfortunate. She traversed all fields of thought, from the pleasant regions of poetry and romance to the highest altitudes of philosophy. We may note the drift of her ardent and imaginative nature in the youthful tales into which she wove her romantic dreams, her fancied griefs, her inward struggles, and her tears. In the pages of "Corinne" we read the poetry, the sensibility, the passion, the melancholy, the thought of a matured woman whose youth of the soul neither sorrow nor experience could destroy. We may divine the direction of her sympathies, and the fountain of her inspiration, in her letters on Rousseau, written at twenty, and foreshadowing her own attitude towards the theories which appealed so powerfully to the generous spirits of the century. We may follow the active and scholarly workings of her versatile intellect in her pregnant thoughts on literature, on the passions, on the Revolution; or measure the clearness of her insight, the depth of her penetration, the catholicity of her sympathies, and the breadth of her intelligence in her profound and masterly, if not always accurate, studies of Germany. The consideration of all this pertains to a critical estimate of her character and genius which cannot be attempted here.

It has grown to be somewhat the fashion to depreciate the literary work of Mme. de Stael. Measured by present standards she leaves something to be desired in logical precision; she had not the exactness of the critical scholar, nor the simplicity of the careful artist; the luxuriance of her language often obscures her thought. She is talking still, and her written words have the rapid, tumultuous flow of conversation, together with its occasional negligences, its careless periods, its sudden turns, its encumbered phrases. Misguided she sometimes was, and carried away by the resistless rush of ideas that, like the mountain torrent, gathered much debris along their course. But her rapid judgments, which have the force of inspiration, are in advance of her time, though in the main correct from her own point of view, while her flaws in workmanship are more than counterbalanced by that inward illumination which is Heaven's richest and rarest gift. But who cares to dwell upon the shadows that scarcely dim the brilliancy of a genius so rare and so commanding? They are but spots on the sun that are only discovered by looking through a glass that veils its radiance. It is just to weigh her by the standards of her own age. Born at its highest level, she soared far above her generation. She carried within herself the vision of a statesman, the penetration of a critic, the insight of a philosopher, the soul of a poet, and the heart of a woman. If she was not without faults, she had rare virtues. No woman has ever

exercised a wider or more varied influence. With one or two exceptions, none stands on so high a pinnacle. George Sand was a more finished artist; George Eliot was a greater novelist, a more accurate scholar, and a more logical thinker; but in versatility, in intellectual spontaneity, in brilliancy of conversation and natural eloquence of thought she is without a rival. Her moral standards, too, were above the average of her time. Her ideals were high and pure. The wealth of her emotions and the rich coloring of sentiment in which her thoughts and feelings were often clothed left her open to possible misconceptions. It was her fate to be grossly misunderstood, to miss the domestic happiness she craved, to be the victim of a sleepless persecution, to pass her best years in a dreary exile from the life she most loved, to be maligned by her enemies and betrayed by her friends. Her very virtues were construed into faults and turned against her. Though we may not lift the veil from her intimate life, we may fairly judge her by her own ideals and her dominant traits. The world, which is rarely indulgent, has been in the main just to her motives and her character. "I have been ever the same, intense and sad," were among her last words. "I have loved God, my father, and liberty." But she was a victim to the contradictory elements in her own nature, and walked always among storms. This nature, so complex, so rich, so ardent, so passionate, could it ever have found permanent repose?

CHAPTER XIX. THE SALONS OF THE EMPIRE AND RESTORATION--
MADAME RECAMIER

_A Transition Period--Mme. de Montesson--Mme. de Genlis--
-Revival of the
Literary Spirit--Mme. de Beaumont--Mme. de Remusat--Mme.
de Souza--Mme.
de Duras--Mme. de Krudener--Fascination of Mme.
Recamier--Her
Friends--Her Convent Salon-- Chateaubriand--Decline of
the Salon_

In the best sense, society is born, not made. A crowd of well-dressed people is not necessarily a society. They may meet and disperse with no other bond of union than a fine house and lavish hospitality can give. It may be an assembly without unity, flavor, or influence. In the social chaos that followed the Revolution, this truth found a practical illustration. The old circles were scattered. The old distinctions were virtually destroyed, so far as edicts can destroy that which lies in the essence of things. A few who held honored names were left, or had returned from a long exile, to find themselves bereft of rank, fortune, and friends; but these had small disposition to form new associations, and few points of contact with the parvenus who had mounted upon the ruins of their order. The new society was composed largely of these parvenus, who were ambitious for a position and a life of which they had neither the spirit, the taste, the habits, nor the mellowing traditions. Naturally they mistook the gilded frame for the picture. Unfamiliar with the gentle manners, the delicate sense of honor,

and the chivalrous instincts which underlie the best social life, though not always illustrated by its individual members, they were absorbed in matters of etiquette of which they were uncertain, and exacting of non-essentials. They regarded society upon its commercial side, contended over questions of precedence, and, as one of the most observing of their contemporaries has expressed it, "bargained for a courtesy and counted visits." "I have seen quarrels in the imperial court," she adds, "over a visit more or less long, more or less deferred." Perhaps it is to be considered that in a new order which has many aggressive elements, this balancing of courtesies is not without a certain *raison d'etre* as a protection against serious inroads upon time and hospitality; but the fault lies behind all this, in the lack of that subtle social sense which makes the discussion of these things superfluous, not to say impossible.

It was the wish of Napoleon to reconstruct a society that should rival in brilliancy the old courts. With this view he called to his aid a few women whose names, position, education, and reputation for esprit and fine manners he thought a sufficient guarantee of success. But he soon learned that it could not be commanded at will. The reply of the Duchesse d'Brantes, who has left us so many pleasant reminiscences of this period, in which she was an actor as well as an observer, was very apt.

"You can do all that I wish," he said to her; "you are

all young, and
almost all pretty; ah, well! A young and pretty woman
can do anything
she likes."

"Sire, what your Majesty says may be true," she replied,
"but only to
a certain point. If the Emperor, instead of his guard
and his good
soldiers, had only conscripts who would recoil under
fire, he could not
win great battles like that of Austerlitz. Nevertheless,
he is the first
general in the world."

But this social life was to serve a personal end. It was
to furnish an
added instrument of power to the autocrat who ruled, to
reflect always
and everywhere the glory of Napoleon. The period which
saw its cleverest
woman in hopeless exile, and its most beautiful one
under a similar
ban for the crime of being her friend, was not one which
favored
intellectual supremacy. The empire did not encourage
literature, it
silenced philosophy, and oppressed the talent that did
not glorify
itself. Its blighting touch rested upon the whole social
fabric. The
finer elements which, to some extent, entered into it
were lost in the
glitter of display and pretension. The true spirit of
conversation was
limited to private coteries that kept themselves in the
shade, and were
too small to be noted.

The salon which represented the best side of the new
regime was that
of Mme. de Montesson, wife of the Duc d'Orleans, a woman
of brilliant
talents, finished manners, great knowledge of the world,
fine gifts of

conversation, and, what was equally essential, great discrimination and perfect tact. If her niece, Mme. de Genlis, is to be trusted, she had more ambition than originality, her reputation was superior to her abilities, and her beauty covered many imperfections. But she had experience, finesse, and prestige. Napoleon was quick to see the value of such a woman in reorganizing a court, and treated her with the greatest consideration, even asking her to instruct Josephine in the old customs and usages. Her salon, however, united many elements which it was impossible to fuse. There were people of all parties and all conditions, a few of the nobles and returned emigres, the numerous members of the Bonaparte family, the new military circle, together with many people of influence "not to the manner born." Mme. de Montesson revived the old amusements, wrote plays for the entertainment of her guests gave grand dinners and brilliant fetes. But the accustomed links were wanting. Her salon simply illustrates a social life in a state of transition.

Mme. de Genlis had lived much in the world before the Revolution, and her position in the family of the Duc d'Orleans, together with her great versatility of talent, had given her a certain vogue. Author, musician, teacher, moralist, critic, poser, egotist, femme d'esprit, and friend of princes, her romantic life would fill a volume and cannot be even touched upon in a few lines. After ten years of exile she returned to Paris, and her salon at the Arsenal was a center for a

few celebrities.

Many of these names have small significance today. A few men like Talleyrand, LaHarpe, Fontanes, and Cardinal Maury were among her friends, and she was neutral enough, or diplomatic enough, not to give offense to the new government. But she was a woman of many affectations, and in spite of her numerous accomplishments, her cleverness, and her literary fame, the circle she gathered about her was never noted for its brilliancy or its influence. As a historic figure, she is more remarkable for the variety of her voluminous work, her educational theories, and her observations upon the world in which she lived, than for talents of a purely social order.

One is little inclined to dwell upon the ruling society of this period. It had neither the dignity of past traditions nor freedom of intellectual expression. Its finer shades were drowned in loud and glaring colors. The luxury that could be commanded counted for more than the wit and intelligence that could not.

As the social elements readjusted themselves on a more natural basis, there were a few salons out of the main drift of the time in which the literary spirit flourished once more, blended with the refined tastes, the elegant manners, and the amiable courtesy that had distinguished the old regime. But the interval in which history was made so rapidly, and the startling events of a century were condensed into a decade, had wrought many vital changes. It was no longer the spirit of the

eighteenth century that reappeared under its revived and attractive forms. We note a tone of seriousness that had no permanent place in that world of esprit and skepticism, of fine manners and lax morals, which divided its allegiance between fashion and philosophy. The survivors of so many heart-breaking tragedies, with their weary weight of dead hopes and sad memories, found no healing balm in the cold speculation and scathing wit of Diderot or Voltaire. Even the devotees of philosophy gave it but a half-hearted reverence. It was at this moment that Chateaubriand, saturated with the sorrows of his age, and penetrated with the hopelessness of its philosophy, offered anew the truths that had sustained the suffering and broken-hearted for eighteen centuries, in a form so sympathetic, so fascinating, that it thrilled the sensitive spirits of his time, and passed like an inspiration into the literature of the next fifty years. The melancholy of "Rene" found its divine consolation in the "Genius of Christianity." It was this spirit that lent a new and softer coloring to the intimate social life that blended in some degree the tastes and manners of the old noblesse with a refined and tempered form of modern thought. It recalls, in many points, the best spirit of the seventeenth century. There is a flavor of the same seriousness, the same sentiment. It is the sentiment that sent so many beautiful women to the solitude of the cloister, when youth had faded and the air of approaching age began to grow chilly. But it is not to the cloister that these women turn. They weave romantic

tales out of
the texture of their own lives, they repeat their
experiences, their
illusions, their triumphs, and their disenchantments. As
the day grows
more somber and the evening shadows begin to fall, they
meditate, they
moralize, they substitute prayers for dreams. But they
think also. The
drama of the late years had left no thoughtful soul
without earnest
convictions. There were numerous shades of opinion, many
finely drawn
issues. In a few salons these elements were delicately
blended, and if
they did not repeat the brilliant triumphs of the past,
if they focused
with less power the intellectual light which was
dispersed in many new
channels, they have left behind them many fragrant
memories. One is
tempted to linger in these temples of a goddess half-
dethroned. One
would like to study these women who added to the social
gifts of their
race a character that had risen superior to many storms,
hearts that
were mellowed and purified by premature sorrow, and
intellects that had
taken a deeper and more serious tone from long brooding
over the great
problems of their time. But only a glance is permitted
us here. Most of
them have been drawn in living colors by Saint-Beuve,
from whom I gather
here and there a salient trait.

Who that is familiar with the fine and exquisite thought
of Joubert can
fail to be interested in the delicate and fragile woman
whom he met
in her supreme hour of suffering, to find in her a rare
and permanent
friend, a literary confidante, and an inspiration? Mme.
de Beaumont--the

daughter of Montmorin, who had been a colleague of Necker in the ministry--had been forsaken by a worthless husband, had seen father, mother, brother, perish by the guillotine, and her sister escape it only by losing her reason, and then her life, before the fatal day. She, too, had been arrested with the others, but was so ill and weak that she was left to die by the roadside en route to Paris--a fate from which she was saved by the kindness of a peasant. It was at this moment that Joubert befriended her. These numerous and crushing sorrows had shattered her health, which was never strong, but during the few brief years that remained to her she was the center of a coterie more distinguished for quality than numbers. Joubert and Chateaubriand were its leading spirits, but it included also Fontanes, Pasquier, Mme. de Vintimille, Mme. de Pastoret, and other friends who had survived the days in which she presided with such youthful dignity over her father's salon. The fascination of her fine and elevated intellect, her gentle sympathy, her keen appreciation of talent, and her graces of manner lent a singular charm to her presence. Her character was aptly expressed by this device which Rulhiere had suggested for her seal: "Un souffle m'agite et rien ne m'embrante." Chateaubriand was enchanted with a nature so pure, so poetic, and so ardent. He visited her daily, read to her "Atala" and "Rene," and finished the "Genius of Christianity" under her influence. He was young then, and that she loved him is hardly doubtful, though the friendship of Joubert was far truer and more

loyal than the
passing devotion of this capricious man of genius, who
seems to have
cared only for his own reflection in another soul. But
this sheltered
nook of thoughtful repose, this conversational oasis in
a chaotic period
had a short duration. Mme. de Beaumont died at Rome,
where she had
gone in the faint hope of reviving her drooping health,
in 1803.
Chateaubriand was there, watched over her last hours
with Bertin, and
wrote eloquently of her death. Joubert mourned deeply
and silently over
the light that had gone out of his life.

We have pleasant reminiscences of the amiable,
thoughtful, and
spirituelle Mme. de Remusat, who has left us such vivid
records of the
social and intimate life of the imperial court. A
studious and secluded
childhood, prematurely saddened by the untimely fate of
her father in
the terrible days of 1794, an early and congenial
marriage, together
with her own wise penetration and clear intellect,
enabled her to
traverse this period without losing her delicate tone or
serious
tastes. She had her quiet retreat into which the noise
and glare did
not intrude, where a few men of letters and thoughtful
men of the world
revived the old conversational spirit. She amused her
idle hours by
writing graceful tales, and, after the close of her
court life and the
weakening of her health, she turned her thoughts towards
the education
and improvement of her sex. Blended with her wide
knowledge of the
world, there is always a note of earnestness, a tender
coloring of

sentiment, which culminates towards the end in a lofty Christian resignation.

We meet again at this time a woman known to an earlier generation as Mme. de Flahaut, and made familiar to us through the pens of Talleyrand and Gouverneur Morris. She saw her husband fall by the guillotine, and, after wandering over Europe for years as an exile, became the wife of M. de Souza, and, returning to Paris, took her place in a quiet corner of the unaccustomed world, writing softly colored romances after the manner of Mme. de La Fayette, wearing with grace the honors her literary fame brought her, and preserving the tastes, the fine courtesies, the gentle manners, the social charms, and the delicate vivacity of the old regime.

One recalls, too, Mme. de Duras, whose father, the noble and fearless Kersaint, was the companion of Mme. Roland at the scaffold; who drifted to our own shores until the storms had passed, and, after saving her large fortune in Martinique, returned matured and saddened to France. As the wife of the Duc de Duras, she gathered around her a circle of rank, talent, and distinction. Chateaubriand, Humboldt, Curier, de Montmorency were among her friends. What treasures of thought and conversation do these names suggest! What memories of the past, what prophecies for the future! Mme. de Duras, too, wore gracefully the mantle of authorship with which she united pleasant household cares. She, too, put something of the sad experiences of her own life into romances which reflect the

melancholy of this age of restlessness and lost
illusions. She, too,
like many of the women of her time whose youth had been
blighted by
suffering, passed into an exalted Christian strain. The
friend of Mme.
de Stael, the literary CONFIDANTE of Chateaubriand, the
woman of many
talents, many virtues, and many sorrows, died with words
of faith and
hope and divine consolation on her lips.

The devotion of Mme. de Cantal, the mysticism of Mme.
Guyon, find a
nineteenth-century counterpart in the spiritual
illumination of Mme.
de Krudener. Passing from a life of luxury and pleasure
to a life of
penitence and asceticism, singularly blending
worldliness and piety,
opening her salon with prayer, and adding a new
sensation to the gay
life of Paris, this adviser of Alexander I, and friend
of Benjamin
Constant, who put her best life into the charming
romances which ranked
next to "Corinne" and "Delphine" in their time; this
beautiful woman,
novelist, prophetess, mystic, illuminee, fanatic, with
the passion of
the South and the superstitious vein of the far North,
disappeared
from the world she had graced, and gave up her life in
an ecstasy of
sacrifice in the wilderness of the Crimea.

It is only to indicate the altered drift of the social
life that flowed
in quiet undercurrents during the Empire and came to the
surface again
after the Restoration; to trace lightly the slow
reaction towards the
finer shades of modern thought and modern morality, that
I touch--so
briefly and so inadequately--upon these women who

represent the best
side of their age, leaving altogether untouched many of
equal gifts and
equal note.

There is one, however, whose salon gathered into itself
the last rays
of the old glory, and whose fame as a social leader has
eclipsed that of
all her contemporaries. Mme. Recamier, "the last flower
of the salons,"
is the woman of the century who has been, perhaps, most
admired, most
loved, and most written about. It has been so much the
fashion to
dwell upon her marvelous beauty, her kindness, and her
irresistible
fascination, that she has become, to some extent, an
ideal figure
invested with a subtle and poetic grace that folds
itself about her
like the invisible mantle of an enchantress. Her actual
relations to the
world in which she lived extended over a long period,
terminating only
on the threshold of our own generation. Without strong
opinions or
pronounced color, loyal to her friends rather than to
her convictions,
of a calm and happy temperament, gentle in character,
keenly
appreciative of all that was intellectually fine and
rare, but without
exceptional gifts herself, fascinating in manner,
perfect in tact, with
the beauty of an angel and the heart of a woman--she
presents a fitting
close to the long reign of the salons.

We hear of her first in the bizarre circles of the
Consulate, as the
wife of a man who was rather father than husband, young,
fresh, lovely,
accomplished, surrounded by the luxuries of wealth, and
captivating all

hearts by that indefinable charm of manner which she carried with her to the end of her life. Both at Paris and at her country house at Clichy she was the center of a company in which the old was discreetly mingled with the new, in which enmities were tempered, antagonisms softened, and the most discordant elements brought into harmonious rapport, for the moment, at least, by her gracious word or her winning smile. Here we find Adrien and Mathieu de Montmorency, who already testified the rare friendship that was to outlive years and misfortunes; Mme. de Stael before her exile; Narbonne, Barrere, Bernadotte, Moreau, and many distinguished foreigners. Lucien Bonaparte was at her feet; LaHarpe was devoted to her interests; Napoleon was trying in vain to draw her into his court, and treasuring up his failure to another. The salon of Mme. Recamie was not in any sense philosophical or political, but after the cruel persecution of LaHarpe, the banishment of Mme. de Stael, and the similar misfortunes of other friends, her sympathies were too strong for her diplomacy, and it gradually fell into the ranks of the opposition. It was well known that the emperor regarded all who went there as his enemies, and this young and innocent woman was destined to feel the full bitterness of his petty displeasure. We cannot trace here the incidents of her varied career, the misfortunes of the father to whom she was a ministering angel, the loss of her husband's fortune and her own, the years of wandering and exile, the second period of brief and illusive prosperity, and the swift reverses which led to her

final retreat. She was at the height of her beauty and her fame in the early days of the Restoration, when her salon revived its old brilliancy, and was a center in which all parties met on neutral ground. Her intimate relations with those in power gave it a strong political influence, but this was never a marked feature, as it was mainly personal.

But the position in which one is most inclined to recall Mme. Recamier is in the convent of Abbaye-aux-Bois, where, divested of fortune and living in the simplest manner, she preserved for nearly thirty years the fading traditions of the old salons. Through all the changes which tried her fortitude and revealed the latent heroism of her character, she seems to have kept her sweet serenity unbroken, bending to the passing storms with the grace of a facile nature, but never murmuring at the inevitable. One may find in this inflexible strength and gentleness of temper a clue to the subtle fascination which held the devoted friendship of so many gifted men and women, long after the fresh charm of youth was gone.

The intellectual gifts of Mme. Recamier, as has been said before, were not of a high or brilliant order. She was neither profound nor original, nor given to definite thought. Her letters were few, and she has left no written records by which she can be measured. She read much, was familiar with current literature, also with religious works. But the world is slow to accord a twofold superiority, and it is quite possible

that the fame of her beauty has prevented full justice to her mental abilities. Mme. de Genlis tells us that she has a great deal of esprit. It is certain that no woman could have held her place as the center of a distinguished literary circle and the confidante and adviser of the first literary men of her time, without a fine intellectual appreciation. "To love what is great," said Mme. Necker "is almost to be great one's self." Ballanche advised her to translate Petrarch, and she even began the work, but it was never finished. "Believe me," he writes, "you have at your command the genius of music, flowers, imagination, and elegance. ... Do not fear to try your hand on the golden lyre of the poets." He may have been too much blinded by a friendship that verged closely upon a more passionate sentiment to be an altogether impartial critic, but it was a high tribute to her gifts that a man of such conspicuous talents thought her capable of work so exacting. Her qualities were those of taste and a delicate imagination rather than of reason. Her musical accomplishments were always a resource. She sang, played the harp and piano, and we hear of her during a summer at Albano playing the organ at vespers and high mass. She danced exquisitely, and it was her ravishing grace that suggested the shawl dance of "Corinne" to Mme. de Stael and of "Valerie" to Mme. de Krudener. One can fancy her, too, at Coppet, playing the role of the angel to Mme. de Stael's Hagar--a spirit of love and consolation to the stormy and despairing soul of her friend.

But her real power lay in the wonderful harmony of her nature, in the subtle penetration that divined the chagrins and weaknesses of others, only to administer a healing balm; in the delicate tact that put people always on the best terms with themselves, and gave the finest play to whatever talents they possessed. Add to this a quality of beauty which cannot be caught by pen or pencil, and one can understand the singular sway she held over men and women alike. Mme. de Krudener, whose salon so curiously united fashion and piety, worldliness and mysticism, was troubled by the distraction which the entrance of Mme. Recamier was sure to cause, and begged Benjamin Constant to write and entreat her to make herself as little charming as possible. His note is certainly unique, though it loses much of its piquancy in translation:

"I acquit myself with a little embarrassment of a commission which Mme. de Krudener has just given me. She begs you to come as little beautiful as you can. She says that you dazzle all the world, and that consequently every soul is troubled and attention is impossible. You cannot lay aside your charms, but do not add to them."

In her youth she dressed with great simplicity and was fond of wearing white with pearls, which accorded well with the dazzling purity of her complexion.

Mme. Recamier was not without vanity, and this is the reverse side of her peculiar gifts. She would have been more than mortal if she had been

quite unconscious of attractions so rare that even the children in the street paid tribute to them. But one finds small trace of the petty jealousies and exactions that are so apt to accompany them. She liked to please, she wished to be loved, and this inevitably implies a shade of coquetry in a young and beautiful woman. There is an element of fascination in this very coquetry, with its delicate subtleties and its shifting tints of sentiment. That she carried it too far is no doubt true; that she did so wittingly is not so certain. Her victims were many, and if they quietly subsided into friends, as they usually did, it was after many struggles and heart burnings. But if she did not exercise her power with invariable discretion, it seems to have been less the result of vanity than a lack of decision and an amiable unwillingness to give immediate pain, or to lose the friend with the lover. With all her fine qualities of heart and soul, she had a temperament that saved her from much of the suffering she thoughtlessly inflicted upon others. The many violent passions she roused do not seem to have disturbed at all her own serenity. The delicate and chivalrous nature of Mathieu de Montmorency, added to his years, gave his relations to her a half-paternal character, but that he loved her always with the profound tenderness of a loyal and steadfast soul is apparent through all the singularly disinterested phases of a friendship that ended only with his life.

Prince Augustus, whom she met at Coppet, called up a

passing ripple on
the surface of her heart, sufficiently strong to lead
her to suggest a
divorce to her husband, whose relations to her, though
always friendly,
were only nominal. But he appealed to her generosity,
and she thought of
it no more. Why she permitted her princely suitor to
cherish so long the
illusions that time and distance do not readily destroy
is one of the
mysteries that are not easy to solve. Perhaps she
thought it more kind
to let absence wear out a passion than to break it too
rudely. At all
events, he cherished no permanent bitterness, and never
forgot her. At
his death, nearly forty years later he ordered her
portrait by Gerard to
be returned, but her ring was buried with him.

The various phases of the well-known infatuation of
Benjamin Constant,
which led him to violate his political principles and
believe his own
words rather than take a course that must result in
separation from
her, suggest a page of highly colored romance. The
letters of Mlle.
de Lespinasse scarcely furnish us with a more ardent
episode in the
literature of hopeless passion. The worshipful devotion
of Ampere and
Ballanche would form a chapter no less interesting,
though less intense
and stormy.

But the name most inseparably connected with Mme.
Recamier is that of
Chateaubriand. The friendship of an unquestioned sort
that seems to
have gone quite out of the world, had all the phases of
a more tender
sentiment, and goes far towards disproving the charge of
coldness that

has often been brought against her. It was begun after she had reached the dreaded forties, by the death bed of Mme. de Stael, and lasted more than thirty years. It seems to have been the single sentiment that mastered her. One may trace in the letters of Chateaubriand the restless undercurrents of this life that was outwardly so serene. He writes to her from Berlin, from England, from Rome. He confides to her his ambitions, tells her his anxieties, asks her counsel as to his plans, chides her little jealousies, and commends his wife to her care and attention. This recalls a remarkable side of her relations with the world. Women are not apt to love formidable rivals, but the wives of her friends apparently shared the admiration with which their husbands regarded her. If they did not love her, they exchanged friendly notes, and courtesies that were often more than cordial. She consoles Mme. de Montmorency in her sorrow, and Mme. de Chateaubriand asks her to cheer her husband's gloomy moods. Indeed, she roused little of that bitter jealousy which is usually the penalty of exceptional beauty or exceptional gifts of any sort. The sharp tongue of Mme. de Genlis lost its sting in writing of her. She idealized her as Athenais, in the novel of that name, which has for its background the beauties of Coppet, and vaguely reproduces much of its life. The pious and austere Mme. Swetchine, whose prejudices against her were so strong that for a long time she did not wish to meet her, confessed herself at once a captive to her "penetrating and indefinable charm." Though she

did not always
escape the shafts of malice, no better tribute could be
offered to the
graces of her character than the indulgence with which
she was regarded
by the most severely judging of her own sex.

But she has her days of depression. Chateaubriand is
absorbed in his
ambitions and sometimes indifferent; his antagonistic
attitude towards
Montmorency, who is far the nobler character of the two,
is a source of
grief to her. She tries in vain to reconcile her rival
friends. Once she
feels compelled to tear herself from an influence which
is destroying
her happiness, and goes to Italy. But she carries within
her own heart
the seeds of unrest. She still follows the movements of
the man who
occupies so large a space in her horizon, sympathizes
from afar with
his disappointments, and cares for his literary
interest, ordering from
Tenerani, a bas-relief of a scene from "The Martyrs."

After her return her life settles into more quiet
channels.
Chateaubriand, embittered by the chagrins of political
life, welcomed
her with the old enthusiasm. From this time he devoted
himself
exclusively to letters, and sought his diversion in the
convent-salon
which has left so wide a fame, and of which he was
always the central
figure. The petted man of genius was moody and
capricious. His colossal
egotism found its best solace in the gentle presence of
the woman who
flattered his restless vanity, anticipated his wishes,
studied his
tastes, and watched every shadow that flitted across his
face. He was in

the habit of writing her a few lines in the morning; at three o'clock he visited her, and they chatted over their tea until four, when favored visitors began to arrive. In the evening it was a little world that met there. The names of Ampere, Tocqueville, Montalembert, Merimee, Thierry, and Sainte-Beuve suggest the literary quality of this circle, in which were seen from time to time such foreign celebrities as Sir Humphry and Lady Darcy, Maria Edgeworth, Humboldt, the Duke of Hamilton, the gifted Duchess of Devonshire, and Miss Berry. Lamartine read his "Meditations" and Delphine Gay her first poems. Rachel recited, and Pauline Viardot, Garcia, Rubini, and Lablache sang. Delacroix, David, and Gerard represented the world of art, and the visitors from the grand monde were too numerous to mention. In this brilliant and cosmopolitan company, what resources of wit and knowledge, what charms of beauty and elegance, what splendors of rank and distinction were laid upon the altar of the lovely and adored woman, who recognized all values, and never forgot the kindly word or the delicate courtesy that put the most modest guests at ease and brought out the best there was in them!

One day in 1847 there was a vacant place, and the faithful Ballanche came no more from his rooms across the street. A year later Chateaubriand died. After the death of his wife he had wished to marry Mme. Recamier, but she thought it best to change nothing, believing that age and blindness had given her the right to devote herself to his last days. To her friends she said that if she married him,

he would miss the
pleasure and variety of his daily visits.

Old, blind, broken in health and spirit, but retaining
always the charm
which had given her the empire over so many hearts, she
followed him in
a few months.

Mme. Recamier represents better than any woman of her
time the peculiar
talents that distinguished the leaders of some of the
most famous
salons. She had tact, grace, intelligence, appreciation,
and the gift of
inspiring others. The cleverest men and women of the age
were to be met
in her drawing room. One found there genius, beauty,
esprit, elegance,
courtesy, and the brilliant conversation which is the
Gallic heritage.
But not even her surpassing fascination added to all
these attractions
could revive the old power of the salon. Her coterie was
charming, as a
choice circle gathered about a beautiful, refined,
accomplished woman,
and illuminated by the wit and intelligence of
thoughtful men, will
always be; but its influence was limited and largely
personal, and it
has left no perceptible traces. Nor has it had any noted
successor. It
is no longer coterie presided over by clever women that
guide the age
and mold its tastes or its political destinies. The old
conditions have
ceased to exist, and the prestige of the salon is gone.

The causes that led to its decline have been already
more or less
indicated. Among them, the decay of aristocratic
institutions played
only a small part. The salons were au fond democratic in
the sense that

all forms of distinction were recognized so far as they were amenable to the laws of taste, which form the ultimate tribunal of social fitness in France. But it cannot be denied that the code of etiquette which ruled them had its foundation in the traditions of the noblesse. The genteel manners, the absence of egotism and self-assertion, as of disturbing passions, the fine and uniform courtesy which is the poetry of life, are the product of ease and assured conditions. It is struggle that destroys harmony and repose, whatever stronger qualities it may develop, and the greater mingling of classes which inevitably resulted in this took something from the exquisite flavor of the old society. The increase of wealth, too, created new standards that were fatal to a life in which the resources of wit, learning, and education in its highest sense were the chief attractions. The greater perfection of all forms of public amusement was not without its influence. Men drifted, also, more and more into the one-sided life of the club. Considered as a social phase, no single thing has been more disastrous to the unity of modern society than this. But the most formidable enemy of the salon has been the press. Intelligence has become too universal to be focused in a few drawing rooms. Genius and ambition have found a broader arena. When interest no longer led men to seek the stimulus and approval of a powerful coterie, it ceased to be more than an elegant form of recreation, a theater of small talents, the diversion of an idle hour. When the press assumed the sovereignty, the salon was

dethroned.

This book was distributed courtesy of:



For your own Unlimited Reading and FREE eBooks today, visit:

<http://www.Free-eBooks.net>

Share this eBook with anyone and everyone automatically by selecting any of the options below:



To show your appreciation to the author and help others have wonderful reading experiences and find helpful information too, we'd be very grateful if you'd kindly [post your comments for this book here](#).



COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

Free-eBooks.net respects the intellectual property of others. When a book's copyright owner submits their work to Free-eBooks.net, they are granting us permission to distribute such material. Unless otherwise stated in this book, this permission is not passed onto others. As such, redistributing this book without the copyright owner's permission can constitute copyright infringement. If you believe that your work has been used in a manner that constitutes copyright infringement, please follow our Notice and Procedure for Making Claims of Copyright Infringement as seen in our Terms of Service here:

<http://www.free-ebooks.net/tos.html>



**STOP DREAMING
AND BECOME AN
AUTHOR YOURSELF
TODAY!**



It's Free, Easy and Fun!

At our sister website, Foboko.com, we provide you with a free 'Social Publishing Wizard' which guides you every step of the eBook creation/writing process and let's your friends or the entire community help along the way!

LOGON ONTO FOBOKO.COM

↪ and get your story told!

FOBOKO.COM



FREE
eBooks



WHOEVER
WHENEVER
WHEREVER
YOU ARE

INSTANTLY DOWNLOAD THESE MASSIVE BOOK BUNDLES

CLICK ANY BELOW TO ENJOY NOW

3 AUDIOBOOK COLLECTIONS

Classic AudioBooks Vol 1 ■ Classic AudioBooks Vol 2 ■ Classic AudioBooks Kids

6 BOOK COLLECTIONS

Sci-Fi ■ Romance ■ Mystery ■ Academic ■ Classics ■ Business