year 1693 saw the loss of two of her oldest friends,—Bussy Rabutin, her faithless and troublesome but in his own way affectionate cousin, and Madame de la Fayette, her life­long companion, and on the whole perhaps her best and wisest friend. Another friend almost as intimate, Madame de Lavardin, followed in 1694. Madame de Sévigné spent but a few months of this latter year alone, and followed her daughter to Provence. She never revisited Brittany after 1691. Two important marriages with their preparations occupied most of her thoughts during 1694-1695. The young Marquis de Grignan married the daughter of Saint-Amant, an immensely rich financier ; but his mother’s pride, ill-nature, and bad taste (she is said to have remarked in full court that it was necessary now and then to “ manure the best lands,” referring to Saint-Amant’s wealth, low birth, and the Grignan’s nobility) made the marriage not a very happy one. His sister Pauline, who, in the impossibility of dowering her richly, had a narrow escape of the cloister, made a marriage of affection with M. de Simiane, and eventually became the sole representative and continuator of the families of Grignan and Sévigné.

Madame de Sévigné survived these alliances but a very short time. During an illness of her daughter she herself was attacked by smallpox in April 1696, and she died on the 17th of that month at Grignan, and was buried there. Her idolized daughter was not present during any time of her illness ; it has been charitably hoped that she was too ill herself. Her known attention to her own good looks, and the terror of the smallpox which then prevailed, supply perhaps a less charitable but sufficient explanation. But in her will Madame de Sévigné still showed her prefer­ence for this not too grateful child, and Charles de Sévigné accepted his mother’s wishes in a letter showing the good­nature which he had never lacked, and the good sense which, after his early follies, and even in a way during them, he had also shown. But the two families were, except as has been said for Madame de Simiane and her posterity, to be rapidly broken up. Charles de Sévigné and his wife had no children, and he himself, after occupy­ing some public posts (he was king’s lieutenant in Brittany in 1697), went with his wife into religious retirement at Paris in 1703, and after a time sequestered himself still more in the seminary of Sainte-Magloire, where he died on March 26, 1713. His widow survived him twenty years. Madame de Grignan had died on August 16, 1705, at a country house near Marseilles, of the very disease which she had tried to escape by not visiting her dying mother. Her son, who had fought at Blenheim, had died of the same malady at Thionville the year before. Marie Blanche, her eldest daughter, was in a convent, and, as all the Comte de Grignan’s brothers had either entered the church or died unmarried, the family, already bankrupt in fortune, was extinguished in the male line by Grignan’s own death in 1714, at a very great age. Madame de Simiane, whose connexion with the history of the letters is important, died in 1737.

The chief subjects of public interest and the principal family events of importance which are noticed in the letters of Madame de Sévigné have been indicated already. But, as will readily be understood, neither the whole nor even the chief interest of her correspondence is confined to such things. In the . latest edition the letters extend to sixteen or seventeen hundred, of which, how­ever, a considerable number (perhaps a third) are replies of other persons or letters addressed to her, or letters of her family and friends having more or less connexion with the subjects of her cor­respondence. As a rule her own letters, especially those to her daughter, are of great length. Writing as she did in a time when newspapers were not, or at least were scanty and jejune, gossip of all sorts appears among her subjects, and some of her most famous letters are pure *reportage* (to use a modern French slang term), while others deal with strictly private subjects. Thus one of her best known pieces has for subject the famous suicide of the great

cook Vatel owing to a misunderstanding as to the provision of fish for an entertainment given to the king by Condé at Chantilly. Another (one of the most characteristic of all) deals with the projected marriage of Lauzun and Mademoiselle de Montpensier ; another with the refusal of one of her own footmen to turn hay­maker when it was important to get the crop in at Les Rochers ; another with the fire which burnt out her neighbour’s house in Faris. At one moment she tells how a forward lady of honour

was disconcerted in offering certain services at Mademoiselle’s levée ; at another how ill a courtier’s clothes became him. She enters, as has been said, at great length into the pecuniary difficulties of her daughter ; she tells the most extraordinary stories of the fashion in which Charles de Sévigné sowed his wild oats ; she takes an almost ferocious interest and side in her daughter’s quarrels with rival beauties or great officials in Provence who throw difficulties in the way of government.

Almost all writers of literary letters since Madame de Sévigné’s days, or rather since the publication of her correspondence, have imitated her more or less directly, more or less consciously, and it is therefore only by applying that historic estimate upon which all true criticism rests that her full value can be discerned. The charm of her work is, however, so irresistible that, read even with­out any historical knowledge and in the comparatively adulterated editions in which it is generally met with, that charm can hardly be missed. Madame de Sévigné was a member of the strong and original group of writers—Retz, La Rochefoucauld, Corneille, Pascal, St Evremond, Descartes, and the rest—who escaped the finical and weakening reforms of the later 17th century, while for the most part they had profited by those earlier reforms which succeeded the classicizing of the Pléiade and the imitation of Spanish and Italian which marred some early work of Louis XIII.'s time. According to the strictest standard of the Academy her phraseology is sometimes incorrect, and it occasionally shows traces of the quaint and affected style of the *Précieuses* ; but these things only add to its savour and piquancy. In lively narration few writers have excelled her, and in the natural expression of domestic affection and maternal affection none. She had an all-observant eye for trifles and the keenest possible appreciation of the ludicrous, together with a hearty relish for all sorts of amusements, pageants, and diversions, and a deep though not voluble or over-sensitive sense of the beauties of nature. But with all this she had an understanding as solid as her temper was gay. Unlike her daughter she was not a professed blue-stocking or philosophess. But she had a strong affection for theology, in which she inclined (like the great majority of the religious and intelligent laity of her time in France) to the Jansenist side. Her favourite author in this class was Nicole. She has been reproached with her fondness for the romances of Mlle. de Scudéry and the rest of her school. But probably many persons who make that reproach have themselves never read the works they despise, and are ignorant how much merit there is in books whose chief faults are that they are written in a strongly marked and now obsolete fashion, and that their length (which, however, scarcely if at all exceeds that of *Clarissa)* is preposterous. In purely literary criticism Madame de Sévigné, few as were the airs she gave herself, was no mean expert. Her preference for Corneille over Racine has much more in it than the fact that the elder poet had been her favourite before the younger began to write ; and her remarks on La Fontaine and some other authors are both judicious and independent. Nor is she wanting in original reflexions of no ordinary merit. All these things, added to her abundance of amusing matter and the charm of her bright and ceaselessly flowing style, fully account for the unchanged and undiminished delight which half a dozen generations have taken in her work. But it cannot bo repeated too often that to enjoy that work in its most enjoyable point—the combination of fluent and easy style with quaint archaisms and tricks of phrase—it must be read as she wrote it, and not in the trimmed and corrected version of Perrin and Madame de Simiane.

There can, moreover, be no one, however wedded he may be to the plan of criticizing literature as literature, who will not admit that great part of the interest and value of these remarkable works lies in the picture of character which they present. Indeed, great part of their purely literary merit lies in the extraordinary vivid­ness of this very presentation. Madame de Sévigné’s character, however, has not united quite such a unanimity of suffrage as her ability in writing. In her own time there were not wanting enemies (indeed her unsparing partisanship on her daughter’s side could not fail to provoke such) who maintained that her letters were written for effect, and that her affection for her daughter was ostentatious and unreal. But few modern critics have followed these detractors, and it may be said confidently that no competent judge of character, after patiently reading the letters, can for a moment admit their view. But this kind of enemy has been followed by another, who, not overshooting his mark so con­spicuously, has been somewhat more successful in persuading spectators that he has hit it. Her excessive affection for Madame de Grignan (the almost importunate character of which seems to