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 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 matters. 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 hay-maker when it was important to get the crop in at Les Rochers; another with the fire which burnt out her neighbour’s house in Paris. 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.

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, Saint-Evremond, Descartes and the rest—who escaped the influence of the later 17th century, while they profited by the reforms of the earlier. 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 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 blue­stocking 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 them. In purely literary criticism Madame de Sévigné 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 reflections of no ordinary merit. But to enjoy her 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.

Great part of her purely literary merit lies in the extraordinary vividness of her presentation of character. But her own has not

united quite such a unanimity of suffrage as her ability in writing. In her own time there were not wanting enemies who maintained that her letters were written for effect, and that her affection for her daughter was ostentatious and unreal. But no competent judge can admit this view On the other hand, her excessive affection for Madame de Grignan, her blindness to anything but her daughter’s interest; her culpable tolerance of her son’s youthful follies on the one hand and the uneven balance which she held in money matters between him and his sister on the other; the apparent levity with which she speaks of the sufferings of Madame de Brinvilliers, of galley slaves, of the peasantry, &c ; and the freedom of language which she uses herself and tolerates from others,—have all been cast up against her. Here the historic estimate sufficiently disposes of some of the objections, a little common sense of others and a very little charity of the rest. If too much love felt by a mother towards a daughter be a fault, then Madame de Sévigné was one of the most offending souls that ever lived ; but it will hardly be held damning. The singular confidences which Madame de Sévigné received from her son and transmitted to her daughter would even at the present day be less surprising in France than in England. They are only an instance, adjusted to the manners of the time, of the system of sacrificing everything to the maintenance of confidence between mother and son. Here too, as well as in reference to the immediately kindred charge of crudity of language, and to that want of sympathy with suffering, especially with the sufferings of the people, it is especially necessary to remember of what generation Madame de Sévigné was and what were her circumstances. That generation was the genera­tion which Madame de Rambouillet endeavoured with only partial success to polish and humanize, to which belong the almost incredible yet trustworthy *Historiettes* of Tallemant, and in which Bussy Rabutin’s *Histoire amoureuse* did not make him lose all caste as a gentleman and man of honour. It is absurd to expect at such a time, and in private letters, the delicacy proper to quite different times and circumstances. It is not true that Madame de Sévigné shows no sympathy with the oppression of the Bretons, though her incurable habit of humorous expression—of *Rabutinage,* as she says— makes her occasionally use light phrases about the matter. But it is in fact as unreasonable to expect modern political sentiments from her as it is to expect her to observe the canons of a 2oth-century propriety. On the whole she may be as fairly and confidently ac­quitted of any moral fault, as she may be acquitted of all literary faults whatsoever. Her letters are wholly, what her son-in-law said well of her after her death, *compagnons délicieux\*,* and, far from faultless as Madame de Grignan was, none of her faults is more felt by the reader than her long visits to her mother, during which the letters ceased.

The bibliographic history of Madame de Sévigné’s letters is of con­siderable interest in itself, and is moreover typical of much other contemporary literary history. From Madame de Sévigné herself we know that her own letters were copied and handed about, sometimes under specified titles, as early as 1673. None of them, however, was published until her correspondence with Bussy Rabutin appeared in his *Memoirs and Correspondence,* partly in the year of her death, partly next year. The remainder were not printed in any form for thirty years. Then between 1725 and 1728 appeared seven unauthor- ized editions, containing more or fewer additions from the copies which had been circulated privately. The bibliography of these must be sought in special works (see especially the *Grands Écrivains* edition, vol. xi.). They have interest, however, chiefly because they stirred up Madame de Simiane, the writer's only living representative, to give an authorized version. This appeared under the care of the Chevalier de Perrin in 6 vols. (Paris, 1734-1737). It contained only the letters to Madame de Grignan, and these were subjected to editing rather careful than conscientious, the results of which were never thoroughly removed until recently. In the first place, Madame de Simiane, who possessed her mother’s replies, is said to have burnt the whole of these from religious motives; this phrase is explained by Madame de Grignan’s Cartesianism, which is supposed to have led her to expressions alarming to orthodoxy. In the second, scruples partly having to do with the susceptibilities of living persons, partly concerning Jansenist and other prejudices, made her insist on numerous omissions. Thirdly, and most unfortunately, the change of taste seems to have required still more numerous alterations of style and language, such as the substitution of “ Ma Fille ” for Madame de Sévigné’s usual and charming “ Ma Bonne,” and many others. Perrin followed this edition up in 1751 with a volume of supplementary letters not addressed to Madame de Grignan, and in 1754 published his last edition of the whole, which was long the standard (8 vols., Paris). During the last half of the 18th century numerous editions of the whole or parts appeared with important additions, such as that of 1756, giving for the first time the letters to Pomponne on the Fouquet trial; that of 1773, giving letters to Mouleeau; that of 1775, giving for the first time the Bussy letters separate from his memoirs, &c. An important collected edition of all these fragments, by the Abbé de Vauxeelles, appeared in 1801 (Paris, An IX.) in 10 vols.; five years later Gouvelle (Paris, 1806, 8 vols.) introduced the improvement of chronological order; this was re­printed in 12 vols. (Paris, 1819) with some more unpublished letters which had separately appeared meanwhile. In the same year appeared the first edition of M. de Monmerqué. From that date