

or in other ways serving to reduce the expenses of students, amounts to more than sixty thousand dollars per year, only one twelfth of it can be promised to applicants before they have proved their ability to maintain a high rank in their studies. The chance of obtaining these ordinary scholarships seems to the student too remote to be reckoned on safely.

It would be much more useful to our colleges to have the gifts designed to aid poor students made directly available for reducing the tuition fee than given, as they now are, for scholarships. It is true, the rich as well as the poor would profit by the reduction; but the numerous collateral disadvantages of scholarships, particularly the evils which arise from the fact that candidates for such places are driven to strive for high rank, and are thus forced to take studies which may not be in the direction of their needed culture, go far to offset this objection. If the tuition fee of Harvard College could be reduced to fifty dollars per annum, it would each year open the doors of that institution to hundreds who now find themselves debarred from its advantages by lack of money. Unfortunately, the immediate loss of revenue from such a reduction would amount to the interest on

about two and a half million dollars. It is doubtful if the interests of the higher education would be served by overmuch diminution in the sacrifices which parents now have to make to procure it for their children. This clearly desirable academic culture should be open to those alone who have some natural fitness to receive such training, and are willing to strive for it; but no one familiar with the struggle of worthy youths to win a liberal education, or with the trials of parents to secure it for them, can doubt that the cost is far too high for the public good.

We may now briefly sum up the present conditions of our academic education with reference to the demands of the people. More attention should be given to the kinds of learning which relate to the work of the world; an order of study is required which will prepare young men for learned occupations at a less advanced age than at present; and, finally, a diminution in the money cost of the higher education is imperatively called for. If these demands receive a fair hearing, and are granted so far as is consistent with the needs of true culture, there is no reason to doubt that our colleges will maintain and affirm the hold which they have always had on the affections of our people.

N. S. Shaler.

MADAME CORNUEL AND MADAME DE COULANGES.

WE know how small a fragment is required by science in order to reconstruct the perfect organism, but what can literature do with only a handful of epigrams out of which to form a living, breathing woman?

Of Madame Cornuel, the wit *par excellence* of Louis XIV.'s court, little more remains to us than a few epigrammatic sayings, which, during that reign,

were in as general circulation as a national currency. Madame de Grignan, in Provence, receiving these *bon mots* through her mother's letters, finds them as charming as did the courtier who first drew them from the mint. Pomponne, the minister of state, "goes into fits of laughter over the epigrams," and begs he may not lose a single one. In fact, contemporary memoirs concern

themselves so exclusively with Madame Cornuel epigrammatically, and not personally, that what survives to us of her individual self is marvelously small. It is a shadow of a shade, a disembodied spirit, keen, shrewd, bright, but unsubstantial.

She was Anne Bigot, daughter of a certain intendant of M. de Guise, who, by virtue of his office, was styled Bigot de Guise. The family came originally from Orleans, and the M. Bigot in question, although he seems to have been involved in certain discreditable business matters, was very rich. He was nevertheless glad and proud to give his daughter to M. Cornuel, *trésorier de l'extraordinaire des guerres*, and brother of the better known President Cornuel.

Anne Bigot is said to have been remarkably pretty, and from her earliest years to have shown close observation, and that keen intelligence to which observation is the handmaid. She was very young when she attracted the attention of the elderly treasurer, — at the burial of his first wife, it is said, although some accounts substitute a rural *fête* as the place of meeting, when, in accordance with local custom, M. Cornuel gallantly removed the bouquet from Mademoiselle Bigot's corsage, to indicate the serious character of his intentions.

M. Cornuel, royal treasurer though he was, was generally esteemed foolish and weak-minded. In his family Madame Cornuel found two young girls of about her own age: Mademoiselle Le Gendre, the child of the first wife by a previous marriage, and M. Cornuel's own daughter, Margot, whom La Grande Mademoiselle mentions among the fine people collected at Forges. By a curious blunder, Mademoiselle Le Gendre is considered by La Houssaye to have been Anne Bigot's daughter; and he says that, having reached the age of forty-five, and finding her mother continue to neglect the duty of suitably marrying her, she reproached her with the same, and drew

from Madame Cornuel the bon mot that, at their age, the only proper sacraments were extreme unction and the viaticum. As the relationship of Mademoiselle Le Gendre to Madame Cornuel was then perfectly understood, this little slander is doubtless invented to supply a *mise en scène* for the epigram which survived without explanatory *entourage*.

The house containing these three young women, all very pretty and *éveillées*, was visited by the world of fashion; for they had, it is said, *bien de l'esprit*, and this *esprit* was a trifle mischievous, "which," explains some chronicler, "is what made it so agreeable."

In that gossip-loving, memoir-writing age, this is all that can be gleaned of the youth of the *bel esprit en titre* of the most brilliant court of Europe in the seventeenth century. The oblivion of time has effaced the blooming girl, but spared the bon mots. In that age, an epigram, acknowledged or anonymous, waited upon every public event, and the witty comments upon current incidents attributed to Madame Cornuel seem as abundant as if she had really delivered them upon official call. One may read the history of the period in her sayings, which are the plums in many a contemporary pudding; yet so impartially are her sarcasms distributed that, unaided by the facts of her personal story, it is impossible to discover her individual opinions upon any question of importance.

She was of the court, yet no historian of court life has ever materialized for us her delicate spirit, Ariel-like in subtlest swift appearing and vanishing. We have never seen a eulogy upon her costume at royal balls or at the king's "after suppers;" yet that she was present is evident from the aptness of her delicate personal criticisms of people who are so much better known to fame than she. That she did not lack for homage within that sacred circle is undoubted. Who could afford to be uncivil to a woman

who, La Feuillade said, "could have turned into ridicule even the battle of Rocroi itself, the finest thing which had occurred since the days of the Romans, had she so inclined"? In fact, her trenchant blade too often struck home not to have been aimed by one thoroughly conversant with the weak points in the armor of each courtier. Of the Comtesse de Fiesque, that best known figure among the ladies of the court of Anne of Austria and of the early years of the reign of Louis le Grand, — she who was styled "Madame la Comtesse" as the wife of the reigning Condé was "Madame la Princesse," the "one and only," — Madame Cornuel has some stinging words on record. She said the countess's beauty was preserved to so great an age, eighty-four years, because "she was salted down in folly," or, as another memoir-writer has it, "preserved in extravagance, as cherries in brandy."

It was this Madame la Comtesse who, Saint-Simon tells us, bought one of the large and very costly mirrors then just coming into fashion, saying to her friends, who knew her slender means and the extent to which she was pillaged by her servants, "I had a miserable bit of land, which yielded me only corn. I sold that, and bought this mirror instead. Who would hesitate between corn and this beautiful glass?"

Madame Cornuel called Madame la Comtesse "a mill which ran by words;" and once, when the lady was defending a friend from the charge of being crazy, she said, "Ah, but you are like people who have eaten garlic."

When Madame de Guerchi, the Comtesse de Fiesque's daughter, died, it was said that the mother did not know whether to laugh or cry. Bussy-Rabutin surmises that "her fun was dearer to her than her children."

Of another courtier, one who was such by nature, and long identified with the etiquette of public royal ceremonies, — that Duc de Richelieu of whom Madame

de Sévigné has so much to say, — Madame Cornuel thought, "The duke *has* a good heart, but to administer so good a heart some judgment is required."

The Marquis d'Alleuys having recently paid her a visit, she remarked that he "looked like a dead man, and so changed that I was on the point of asking him if he had permission of the grave-digger to go to town."

Poor M. Jeanin de Castille, whom Bussy-Rabutin so cruelly ridiculed, Madame Cornuel said had been "born dead."

She wickedly hinted that the brave Marshal Duras, who commanded at Philipsburg, "was like an almanac, — he made so many predictions that he must sometimes hit the truth."

Madame de Lionne, wife of the secretary of state, Mazarin's most accomplished pupil in diplomacy, was a woman who would never have been tolerated in any other age or society. Madame Cornuel one day said, when called upon to admire her superb diamond ear-rings, "Ah, madame, your jewels remind me of the bacon in the mouse-trap."

This was the Madame de Lionne whom Madame de Sévigné crossed off her list of acquaintances, and whom society at last forced to retire to a convent, that retreat for assorted sinners. There, alas! she did not experience sanctification and final canonization, according to accepted programme, but she forsook it so soon as the public had forgiven (or forgotten) her misdeeds; and this was not long.

None of the faults and failings of humanity seem to have escaped those keenest eyes; yet Madame Cornuel's comments are those of a shrewd and not unkindly nature, rather than such shafts as poison when they wound. Madame de Sévigné says her bon mots were uttered "with abandon, and with that finest grain of malice which rendered them still more agreeable."

She seldom employed that form of

wit whose point lies in the inversion and torture of words. The spirit of epigram she conceived to be of organic growth, not a phantom materialized for a moment's amusement. Many of her bon mots are more delicately witty than those of Madame de Sévigné. In fact, the latter's brilliance was rather that of refined humor, while Madame Cornuel's wit is as keen as anything to be found in French literature.

The most famous and perhaps the best example of her wit was uttered upon the occasion of the death of France's great, perhaps her greatest, general, Marshal Turenne, who was killed at Salzbach, July 27, 1675. After this event Louis XIV. created eight marshals of France to repair the country's loss. Madame Cornuel called them "the small change for Turenne."

M. Gault-de-Saint-Germain says it is astonishing that this exquisite mot should have escaped Madame de Sévigné's notice, who was so fond of securing these airy nothings to inclose in her letters to Provence. Monmerqué, trying to supply the omission, quotes Madame de Sévigné herself as saying that "the king had changed a *louis d'or* into pieces of four *sous*." But her later editor calls this brusque compared with the *spirituelle* character of the Cornuel epigram, "which," he says, "has the tone of good society, and will never be forgotten."

Although in seventeenth-century France wit would have been considered tasteless and dull, if always and altogether free from double-entendre or doubtful suggestion, the bon mots of Madame Cornuel seem to wear the conventional coarseness as the fashionable dress of the day was worn, as a disguise, a mask, a mantle, which concealed nature even while it adorned it.

What license was permitted in the society of that day may be evidenced by the more familiar letters to her daughter of Madame de Sévigné, that thoroughly pure-souled, refined woman, — letters

which are found only in the complete editions of the correspondence, and carefully excluded from *Lettres Choiesies*. One wishes some fine prophetic modern perception of delicacy had been vouchsafed to the charming letter-writer and to the brilliant *bel esprit*. But there is enough on record of the true, uncontaminated mind of both women to show what lurked beneath disguise.

It is not necessary to revive these dead and forgotten epigrams to prove the quality of that keen wit which has lost its charm of immodesty for us nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxons. In 1670, they were most eagerly repeated, but we can, without their help, appreciate the esprit without reanimating the body of sin.

To explain many of Madame Cornuel's most witty comments upon current events requires that each mot be set in its appropriate surrounding of time and place and circumstance, making a little *historiette* for each.

It was she who gave the name of "Les Importants" to the cabal of that fair-haired darling of the people, the Duc de Beaufort, because "they were always saying they were going upon an affair of importance." The title clung to them for all time. Pasquinade, epigram, lampoon, assailed this party, whose opposition to the court was occasioned by the arrest and imprisonment of the son of the Vendômes for his championship of the oppressed queen of Louis XIII. Its second grievance was perhaps deeper, when the queen, become regent, turned her back upon the friends who had suffered in her cause, having no present need of their services. In return they gave her the Fronde, which turned out the sequel of Les Importants.

Of the best known squib upon this subject the following is a stanza: —

"Courir jour et nuit par la rue,
Sans affaire et sans dessein,
Faire aux farces le pied de grue,
Trancher du petit souverain ;

Avoir des brigands à sa suite,
Contrefaire les capitans,
Et des premiers prendre la fuite,
C'est ce que font Les Importants.

Fuir la vertu, suivre le vice,
Parler et rire à contretemps,
Au roi ne rendre aucune service,
C'est ce que font Les Importants."

Madame Cornuel called the Jansenists "Les Importants spirituels."

Another fruitful theme for epigram was the bloodless conquest of France's monarch by the discarded king of England, James II. Driven from his kingdom by the righteous wrath of his subjects, he landed in France in 1689, and was received in royal state and paid royal honors by Louis XIV.

"Le bel âme du roi se plait à jouer ce grand rôle," wrote some loyal ninny. Alas! all the woes which fell upon that sunny land of France at the opening of the next century may be traced in direct sequence to "ce grand rôle" of the king. Voltaire, too, said of this reception, "Never had our king appeared so great." James's brother, the equally detestable but more fortunate Charles, second of his name, had prophesied that he would not even make a good saint. The king of England used to say that James would lose his kingdom through zeal for religion, and his soul through love for base pleasures, since his taste rejected those of a refined nature.

The ex-king was soon established in the palace of Saint-Germain as a visiting sovereign, with a large pension, a royal household and court. "Old and tired" the curious pronounced him; the queen, "pale, with eyes that have wept much, but beautiful and black."

There were not wanting French eyes clear sighted enough to pierce the shallow waters of King James's mind. Louvois said, "There is a man who has left three kingdoms for a mass." The Paris populace received with acclamations so convenient a hook upon which to hang a jest. Madame de Sévigné, never among

the dim of vision, reports, "The king has a common mind; he relates all that has passed in England with an insensibility which kills one's sensibility for him. A good enough man, who takes part in all the pleasures of Versailles." At a later period, when the ex-king, dispatched to the ill-fated campaign in Ireland, with all the magnificence of a holiday regatta-fleet, was, *en route*, entertained in Brittany by the Duc de Chaulnes, governor of the province, Madame de Sévigné marveled that "he ate, this king of England, as if there were no Prince of Orange in the world."

Speedy and abundant was the crop of depreciatory verse which sprung in ground so meet for culture. It was said of the palace of Saint-Germain:—

"'T is here that James the Second, king
Sans mistress, premier, everything,
Goes every day to early mass,
To preaching every night, alas! "

And thus his life passed, numbering *Ave Marias* on his beads.

Madame Cornuel said of him that "the Holy Ghost has eaten up his intellect, on account of his imbecility and his devotion."

There was a lampoon upon this theme, whose bitter satire is untranslatable, its point lying in the French rhymes:—

"Quand je veux rimer à Guillaume
Je trouve aussitôt un royaume,
Qu'il a su mettre sous les lois;
Mais quand je veux rimer à Jacques,
J'ai beau rêver, mordre mes doigts,
Je trouve qu'il a fait ses Pâques."

A much-quoted epigram of Madame Cornuel's was upon the appointment of the Marquis de Seignelai as minister to the king, upon the death of his father, Colbert, in 1689. The marquis was then only thirty-six years old, and Madame Cornuel, returning from Versailles, where Maintenon reigned, a queen uncrowned, said, "I have seen strange things,—love at the tomb, and ministers in the cradle."

De Seignelai never outgrew his youth,

but died when thirty-seven years old. On his death, his estate of Sceaux, embellished by the owner's taste for the fine arts, which had been cultivated during prolonged residence in Italy, was sold, and its beautiful pictures were scattered. Madame de Sévigné tells of a splendid fête, to which the famous one at Vaux, which sealed the doom of Fouquet, was but a village festival. When the end came, suddenly and ill timed, she exclaims, "What youth! what future! what possessions! Nothing wanting to his happiness! It would seem as if splendor itself were now dead."

Of all the magnificence of Sceaux, whose glory flamed up anew as scene of the little court of the Duchesse du Maine, nothing now remains save a solitary pedestal surmounted by a statue, mutilated and defaced. That other home of De Seignelai, the tomb in St. Eustache's church, masterpiece of Coysevox and Tubi, and executed from designs by Charles le Brun, has remained uninjured through the long succession of years of change and destruction.

Perhaps no public event in France during the reign of Louis le Grand gave rise to so many epigrams as did the king's rash creation of a large batch of chevaliers of the order of the Saint Esprit, in 1689. The full history of these appointments has probably never been made public. The wheel within wheel of royal diplomacy, of which, in its foreign relations, the state archives have preserved the record, makes it impossible to ascertain the tactics of the king. So curiously mixed was the list of candidates that in more than one instance the ribbon, when offered, was declined. We may be sure that Louis neither forgot nor forgave such insult.

Madame Cornuel said, "I do not know why the king is supposed not to love Paris, in view of the number of bourgeois chevaliers he has created."

Disputing one day with the Comte de Choiseul on the subject of these promo-

tions, she cried, "Take care, or I will nominate *your* comrades."

The order of the Saint Esprit was instituted by Henri III. to detach his nobles from the Huguenot party; no Protestants being admitted to membership therein.

Madame de Sévigné's lively account of the ceremony of investiture with the badge of the order, which took place at Versailles, January, 1689, has been so read and re-read, as a typical specimen of her style and talent for humorous description, that many of us are as familiar with the incidents of that *jour des rois* as if we too had been present with the court.

We know how the naked knees of the Maréchal de Bellefonds amused and amazed an audience unwonted to Highland garb, he having forgotten to tie down his *chausses de pays* with the necessary ribbons; and we see in vision M. de la Trousse, in all his splendor, with that unlucky wig awry and revealing what it should conceal, in spite of frantic efforts on the wearer's part to drag it into place.

Nor do we forget that encounter between M. de Montchevreuil and M. de Villars, who hooked themselves inextricably together, with such fury that lace, swords, ribbons, became interlaced, embarrassed, entangled. "All the little ultimate atoms" (*atomes crochés*) "which, according to Epicurus, form the elementary particles of matter and of all organized being, were so interlocked that no living hand could separate them; and the more they were meddled with, the more complicated grew the problem."

Through those delightful eyes of Madame de Sévigné, so penetrating, so bright, yet so softly sympathizing, we see all the ceremony, thus absurdly interrupted, and behold the climax, when chevalier from chevalier was rudely torn, the victor carrying off the spoils of gold lace and silver ribbon.

We do not wonder that Madame la

Dauphine cannot restrain her laughter at the good Hocquincourt, attired *à la Provençal* or *à la mode de Bretagne*, with those fatal chausses de pays, less roomy than desirable, and refusing to conceal the white undergarment. How fruitlessly he tugs at it, how vainly he entreats it to lie *perdu*!

It was a queer assemblage, the king's Chevaliers du Saint Esprit! The Comte de la Vauguyon, one of the number, was of humble birth, and rose to this elevated station through the good services of a *femme de chambre* of the queen mother.

Of M. de la Vauguyon and M. de Courtenay, Madame Cornuel said, upon their promotion, "The difference between them is that one can't have what he wants, and the other has what he does n't want."

Even Madame la Comtesse was moved to poetic expression, and in a burst of impromptu verse exclaimed:—

"Le roi dont la bonté le met à mille épreuves,
Pour soulager les chevaliers nouveaux,
En a dispensé vingt de porter des manteaux
Et trente de faire leur preuves."

The great Colbert himself was at times the butt of Madame Cornuel's wit. Being one day obliged to seek an audience of him, she became out of patience with his well-known and most annoying habit of never replying or giving mark of attention to what was addressed to him. "At least, sir," she begged, "have the goodness to give me some sign that you hear me." Detained in his antechamber, which was crowded to excess by persons seeking interview with the minister, she said she thought she "must be in hell,—it was so warm, and everybody appeared to be so discontented."

Madame Cornuel was treated with extraordinary rudeness by Berryer, lieutenant of police, in 1676, and obliged to await audience in a room filled with lackeys. A respectable man, entering, expressed his fears that she was very

uncomfortable. She replied, "Alas! I am well enough off *here*, since they are only his lackeys. I am not afraid of *them*."

On the occasion of the failure of the Abbé Polignac to bring with him from Rome the expected bulls to the Gallican Church, which the dying Pope Alexander VIII. was coquetting with death to avoid sending, Madame Cornuel said, "Ce ne sont pas des bulles. Ce sont des préambules,"—a bon mot whose point is lost in translation.

This Pope, dying at last, left all his personal fortune to his nephews, whereupon Pasquin said, "It would have been much better for the Church to be his niece than his daughter."

It is curious to note how much of contemporary history is connected with fashion and its nomenclature.

La palatine, a fichu of lace or muslin, took its name from the sturdy German Palatine princess, second wife of Monsieur, only brother of Louis XIV. Courageous, upright, neglected, unattractive, she was the secret critic of the court and commentator upon its manners; and her shocked sense of propriety, in view of the unveiled bosoms of the French ladies, is perpetuated in the name of this "airy nothing."

The *fontange* was so called from the beautiful, soulless Duchesse de Fontange, Louis XIV.'s last broken plaything. Her lovely locks of gold becoming loosened, on a hunting-party, the favorite bound the ringlets with her ribbon garter, their ends falling over her forehead in a shower of tiny curls. This improvised head-dress, christened *fontange* by the enamored king, became the fashion of the day, and, spreading to the provinces, was there carried to extravagant lengths. Women in Provence grew so infatuated with their beribboned ringlets that they made dying requests to be allowed to lie upon the bier with face uncovered and locks *à la fontange*.

Madame de Sévigné says, in a letter

to her daughter, "How stupid these women are, living or dead! It disgusts me with dying in Provence. Give me your word that you will not send for the hair-dresser for me when you fetch the undertaker."

Strange to say, long afterwards, the body of Madame de Sévigné was discovered, in the chapel of Castle Grignan, arrayed in the detested style, with be-ribboned hair, à la fontange.

A peculiar fashion of ornamenting the front of the dress with knots and loops of ribbons, called *échelles*, furnished Madame Cornuel with one of her most brilliant epigrams. To explain it requires the setting of a scene in seventeenth-century history.

In 1679, the Marquise de Brinvilliers and her henchwoman, La Voisin, were put on trial, on the charge of, poisoning, before a commission appointed by the king, and called *la chambre ardente*. Historians consider the trial and execution of these criminals as, in the main, just, although doubtless popular excitement exaggerated their guilt. The interest of the case, for us, lies in the accusations brought against some of the most distinguished names in France. Among the clients of Brinvilliers were many, moved by curiosity, who, by visiting her, brought upon themselves arrest, under charge of blackest crime. The most noted of those indicted were Olympia Mancini, Comtesse de Soissons, Marianne Mancini, Duchesse de Bouillon, and the Maréchal de Luxembourg, one of the greatest soldiers of his times. The Comtesse de Soissons, the only one of the three who, judged by subsequent history, could be supposed guilty of the crime charged, being warned of impending arrest, was urged to fly, if guilty. Louis XIV. said to Madame de Carignan, her mother-in-law, "Madame, I am well pleased that Madame la Comtesse has escaped. Perhaps, however, I shall have to give account for it to God and to my people."

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The trial of the other highly-born and over-curious woman was strange enough. The Duchesse de Bouillon was escorted to the court-room by the old and *ennuyéux* husband of whose attempted taking off she was accused. Her haughty mien and audacious answers have become historical, and put an end to further interrogation in her case. But subsequent exile taught the lady the cost of an epigram, and also a trait of character of the magnificent king.

The attitude of the royal commission towards the prisoners, and especially towards M. de Luxembourg, who voluntarily subjected himself to imprisonment and insult unparalleled, would be indeed mysterious but for the admission of La Reynie, lieutenant of police, a member of the commission. A colleague remonstrated with him for having introduced into a trial for attempted poisoning a charge of sorcery, — a crime with which the commission had no authority to deal. "I have my orders," said La Reynie, and, thus speaking, uttered that most terrible indictment against Louis XIV. and Louis's minister, Louvois. It is the gravest charge that history can bring against the Bourbon that, as head of the state, he could thus tamper with justice, and use his almost absolute powers to serve the purposes of personal interest or revenge in thus prejudging an innocent man, whose services to the state were recent and very great. One agrees with Madame Cornuel's remark, upon the conviction of Brinvilliers: "That was well so far, but they should have burnt judges and witnesses too."

La Reynie's wife, on one occasion, wore an "*échelle*" (ladder) trimming upon her gown, and it requires all the previous explanation to understand the savage point of Madame Cornuel's reply when she was called upon to admire it: "I wonder she does not wear the gilet, too."

Of M. Cornuel there seems so little to be said that the fact of his official

position is almost all of personal history remaining to us.

His brother, President Cornuel, offered to adopt Margot, his niece, but the parents unwisely withdrew her from his care. Madame Cornuel's critic said, with great *naïveté*, "This they did, not foreseeing the great decline in *rentes* on l'Hôtel de Ville, in which M. Cornuel's riches chiefly consisted." President Cornuel would have made Margot his heir; and, in spite of the quarrel between the brothers, she received ten thousand crowns, under her uncle's will.

A solitary anecdote concerning Madame Cornuel's husband outlives the two centuries. When, one day, traveling with two young ladies, the carriage upset, and the party was withdrawn on the brink of a precipice, unharmed, M. Cornuel said, "In two minutes we should all have been of the same age."

Madame Cornuel lived to a great age, dying in 1693, eighty-seven years old. She was epigrammatic to the end. On paying a visit to M. de Montausier, who was very ill, his valet informed her that his master did not receive ladies in his present condition. "Nonsense!" she replied. "There is no question of sex at my age of eighty years."

Her epitaph, long anonymous, is now said to have been written by Titan du Tillet, and is found in the *Recueil des Pièces Curieuses*, published at the Hague in 1694. Its close and climax is an odd commentary upon French society morals. After eulogizing Madame Cornuel's charm of manner and finished grace of speech and discourse "seasoned with Attic salt," the poet sums up all the virtues of her who was visited by all the *élite* of worthy folks thus:—

"In one all attributes to blend,

She was of Ninon's self the friend."

Alas! to translate airy French epigrams into our lumbering, inflexible speech is to prove the truth of Madame de la Fayette's clever saying: "Those stupid translators are like ignorant lackeys,

who change into absurdities the messages with which they are entrusted."

In curious contrast to the vague shadow of Madame Cornuel is the gay, bright, sparkling personality of Madame de Coulanges, esteemed by her contemporaries, says Madame de Caylus, as only second to Madame Cornuel in esprit and in power of delicate epigram.

Yet Madame de Coulanges, while universally credited with witty sayings, has left so few on record that we are forced to take upon the word of her friends that wit which has evaporated in the course of two centuries. But of herself, "the leaf," "the fly," "the sylph," of Madame de Sévigné's playful masquerade, that gay, coquettish being, how vivid the image we receive from the letters of the period! She lives for us in such correspondence rather than in her own letters, which, although always graceful and playful, with an occasional epigrammatic flavor, yet hardly sustain the high reputation they enjoyed among admiring recipients.

Madame de Coulanges was the daughter of M. Gue de Bagnols, a member of the council and intendant at Lyons. She was niece of Madame Le Tellier, and consequently first cousin of Louvois. She was remarkably pretty. Madame de Villiers says no picture could reproduce the charm and vivacity of her countenance; and Madame de Caylus thus describes her: "An agreeable figure and mind, conversation full of brilliant and lively turns, and this style perfectly natural." She married Emmanuel de Coulanges, first cousin of Madame de Sévigné, and this relationship gave rise to the long and close intimacy which existed between the three persons. Coulanges was a *bon vivant*, a professional humorist, who supplied the epigrams (borrowed from other people) and the *chansons* (his own) which entertained the guests at the houses of his noble friends. He eulogized the

châteaux, the estates, the company, the good cheer; nothing exciting, on the whole, his genius more powerfully than the food of which he was the panegyrist. Take, for example, his triolet beginning,—

“Quel bœuf, quel veau, et quel mouton!”

As he says, with a fine burst of feeling, “There is nothing to equal a stomach that digests.”

It is marvelous that a woman of Madame de Coulanges’s fine spiritual fibre could have married a man who has been called “the epicurean pig.” Horace Walpole once exclaimed, indignantly, “You seem to take me for Coulanges, you describe eatables so feelingly!” La Bruyère sums up the sad results of such a life as that of the gay, *insouciant* Coulanges: “In general he who amuses the company does not make himself either loved or esteemed.”

In the days of Madame de Coulanges’s youth she entertained the true butterfly idea of life. When the Princesse des Ursins is appointed to great honor in Spain, Madame de Coulanges wonders how, at the age of sixty-five years, there can be anything left to enjoy. “I never, in comedies, fancied the elderly people, and the distaste clings to me in the theatre of the world.”

She was a member of that coterie to which Mesdames de Sévigné, de la Fayette, and de Sablé belonged, but her firm friendship with them was but one phase of her life. Through her intimacy with Madame de Maintenon, and possibly by reason of her connection with the Le Tellier family, she was established on a most desirable standing at court, and esteemed one of its most brilliant members. When the Dauphine, the bride of Monseigneur, arrived in Paris, in 1680, she expressed immediate and earnest desire to see Madame de Coulanges; telling her that she knew her already by her letters, and, having heard much of her personally, wished to judge for her-

self. Madame de Sévigné, who relates this incident, says that Madame de Coulanges sustained her reputation and blazed with epigrams. After dinner she was admitted to the cabinet, which implied great familiarity. Her friend adds, “But where can it lead? If not always thus honored, what heart-burnings!”

But Madame de Coulanges did sustain for many years the reputation she had acquired, and was the one person whose presence added the crowning joy to festivity. Her beauty, her wit, her joy in life, that very *insouciance* which banished, in her society, all thought of serious things, made her the pet, the idol, of a court which was used to enjoy and then discard all lovely things when the charm of novelty had vanished. Something of this she doubtless experienced, but it was after failing health had compelled her retirement from the favor she so long enjoyed. Madame de Sévigné finally said of her, “If she is attached to that country, the court, it is for the fleeting pleasure she gets there; she is not in the least the dupe of the sort of tenderness and friendship dispensed there.” She herself asserts, with some bitterness, in relation to a misunderstanding, “You do not know the court, if you think a note of justification will be read there, a note even of two lines, no matter what its importance.”

Madame de Coulanges had much native dignity, and would appear never to have traded upon her opportunities. Both her husband and herself would have gladly added to their small fortune, but her friends “gave her nothing but flattery and caresses.” She said, “I am more obliged to M. de Louvois for what he has *not* done than for the contrary.”

She was easily first for wit combined with personal charm in a society where such qualities held chief place. “*Finesse* and delicacy of thought distinguished her; always ready, appropriate, adorning with her own peculiar grace the veriest airy trifles, wrapping up the idea in the

thinnest disguise of cut filigree paper, the true genius of *sous-entendre* and double-meaning." So subtle were her turns of speech that her biographer remarks, "Flattery from her seemed dressed in thorns, and malice to be sugar-coated."

As a letter-writer she became famous even before and above the women of that time who have acquired greater reputation. M. Gault-de-Saint-Germain says there is no doubt that in this respect she was ranked more highly than Madame de Sévigné herself, and that the majority of persons acquainted with the style of both women would not have hesitated to give the palm to Madame de Coulanges; yet how inexplicable appears this verdict! Her personal charm shone for her contemporaries through phrase and expression, recalling the writer's grace and beauty; but this has vanished for us, and with clearer vision we reverse the seventeenth-century decision. Her friend, Madame de Sévigné, often writes of her odd and annoying epistolary habits. Her letters were written upon small bits of paper, which were called "sibylline leaves," *feuilles volantes*, and she insists that they interrupted the thread of the story, until "elles me font enrager. Je m'y brouille à tout moment. Je ne sais plus où j'en suis." Coulanges, on the contrary, liked "good sheets of paper, like those of our fathers' days, with easy room for details." Madame de Coulanges wrote like everybody else in the France of that day, in a sharp, thin, straggling hand. The Princesse de Tarente took time for writing; or would have done so, could she have found things always mislaid. "She mends her pens; her letters are a sort of embroidery, not done in a moment, with fine twirls and twists to the *D's* and *L's*." These ornaments were called the *lacs d'amour*. Coulanges once said, "I am revenged for all the bad jokes she [madame] has indulged in at my expense by the well-

founded hope that her correspondent can never read them."

The letters, when written, were "sealed on both sides, and tied with a bit of white floss silk."

Dividing with Madame Cornuel, as we have said, the honors of *bel esprit* en titre, although in the world's final judgment ranked below her, nothing could be more unlike than the character of their wit. Madame Cornuel's, like a blade kept bright by constant use, was keen, sharp, piercing, while Madame de Coulanges's *bon mots* were carefully studied, graceful inversions, a play upon words; French toys, whose dress of language claimed one's attention, perhaps holding it until the delicate spirit of the epigram had escaped. Once wishing to tell Madame de Grignan that she desired her friendship, she said, "I long too much for your reproaches, to merit them." Madame de Sévigné reports of her, when recovering from a severe illness, "The epigrams are beginning again." The Abbé Gobelin, her confessor as well as Madame de Maintenon's, said, "Every sin of that woman is an epigram."

Her *bon mots* were such as formed the current coin of society in her day. M. Gault-de-Saint-Germain says they were circulated by the Abbé Tetu and repeated by Madame de Coulanges's husband until they became flat and pointless.

On the death of Harlay, Archbishop of Paris, she remarked that there were only two trifles in the way of preaching his funeral discourse, — his life and his death. She described the contestants at the siege of Namur as making war very politely, and killing each other with the utmost good humor.

"Les passions sont horribles. Je ne les ai jamais tant haï que depuis qu'elles ne sont plus à mon usage. Cela est heureux."

In speaking of a friend whom she felt had deserted her, she said, "Ce

n'est pas la voir [the beloved one] que de s'en souvenir," which is a very good example of Madame de Coulanges's delicate humor. It was designed for an audience whose serious life-business it was to retail epigrams, when they could not make them, and who had exhausted the meanings to be evolved from word and phrase. The electric spark passed from lip to consciousness, emphasized and enlightened by sparkling eye, by smiling mouth, by speaking countenance. What can we make of that brilliant Psyche of wit, that butterfly pinned to the page of centuries-old story?

Coulanges well describes the humor of his day in speaking of bon mots "each more delicate and more *Françaises* than the other."

Madame de Coulanges was no doubt "coquette," a word in the vocabulary of the day almost synonymous with "pretty woman." Among her admirers were the absent-minded Brancas, Abbé Tetu, that Gallic Paul Pry, La Fare, and her cousin, the Marquis de la Trousse, with whom her friendship was strictly platonic, although the cause of great uneasiness to the gentleman's wife.

In 1676 she had a severe illness, when her life was in danger. In her delirium she reproached herself with strange expressions of condemnation, begging her husband's forgiveness with a passion of penitence which startled and perplexed her friends. It was like firing a cannon over still waters, bringing to the surface the evidence of crime which those quiet depths had held concealed. She was never "the leaf," "the fly," "the sylph," after that troubling of the waters, although not of the stuff of which *dévotés* are made.

Madame de Sévigné's letters contain all the details of this illness, which attacked Madame de Coulanges and her young lady-in-waiting, Beaujeu, with premonitory chills, at Versailles. We have not far to look for the cause, remembering the army of victims which

fell to celebrate, in true barbaric style, the magnificent king's triumph over nature in the creation of that palace and gardens. The two poor women underwent a terrible ordeal by doctors, and were promptly and frequently bled. The treatment — emetics, bleeding, sacraments — killed poor Beaujeu, while her mistress survived. "It is not so easy to die as one thinks." Madame de Coulanges returned from the dead, with that strange half-awakening, that is yet half-dreaming, which the Lazaruses bring back into this present world from their vision of the unseen. Writing to Madame de Grignan, she says, "Perhaps you would like to hear a bit of news from the other world. I am glad to be no longer dead, since you return this winter. I am in your house. I could not endure the house or bed where I was dead."

In the lapse of years Madame de Coulanges's friendship with Madame de Maintenon grew cool. Little by little, the court and its vanities were appreciated by her at their true value. She was temporarily infected by the mania for devotion, which, however, in her case proved only a *relevé*, while to so many others it formed the chief and only course. Her friendship with Ninon de l'Enclos, who numbered not a few virtuous women among her intimates, grew stronger as time went on. In 1698, she said, "The women run after Ninon now as folks of another kind ran after her formerly. How can people help hating old age, with such an example!"

But as time drew this reluctant victim towards the dreaded period of old age, it brought her, too, its own peculiar healing. Gradually and willingly her hand dropped the objects of her strong desire. Her period of devotion, her friends said, meant "giving a few hours less to the great world, and some hours more to her church or director." Her friends were horrified when, after a disastrous fire which drove the Coulanges from

their home, they took an apartment in the Temple, Rue des Tournelles, where her *media-noctu* of life was passed. A coterie, whose members were certainly a survival of the fittest of her wide circle of friends, still surrounded her with delicate flattery and assiduous attention, applauding her half-sad, half-mocking tirades against time and circumstance. A tender melancholy tinged her reminiscences of former pleasures; a *souçon* of malice gave point to her reflections upon court life.

Of Massillon, whose preaching at court had been extraordinarily successful, she said, "One sows in ungrateful soil, often, in sowing in the court; that is to say, people who are much touched by sermons are already converted, and others are waiting for grace. Often they wait without impatience, where impatience would be a great grace."

And again, "Ah, how could one wish to begin again all the visiting days; troubling one's self with events which do not concern one, alert as to journeys to Marly, treating them seriously, going to one side to speak of them with an air of gravity which makes people laugh who see things as they are!"

"T is the world, — that world which I think I love no more. Heaven grant that I do not deceive myself."

"My taste for solitude increases, or at least for small companies."

With years came also illness and a long period of invalidism. A curious picture of seventeenth-century medicine might be formed from the letters of the Coulanges. The wife's anomalous disease, for which classification was vainly sought, was evidently a trouble of the stomach, and "to establish the stomach" was the confessed aim of the doctors of the day. Madame de la Fayette congratulated herself upon having a fever for which a name was found. But Madame de Coulanges was never so happy. Many a quack fished in the depths of uncertainty, hoping to bring up some-

thing unmistakable upon which to found a diagnosis. Carette, the most notorious empiric of his times, was long physician-in-chief, and had many successors. Coulanges, who says of his wife's ill health, "Cela me donne du chagrin et m'envoie des tristes vapeurs à la tête," fondly dwells upon the number of bottles of Carette's elixir which Madame de Coulanges had taken. Carette gave place to Helvetius, and the patient survived them all, — doctors and their elixirs; outlived even her rosy little husband, of whom she said, "As my years increase, his diminish, so that I am now old enough to be his mother."

But, after all, Madame de Coulanges seems to have enjoyed in some degree this life, in spite of that invalidism, which, as in so many other cases, served as excuse for the non-performance of disagreeable duties. It was said of her that "feeble health, the natural and expected neglect of the court, loss of beauty, small means, did not embitter her. The more she put aside the world, the more it wanted her." Her house was still full of people, all giving advice, and in fact it was playfully called *ce bureau d'adresse*. In 1695, she writes: —

"No family, thanks to God, a distaste for fatiguing occupations, years a plenty, tolerably bad health, — all this keeps me in my chimney corner, with a pleasure which I prefer to all others which appear more sensible."

So attractive was her *salon* that Barillon, returned from his embassy in England, and spending the evening of his days by the chimney corners of his friends, said to Madame de Coulanges, "Madame, your house pleases me. I shall come here every evening when I am tired of my family." To which she replied, "Sir, I shall expect you to-morrow."

La Fare was one of the coterie for a time, but he left her as he left the Marquise de la Sablière, and Madame de Coulanges often said he had deceived her.

In constant attendance was the Abbé Tetu, that busy, important member of society, who was long so very young that "every year seemed to take off two." When he last appears in Madame de Coulanges's letters, he is accompanied by a lamentable train of ills.

Another friend was the Comte de Tréville, of whom Bossuet remarked, "He is a man all of a piece, — he has no joints;" a mot which brought out the response, "If I have no joints, he has no bones," in allusion to the bishop's well-known pliability. He was the devoted friend of all the great Jansenists, and wrote much upon disputed theological points, which he refused to make public. In the quiet of Madame de Coulanges's salon he read to a select few his essays on quietism, which his fair audience considered "the most beautiful things in the world," and felt honored in being thus distinguished.

Archbishop Le Tellier, too, came to the Rue des Tournelles, Louvois's brother, who exclaimed, when Fénelon, on receiving the see of Cambrai, gave up his benefices, "Monsieur, vous nous perdez." He was a violent, turbulent man, with a great fancy for good books, of which he collected in Holland and England a library of fifty thousand volumes, which he bequeathed to the abbey of St. Geneviève.

M. de Villeroi was devoted to the fair invalid. He was the subject of eulogy, of detraction, of admiration, of satire. Selected, for elegance of person and courtly grace, to dance with Monseigneur's bride, upon her arrival at Versailles, he acquitted himself so well that Madame de Sévigné wrote, "He danced so well, was so approved, so often talked of, was dressed in such appropriate colors, that one day the father [Louis XIV.], meeting him, said, 'I fear you want to make my son jealous. I advise you not to.'" But as a general he was not so fortunate, as the chanson written upon his reverses proves: —

"Villeroi,
Villeroi,
A très bien servi le roi
— Guillaume, Guillaume."

Saint-Simon says of him, "He was a man made to preside at a ball, to be judge at a *carrousel*, and (if he had had any voice) to have sung at the opera in the parts of kings and heroes. Perfect as to his dress and for setting the fashion, but having nothing else in him." He was styled "*Le Charmant*" by Madame de Coulanges.

The enumeration of the *habitués* of that salon in the Temple, adorned with Emmanuel de Coulanges's questionable collection of paintings, would be tedious. Among them were Brancas, the *distrain*, and Corbinelli, who, beginning his career by a disastrous connection with the affair of "the forged letter," which procured the Marquis de Vardes years of exile, was now the intimate friend and handy philosopher of the Sévigné coterie; La Rochefoucauld, who had given up war and intrigue for the placid composing of maxims in the society of sympathizing and clever women; the Cardinal d'Estrées, whose subsequent career in Spain and in Rome involved such a course of secret diplomacy and intrigue; "*Le bel Orondate*," which name had been given the Marquis de Villars on account of his good looks and fine manners. These men, with that brilliant galaxy of women who were so closely united, not only by sympathy of tastes, but by warmest personal friendship, made Madame de Coulanges's circle a representative one, embracing all that was best and brightest in the society of the day.

Meanwhile, M. Emmanuel de Coulanges led a life oddly distinct from that of his wife, although there was plenty of polite deference on the part of each for the other's tastes. She views him, his chansons, his raptures, his marvelous appetite, with a smile, half amused, half superior. "I found," she

writes, "on my return, an elderly child, surrounded by playthings and absorbed in delighted contemplation of his dolls." "I have nothing to present to him but an aged face, nothing new to show him; there is nothing unexpected to discover."

Coulanges felt for his wife an admiring friendship and that delicate anxiety proper to a husband *comme il faut*. Of her health he writes, "Her condition orders my journeys, and is my first solicitude, — a duty I am careful never to fail in; but it is she who begs me to go my own way, and my part is to walk therein prudently."

Thus gayly discharging his domestic duties, he speeds away to visit his better lodged noble friends. He said of himself, "*Je suis né pour le superflu, et jamais pour le nécessaire.*" And with that taste for *les poissons nobles* to which he confesses, he departs to Saint-Martin, estate of the Cardinal de Bouillon, with only the longing regret that Madame de Coulanges cannot see how much more he is at home there than the master of the house; and to Choisy — once Mademoiselle's beloved home, and exchanged for Meudon by her heir, the Grand Dauphin of France — he goes with Madame de Louvois, whom Coulanges calls "his other wife." There he appears as her *aide*, or first gentleman-in-waiting. Or, possibly, he goes to Chaulnes, where the duke and duchess, with his help, keep high state.

It was said that Coulanges's friends would never aid him in maintaining a table of his own, lest he fail to grace their boards. Even of his supernumerary spouse he says, "With all the tenderness in the world for me, the *beaux yeux de la cassette* so dazzle Madame de Louvois that she never sees the little presents she might make me." And with resignation he adds, "*Il faut s'en consoler, et mourir heureux au milieu de l'indigence.*" Thus, with true epicurean philosophy, he pursues his royal progress from château to château, and

writes to Madame de Sévigné letters so wonderfully detailed and picturesque that we almost assist ourselves at the splendors of high life in the seventeenth century. As a specimen of society at that period, he gives an amusing picture in his description of a fête given in Paris by the Duc de Chaulnes: —

"Meanwhile, the dirty spoons were collecting upon the plates, which had been used for one purpose or another; and having, unluckily, called for a *vive*, Madame de Saint-Germain put one of the finest on a plate to send me. I in vain declined sauce, but the lady, assuring me that the sauce was indispensable to the fish, deluged it with the liquid three times, with the help of the spoon fresh from her lovely mouth. Madame de la Salle never served a thing save with her ten fingers. In a word, I never saw more filth, and our good duke was dirtier than all the rest."

He sums up his calendar thus: "The house I know least of is that of Madame de Coulanges, which has its attractions, too."

Thus the tranquil years went on. Madame de Sévigné died, and Coulanges substituted as correspondent the Marquise d'Uxelles, classified as *femme amiable*, the ex-mistress of Louvois. Madame de Coulanges, up to 1704, wrote to Madame de Grignan letters which have been preserved. In the last of these she speaks of the visits of the Cardinal d'Estrées, and says she had been so impolite as to ask him not to carry them to so great an extreme. "My antiquity does not permit me to entertain company after nine o'clock in the evening, and our cardinal, who is more active and young than ever, does not trouble himself to find out what the hour is." Her friends were ceasing to pay her court for urgent reasons of their own, — rheumatism, violent dysentery, cruel colics, *très douloureux cancer*, gout, swollen limbs, and physicians, whether Carette, or Chambon, or that mysterious

Swiss who was credited with killing two patients of rank. These were causes against which protest was vain. When Madame de Sévigné died, Madame de Coulanges said, "I have no friend left." "Je ne m'en consolerais jamais. J'y pense sans fin et sans cesse." The Abbé Tetu, who was "really too young," found youth escape him and woes accumulate, until he became "like Job upon his dunghill." "It is like dwelling alone upon earth to see all whom one has known disappear. This only is certain, — no one will be here long." "On ne peut tenir à trop peu de choses."

But although "I am more solitary than ever, and believe I shall retire to some little desert, for the future is short for me," there were still habitués, old and new, of the salon of the Coulanges and of the old château of Ormessen, which became their country house. That new world of the court, which arose on the ashes of the old with the advent of the charming Duchesse de Bourgogne, is pictured in these later letters, and the interest attaching to the well-known names is carried forward to sons and daughters.

Madame de Coulanges lived until 1723, but after the death of Madame de Grignan, in 1705, there is no personal record. Coulanges, who died in 1716, wrote to the Marquise d'Uxelles, in 1705, a most characteristic letter, in which he incidentally mentioned, "Madame de Coulanges me tiennent fort au cœur," and that is the last record we have of her. She had repeated, in her customary half-jesting strain of moralizing, in her own last letter, "I find myself alone remaining of all the persons with whom I have passed my life. I dwell in solitude, and my existence is very far removed from that of the world." But after this there were still nineteen years of that old age which Madame de Coulanges so dreaded. Perhaps it is fortunate that silence rests on that last period. Now, though there is no pictured face to recall "the leaf," "the sylph," in living beauty, yet she is brought so vividly before us, if not through what she reveals of herself, still by her friends' voices, that it is difficult to remember, of a being so feminine, so graceful, so modern, that she lived and wrote and died nearly two centuries ago.

Ellen Terry Johnson.

FELICIA.

IV.

IN her leisure moments, of which she enjoyed some superfluity, Felicia meditated much on the unexpected interview in the Park, and in the course of the next week she evolved the idea that it would be desirable to draw out cousin Robert on the subject of the Kennetts, father and son. This astute design was frustrated. Hearing nothing from him or his wife, she undertook a pilgrimage to the Rectory. The fat old dog on the portico gave a gentle wheeze of recogni-

tion and a tap or two with his tail. As the bell clamored through the house, it had an indefinably hollow sound, and the maid appeared promptly at the door.

"I'm thankful to see you, Miss Felicia!" she exclaimed. "I'm too lunsome to live, with nobody to speak to but the old dog. You didn't know Mrs. Raymond was gone, yet alreatty? Oh, yes'm, since Chewsdays. She'd a telegram that her uncle Lucian is sick up in the country at his house, where her maw is visitin' him. An' her maw is worn out nursin' him. So Mrs.