The Education of women in seventeenth century France.

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The Education of Women in Seventeenth Century France

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The Education of Women in Seventeenth Century France

by

Mary C. Giblin

A Problem Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Science Degree

Massachusetts State College

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Chapter I

The Introduction
THE INTRODUCTION

The question of women's education has always been an interesting one. Today they enjoy privileges heretofore unknown. Women have taken over every phase of human endeavor. There are women in the fields of medicine and science, in the fields of language and literature, and in the fields of politics and education.

Such is the situation today. Was it always so? When did women first enjoy the freedom which they now possess? The reply to the first question is, of course, in the negative. The second question is more difficult to answer.

This study is concerned with the education of women in France. And it was not until the seventeenth century that French women began to enjoy the New Freedom or to take advantage of Women's Rights.

For the first time in France's history, women stood on a par with men in the fields of language and literature. It was at the Hotel de Rambouillet that their position as intellectual companions of man was first recognized. Once women had achieved this new social and intellectual position, they never
relinquished it. From then on, the women of France made appearance in the literary salons. It was through the efforts of one woman that seventeenth century France was purged of its barbarisms.

The organization of the salons marked the beginning of the culte called preciosity. Adherers to the culte assembled at the Hotel de Rambouillet where they discussed the problems of the time. A vulgar literature was refined. The précieux, as these people were called, approved only the best and purest of language and literature. From this Hotel sprang the ever famous French Academy.

During the course of the century, other salons increased in number. Although these salons were based on the first or mother of them all, the style of preciosity was distorted. Moliere, the French Comedian, wrote satires on this distorted form.

There was a definite trend toward the education of women during the period. This point is to be considered. Education in the convents was the most common means of female training. Two of the formal schools will be discussed, namely, Port Royal and Saint Cyr. Again Moliere satirizes the schools of the time because of their narrow aims and purposes.
Outstanding examples of the well educated French woman of the seventeenth century are Mme. de Lafayette and Mme. de Sevigne. Their lives will be considered in a section of this study.

The Education of Women in Seventeenth Century France would not be complete without due mention of the educational treatise *De l'Education des Filles* by Francois de Fenelon. His work marks a transition between the old and the new ideas with regard to the education and social position of women.

So, a threefold division has been made for the purpose of simplifying the study. Women will be considered in connection with the literary salons, and with the schools. The lives of Mme. de Lafayette and Mme. de Sevigne will be discussed as indicative of the trend in refined social groups.

Again, I repeat, Fenelon's contribution to pedagogy is not to be ignored. Since he comes, chronologically, at the end of the age, the last section will be devoted to his treatise *De l'Education des Filles*.

The summary will contain observations made by the author of the education which women of seventeenth century France received.
Chapter II

Women of the Salons
"Until the seventeenth century the crudest views prevailed as to the education and social position of woman. It was at the Hôtel de Rambouillet that her position as an intellectual companion of man was first recognized and the deferential aspect which followed it had powerful influence in refining the rude manners of men of rank whose lives had been passed in camps, and of men of letters who had previously enjoyed few opportunities for social polish. The two sexes met for the first time on a footing of equality, and it resulted in elevating the occupation of letters and imbuing men of rank with a fondness for intellectual pursuits." (1)

With the words, "A pencil! paper! quick! I have found a way to build my house!" (2) the idea of the Hôtel de Rambouillet was conceived. Yet under this apparently frivolous exterior there was a far more serious reason in the mind of the founder. Mme. de Rambouillet's aim was to combat the social barbarisms of the day and to repair the deficiencies in speech, behavior and culture which were then prevalent.

The conditions of the time, indeed, warranted the changes which the Hôtel de Rambouillet was about to make. The king, Henry IV, was a rough soldier utterly lacking in refinement. He was ignorant of literature and the fine arts. Sports rather than intellectual pursuits attracted him. He was slovenly about his personal appearance and

(1) Crane, Thomas: Société Française au dix-septième Siècle, p. XVII
(2) Hamel, Frank, Famous French Salons p. 1
his intrigues were without nicety of choice or delicacy of sentiment. Sully, his minister was even less favorable to the development of refined living and artistic pursuits.

The court life of the period was colored by the influence of such illiterate rulers. A refined artistic life would hardly be expected in such a France. Nobles prided themselves on their lack of knowledge and envied all who were less ignorant than they. Education was physical; conversation was warlike; bodily violence was common. At the funeral of Henry IV, the nobles established precedence by free fights.

Excesses in eating, drinking and gaming were the order of the day. A man who refrained from such vices was an exception. Chivalry was dead; women were almost brutally treated. The women themselves were hopelessly ignorant and vulgar.

It was from a coarse, corrupt court life such as this that Catherine de Vivonne withdrew in 1608. Seeing a need for reform, she devoted her all to the accomplishment of it. Historians are generally agreed that she was of prime importance in cleansing society of its barbarisms. For forty years her private home near the Louvre was to be the meeting place of a most brilliant coterie of the seventeenth century.
The founder of this first French salon, Catherine de Vivonne, was born in Rome in 1588. Her mother was Julia Savelli, a noble Roman woman; her father was Jean de Vivonne, the marquis de Pisani. To her nationality as well as to her early training, she owed her taste for the beautiful in literature and art which later gave rise to the association of her name with all that was elegant and refined in Parisian society.

Catherine received an excellent private education under scholarly tutors. She spoke Italian and French flawlessly. An attack of fever prevented her from studying Latin, which she desired in order that she might read Virgil in the original. When she recovered, she contented herself with the study of Spanish. She was an excellent talker without being either epigrammatic or witty.

At the tender age of twelve, her parents arranged a marriage for her with the marquis de Pisani. He was, then, a mature man and Catherine always regarded him as a child would its father. The union proved to be a happy one based, as it was, on a foundation of mutual affection and unity of tastes.

Six children were born to the Rambouillets. The eldest daughter, Julie, and the youngest, Angélique attended their mother at the salon.
The other children entered religious life. The marquis de Rambouillet did all he could to further his wife's popularity yet he does not figure in the salon life.

The Hôtel de Rambouillet stood in Rue-Saint-Thomas-du-Louvre. It was a part of Catherine's marriage dowry and previous to 1600 had been known as the Hôtel de Pisani.

Drastic changes were made in the construction of the hotel. Mme. de Rambouillet was her own architect. She drew up the plans and supervised the work. The staircase, which up to this time had held sway over the principal part of a house, was banished to a corner and built in an easily ascending curve.

Instead of the customary single drawing-room, there was a series of rooms on the same floor. The apartments were spacious, beautifully arranged and decorated. The floors were raised and long broad windows opening to the ground assured free entrance to light and air. All that art could device was employed in perfecting the new mansion. Beautiful gardens, which were visible from the reception halls, extended to the Tuileries.

Mme. de Rambouillet's particular salon was tapestried in heavy blue velvet. Hence, it was called the salon bleu. The room was kept dim
because light affected Mme's sensitive skin. A guest made his way to the presence of the great lady by a series of ante-chambers, chambers and cabinets. Reclining on a beautiful bed in this shadowy recess, Mme. de Rambouillet received her company. The ruelle was separated from the rest of the room by a balustrade. Into this otherwise unfurnished room the visitors were led. The importance of the guests determined the length of the visit and whether they should be given a foot-stool or fauteuil.

The reform of society turned her attention to a reform of society. She drew up an entirely new code of behavior, of manners, and of speech. She urged an intellectual appreciation of beauty and the study of language and letters. Those who adhered to her code were styled précieux.

The genre précieux was at first what is simply the style distingué. Distinction was sought above all else at the Hôtel de Rambouillet. Those who possessed it, or aspired to it were retained in the illustrious company.

According to Victor Cousin, two things enter into distinction—two things in appearance, conflicting, which will combine in choice spirits happily cultivated. These things are a certain
elevation of ideas and sentiments added to an extreme simplicity in manners and language. It was precisely the loss of the second condition and an undue inflation of the first which later brought the whole culte into disrepute.

To Mme. de Rambouillet's palace of beauty aristocrats and men of letters flocked between years from 1610 to 1650. Mme. was the leading spirit of the salon bleu. Realizing that wit and intellectuality require the very best conditions on which to thrive, she consecrated her beautiful residence as a shrine to the Muses, the manners, the letters and graces.

Requisites for admission to the society of the Hôtel de Rambouillet were wit and learning together with good manners. Once these conditions were fulfilled and the individual had entered the portals of the salon bleu, the élite society was democratic. A great variety of people assembled here among them were nobles, ladies of high degree, priests, soldiers, courtiers, poets and novelists.

Mme. de Rambouillet did more, perhaps, than any other woman to secure for authors the privilege of being received into the best society on equal terms with the aristocracy. Poets found themselves released from the bonds of patronage. A poet was no longer under compliment to a rich and powerful
lord; at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, he was a man among men.

The habitués of the salon bleu counted among their number the majority of contemporary nobles and writers of merit. To list them all would be to compile a society directory. Only a few of the most important personages will be mentioned here.

Malherbe and his disciple Racan were among Mme. de Rambouillet's first visitors. Malherbe instilled in Catherine's mind a love of grave and noble verse. To him she owed her name Arthénice, an anagram for Catherine. He did a great deal to purify the French language but his efforts were cut short by his untimely death in 1623.

The following group of literary men who attended the salon bleu—Chapelain, Conrart, Godeau, Gombault, Maleville, Hobert, Racan, Balzac, and Vaugelas—also assembled at the home of Valentin Conrart, one of the king's secretaries. Here literary endeavors were scrutinized in much the same fashion as at the Hôtel de Rambouillet.

Richelieu learned of the existence of the Conrart circle through Boisrobert who reported on the meetings and assured him that this male assembly was deserving of royal recognition. Sufficiently convinced that the work was meritorious,
Richelieu decided to organize the men into the French Academy with himself as founder and protector. The first official meeting of this body took place on March 13, 1634. Its aim was to place a stamp of approval on what was considered the best and purest of literature. This it did then, and is doing now.

We are concerned with the French Academy only because the original impetus back of it came from the Hôtel de Rambouillet.

The great tragedian, Corneille, read his plays at the *salon bleu*. He represented the serious side of the salon. La Bruyère said of him: "He is simple, timid and when he talks a bore, he mistakes one word for another, and considers his plays good or bad in proportion to the money he gains by them. He does not know how to recite poetry and he cannot read his own writing." He read his *Polyeucte* to the *saloniers* and when he had finished they did not know whether or not it deserved applause. But when the young Abbé Bossuet, later a renowned preacher, read the same play in his rich sonorous voice, the assembly was awed by the beauty which it heard.

Vincent Voiture, a contrast to Corneille, represented the lighter vein of the salon. He endeared himself to all but especially to the ladies.
His gaiety and laughter never failed him nor the salonièrès. A pleasing, fanciful style in poetry together with a quick, sparkling wit made him one of the favorites.

Many of the literary events of the period were born or died at the Hôtel de Rambouillet. Corneille read his plays, Bossuet preached his sermons and the élite society gave its approval or disapproval. There was a dispute over the merits of Voiture's Uranie and Benserade's Job. Both were sonnets. Boileau said in reminiscence: "A perfect sonnet is worth a long poem."

Words were scrutinized by the saloniers with the utmost care. Vaugelas, the grammarian, had great influence in this regard. Whether a word should be accepted, rejected or renovated was decided by actual popular vote of the entire assembly. Radical changes were made in the spelling of words. Superfluous letters were dropped as, for example, teste (tête), hostel (hôtel), goust (gout), and toujours (toujours).

Ménage and Chapelain were leading lights of the salon bleu. The former was renowned for his able discussions of foreign verse, and the latter was learned in Italian and Spanish letters, a critic whose judgments were not to be ignored.
During a later period Mme. de Lafayette and Mme. de Sévigné were regular attendants at the Hôtel de Rambouillet. Both were pupils of Menage and Chapelain.

La Rochefoucauld, author of the Maximes, which he wrote in collaboration with Mme. de Sablé, was another salonier of repute. The Maximes were based on observations which La Rochefoucauld had made of human nature.

However, the greatest achievement of the salon bleu was Montausier's Guirlande de Julie. Tallement called it the greatest piece of gallantry ever written.

Charles de St. Maure, as Montausier was christened, was born in 1610, the year Mme. de Rambouillet opened her salon. He was educated at Sedan and later attended the military academy at Paris. Early in life he displayed a great love for literature and at the age of twenty-one he made his first appearance at the salon bleu. When his brother died, he became the marquis de Montausier. His military career was very successful and he became a brave and capable officer. From his first visit to the salon, he became enamoured of Julie d'Argennes, daughter of Mme. de Rambouillet, and for a period of fourteen years, he aspired for her hand.
In 1641, Montausier presented the Guirlande de Julie to Julie. The edition was of beautiful red morocco binding with the initials J. L.—Julie Lucine engraved on the cover. The frontpiece was a garland with the title La Guirlande de Julie pour Mlle. de Rambouillet, Julie Lucine d'Angennes. On the front page was painted a zéphyr holding a garland of twenty-nine flowers in his right hand. The succeeding pages had separate flowers painted by Robert and beneath each was an appropriate madrigal inscribed by Jarry. Montausier wrote the greater number of the sixty-two madrigals and the remaining poems were written by poets of the salon bleu.

The first or dedicatory poem is cited below:

Zéphyr to Julie

"Receive, O adorable nymph
From whom our hearts receive their love
This more enduring crown
Than that which we place upon the heads of kings.
The flowers from which my hand has woven it
Outshine the golden flowers seen in the sky;
The water wherewith Parnassus bathes them
Gives them on everlasting freshness;
And everyday my dear Flora,
Who loves me and whom I adore
Angrily reproaches me,
That my sighs never for her
Produce a flower so beautiful
As I have produced for you." (1)

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(1) Van Lawn, History of French Literature p. 157
This is but one of the sixty-two madrigals in Montausier's garland. Note its beauty, simplicity and sincerity. And yet it was not until four years later that Julie finally agreed to marry Montausier.

Julie's marriage marks the decline of salon bleu. From the time of Julie's marriage (1645), the Hôtel de Rambouillet declined. The mimic war of the Fronde, the departure of Julie, and the declining health of the Marquise de Rambouillet tended to disperse the friends, who had gathered in the salon of friendship and refinement for over forty years.

Death of the Marquise put a definite end to the lingering hours of the salon's decaying brilliancy. Mme. de Rambouillet was buried in the Church of the Carmélites de Faubourg St. Jacques. Tallément wrote her epitaph.

"Ci-gist la divine Arthénice
Qui fut l'illustre protectrice
Des arts que les neuf sœurs
Inspirent aux humains." (1) *

So ended the Hôtel de Rambouillet. For a period of forty years (1610--1650) Catherine had held society in the palm of her hand. And the amazing thing is that so little is known about the lady herself. Once she had dedicated her temple to the Muses, and had set the stage for

(1) Hamel: op. cit. p. 43
* See Appendix for translation.
the reform of manners, Mme. de Rambouillet withdrew in the background. Yet she was always there, always influencing.

And society had been refined. Literature was the chief topic at the salon bleu, yet the rencontres were not dull. The habitués enjoyed themselves. They played games, they danced, they sang and even made love.

One of the favorite diversions of the précieuses was to paint word portraits of characters. A maxime of preciosity is here employed:

"C'est encore un point de morale bien approuvé entre elles de ne dire leurs sentiments que devant ceux qu'elles estiment, et de ne dire jamais les défauts d'une personne sans y joindre quelques louanges, et cela pour adoucir l'aigreur de la critique." (1)*

Many of these character portraits later found their way into future novels. Mlle. de Scudéry painted a picture of Mme. de Rambouillet under the guise of Cléomire in Le Grand Cyrus.

"Imagine beauty of person," says Mlle. de Scudéry, "Cléomire is tall and her figure excellent; all the features of her face are perfect; the majesty of her person cannot be expressed; the fire of her eyes shines I know not what fire, which imprints respect in the soul of those who behold it. For myself, I know that I never approached Cléomire without experiencing in my heart a respectful fear which obliges me when in her presence to think more of my actions than I do under other conditions. Moreover the eyes of Cléomire are so beautiful that it has been impossible to represent them well. Still they

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(1) Schinz & King, Seventeenth Century French Readings, p. 38
* See Appendix for translation.
are eyes which while exciting admiration have not caused what other eyes are wont to do; for if they inspired love, they inspired always equal fear and respect and by a special privilege they have purified all the hearts they have enflamed. There is even in their brilliancy a modesty so great that it is shared by those who gaze on them and I am strongly persuaded that there does not exist a man who ever dared to harbor a criminal desire in the presence of Cléomire. Her physiognomy is the most brilliant I ever beheld, and in her visage a tranquillity which shows clearly that of her soul....if Virtue took a human garb it would be that of Cléomire." (1)

Effects of the Hôtel de Rambouillet had many effects. It purified the French language and paved the way for the establishment of the French Academy. Many types of literature were born at the salon bleu, namely, the tragedies of Corneille, the sermon of Bossuet, the letters of Balzac, the maximes or proverbs of La Rochefoucauld are but a few.

The Hôtel de Rambouillet had another effect. It changed the social position of woman. She was now on a par with man in the field of letters and this position, once acquired, she never relinquished.

When the Fronde was terminated and Mme. de Rambouillet had ceased to hold her receptions, Mlle. de Scudéry succeeded her. Smaller salons increased in number, the frequenters multiplied.

(1) Hamel, op. cit. p. 4--5
Although the imitators of the salon bleu had obviously good intention, they distorted the style of preciosity. The word précieuse now took on the meaning of affected woman. This meaning gained currency about 1655 when the Hôtel de Rambouillet had closed its portals.

The most famous imitator of the salon bleu was Mlle. de Scudéry, whose samedis over which she presided under the name of Sappho, gave entrée to a people quite as literary but less distinguished in social rank and thus visibly more affected in their attitude.

Then on November 18, 1659 at Petit Bourbon, Molière presented his comedy, Les Précieuses Ridicules, in which not only the imitators but preciosity itself was satirized. The whole Rambouillet family was present at the opening performance. The result was the abolition of an affected and stilted style of speech.

After the production Ménage said to Chapelain:

(1) "Monsieur...nous approuvions, vous et moi, toutes les sottises qui viennent d'être critiques si finement et avec tant de bons sens. Il nous faudra brûler ce que nous avons adoré et adorer ce que nous avons brûlé." *

In the Précieuses Ridicules Molière satirized

(1) Nitze & Dargon: History of French Literature, p. 225
* See Appendix for translation.
a style of speech and an affected taste in art and literature which were prevalent among a certain class at that time.

Plot of P. R. Two country ladies, Madelon and Cathos, reject their would-be suitors because they would not adhere to Mlle. de Scudéry's long apprenticeship of courtship and gallantry then in vogue. In revenge the rejected suitors clothe their valets, Mascarille and Jodelet, in rich dress and they masquerade as a Marquis and Vicomte, respectively. The young ladies are charmed by these nobles, and more especially with the marquis who desires to write a history of Rome in madrigals. He composes four lines (impromptu) and then proceeds to dissect them word by word. Attention is called to the great beauty of these words—which beauty is visible only to a true précieuse. The deception continues at a high pitch until the two masters come and despoil the would-be nobles of their fineries leaving them only their servants' garb. The final laugh is on the précieuses ridicules.

Criticized It is generally agreed that Molière satirized the frequenters of the samedis rather than the habitués of the salon bleu.

Imitators

Life of Sappho, as Madeleine de Scudéry called herself, was born in 1607 at Havre. She had a brother George, a few years her senior. Madeleine's father was
Scamandragini whose birth was so noble that undoubtedly there is no other family which possessed such a long line of ancestors or such an illustrious genealogy.

Education

In 1613 both father and mother died. An uncle was charged with the duty of their education. Both followed literary careers. Madeleine learned all that was taught to a girl of noble family in the seventeenth century, that is, writing, spelling, drawing, dancing, painting, and needlework. She also learned Italian and Spanish, and was especially fond of the popular romances, Théogène and Astrée.

Literary career

Her brother, George, abandoned the army to pursue a literary career. In 1630, he established himself at Paris. He produced a number of plays, took part in the controversy over the Cid and as a result won the favor and protection of Richelieu.

Madeleine is presented at Hotel

Madeleine joined her brother in Paris and for sixteen years, they worked together. He presented her to the society at the Hôtel de Rambouillet. She made many friends by her ingenious quality for conversation. In 1642 George and Madeleine went to Marseilles. There they found a cultivated society.

Scudéry's part in Fronde

In 1649 they returned to Paris. In the Fronde the Scudérys took the part of the Condés and to one of them, Mme. de Longueville, La Grande Mlle. Madeleine dedicated the Grand Cyrus.
George left Madeleine in 1654. He went to Havre where he, later, married. From that time on, Madeleine did independent work.

In 1650 she began her famous *samedis*. Her house became the boarding school of the précieuses.

A few differences, between the *samedis* and the Hôtel de Rambouillet, which are worthy of note are the following. At the Hôtel the gathering was largely aristocratic, distinguished by fine blood as well as fine breeding. The influence of the *salon bleu* was far reaching. It was not confined to the *belles-lettres* exclusively. War, politics, religion and education were discussed. At the *samedis*, the meetings were purely literary. The general tendency was exaggerated preciosity. At the Hôtel de Rambouillet the *saloniers* tried to express noble ideas in a simple way. At the *samedis*, unimportant things were expressed in a strained and affected style. It was precisely this loss of simple style and inflation of lofty ideas which led preciosity into disrepute.

Examples of common précieuses expressions are the following. Ears would be called, by the frequenters of the *samedis*, the *gates of my understanding*. Night would be the *mother of silence*; war was the *mother of discord*; a hat was the *defier of the weather*; chairs were the *indispensables of*
Novels by Madeleine de Scudéry

Madeleine de Scudéry wrote novels of seemingly interminable length. Stories were at least ten volumes long. It is doubted that the books were ever read through. Yet there was great interest in the books due to the fact that under classical names were easily recognizable contemporaries. People looked at the Grand Cyrus to find out what Mlle. de Scudéry thought of them. The manners, events, and ideas were true to the seventeenth century.

La Carte du Tendre

The romance Clélie has for a frontpiece, a map designed by the frequenters of the samedis. This map, called La Carte du Tendre shows the route to three kinds of love, namely, Recognition, Inclination, and Esteem.

The first destination or Tenderness on Recognition is achieved by constant service and attention to the object of one's affection. Tenderness on Inclination illustrates the progress of great and passionate love. There is danger lest the lovers be carried into the Dangerous Sea.
To arrive at Tenderness on Esteem, the lover starts at New Acquaintance. Then he writes Pretty Verses. Later he sends her Love Notes. Having proved himself an honest man, he can now obtain a confession from his beloved of her love for him. That obtained, he has reached Tenderness on Esteem. But, marriage is never the outcome of preciosity, so the pair enjoy a platonic friendship.

In summing up the salons of the seventeenth century it must be remembered that there were not two, but several. The Hôtel de Rambouillet was the first. Of all the salons of old France, no other possesses the glamor, the coloring, the individuality, the beauty, the picturesqueness of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. All the others in comparison seem to be brilliant but vulgar crowds. Others may seem to be identical but there is an indeterminable something lacking in each; something which would have been out of place except in the salon bleu. It is the pure gold of the first preciosity which is missing from the others.

Mme. de Rambouillet's purpose was achieved. She had a refining influence on manners and letters. She accomplished what she set out to do. Society was reformed. The "Golden Age" of French literature, indeed, had its inception in the salon bleu.
Imitators lead culte to disrepute code. Thus it was that the samedis fell into disrepute. They were ultra literary. Lofty ideas were unimportant and the simple mode of expression was stilted and exaggerated.

Molière's criticism of the pseudo-education of the salons had in mind when he wrote Les Femmes Savantes. In this comedy he satirized the pseudo-education of the précieuses. He did not intend to ridicule higher education of women. The femmes savantes are ridiculous because of their superficiality. These précieuses endeavored to refine the language not only by throwing out all coarse and offensive words, but also by substituting for perfectly proper words, others of a refined nature which proved to be utterly ridiculous.

The theme of Les Femmes Savantes is pedantry versus common sense. On the pedantic side are Bélose, a vain old-maid who thinks everyone is in love with her; Philaminte, who neglects her family and parades knowledge which she doesn't possess; and Armande, daughter of Philaminte, who believes that women have equal rights with men in the fields of literature and science. Common sense is represented by Clitandre, who loves Henriette and openly opposes the pedants; Chrysale, father of Armande
and Henriette, who is opposed to pedantry, but hasn't the strength to express or stand by his convictions so long has he been under pressure of his wife, the pedantic Philaminte; and Henriette, a young lady of great common sense, who loves Clitandre, dislikes pedantry and urges her father to declare his beliefs.

The two sisters, Armande and Henriette, have very opposite views regarding life. At the opening of the play Armande urges her sister to raise herself to more dignified heights, to forget Clitandre, to cultivate a taste for noble accomplishments, and to give herself up to intellectual pursuits. Marriage and family life, according to Armande, are degrading, vulgar, purely sensual and contemptible. She warns Henriette to suppress her animal instincts and unite herself to philosophy and thus imitate her mother whom she considers an excellent example of culture. (1)

Henriette says that nature calls each one to a different destiny. She does not intend to interfere with the call of heaven and suggests that they go their separate ways and in different ways imitate their mother. Henriette will imitate her by marriage with Clitandre; Armande by marriage with philosophy. During the course of the play,

(1) Femmes Savantes, Act I, Sc. 1
the ridiculousness of pedantry is brought out. The savantes oppose the marriage of Clitandre and Henriette. They prefer that she marry M. Trissatin, a wit. Chrysale finally asserts himself and contrives a scheme whereby the merits of both men, Trissatin and Clitandre, will be known.

In the presence of all, a messenger brings news to Chrysale and Philaminte that their fortunes have been lost. Trissatin falls for the hoax and takes advantage of the opportunity to make a quick exit. Clitandre remains steadfast. He and Henriette are joined in wedlock. The stability of common sense triumphs over the insincerity of pedantry.

Molière's ideas on the education of women are evident from the comedies les Femmes Savantes and l'École des Femmes. He realized that women needed education but sought a middle path between ignorance and pedantry so that both would be avoided and yet, the mind and body of women would be developed.

Opposed to pedantry he says:

"Je consens qu'une femme ait des clartés de tout; Mais je ne lui veux point la passion choquante De se rendre savante, afin d'être savante." (1) *

Molière's ideas were common sensible. He believed in education for home life as well as

(1) Femmes Savantes, Act I, Sc. III
* See Appendix for translation.
for the salon. He ridiculed preciosity à outrance and the affectation of savantes, whose taste in literature goes as far as M. Trissotin's verses. He attacked the false deduction of the savantes who believed that the only possible union should be with "Philosophie."

"Qui nous monte au-dessus de tout le genre humain
Et donne la raison l'empire souverain,
Soumettant à ses lois la partie animale
Dont l'appetit grossier aux bêtes nous ravale." (1) *

According to Molière, women must not be kept in total ignorance as was Agnès in l'Ecole des Femmes nor must they develop theories contrary to the function which their Creator had in mind when He created them, as did Armande in les Femmes Savantes.

Molière, in the person of Chrysale, says a woman knows enough if she has capacity, "A connaitre un pourpoint d'avec un haut-de-chausser," (2) * that her conversation should be confined to household tasks, and her only books should be her thimble and her needle.

(1) Femmes Savantes, Act I, Sc. 1
(2) Femmes Savantes, Act II, Sc. 7
* See appendix for translation.
Chapter III

Women in the Schools
Part III

Women in the Schools

Convent education in 17th century France received what then passed for an education. The conventual aim was to prepare women for heaven or a life of devotion. Spiritual devotions and exercises formed the only occupation of the pupils and study was hardly taken into account. Two institutions, however, devoted to female education, were the Abbey of Port Royal and Saint Cyr.

The Petites Ecoles of Port-Royal had a short and troubled existence. Their foundation dates back to 1637. Several times they were broken up due to the theological disputes concerning Jansenism. Finally in 1661, they were ordered closed by the king's command.

Cornélius Jansen, a Dutch professor at the University of Louvain, and later Bishop of Ypres, had made a profound study of St. Augustine. At the time of his death in 1638, he left in manuscript form, a book in which he pretended to present the genuine views of St. Augustine. The work, which was published in 1640, met with approval.

Under the leadership of his disciple, the Abbé of St. Cyran, the principles of Jansenism were spread among the family Arnauld. St. Cyran also propagated the doctrines among the solitaries.
and nuns at Port-Royal.

In the work *Augustinus* Jansen denied the existence of human liberty. Man, in all his actions, is prevailed upon by force. The force compels each to a good or a bad action. Thus man is either saved or lost without any cooperation of his own. Hence redemption was not for all men but only for the predestined.

St. Cyran further advocated the principle of excessive austerity regarding conduct. His system of rigor was particularly apparent in the severe conditions and high perfection he required of persons who were to receive the Sacraments. His demands caused persons to abstain from Communion even to the neglect of their Easter obligations. St. Cyran died without receiving the sacraments. His successor, Antoine Arnauld, immediately published a book, *On Frequent Communion*. It also discouraged reception of the Sacraments.

In 1641, Jansen's *Augustinus* appeared. The work was condemned by the Pope. The Jansenists refused to accept the papal condemnation and the result was a series of quibbles and controversies. In 1642 a papal bull was issued which pronounced Jansenism a heresy. Again the heretics refused to submit to the condemnation on the ground that it was too general and indefinite.
Finally in 1653 the Pope Innocent X condemned five propositions which were taken from the *Augustinus*. The propositions were:

1. Just men cannot keep the commandments of God without grace given to them.
2. Grace is irresistible
3. Man cannot of his own free-will obey or resist it.
4. Man has no liberty of action as distinguished from necessity and
5. The redemption was not for all men but only for the predestined.

The sum of these contentions is a denial of free will and an expression of belief in predestination.

Still the heretics refused to accept the condemnation accusing the papal authorities of misinterpreting the propositions. For the next twenty years there were numerous controversies between Jesuits and Jansenists, papal and royal conventions. In 1656 Blaise Pascal, a solitary Jansenist, published his *Lettres Provinciales*. Jesuits condemned Pascal's book as heretical.

In the same year the pope again condemned the five propositions and four years later the king, Louis XIV confirmed the condemnation and the *Petites Écoles* of Port-Royal were suppressed by royal command.
Thus the schools of Port-Royal were closed after an existence of less than twenty-five years. Their education and methods were highly ascetic based on austere principles of Jansenism.

When Mère Angélique Arnauld became abbess of Port-Royal, she felt bound to enforce order in the abbey. She exacted the rule of perpetual enclosure. To effect this she had to exclude her own father and other members of her family from the precincts belonging only to the nuns. A firmness of mind together with the help of her sister, Mère Agnès, caused the reform to be successful.

During the seven year period of reform, the number of nuns at Port-Royal increased from twelve to eighty. This necessarily resulted in the purchase of a larger home for the community at Paris. (1630)

The Abbé of St. Cyran, to whom the foundation of the Petites Écoles belongs, was so profoundly moved by the importance of the education of the young that he said to Fontaine, "I confess that I should consider it a religious duty if I could be of use to children." Of the dignity of the teaching profession he added, "There is no occupation more worthy of a Christian in the Church, there is no greater charity after the sacrifice of one's life....The guidance of the most tender soul is
Aims of education

1. The fundamental **purpose** of the Port-Royal Jansenists was to fortify the baptized souls against the evils of the devil. This could only be achieved by inculcating principles of genuine Christian piety.

2. Closely akin to this primary object was the development of reason, "to carry forward intelligence" as Nicole said on Reason; "to impart in the mind a love and discernment of truth; to render it delicate in discovering false reasoning; to let it not be put off with obscure words and principles, and not to be satisfied until the foundations are reached; to render it subtle in seizing the point in complicated questions; to discover what is relevant, to fill it with principles of truth which will be helpful in finding it in all things."

Interest in education of girls

The education of girls interested the Jansenists as much as the education of men. Small schools called **Petites Ecoles** were organized which accommodated twenty-five boarders. Women of rare and beautiful character were charged with the education of the girls. No teacher had under her care more than six children.

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(1)Cadet: Port-Royal Ed. p. 2
| Admission and curriculum | Children were taken at Port-Royal in their teens. Up to the age of twelve, children were occupied with sacred history, geography, and history under the form of amusements. These were given to develop intelligence without wearying it. The regular course of study began at twelve and included the Greek and Latin Classics, together with grammar, rhetoric, logic, mathematics and the Church Fathers. |
| Methods of instruction | The method employed at Port-Royal was to direct instruction first to the senses, if possible, by means of pictures. Pascal invented phonic spelling. The first books were French texts prepared by the Port-Royalists themselves. Indirect method was used to introduce the child to the classics, i.e., by use of the mother tongue. |
| Discipline | With regard to discipline, corporal punishment was thoroughly rejected as it hindered moral development and piety. Admiration of the teacher was instilled in the pupil. The teachers were chosen with qualifications of self-control, patience, and piety. |
| Appraisal monastic | The Regulations for Children by Jacqueline Pascal indicate that Port-Royal education was monastic. The interior of the girl's institution was sad, the rules were austere. In the words of Gréard, "A strange emotion is caused by the sight of those children keeping silence
or speaking in a whisper from their rising till retiring, never walking except between two nuns, one in front and the other behind, in order to make it impossible, by slackening their pace on pretext of some indisposition; for them to hold any communication; working in such a way as never to be in companies of two or three; passing from meditation to prayer; from prayer to instruction; learning, besides the catechism, nothing but reading or writing; and, on Sunday, a little arithmetic as diversion; the hands always busy to prevent the mind from wandering; but without being able to become attached to their work, which would please God as much as it pleased them the less, opposing all their natural inclinations, and doing nothing except in the spirit of mortification." (1)

The above paragraph very well describes the rigidity and monotony of the system used at Port-Royal. It was against this type of conventual education that Fénelon later rebelled. It excluded the outside world completely. Thus, if the pupils were to again enter society, they would be totally ignorant.

The girls at Port-Royal dressed as nuns, were taught by an ascetic group of reformed nuns, who took advantage of every opportunity to recommend

(1) Compayré: History of French Pedagogy, p. 216
Long day

Marriage was dissuaded. St. Cyran said that he would do his utmost to prevent entrance into the state of matrimony. Mere agnes advised her nephew to refrain from a prospective marriage.

A fourteen hour day kept the mind from wandering. Thus frivolity was avoided. Silence marked page after page of Jacqueline Pascal's Regulations. "Silence while rising and dressing--at work--after breakfast--during household work--during the writing lesson--silence during services and mass--silence in the refectory--during work until vespers--after the angelus--and great silence while undressing and going to bed." (1)

Books used

With regard to studies; the reading books were all works of piety and comprised the Imitation of Christ, Lives of the Saints, Meditation of St. Therese on the Pater Noster, and Familiar Theology.

The education at Port-Royal was excessive in piety. The Port-Royalists aimed to prepare girls for the religious life. Religion headed the curriculum with a little reading, writing, arithmetic, needlework, housekeeping and singing.

Transition to St. Cyr

When one turns from the highly monastic education at Port-Royal to the school of Saint Cyr, there seems to be a ray of light. Madame de

(1) Cadet: Port-Royal Education, p. 53.
Maintenon who founded St. Cyr in 1686 said, "It is not a convent. It is a great establishment devoted to the lay education of young women of noble birth; it is a bold and intelligent secularization of the education of women."

The praise given to Saint Cyr is over exaggerated. For the school knew two periods. During the first it was secular, worldly and brilliant. The education was broad and liberal. It prepared girls to take an active part in salon life. Mme. de Maintenon later realized that the salon was not the destiny of her young charges. She took drastic steps to reform the institution and curriculum and succeeded so well that Lavallée, an admirer, said of the reformed Saint Cyr, "It is too religious, too monastic."

The two plans of teaching will be considered later in connection with the life of Mme. de Maintenon, for her own girlhood gives us the key to her ideas on education.

Françoise d'Aubigné, later known as Mme. de Maintenon, was born on November 28, 1635 in the prison of Niort where her parents, Constant d'Aubigné and Jeanne de Cordilhac were incarcerated. The child was not to remain in the prison. A paternal aunt, Mme. de Villette offered to take the child to her estate at Mursay. Here she was taught to hate
feebleness and vice, and to despise Catholic superstitions. Thus she was raised to be a worthy grandchild of the great Huguenot champion, Agrippa.

At the age of seven, Constant sent for his little daughter. The death of Richelieu had set him at liberty. Now the child was to taste the poverty of life as fully as she had drunk in its luxury at Mursay. Constant secured the governorship of the isle of Marie-Galante through the American Commissioners and the family left France. Françoise's heart never left Mursay.

A few years later they returned from America to France, and in 1645 Constant died leaving his family in dire need. Jeanne de Cordilhac, hardened by the many bitternesses of life, gladly accepted Mme. de Villette's second offer to take Françoise. Happily Françoise returned to the scene of her childhood but her stay was of short duration. Another aunt, Mme. de Neuillant secured a claim for the child and Françoise was taken to the Neuillant estate at Paitou. Here she was taught principles of Catholicism but being so obstinate in her Huguenot beliefs Mme. de Neuillant deemed it necessary to send her to a convent. The good nuns refused to keep her. Disgustedly Mme. de Neuillant sent Françoise back to her mother.
At the Ursuline Convent Jeanne de Cordilhac sent the child to another convent directed by the Ursulines. While there she wrote this pathetic letter to Mme. Villette whom she always called her real mother. However exaggerated the letter might be, it is said to depict the convents of the day. It follows:

"Madame and My Aunt:

"The memory of the singular kindness it has pleased you to pour out on poor little forsaken creatures leads me to stretch out my hands, beseeching you to use your credit and your pains to get me out of this place, where to live is worse to me than death. Ah! Madame and My Aunt! You cannot imagine the hell this house, so-called the house of God, is to me, nor the ill-treatment and harshness of those who have been made the keepers of my body, but not of my soul, for that they cannot reach! Rivette will tell you the full tale of my terrors and my sufferings, being, as I am, alone in this place, without anyone in whom I may put my trust. Once more I beseech you, Madame and my Aunt, to take pity on your brother's daughter and your humble servant, (1)

Françoise

No answer came to the plea. But Françoise was to be freed. One of the nuns felt that more could be accomplished by reasoning and persuasion than by perpetual scoldings. She took the child

(1) Tallentire: Mme. de Maintenon, p. 21.
in hand and permitted her to listen to a theological discussion. The result was Françoise's conversion to Catholicism at the age of fourteen.

Two years later her mother died. The lame poet, Scarron, felt sorry for the girl's poverty. He offered her his hand or a dowry for the convent. Françoise had had enough of convents in her youth and decided to accept the offer of marriage. For eight years she was to attend him, to preside over a salon, to entertain the favorites of birth and literature. This was her pride. When Scarron died, Mme. Scarron was brought to the attention of Mme. Montespan. Thus she became a part of the brilliant court of Louis XIV, first as a governess to his children and later as his wife.

In 1675, she purchased the Maintenon estate with the grant which the king gave her. From then on she dropped the name of Scarron and assumed that of Maintenon at king's request.

The queen died in 1683. After that time, at a date still unknown, Mme. de Maintenon secretly became the wife of Louis XIV.

Her prime interest was in the work of education. Louis endowed St. Cyr and gave it Mme. de Maintenon as its founder.

The aim of Saint Cyr was to assure to the two hundred and fifty daughters of the poor nobility...
and to the children of officers dead or disabled, an educational institute where they might be prepared to become either nuns or mothers. As M. Gréard said, "the very idea of an establishment of this kind, the idea of making France pay the debt of France, educating the children of those who had given her their blood, proceeds from a feeling up to that time unknown." (1)

Saint Cyr was founded in 1686. It was not a convent—Mme. de Maintenon had founded first secular institute for the education of young girls in France.

The girls of St. Cyr were divided into four classes—the reds, the greens, the yellows, and the blues. The reds were girls from seven to eleven years of age, the greens were girls from eleven to fourteen, the yellows were fourteen to seventeen and the blues were from seventeen to twenty years of age. Each class was subdivided into five or six families of eight or ten girls.

The teachers at the institute were trained by Mme. de Brinon, an Ursuline nun, the Mother Superior of Noisy, whose aid Mme. de Maintenon had sought. She made twelve chosen ladies from Noisy undergo a regular novitiate. The theory of

Methods

Principles at St. Cyr

instruction and the duties of the various posts of the institute were introduced. Retreats, lectures, prayer, and silence had their part. Of the twelve, only four were sufficiently imbued to permit their employment as the young mothers of St. Cyr. They were bound to it by simple vows.

The method which was employed at Saint Cyr included activity and energy, gaiety, simplicity and genuineness, knowledge of child nature, and appreciation of individuality, justice and equal treatment; reality, reasonableness and religion without religiosity.

Mme. de Maintenon was a true exemplum of activity. She busied herself with the menus of the meals, with the school curriculum, with the development of their bodies and character. She was in the dormitory when the girls rose; she appeared in classes unexpectedly and took the lessons into her own hands.

The following maximes guided the girls of Saint Cyr:

1. Learn good habits--there are none which do not at last grow easy, however wearisome they are at first.

2. Make yourselves capable of whatever possible because you never know for what God intends you.
3. Be severe towards yourselves, be indulgent towards others.

4. If you never waste time, you will be capable women.

5. Work always, but without affectation.

6. Acquire the good habit of filling every moment of the day.

7. Never go to bed without having learnt something. (1)

Brilliant years

The first years of St. Cyr were brilliant years. The spirit was broad and liberal; literary exercises and dramatic representations held an honored place. It was the notorious success of the performance of Andromaque and Esther which led to Mme's reform of St. Cyr. Racine wrote Esther for the girls at St. Cyr; Boileau conducted the training of the girls chosen; the entire court, the king at the head, came to witness and to applaud the pretty actresses. The school inclined to worldliness, better fitted to train women for the salon than the home.

Reform of St. Cyr

This undue publicity of 1691 showed Mme. de Maintenon that she had taken a false step and thus she endeavored to correct these excesses. Heads were turned by all this show; dissipation crept into the school. The pupils were no longer willing to sing in Church for fear of spoiling their voices.

(1) Hodgson: From Rabelais to Rousseau, p. 100
Jealousies on the part of the girls were common and interest along other lines of study was gone. M. Herbert, curé of Versailles, objected saying: "All the convents look to Saint Cyr; they will follow the example set there and instead of educating novices, they will turn out play actresses." (1)

The reform began with the abolition of Racine's plays. St. Cyr had not been a convent. It was a secular institute. But the founder thought it necessary to transform St. Cyr into a monastery and she founded the Order of Saint Augustine. Mme. de Maintenon related in a letter to Mme. de Fontaine the reasons of that reform which modified the character of St. Cyr.

"The sorrow I feel for the girls can only be cured by time and an entire change in the education that we have given them up to this hour. It is very just that I should suffer for this, since I have contributed to it more than anyone else.... The whole establishment has been the object of my pride....I wished the girls to be witty, high spirited, and trained to think....They have wit and they use it against us. They are high spirited, and are more heady and haughty than would be becoming in a royal princess....We have trained their reason, and have made them talkative, presumptuous, inquisitive, bold....Let us seek a

(1) Hodgson: From Rabelais to Rousseau, p. 106.
remedy....As many little things form pride, many little things will destroy it. Our girls have been treated with too much consideration, have been petted too much, treated too gently. We must now leave them more to themselves in their classrooms, make them observe the daily regulations, and speak to them of scarcely anything else. Pray to God, and ask Him to change their hearts....There should not be much conversation with them on the subject. Everything at St. Cyr is made a matter of discourse. We speak of simplicity....yet the girls make merry in saying: 'Through simplicity I take the best place; through simplicity I am going to commend myself.' Our girls must be cured of jesting. We have wished to shun the pettiness of certain convents, and God has punished us for this haughty spirit. There is no house in the world that has more need of humility....than our own. Its situation near the court, the air of favor that pervades it; the favors of a great king; the offices of a person of consideration; all these snares so full of danger, should lead us to take measures directly contrary to those we have really taken....(1)

The moral discipline and programme of studies were reformed.

(1) Compayré: History of French Pedagogy p. 220 and 221
The curriculum was limited to reading, writing, and counting. Reading was viewed with distrust. Books of a secular nature were interdicted; only works of piety were accessible. Such books were Introduction to a Devout Life by St. François de Salles, and Confessions of St. Augustine. Reading does more harm than good. It would probably lead to preciosity. Thus it was severely restricted.

Compositions were rejected lest they became précieuses. Spelling and writing contented her if it was free from gross mistakes. Perfect spelling had a savor of pedantry and a desire to play femme savante.

Little importance was placed on history. French history was taught for the sole purpose of distinguishing kings from emperors and of knowing the proper succession of rulers. Ancient history was entirely eliminated.

Moral discipline was achieved by manual labor. Girls were taught to sew, to knit, to embroider, and to make tapestry. Madame de Maintenon continued to set an example of activity for her girls. In the carriage en route to or from St. Cyr her fingers were ever busy with the needles.

Manual labor is a protection against sin and vice. The girls of St. Cyr were taught to employ every moment of their time so that their minds would not wander. Work calms the passions, occupies
Mme. de Maintenon wanted her girls to have a religious education without religiosity. Prayer was not overdone. The girls were to fear God, honor the king, be upright, sincere, and virtuous. After the reform Mme. said, "Let the piety be cheerful, gentle, and free. Let it consist of the simplicity of their occupations rather than in austerities, the retirements and refinements of devotion." (1)

The work of St. Cyr is, no doubt, a credit to Mme. de Maintenon. Women's rights, duties, and capabilities had been recognized. An education for women was deemed necessary. Mme. de Maintenon, having had enough of the austere convent life in her own early training, decided that her institute at Saint Cyr would not be a convent.

And so it was a first attempt at a secular institution for the education of girls. For the first few years it was delightful. The education was brilliant. The poet, Racine, wrote his Esther and Athalie for the girls of St. Cyr. The girls gloried in their acting to such an extent that jealousies crept in. Mme. appealed to Racine to write a play whose theme was sacred. Thus he wrote the biblical play Esther (1691). After the presentation, Racine's plays were abolished from Saint Cyr forever.

The institute had been too worldly. It was preparing girls for the stage or the salons. Mme. set out to reform her institute and she did it with all the vigor she possessed. She realized that her girls were not to enter the court or the salons, but were to perform the laborious tasks of housewives.

The reform narrowed the curriculum to the rudiments of reading, writing, and counting. Reading was spiritual as secular books told of the world and Mme. painted it as a wicked place.

In a word, Mme. de Maintenon reformed her school in such a way that it passed from the worldly extreme to the austerity of the convent.

Saint Cyr and Port-Royal represent the type of education offered to young women of the seventeenth century. A narrowness of aim characterized both institutions. Port-Royal prepared women for the convent; Saint Cyr, before the reform, prepared women for society. Since the majority of women has neither of their destinies, Mme. de Maintenon decided to reform Saint Cyr. She intended to meet the destiny of the majority. But the reform made St. Cyr as monastic as it had been worldly.

In his comedy _l’Ecole des Femmes_, Molière criticized the convent education of the times as he had criticized the education of the salons.

The subject of _l’Ecole des Femmes_ is the failure of Arnolphe, a middle-aged guardian to
win the affection of his childish ward, Agnès. She had been educated in a secluded convent where, according to Arnolphe's directions, she was brought up "as simple as possible." He rebelled against the blue-stockings who talked only of their salons and their assemblies, who wrote verses and entertained marquises to the neglect of their husbands. He wants his wife "to know how to pray, to love him, to sew, and to spin." Content that Agnès is innocent of all other things, he takes her from the convent and keeps her imprisoned in his own house where she sees no one but him.

Once, while away from home, Arnolphe met Horace and told him that he was in love with a beautiful young creature whom M. de la Souche (Arnolphe) is guarding. Horace confessed his plan of kidnapping the lady.

Arnolphe returned home, reprimanded the servants for allowing Horace to enter. Then he questioned Agnès. She confessed everything. Her total ridiculous simplicity was brought out when, Arnolphe told her that tokens of affection and manifestations of love are permissible only in the married state, she replied, "marry me that I may love him (Horace)."

Determined to win the love of Agnès, Arnolphe lectures to her about marriage. He presents her with a book, Maxims of Marriage or The Duties of Married Women With Her Daily Lesson. The book
contained several maxims which amounted to one—that a wife is to live only for her husband and never to look at another.

By intrigue, Arnolphe arranges for Horace to gain entrance to Agnès' room by a ladder. The servants are to toss him off. Agnès sees Horace on the ground, runs to him, confesses her love for him, and actually proposes marriage. Agnès is reminded by Arnolphe of her obligations to him. She thwarts him with the reply, "It is he (Horace) who has taught me what I know and I feel that I owe him more than I owe you."

Horace's father returns from a long journey and tells him that he wants him to marry. Horace is disturbed, but not for long. His father's choice is his own choice, Agnès.

The play proves that nature is stronger than those who would try to thwart it. Molière showed his disapproval to existing modes of feminine education. Between the stupidé and the savante, he would place the libéral.
Chapter IV

Educated Women
The seventeenth century was not lacking in women of talent and genius. Two outstanding examples of the educated woman were Mme. de Sévigné, queen of letter writers, and Mme. de Lafayette, the novelist. It is well to consider their education in some measure, indicative of the trend in good social groups.

St. Beuve said of Mme. de Sévigné: "It is impossible to speak of woman without first putting one's self into a good humor by the thought of Mme. de Sévigné."

Marie de Rabutin Chantal (Mme. de Sévigné) was the only child of Celse Bénigne de Rabutin, Baron de Chantal, and Marie de Coulanges, daughter of king's counsellor. She was born at the Place Royale du Marais in Paris on February 5, 1626. When Marie was still an infant, her father was killed in a battle defending the isle of Rhé against the English. A few years later her mother passed away. So the little orphaned daughter was placed in the care of her maternal grandparents, M. and Mme. de Coulanges. Death, which had robbed this little child of both parents before she was five, was to strike again. The loving grandparents passed on in rapid succession. Thus the remaining members of the family assembled to decide upon a
Abbé appointed guardian for Marie. The lot fell to her uncle Christophe de Coulanges, abbé of Livry.

At this time the abbé was twenty-nine years of age and his ward was ten. For a half century he was to be her faithful friend and wise counsellor. At his death, she declared, "To him I owe the happiness and peace of my life."

Although young, the abbé was a sensible man and one of irreproachable integrity. He was father, mother, and instructor to the little niece. Marie loved the abbé as a dear friend and called him le Bien Bon.

The Abbey of Livry was a beautiful place situated a few miles from Paris. A healthful country with invigorating air was a good environment for the child. Thus she became strong in body and mind.

The problem of the child's education was of prime importance to her uncle. She received an exceptional training for the seventeenth century. The best masters of the age, Chapelain and Ménage, were engaged as Marie's tutors, men of literary repute who gave her a solid and thorough education.

Ménage taught her Latin and instilled in the girl a great love for Tacitus and Virgil in the original. Chapelain introduced her to the best of Greek literature also to the Italian and Spanish as well as to the mother tongue. Marie was to
become a linguist par excellence.

Marie also received instruction in dancing and singing. She composed little chansons, and took a part in acting. Aside from this cultural training her uncle busied himself with her religious training.

A shrewd business man, the abbé de Coulanges, looked after his niece's finances and amassed her a great fortune. When he presented her at Court, at the age of eighteen, she was a young woman of great wealth. Marie charmed the élite society by her beauty and gaiety. She had several suitors but her choice fell upon the marquis de Sévigné, cousin of Retz, of a noble Breton family.

In 1644 Marie married the marquis. She was eighteen; he was a little older. From the point of view of amassing fortunes the marriage was ideal, but it was not a happy one. A young, rich, and handsome man, Sévigné was weak, vain, and libertin. He squandered her fortune and his own by gambling and prodigalities.

Bussy Rabutin, Mme. de Sévigné's cousin, lost no time in informing her that Sévigné was unfaithful. Although she refused to accept this truth, she did lose respect for her husband.

Seven years after the marriage Sévigné was mortally wounded in a scandalous duel over one of his mistresses. When Madame was informed of the
death, she could not refrain from mourning her faithless husband.

Thus Madame de Sévigné was left a widow, with two children, at the age of twenty-five. From then on she devoted herself to the care and education of her daughter Marguerite-Françoise, and her son Charles.

The young widow refused to marry in spite of her many offers. Most persistent suitor was her cousin, Bussy. She went to live at Les Rochers, property of her husband in Brittany. Because of a hardy and untiring spirit, acquired perhaps from the Abbé de Coulanges, Mme. de Sévigné succeeded in restoring the patrimony to her children.

After a time Mme. de Sévigné returned to Paris where she frequented high society and became one of the most respected ladies of the Hôtel de Rambouillet.

Both Ménage and Chapelain were men of the world and frequenters of the best society. It was through their good efforts that Mme. de Sévigné was intellectually fitted to take a high place among the cultured circle of the précieuses at the Hôtel de Rambouillet.

Her charm and wit made her a favorite at once. At the Hôtel she mingled with the most prominent men of the time: Bossuet, Fénelon, Bourdaloue, Voiture and Corneille.
Her greatest inspiration was her affection for her two children. She devoted herself to their education, teaching them Latin, Italian, and Spanish as she herself had been taught.

She accumulated sufficient funds to establish her son and aid him with her money and influence.

When Marguerite-Françoise was eighteen, she presented her to the Court where she was a sensation for her beauty. Her cousin, Bussy, called her "the prettiest girl in all France."

Beautiful as she might have been her marriage was not one of the Court's most brilliant. In 1669 she married the Count de Grignan. She was twenty-three, he was forty years old. It was her first marriage, it was his third. Twice a widower, his first wife had been Angélique de Rambouillet.

Mme. de Sévigné approved the marriage. To Bussy she wrote, "At length, the prettiest girl in France is to marry not the best looking boy, but one of the most honest men of the realm. All his wives have died to make way for your cousin."

The Count de Grignan was rich, of noble birth, and a favorite at court. Two years after the marriage he was named Lieutenant general of Province. Mme. de Grignon accompanied her husband to the seat of government. From that time on Mme. de Sévigné's
life consisted in awaiting her daughter or going to visit her, in thinking of her and writing to her. Madame de Sévigné suffered greatly from this separation. She spent most of her time at Paris in the elite society. Sometimes she stayed at Les Rochers or at Livry. On occasion she went to Province to visit her beloved daughter.

Separation

Correspondence She sought comfort for her loneliness in a daily correspondence which lasted until her death in 1696, a period of twenty-five years. From 1671 on, her private life, her habits, the books she read, even the smallest movements of society are known.

The letters Madame de Sévigné wrote the bulk of her fifteen hundred letters to her daughter. Among the many other people with whom she carried on a correspondence were her son and Bussy Rabutin.

Letters to Bussy Although the latter had painted a none too flattering portrait of Madame de Sévigné, she forgave him. Her letters were his only contact with the elite society of Paris which he loved.

La Rochefoucauld La Rochefoucauld and his friend Madame de Lafayette were numbered among Madame de Sévigné's choicest correspondents. The two women were bosom friends. When Madame de Lafayette was dying she said: "Let the end come when God wills; I am resigned. Believe my very dear friend (Madame de S.) that you are the one person in the world whom I have truly loved."
During the seventeenth century the epistolary style had become fashionable. Letters containing literary portraits and conversations were circulated. Some portraits found their way into such novels as Mme. de Scudéry's *Le Grand Cyrus* and *Clélie*.

Voiture and Balzac were users of the epistolary style and when one reads Mme. de Scudéry's letters one is fully convinced that they used only the form. There is nothing of the person in their letters. (1)

Style plus sincerity of the writer equals literary perfection. A Jesuit who wrote a criticism of epistolary style said of Mme. de Scudéry's letters "one of her letters deserves the expenditure of more time on the part of the readers than it took her to write it." (2)

In the letters to her daughter, one is ever conscious of Mme. de Scudéry's presence. One feels that she is talking.

Mme. de Sévigné was writing the news, as it were, to her daughter. She wrote of things as they happened. Her expression gives a life and vitality to the accounts whether they be of historical, literary, or merely conversational events. A keen observer, she omitted nothing from her letters. One is certain that the accounts of events are historically sound and true because she had no reason to deceive her daughter.

(1) Boissier: *Mme. de Sévigné*, p. 62
(2) Boissier: *Mme. de Sévigné*, p. 64
Boissier said of her letters, "It appears to me that the majority of those of whom Mme. de Sévigné speaks to her daughter could have read her letters without suffering any of those cruel wounds that cannot be pardoned." This is a test which few private correspondences could pass.

Mme. de Sévigné wrote about her friends, but of their faults and eccentricities she wrote lightly. Jests softened by a smile characterize her letters rather than darts pierced by a meanness of spirit. (Bussy)

Her letters today are heralded as perfection of epistolary style. The question often rises as to whether or not the letters were spontaneous outbursts or carefully prepared bits of information. Mme. de Sévigné answered these questions in her own letters to her daughter. "I am always astonished at the kind things you say of them (my letters), they pass from me so quickly that I never perceive their merits, nor their shortcomings." Again she wrote, "I always begin without knowing what the end will be; ignorant of whether my letter will be long or short. I write as much as my pen chooses. It has full away."

Mme. de Sévigné had no intention of making her letters public. For that reason she is perfectly natural and entertaining. She had a natural bent for relating events. Her perfection of style is
due to her excellent education, and her extensive reading. Then, too, she frequented the best society of the day and was present at the discussions regarding French language and literature.

The subject of many of Mme. de Sévigné's letters to her daughter is family life. She counselled and advised the daughter as to the course of action to be taken in certain crises.

Extremely pleased and proud of the education which she had received, she desired that her granddaughter, Pauline, should receive a similar training. She advised her daughter to take the child in hand at an early age. "It is presuming too much to expect everything from the natural gifts unaided."

With regard to convent education Mme. advised "Do not believe that a convent can mend her education better with regard to religion, of which the good sisters know little, or in other matters." The mother can better care for her child with gentleness. "Guide her gently, her desire to please you will do more than scoldings; try to reason with her without scolding or humiliating her....and you will have done much."

As for actual study Pauline's grandmother was delighted to know that Pauline had a fondness for books. She suggested that she acquire a taste for
historical work. "By reading one becomes accustomed to reflect, one learns to write. It is such a delightful accomplishment to know how to write what you think." She suggested that the child read Corneille's Polyeucte and Cinna. As for romances, she would wait until the child's mind was well balanced.

Thus, Mme. de Sévigné directed Pauline's education. Again and again she suggested reasoning with the child, she would rather keep the child with her mother than send her to a convent. Good sound reading, not too simple but well chosen, is essential.

Madame directed her grandchild's education well. She (the child) also wrote letters perhaps not quite so perfect as her grandmother's. It was through her efforts that the public has received the letters of Mme. Sévigné.

Truly Mme. de Sévigné was a well educated woman of the seventeenth century. Because of her liberal education she was able to write down so entertainingly not only facts pertaining to her daughter's family life and her granddaughter's education, but also historically sound political and literary events of the years 1671 to 1696.

In 1696 while on one of her few vacations to Provence, Mme. de Sévigné was seized with a sickness which resulted in her death. Her daughter had lost a kind and loving mother, society had lost its soul.
A contemporary picture of Mme. de Sévigné, beside her and a most intimate friend was Mme de Lafayette, of whom we get a true picture from the former's pen. "To tenderness of soul", says Mme. de Sévigné, "and a romantic imagination she added natural precision and a divine reason that never failed her, she had them in her writings and in her life."

Marie Pioche de la Vergne was born at Paris in 1634. Her father, a general and the governor of Havre, took great pride in his daughter and exercised great care with her education. At a very early age she had read and studied more than the mighty intellectuals of preceding generations.

Her father engaged Ménage and Chapelain as tutors. In this respect, her education was similar to Mme. de Sévigné's. Marie was an excellent Latin scholar. A few months after she had begun to study it, Segrais reports that she knew more than Ménage. One day, while translating a Latin passage a question arose as to the meaning of the text. Both tutor and pupil held to their respective views, each refused to accept the authority of the other. Finally, Ménage had to admit that the girl was right.

When Marie was fifteen years old, her father died. Her mother married again, her second husband being Chevalier Renaud de Sévigné.
In 1655 Marie married the Comte de Lafayette. This man whose name she made famous seems to have deserted her. At any rate we find her embarking on a literary career.

She frequented the Hôtel de Rambouillet and other salons. Here she met Mme. de Sévigné and both became inseparable. Both absorbed the best at the hôtel. Neither became a précieuse.

When Mme. de Lafayette began to write for pleasure, the poet Segrais was her advisor and helped her in the arrangement of her plots and lent his name to her first novel, Zaide. (1662) Women were told that they could not write.

About this time Mme. de Lafayette began to receive La Rochefoucauld and Mme. de Sévigné, her intimate friends, Condé, La Fontaine and Segrais at her own home.

She had met La Rochefoucauld at Mme. de Sablé's salon. From then on began that indissoluble relationship which seems to have worked out so happily for them, and which gave the world so much talk. Before their meeting M. de Rochefoucauld had said; "Love is nowhere but in novels." Once he had met Mme. de Lafayette he knew differently. He had a deep feeling for her.

They were together constantly. When Mme. de Lafayette became ill and M. de Rochefoucauld was crippled with the gout, they were indeed an unhappy couple.
Together, this sad pair received their few intimate friends, talked and wrote. She was diplomatic and restored the duc's broken fortunes as well as she reformed his bitter heart.

During this great period of friendship Mme. de Lafayette wrote her *Princesse de Clèves*. Together they worked. She wrote, La Rochefoucauld revised and approved. Together they enter the kingdom of romance. Mme. de Lafayette's own imaginings are pictured in the character of Mlle. de Chartres, the M. de Nemours is the duc in his youth. The atmosphere was one of deep and tender sentiment; the ending, sombre and sad as if they felt the coming of the end. Reality touched the story from beginning to end. The two were in love. The husband Lafayette made a marriage contract with the duc impossible. Ill and sad, they were awaiting the end of a sad life.

The book appeared in 1678 and was the talk of the season. The authorship was unknown. Many attributed the work to Mme. de Lafayette. To this she replied, "I am flattered of being suspected of it. I would acknowledge the book if I were sure the author would not claim it. I find it 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 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 memories, and that I am told was its title, but it is changed. This is my judgment on the Princess of Clèves." (1)

A brief analysis of the plot of the Princess fairly satisfies us that Mme. de Lafayette is the true author. Mlle. de Chartres (Mlle. de Lafayette) married the prince of Clèves, whom she esteemed but didn't love. The match was suggested by her mother. Some time after the marriage she met the duc de Nemours at a dance. He fell in love with her. But being a woman of honor and principle she shunned his love. She confessed her new love to her husband and promised to remain faithful. The husband is thankful for such an honest wife. But little by little a bitter jealousy crept into his heart. He did not mention this to the Princess. He died of chagrin. After his death the duc de Nemours hopes that the Princess of Clèves will marry him but she decides to remain faithful to her first marriage vows, and seeks refuge from her passion in a convent.

The book was not wanting proof of its authorship. Instead of stilted and impossible, this novel was real and natural. Its interest was in characters

(1) Brooks: Dames and Daughters of the French Court p. 50
and motives. It belonged to a new school—the psychological. Thus Mme. de Lafayette was the first writer of psychological novels.

After completing the novel Mme. de Lafayette sat back to watch the result of their work. The book proved to be a huge and amazing success. Thus a small measure of happiness was brought to the couple in their closing lives.

The duc de Rochefoucauld died in 1680. Mme. de Lafayette could not be comforted. She turned her thoughts to religion. Her life was quiet, filled with repentance and hope. Thus she spent her last years and on June 1, 1693, she died.

St. Beuve said; "Thus lived and died in a mingling of sweet sadness and sharp suffering, of wisdom according to the world and of repentance before God, the woman whose ideal production still enchants us."

Thus were the lives of the two greatest women of this seventeenth century. Both received excellent classical educations at the hands of tutors; both frequented the best society; both made names for themselves in literature. Madame de Sévigné achieved fame as a letter writer; Mme. de Lafayette achieved fame as a novelist.
Chapter V

Fénelon's Ideas on the Education of Girls
François de Fénelon, the last great representative writer of seventeenth century France holds an important place in literature; but the part he played in the field of education is even more important. He was the first one to cope with the problem of woman's education in its entirety. He laid down a code, based on the duties of womanhood, which would guide the education of girls from infancy until their entrance into society.

Francois de Salignac de Lamotte Fénelon was born at the Chateau Fénelon in Périgord on August 6, 1651. The family had more titles of nobility than it had money yet it was able to give the boy a good classical education.

At the age of twelve, François was sent to the University of Cohors. Upon the completion of his course, he answered the divine call to the clergy by entering the seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris.

In 1675 Fénelon received Holy Orders. For the first few years following his ordination, he did parish work at St. Sulpice. In 1678, he was made director of the Nouvelles Catholiques, a hostel whose purpose was to retain and to make young Protestant Converts to the Catholic faith. During this period Fénelon made the acquaintance of the Abbé Bossuet whom he regarded as a teacher.
At the request of the Duchess of Beauvilliers, a friend, Fénelon wrote his treatise *De l'Éducation des Filles*. (1687) The book was written for the duchess alone. It was not meant for public use. It was to guide the duchess in the education of her eight daughters.

Two years later (1689) Louis XIV had named him preceptor to his grandson, the duke of Burgundy. In that capacity he proved his worth as an able educator. The duke was a difficult pupil, subject to frequent fits of temper which Fénelon curbed by reason and justice. It was for his royal pupil that he wrote *Fables*, *Dialogues des Morts*, and *Télémaque*.

During his preceptorship, Fénelon became acquainted with Mme. Guyon, a pious widow, who had written *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer*. Although not a professed follower of Molinos, the father of Quietism, Mme. de Guyon did favor his spiritual doctrine. The church declared Mme's works to be dangerous.

Bossuet immediately condemned her pamphlet on prayer. He and Fénelon then became antagonists. Fénelon half-defended Mme. Guyon in a book, *Les Maximes des Saints*, which the Church condemned. Fénelon accepted the condemnation and retracted the work in a sermon to his parishioners. He was banished to the island of Cambrai, the bishopric
Exile perpetuated

To further complicate his sad plight, the Télémague, which was as private text for the duke of Burgundy, fell into the hands of Louis XIV. When the king read the book he saw in it a satire against his absolutism. Thus he made Fénélon's exile perpetual.

Last years

His last years were spent in prayer and works of charity. In 1715 death released him from exile.

Work on Education of Girls

The work here to be considered is his treatise on woman's education. The time was ripe for such a treatise. Seventeenth century loved to argue about women's rights and women's position, to discuss whether her place was in the kitchen or in the drawing-room, whether she was to be slave to a household or the adored object of society's affection.

Analysis of treatise

An analysis of the treatise indicates a triple division. In the first section Fénélon brings a charge against the ordinary methods of education—"Nothing is so neglected as the education of girls." Having pointed out the necessity of educating women, he then gives a number of general counsels regarding health, impressions, pleasing presentation of material and basic knowledge of religion and history. The third section concerns the duties of womanhood, and the particular question of educating girls to fulfill these duties.
Necessity of educating women

To establish the necessity of education, Fenelon said, "Women are one-half of the human race which was redeemed by the blood of the Savior... Men, themselves, even though they have all the authority in public cannot by their deliberation alone establish any effectual system of right, if women will not help them to achieve it. The success of civilization is in woman's hands."

Granted that girls should be educated, he takes up the problem of when to educate them; begin during early infancy. He then sets down three principles to guard the child's health:—

First: Let the body grow strong; give it time to develop itself. Don't force it.

Secondly: Choose the proper diet; have definite meal times, avoid highly seasoned foods or a wide variety. Don't allow eating between meals.

Thirdly: Follow and assist nature.

Impressions

During infancy and childhood it is important to make the right impressions in children's minds. The memory, at this time is strong yet sensitive. Only the best chosen impressions should be engraved on the child's mind.

Don't deceive the child. Deception breeds suspicion, criticism and contempt. Don't create false impressions. To let him think you are pleased with every little thing will create a false impression of the real world and its people.
Moderate interest

Foster a moderate interest and curiosity. Avoid idle curiosity especially with regard to religion.

Duties of women

The question of the duties of womanhood resolves itself into those of wife and mother. As a curriculum Fénélon suggested reading the mother tongue before Latin, writing to some avail (not idle copying) and some knowledge of law. She must know how to buy and keep accounts, teach her prices and economy.

Neatness

Neatness of person and household is a sine qua non.

Motherhood

The most important duty of womanhood is that of motherhood. Religion is the groundwork of education. The mother must have it, to teach it to her children. Use story-telling method. Teach religion by concrete objects. Children love stories and will crave more. Link the stories together. Let the children repeat them.

How to overcome feminine fault of ennui

Fénélon devoted a section to the overcoming of feminine fault of ennui. He suggests work for leisure time—reading. If the woman is interested in art let her engage in painting. This will aid her in her needlework. Let her do something useful.

To overcome idle curiosity, he suggested telling the woman that such subjects were not to be engaged in by the fair sex. Let men take part in religious and political discussions.
To overcome vanity—teach the girls modesty. Beauty depends on age. A few years blot it out. Charm is not only exterior. It is the person who counts.

The final summation might be the following:

Girls should be educated to take over their duties of wifehood and motherhood. Parallel the curriculum with the aim. Teach subjects which will make them good wives and mothers.

Fénelon took a middle course between the types of education of his day. He criticized and said that ignorance was appalling. As for convent education, he would rather have the girl remain in the world than attend a worldly convent. On the other hand, a convent education which brings the girl up in ignorance of the world of which she is to become a part is also useless.

Fénelon represents the idea of the Roman Church. To him religion is the framework of education. There is a destiny which is not of this world. Although education is a preparation for this earthly life—the ultimate end of living—eternity—must not be lost sight of. Thus Fénelon urges a moderate education with religion permeating and forming the basis of the entire system.
Chapter VI

The Summary
There is evidence of an education for women in seventeenth century France. The appearance of women in literary salons and in the schools indicates that this is true. But the education was not general. The women, who have been considered in this study, were the nobility, the elite, the wealthy.

Mme. de Rambouillet received her education in Italy, the center of the Classic Renaissance. Mme. de Sevigne and Mme. de Lafayette were educated by Menage and Chapelain, two of the most renowned literary men of the period. But these women were wealthy and could engage private tutors.

The schools of the period gave a very narrow education. They aimed at preparation for a life of devotion. At Saint Cyr, nobility of birth was a requisite for admission. This point was ascertained by geneological proof. Mme. de Maintenon, founder of Saint Cyr, was, at this time, wife of Louis XIV.

Fenelon wrote a treatise De l'Education des Filles for Mme. de Beavilliers. This book was written for a noble woman. Although the principles are general, it was not meant for public use.

So, it must be concluded that the education of women was restricted to the aristocracy. In the lower brackets of society, women were still considered as slaves and drudges. In their case, intellectual training would be useless and dangerous.
Appendix to Chapter II

P. 15 The epitaph by Tallement follows: "Here lies the divine Arthenice, who was the illustrious protector of the arts which the Muses inspire in humans."

P. 16 This maxime of preciosity is: "It is a well approved point that they (the Precieuses) never express their sentiments except in the presence of the person spoken of, and they never expose the faults of a person without adding something praiseworthy, to soften the sting of criticism."

P. 18 Menage's comment to Chapelain after the presentation of Precieuses Ridicules was: "Sir...We approved, you and I, all the foolishness which has just been so finely and sensibly criticized. We will have to burn what we have adored, and adore what we have loved."

P. 26 "I like a woman to have a knowledge of all things, but I do not like the detestible passion of wanting to be learned for the sake of being called learned."

P. 27 "Unite yourself in marriage with philosophy which raises us above the whole human race and gives reason a supreme sovereignty, subjugating to its laws, the animal instincts which lower us to the level of beasts."

P. 27 A woman knows enough "if she can distinguish a vest from a pair of breeches."
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