SOME NEW BOOKS.

Woman in France.

The Messrs. Putnam have reprinted in two volumes, embellished with a number of portraits, the well-known work by JULIA KAVANAGH, entitled *Woman in France During the Eighteenth Century*. It is well known that the political influence of women has been but [illegible] in France under a Republican régime, [illegible] it was virtually extinguished under the military régime of the first empire. But the part, on the other hand, played by [illegible] a large portion of the eighteenth century, it would have been impossible [illegible] the public opinion which [illegible] the convocation of the States [illegible] and brought on the revolution [illegible] not too much to say [illegible] in the Paris drawing rooms presided [illegible] ladies was freedom of thought [illegible] and that there were generated the currents of opinion which eventually pervaded and controlled all the thoughtful and powerful sections of the community. It is the rôle taken by women during the fifty years between 1730 and 1780 which forms the principal subject of the volumes before us, although there are preliminary chapters which deal with the influence of women in the reign of Louis XIV. and under the Regency of the Duc d'Orleans, and again during the closing years of the reign of Louis XVI. and amid the stress of the revolution. On the preliminary and supplemental chapters it is needless to dwell, for the greater part of the work performed for France by women was done during the half century whose limits we have indicated, by such bureaux d'esprit as those opened by Mme. de Tencin, Mme. du Châtelet, Mme. d'Epinay, Mme. du Deffand, Mlle. de Lespinasse, and Mme. Geoffrin. It is from the drawing rooms of these leaders of the intellectual element of Paris society that we shall be able to exemplify the services rendered to the progress of philosophy, of political economy, and of political liberalism in France.

I.

The story of Mme. de Tencin carries us from the Regency far into the reign of Louis XV. The extraordinary thing about her, when we recall the influence she wielded in society, is that she was an ex-nun. This clever, handsome, and unprincipled woman had been compelled by her father to take the veil at an early age, and to enter the convent of the Augustines of Montfleuri. The gay and worldly life led by the inmates of this sacred asylum, which stood at the end of a fashionable promenade in the town of Grenoble, had long been a source of scandal to the faithful. The recluses daily received a large and brilliant company, made up of the young and gay of both sexes, and the visitors did not long remain unconscious of the attractions, both mental and physical, of Mlle. de Tencin. She is described, however, as rather fascinating than strictly beautiful; in her half-closed eyes there was something feline and, at first, unpleasant; but the seeming languor and indolence contrasted so strikingly with the vivacity of her wit as to materially enhance the charm of her appearance. Her manners were pliant and insinuating; her tact is said to have been unerring. She never seemed aware of her own attractions, but practised the flattery of appearing absorbed in whatever others said and did. The fascination which she exercised over the abbess and her confessor procured her unusual freedom; she was allowed to receive private visitors, and to leave the convent to return as late as she pleased. But the more she saw of the world, the more her ambitious and intriguing spirit, which already suggested to her the advantages she might derive from her wit and beauty, made her long to enter its forbidden precincts. She adroitly learned from her religious director the steps by which she might regain her liberty. She then protested against her vows, and succeeded in being transferred to the Chapter of Neuville. The obligation of celibacy was the only one under which she still labored; the freedom enjoyed by the Sisters of her order during the last century being sufficiently notorious. Some time after this the young canoness went to reside with her brother, the Abbé de Tencin, and report said that various scandalous adventures, of which she was the heroine, had compelled her to take this step.

Mme. de Tencin, for she henceforth took that name, was soon surrounded by a host of admirers, among the most assiduous of whom were Bolingbroke, then in France, and Fontenelle. The latter was so thoroughly captivated that, though in general little disposed to exert himself in favor of his friends, he procured from the Papal Court Mme. de Tencin's release from her vows, in pursuance of her ardent wish. Being now released from every monastic tie, she became more imprudent in her conduct; she had several notorious intrigues, and, among the rest, one with Canon Destouches, which ended in the birth of a son, who was exposed on the steps of the Church of Saint Jean-le-Rond on Nov. 17, 1717. The child thus forsaken by its mother was found and brought up by a poor glazier's wife, and eventually became the great mathematician, D'Alembert. It may be said that, residing, as she did, in the house of her brother, a priest, Mme. de Tencin could not recognize her child without ruining the abbé's prospects of aggrandizement; but, as the author of this book points out, she might at least have provided for him; the fear, however, of future detection overbalanced every other consideration. It was about this time that Mme. de Tencin began to take an active share in her brother's political intrigues. After vainly trying to influence the Regent, she stooped to Dubois, and entered into a degrading connection with him, which her biographers have vainly sought to excuse by ascribing it to her sisterly affection. Dubois was incapable of loving her, or, indeed, any human being, but he admired her talent, and at a time when Mme. du Maine was enlisting society against the Regent, he felt the value of Mme. de Tencin's sway over the select and brilliant company which assembled at her brother's house. The abbé's easy conscience was also peculiarly acceptable; to him Dubois intrusted the task of converting John Law, when the Scotchman was disposed to abjure his original creed, with a view of becoming minister. Tencin retired with his proselyte to Murin in order to avoid the sarcasms of the Parisians; Law was said to have rewarded his complaisance with a large amount of paper money. This accusation was coupled with one of simony, which was proved against the Abbé de Tencin in his own handwriting at the very moment that he offered to attest his innocence by oath. Though this disgraceful exposure occurred before the Parliament of Paris, Dubois had nevertheless the effrontery to send the abbé to Rome in order to forward the negotiations relative to his cardinalship. At Rome the abbé signalized himself by his unscrupulous and profligate conduct. He opened the letters which Roman prelates sent to Paris through the French Ambassador, and commissioned his sister to seal them up again and cause them to be delivered to the persons to whom they were addressed. Mme. de Tencin was herself so reckless of public opinion that she communicated to Duclos, the historian, the correspondence between herself and her brother in which these facts were recorded. When the Abbé de Tencin returned from Rome he was rewarded with the Archbishopric of Embrun; he aimed, however, at a Cardinal's hat for himself, but the death of Dubois put an end to his hopes of favor, and, for a time, threw him and his sister into the shade. When Fleury, the preceptor of Louis XV., succeeded the Duke of Bourbon at the head of the Government, Mme. de Tencin and her brother, the Archbishop of Embrun, tried to put themselves at the head of the religious party which had resumed the persecution of the Jansenists. Tencin presided over the Council of Embrun, which deposed the virtuous Bishop of Senez as guilty of heresy, while his sister made herself so conspicuous for zeal in the capital that Fleury, who disliked religious discussions, sent her word to leave Paris. She obeyed, but was soon recalled through the influence of her brother. The suicide of La Frenaye, which preceded this event, had already added new scandal to that associated with her name. This gentleman, who had been one of her favored lovers, shot himself at her house in a fit of jealousy or despair. In an incoherent document, which he left behind him, he declared her to be the cause of his death. The accusation was taken in a literal sense, and Mme. de Tencin was incarcerated in the Bastile. She was, however, soon released; although it was evident that she had behaved unjustifiably toward the unhappy La Frenaye, there did not exist the least proof of her supposed guilt.

Neither the scandal caused by this event nor her total want of moral sense seems to have prevented Mme. de Tencin from being well received in society. She was a profound dissembler, and even those who knew her best were unable to resist the soothing charm of her manner. The author of this book has read the writings with which she amused her old age, and which were published after her death, and we are assured that they are calculated not only to give a high idea of her intellect, but also to suggest a delicacy and nobleness of mind which seem contradicted by the whole tenor of her life. The close of her tale entitled "Memoires de Comminges" is pronounced beautiful and pathetic, and we are reminded that M. Villemain did not hesitate to pronounce it sublime. At the same time the morality of her productions is of a conventional kind, and to that extent characteristic of the writer, whose apparent gentleness, but real want of heart, justified the Abbé Trublet's comment when he heard her mildness praised. "Ay, if she wanted to poison you, she would choose the mildest poison."

There is no doubt that Mme. de Tencin possessed a deep knowledge of human nature, especially of its evil side; her keen perception of character explains one source of her power, for it is easy to govern that which we understand. Her observation respecting Fontenelle, that his heart was only a second brain, was singularly incisive. One of her sayings has been repeatedly quoted under divers forms: "Clever people," she remarked, "often commit mistakes from not believing the world to be as stupid as it is." It is acknowledged, however, that it was not through the charms of her intellect alone or by tact and sagacity that Mme. de Tencin drew around her such men as Montesquieu, Fontenelle, Mairan, Helvetius, and Marivaux. With all her faults she was capable of friendship, and almost as ready to intrigue for her acquaintances as for her brother or herself. One of the great seductions of her society was that her wit never took a dictatorial accent; her finesse itself was admirably veiled by an appearance of quiet simplicity and good sense. Few women understood so well as she did the art of gathering together men of the most varied tastes and opinions, of influencing them without letting them even suspect her power, and of exercising it for the enjoyment of all.

II.

It was not so much directly as indirectly, through her long and intimate relations with Voltaire, that Mme. du Châtelet can be said to have influenced the drift of opinion in the French capital. A Paris salon she did not care for, and most of her life was spent in her country house at Cirey. She was but 19 when her parents married her to an honest but commonplace man considerably her senior. She had received a classical education, to which was united every accomplishment then in fashion; she possessed an excellent knowledge of English and Italian as well as Latin. Her mind was of a breadth and depth that enabled her to understand and comment upon Newton and Leibnitz, and caused Ampère to proclaim her a genius in geometry. She was a tall and graceful woman, and her blue eyes, dark hair, and expressive countenance entitled her to the epithet of handsome. Her great talents long remained unsuspected, the world seeing in her only a fine woman who sang and played exquisitely, and who seemed passionately fond of hunting and of dress. Her ideas of morality were those of her time, and soon after her marriage she had a transient liaison with the Duc de Richelieu. But, although she loved pleasure, she was not fitted for a merely worldly life. Soon weary of dissipation, she entered with ardor on the study of the exact sciences. It was while she was immersed in the works of Newton that she met Voltaire, who had recently returned from England, and who, like her, was an enthusiastic admirer of Newton's discoveries. At this time Mme. du Châtelet was in her twenty-eighth year, Voltaire being twelve years her senior. The loose maxims of the time justified the connection which they formed and maintained for many years. No one expressed any surprise when Voltaire took up his residence at Cirey, a splendid chateau which M. du Châtelet possessed in the province of Lorraine. The owner of the chateau either did not suspect the truth or was indifferent to it, for he certainly raised no objection to the sojourn of Voltaire under his roof, but was rather flattered at being considered the host and patron of a man already enjoying European fame. The fifteen years which Voltaire spent at Cirey were undoubtedly the happiest of his life, notwithstanding the occasional differences which arose betwen him and Mme. du Châtelet. To a man so eminently intellectual and so much attached to every elegance and refinement of private life, no woman, unless one almost as highly gifted as himself, could have long proved attractive. The requisite gifts, however, his mistress unquestionably possessed. It seems certain that the mind of Mme. du Châtelet was greatly superior to her learning, and even to her personal attractions, considerable as these were. No attempt is made by the author of these volumes to exclude the laxity of her morals, but it is admitted that, notwithstanding her errors, she possessed great qualities. As a friend, for instance, she was devoted and sincere. Her attachment for Voltaire was full of truth and earnestness. She made it her constant task to soothe his susceptible vanity, concealing from him the libels of his enemies, to which he was so keenly sensitive. Mme. du Châtelet herself was nobly indifferent to such attacks. On being shown one day a pamphlet in which she had not been spared, she calmly observed: "If the author has lost his time in writing such nonsense I cannot lose mine in reading it." She learned the next day that the guilty individual had been imprisoned, and immediately wrote to obtain his release. She succeeded, but never let him know from whom he had obtained this favor. It is clear, indeed, that few women of her time were so free as Mme. du Châtelet from that intriguing spirit and thirst for distinction by which almost all were then possessed. Science she loved for its own sake, for the pure and exquisite delights it yielded to her inquiring mind, and not for the paltry gratification of being considered a learned woman. She never sought to gather a literary coterie around her, and never showed the least wish to dictate in matters of which she might be an excellent judge. Many persons with whom she was in the habit of associating remained unconscious of her great talents, so little did she care to display them. Indifferent to praise, unless it came from experienced judges—and then she considered it her due—she disdained the easy advantage of shining amongst the ignorant. It was this love of science for its own sake, this haughty contempt of easy and showy success, that rendered Mme. du Châtelet incomparably superior to the women with whom she mingled, and which almost maddened the envious Mme. du Deffand, while it even discomposed the philosophy of the more amiable Mme. de Staal. It must not be assumed, however, that Mme. du Châtelet exercised no direct personal influence because she had no wish to make it felt. Undoubtedly she contributed to spread among her countrymen a greater knowledge of scientific matters, and, by her own example, she added to the strength of the anglomania which was beginning to prevail in France. In the latter respect, however, the influence which she exerted was not so much experienced during her lifetime as after her death. Her name was then no slight authority for those who maintained the superiority of everything English over its French counterpart.

III.

As the name of Voltaire is associated with that of Mme. du Châtelet, so is Rousseau's with that of Mme. d'Epinay. Without being very clever or very handsome, Mme. d'Epinay was an attractive woman. She never had a regular bureau d'esprit, which rendered her house more pleasant than it could otherwise have been. She established in her circle a philosophic ease and freedom authorized by her secondary position in society. Authors, artists, men, and women of the world met there without restraint, and not for the express purpose of philosophizing and uttering clever paradoxes. Her society, indeed, was neither brilliant nor renowned; perhaps it was not very amusing, for Mme. d'Epinay had little of what is called wit and still less originality; but it was at least free and natural. She had the good sense to abstain from exercising over her friends a control for which she was little adapted. She possessed judgment and penetration, but she had no imagination and very little taste. She derived pleasure from the intercourse of clever people, but she could not afford them much entertainment herself. Her conversation was cold and somewhat commonplace, and she yielded almost instinctively to the opinions of those in whose intimacy she lived; she was caustic with Grimm and sentimental with Rousseau; she would not have been either, if left to her own impulses. The same traits characterized her writing; whenever she attempted high compositions she failed, but her epistolary style was good, and she excelled in easy, gossiping narative. It was less design than accident which procured for her her philosophical connection. She seems to have been naturally inclined to virtue, but the example of her husband had a pernicious influence on her character. Disgusted with the vices of M. d'Epinay, she formed an attachment for M. de Francoeil, with whose philosophical and literary friends she was soon on intimate terms. Among those brought to her house were Diderot, D'Holbach, Grimm, and Rousseau. Diderot, however, she could not retain, for he was always ill at ease in the polite world. Too great a portion of his life had been spent in too questionable society for him to acquire the aristocratic elegance which distinguished Voltaire. This was perhaps why, with all his fervid eloquence, Diderot often failed in producing the effect which might have been anticipated from his great talents. His mind was too vast and his manner too vehement for the artificial society in which he was compelled to move. It was the waspish German Grimm, the successor of Francoeil in Mme. d'Epinay's affections, who held the most conspicuous place in her circle; where his despotic disposition and his habit of covering his face with a coating of red and white paint caused him to be familiarly named "Tyran le Blanc." The lively little Abbé Galiani also stood high in Mme. d'Epinay's good graces. A few foreigners of distiction, the most eminent of whom was Hume, likewise made their appearance in the circle of Mme. d'Epinay. Hume then enjoyed in Paris so high a reputation that a lady was disgraced at court for having asked who and what he was. The star, however, of the coterie, so long as he consented to shine in it, was Rousseau, who had not yet wholly broken with the world when he contracted for Mme. d'Epinay a friendship, which, though very ardent at first, was as unfortunate as his other attachments. It is well known that Rousseau's unhappy temper would never let him agree long with his friends of either sex. He passionately loved the society of women—it was to his intercourse with them that Diderot partly ascribed the grace and fervor of his style—but he did little to conciliate their favor; though he knew from the first "that nothing could be done in Paris without the aid of women." He absolutely refused to submit to the patronizing tone they were in the habit of using toward the philosophers; nor were his quarrels with his fair friends marked by much amenity of tone or feeling on his part. His connection with Mme. d'Epinay was particularly unfortunate. The passionate love he expressed for nature and solitude induced Mme. d'Epinay in the first enthusiasm of her friendship to fit up for him a romantic little hermitage at Montmorency, in the neighborhood of her own residence. Rousseau was extremely unhappy in this retreat; he complained that his friends deserted him, and accused Grimm of seeking to deprive him of the friendship of Diderot, D'Holbach, and Mme. d'Epinay. To add to his misery, he fell desperately in love with Mme. d'Houdetot, Mme. d'Epinay's sister-in-law, and the mistress of Saint-Lambert, who had been brought into notice in Parisian society by the fact that he had succeeded so great a man as Voltaire in the affections of Mme. du Châtelet. Rousseau was then composing his Nouvelle Héloise, and he read the letters as he finished them to Mme. d'Epinay and Mme. d'Houdetot. Though this latter lady was, as he avers, the only woman he ever loved, she could boast of little beauty; she squinted and was marked with the small-pox. But she was gay, frank, and thoughtless, and, according to all accounts, witty and very charming. Her friends called her the "parfaite Julie." Rousseau's love was hopeless, for Mme. d'Houdetot was ardently attached to Saint-Lambert, to whom she always remained constant. Her husband, as was usual at the time, raised no obstacle to her passion; he and Saint-Lambert agreed very well until their old age, when they became extremely jealous of one another, and led Mme. d'Houdetot a very uneasy life. Rousseau was soon thoroughly wretched in his hermitage; he not only accused Diderot of abandoning him, but Mme. d'Epinay of being in a league with his enemies. After vainly attempting to sow division between Mme. d'Houdetot and M. Saint-Lambert, he ended by turning on Mme. d'Epinay with a singular degree of acrimony. They parted with mutual feelings of ill will, and this disagreement was the origin of Rousseau's long quarrel with the whole philosophic party. After his quarrel with Mme. d'Epinay, Rousseau appears, indeed, to have broken entirely with the Parisian world and the ladies who ruled over it. Mme. d'Epinay, who was wholly influenced by Grimm, and whom Rousseau's caprices had partially wearied, did not regret the loss of her former friend; it is nevertheless to her connection with him that she owed the interest now attaching to her name, as well as the attention she excited in her own time. When Rousseau had left the hermitage and his quarrel with her was no longer spoken of, Mme. d'Epinay found herself comparatively forgotten. In her latter days she wrote works on education, and became the rival of Mme. de Genlis, but her talent always remained essentially commonplace.

IV.

Mme. du Châtelet and Mme. d'Epinay are remembered solely by reason of their relations to Voltaire and to Rousseau; the social circles of which they were the centres were secondary in importance to the bureaux d'esprit, so celebrated in the history of the eighteenth century. Of these latter assemblies, the three most distinguished were presided over by Mme. du Deffand, Mlle. de Lespinasse, and Mme. Geoffrin. The first of these ladies was famous for her caustic wit, the second for the charm of her conversation, and the third for her active benevolence. Montesquieu, seemingly alluding to the influence of these ladies, observes that a nation where women give the prevailing tone must necessarily be talkative. As a matter of fact, however, it was the men who talked and the women who listened. The men talked because there was nothing else for them to do; women gave the prevailing tone, because men of all classes were partly compelled and partly willing to gather around them. The nobles, being excluded from politics—in which none but the ministers and their creatures could take part—and exercising no control, either as individuals or as a body, naturally gave themselves up to the pleasures of society. Their political insignificance thus increased the power and importance of the female sex. The society of women was also sought by authors and scientific men, because there was no freedom anywhere except in a lady's drawing room. Opinions which, if published openly, would have drawn down persecution on the men who expressed them, could be uttered without fear in a salon. To this motive for courting female society may be added the knowledge that the women who then presided over literary circles not only named whom they liked to the Academy, but dispensed as they chose influence and reputation. So it came to pass that the indolence of the upper classes, the general want of liberty, and the vanity and ambition of authors laid the basis of the power of women, a power then carried to an extent which can now scarcely be conceived.

The political insignificance of the men placing the women on a level with them rendered the intercourse of the two sexes more polished and agreeable. They could speak on the same subjects, since there were no political discussions, from which the women were to be excluded. Conversation was soon carried to the height of an art, although it was always marked by the most elegant simplicity. It not only acquired a style, but also became remarkable for its perspicuity and conciseness. The necessity which men experienced of explaining to the women with whom they conversed matters which their ignorance hindered them from understanding, compelled the acquirement of a clearness and a facility which were often transferred to literary compositions. The excessive polish which is at once the beauty and the defect of the French language, is to be attributed to female influence. The assemblies over which women presided produced refinement and elegance, but, at the same time, they were not free from certain disadvantages. One of their most serious drawbacks was that for the calm and mature meditation of former writers was substituted the habit of the quick and light decisions peculiar to conversation. Mingled presumption and frivolousness thus became one of the characteristics of the time.

The three typical bureaux d'esprit of the eighteenth century were themselves distinguished from one another by strongly marked characteristics. The polite, profligate, and skeptical noblesse gathered around Mme. du Deffand, an aristocratic and a witty woman. Mlle. Lespinasse, a social outcast by her illegitimate birth, and gifted with an ardent and enthusiastic mind, attracted the political reformers of the day; the worldly wise and moderate members of the philosophical party met at the house of Mme. Geoffrin, a quiet and prudent bourgeoise, who endeavored to reconcile her religious feeling with the patronage of professed skeptics. The society of Mme. du Deffand is the first that deserves attention.

V.

Marie Vichy de Chamrond was born toward the close of the seventeenth century. In the convent where she was brought up, and where she received an excellent education, she early distinguished herself for a tone of raillery on religious matters which alarmed the nuns. They called in Massillon to talk to her, but the amiable Bishop was too much delighted with the grace and frankness of the young girl to be very severe. "Elle est charmante," was his only reproof. At the age of 22, Mlle. de Vichy was married to the Marquis du Deffand, from whom her intrigues soon caused her to separate. Eyes remarkable for their brilliancy and beauty, a pleasant smile, and a countenance full of piquancy and expression were the chief personal attractions of the young Marchioness. She is described as frank without candor, and impetuous without either passions or feelings; as full of wit and sound judgment in her mode of thinking, but extravagant, and often ridiculous in her conduct; in fine, as openly selfish, and yet capable of friendship. Constancy in love was not one of her virtues. During her youth, she was noted for her vivacity and equivocal behavior. As age drew on, her charms vanished, and she became blind, ill-tempered, and ennuyé. She sought for a time a refuge in religion, but having naturally little turn that way, she opened a bureau d'esprit for the philosophers. Neither their society, however, nor her own wit—which after that of Voltaire and Piron is said to have been the keenest of the time—could preserve her from the incessant ennui which consumed her declining years. "Give me a secret to ward off ennui," she observes in one of her letters to D'Alembert, "and you will lay me under a greater obligation than if you had bestowed on me the philosopher's stone." This feeling was by no means peculiar to Mme. du Deffand. The published correspondence of the circle over which she presided shows that with all their wit and boasted philosophy her friends found the burden of life intolerably heavy. In her case ennui was increased by a singular degree of heartlessness. She had intellectual predilections, but she could not love. The gayety and vivacity of D'Alembert were acceptable to her; so were the originality and naïveté of Montesquieu, the polished wit of President Henault, or the satire of Voltaire; but she had little affection for them as individuals. This did not prevent her from being in many cases a sincere and zealous friend, though friendship was with her divested of all its charms. Of her deficiency in this respect, Mme. du Deffand was well aware; when, in the latter years of her life, she became acquainted with Mme. de Genlis, who was then bringing up with her own children and those of the Duc d'Orléans, a young English girl named Pamela (afterward the wife of the unhappy Lord Edward Fitzgerald), she asked her, with evident surprise, "Are you so fond of that child?" "I am very fond of her, indeed," was the natural reply. "Ah, you are very fortunate," sighed Mme. du Deffand; "I never could love anything." According, indeed, to the testimony of one who knew her well, it was difficult to have less feeling and more selfishness. If, however, she was selfish and heartless, she had, at least, the merit of being perfectly frank about it. When the celebrated work of Helvetius appeared several persons blamed him, because, following Hobbes, he had made selfishness the great motive of human actions. "Bah," said she, "he has only revealed a secret that everybody knows."

The total lack of sensibility, not being accompanied by the affectation of the contrary feeling, did not prevent the society of Mme. du Deffand from being eminently attractive. It was, indeed, impossible to resist the fascination of that brilliant, active intellect, which yielded to every impression, and passed from one subject to another with ever new freshness and variety. In all matters connected with the everyday world Mme. du Deffand was inimitable. The soundness of her judgment, united to the originality and pungency of her language, and the causticity which never forsook her, caused her society to be eagerly sought for and highly valued. Her freedom from seeking for effect, and her striking impartiality, were also very remarkable characteristics of her mind. At an epoch when simplicity was by no means prevalent, she displayed an unbending hatred of everything like subtlety and finesse, and unsparingly accused of affectation all the thinkers of the day. She had no more sympathy with the declamatory enthusiasm of the philosophers than with the rigorism of the devotees. She did not believe in the existence of feelings she could never experience herself.

The society at Mme. du Deffand's was neither preponderantly literary nor preëminently artistic. It was a society made up of aristocratic and intellectual persons who met for common amusement, with a sprinkling of philosophers, in order to give some variety to conversation, and also because philosophy was the fashion of the day. She spared no effort to render her house attractive to her visitors. "Let us have good cheer," she often said to her cook, and she was wont to observe that "suppers were one of the four great objects of man in life." With all her wit, she did not rely exclusively on its effect. Abstemiousness was neither a virtue of hers nor of the sensual philosophers with whom she associated. It should, at the same time, be noted that the most ardent members of the philosophe set had but little sympathy with the cold-hearted Mme. du Deffand. Diderot came once to visit her, eyed her witty epicurean friends with contempt, and never came again. Freedom and good breeding were the chief characteristics of her circle. Within its narrow limits, however, Mme. du Deffand set up for an arbitrary judge on all questions of philosophy or taste. Her correspondence with Voltaire, and the high value he set on her opinions gave her great authority; her decisions, however, were marked by more wit than correctness. Of Montesquieu's great work, she observed that it was not L'Esprit des Lois, but De l'Esprit sur les Lois—a saying which Voltaire thought sufficiently good to make his own and repeat. She was also wont to express the opinion that what cannot be known to us is evidently of no use to us; a remark which Voltaire pronounced admirable: "this is a great truth, madame, and what is better still, a very consoling one."

On the whole the coterie of Mme. du Deffand is presented as the best illustration of French society in the eighteenth century. Unlike the other philosophical circles, it had no purpose more definite than to furnish a resource against ennui. Ministers, titled ladies, philosophers, and foreigners met on this neutral ground; they cared little for one another, but they were witty, well bred, and could afford and receive amusement by meeting together. This society was particularly admired for the accomplishments of its members, who contributed to spread around it their own polished and unaffected manners. But this was the only influence which they directly exercised. Mme. du Deffand had no aim, and cannot be said to have effected anything. She succeeded, however, in making her house the resort of all the distinguished foreigners who visited France. When the reforming and philosophical sovereign, Joseph II., the brother of Marie Antoinette, came to Paris in 1777 he was careful to visit Mme. du Deffand. Her prestige, however, declined under the reign of Louis XVI. The times were altered. The power of the philosophers had progressed, and no longer sought the patronage of narrow circles; their spirit had become that of the whole nation.

VI.

It is pointed out by the author of these volumes that fiction has seldom brought in contact two beings in nature so dissimilar as were those of Mme. du Deffand and of Mlle. de Lespinasse. The blindness and other infirmities of the former lady had rendered it necessary for her to have a companion, and she took Mlle. de Lespinasse for the purpose. The young girl's history was a pathetic one. She had in reality no claim to the name she bore, being the illegitimate daughter of Mme. d'Albon, a married lady of high rank. She was brought up in a convent, under the name of Lespinasse, and when she was of age was placed as a governess in the family of her mother. The affection which Mme. d'Albon could only show her in secret supported her for some time under her trials. But her mother died, and the proofs of her birth, which had been bequeathed to her, were, as well as a large sum of money, wrested from Julie de Lespinasse by her relatives. It was then that she met Mme. du Deffand and accepted her proposal of residing with her as demoiselle de compagnie. It was not to be expected that the cold and selfish Mme. du Deffand would treat her young attendant with much kindness. She made her sleep during the daytime and sit up all night, in order to read aloud to her. This unnatural mode of life impaired the health of her young attendant. The chief consolation which the latter found in her melancholy position was the friendship of D'Alembert, who was himself, as we have said, the illegitimate son of Mme. de Tencin. She also derived much gratification from intercourse with the select company which met at Mme. du Deffand's house. The instantaneous impression made on her mind by whatever was excellent rendered her extremely seducing to men of talent. She pleased not merely by her own personal attractions, considerable as these were, but still more by the evident delight she received from the wit and eloquence of those to whom she listened. In order not to excite the jealousy of their hostess the visitors of Mme. du Deffand avoided, while in her presence, taking too much notice of her young attendant, but used to proceed secretly to her room about an hour before the usual time of calling. For a long time Mme. du Deffand remained unconscious of these circumstances. When she at length learned of them her fury was unbounded, and she announced the intention of dismissing Mlle. de Lespinasse immediately. The young woman, seeing herself thrown upon the world without a home, was driven to despair and swallowed a dose of laudanum. Timely remedies saved her from the consequences of the act, but her health, already much impaired, never recovered the shock, and as soon as she was able to leave the house of Mme. du Deffand the two parted. Their separation agitated the whole Parisian world, and, after vainly attempting to effect a reconciliation, the society of Mme. du Deffand split into two hostile parties that filled the town with bitter recriminations. The Marechale de Luxembourg furnished the apartment taken by Mlle. de Lespinasse and the old President Henault offered to marry her, a proposal which she declined. The Duke of Choiseul, owing to the exertions of her friends, procured her a pension on the King's privy purse, and Mme. Geoffrin, with unostentatious benevolence, made her a yearly allowance. Mlle. de Lespinasse, being thus placed above want, soon gathered around her a choice literary circle. If a new Academy had been opened it would not have caused so deep a sensation in French society. Though consisting chiefly of the same guests who had formerly frequented Mme. du Deffand's salon, the coterie of Mlle. de Lespinasse took a quite different tone. Ideas of reform and the doctrines of political economy were then beginning to excite and divide the French public mind. Mlle. de Lespinasse sided with the economists and philosophic reformers. Turgot, the future Minister of State; Morellet, Diderot, D'Alembert, Marmortel, Chastellux, and Saint-Lambert were her constant guests, and made her house the central point whence they disseminated their doctrines in financial, political, and literary matters. All the foreigners of distinction also visited Mlle. de Lespinasse, and it was a subject of some jealousy between her and Mme. du Deffand as to which of the two should have most Englishmen.

The accounts left of the society of Mlle. de Lespinasse represent her house as one of the most agreeable places of resort in Paris. There might be seen every evening the most remarkable individuals of every rank. The Church, the State, and the army were as fairly represented in her drawing room as philosophy; and when, though this happened rarely, she went either to the country or to the play, all Paris was informed beforehand of the important event. Mlle. de Lespinasse seems to have been one of the most bewitching women of her day. Many surpassed her in youth and beauty; many were as clever, and a few were more brilliant and witty; but none equalled her in the deep power of seduction, deep and great, although involuntary, which drew around her the most celebrated men of the time. Mlle. de Lespinasse listened more than she spoke; but when she did speak, it was admirably; she uttered, however, no witticisms, and none of the artificially clever sayings then so much in vogue. Her power was not merely intellectual; it seems to have sprung less from the activity of her mind than from the depth and fervor of her feelings. An inward fire imparted to her language a passion and eloquence rarely surpassed. With respect to the coterie over which she presided, Mlle. de Lespinasse possessed another remarkable and necessary talent; this was the infinite tact with which she brought the most opposite characters into communion and kept them together in harmony. Without imposing any restraint on conversation, she knew how to direct it and prevent it from becoming vapid or insignificant; in that age distinguished for women accomplished in the art of guiding social intercourse none excelled her in this respect. It was not, however, the aim of Mlle. de Lespinasse to check discussion, which was, indeed, at that time the purpose of society. All the new works were reviewed and criticised in the fashionable drawing room, where, likewise, the acts of the Government underwent a free scrutiny; circumstances compelled society to be its own organ of criticism. The result was that discussions, through long practice, were carried on with a politeness and courtly ease now unknown in France owing to the political changes which have since occurred. In a nation autocratically governed, party spirit never could run high; the revolution, by rousing the passions of the masses, substituted a more energetic but less elegant mode of expressing them. Mlle. de Lespinasse encouraged the habit of discussing the questions of the day; it imparted to the men who assembled in her house a social power by which they afterward attained to political eminence.

VII.

The third bureau d'esprit, which calls for particular notice, was that of Mme. Geoffrin. She was a quiet, middle-aged bourgeoise, unassuming alike in dress and manner, and had been one of the few women whom Mme. de Tencin admitted to her reunions toward the close of her life. "She comes here to see what she can inherit from me," Mme. de Tencin often observed with a smile. It was, in truth, Mme. Geoffrin's object to become personally acquainted with the eminent men who met at the house of the ex-nun in order, whenever the latter's demise should occur, to gather them around herself. On the death of Mme. de Tencin the bourgeoise effected the long-cherished project of succeeding to her power. She greatly enlarged the circle of her predecessor, and may be said to have founded a new society, which rivalled that of Mme. du Deffand, between whom and her, accordingly, there sprang up a feeling of enmity. Notwithstanding the deficiencies of her education, Mme. Geoffrin was well fitted for her self-appointed task; her excellent sense, benevolence, and deep knowledge of the world adapted her admirably to lead and conciliate the vain and irritable sect she had undertaken to patronize. Her tact and kindness soon rendered her house one of the rendevous of the Parisian world. Her power in time even became so high that all the German courts that had any pretensions to philosophy paid correspondents to inform them of the subjects discussed by her circle. One of the first acts of Catharine II., for example, on ascending the imperial throne of Russia was to send a salaried commissioner to the court of Mme. Geoffrin, who by her consummate address had succeeded in making it the European school of bon ton. Though she was not versed either in literature or in art, Mme. Geoffrin drew around her authors and artists, and, by listening attentively and never speaking on what she did not understand, succeeded in presiding with remarkable grace and judgment over their meetings. She was not, however, a mere silent listener; she had learned, in the intercourse with persons of high rank whom she adroitly induced to visit her, the peculiar phraseology, exquisitely polished even in its incorrectness, known as the "style de grand seigneur." No one surpassed her in the art of story telling; her language was clear, concise, and displayed the mingled sense and shrewdness of her mind. Her wit was like everything about her, quiet and unpretending; it never soared above a certain plane; she often gave to the most ingenious ideas a homely and even commonplace form. A person was once speaking in her presence of the Abbé Trublet, a man of little talent, but who, through seeing a good deal of Fontenelle and other talented men, had acquired a certain amount of tact and cleverness. "Ah," said Mme. Geoffrin, "c'est un sot frotté d'esprit"—a fool rubbed over with wit. It was not often, however, that Mme. Geoffrin indulged in witticisms. She was, at the same time, severe and indulgent. Her temper, which she took great pains to subdue, was by nature somewhat brusque and impatient; but her judgment was sober, and, as she was unimaginative, she could seldom be deceived in her opinion of the characters of those around her. But, while experience of the world rendered her a keen judge of human foibles, her kindness of heart made her deal gently with the errors she detected. To give and forgive was her maxim, and, so far did she extend forbearance, even with regard to trivial matters, that she held it a duty to listen as attentively to the tedious speeches of a fool as to the brilliant and amusing discourse of a man of brains. "Besides," she used to say, "if you let a fool alone he will talk about himself; and, let him be ever so foolish, this is a subject on which he can scarcely fail to become instructive and eloquent."

The society which gathered around Mme. Geoffrin was composed partly of the disciples of Voltaire and partly of those of Rousseau. But, though she tolerated the friends of the Genevese, she had a very ill opinion of his character, nor was the violent and declamatory tone of his writings likely to please her sober judgment. She gave two dinners a week, one to artists and the other to men of letters. D'Alembert and Mlle. de Lespinasse used to be present at the latter of those dinners. Marivaux, who saw a finesse in all that was said or done, and who tortured his subtle mind in order to give an ingenious turn to everything he uttered, was also there. The cold and reserved Thomas, whose fame has suffered from the indifference he displayed for the women of his time; the declamatory Raynal; Mairan, the learned antagonist of Mme. du Chatelet; the latter's lover, Saint-Lambert; the satirical Galiani, and many others now forgotten were among the guests of Mme. Geoffrin. Besides the distinction which the friendship of men of talent conferred on her, the gentle Mme. Geoffrin had her share of worldly honors. Stanislaus Poniatowski, while he was still a Polish noble, was a great favorite of hers, and always called her by the endearing name of mother. Once, when he was imprisoned for debt, Mme. Geoffrin satisfied the demands of his creditors and released him. After he had been raised to the throne of Poland, one of his first acts was to write to her, "Mamma, your son is King." In the same letter he invited her to come and visit him in Warsaw, and, notwithstanding her advanced age, she complied with his request. Her journey through Germany was a triumph; she was received with distinguished honors by the Empress Maria Theresa, and on her arrival in the King's palace at Warsaw she was touched to find herself introduced into an apartment absolutely similar to that which she occupied in Paris. On her return through Vienna, she again saw Maria Theresa, who presented to her her daughters, among them Marie Antoinette, who afterward, meeting Mme. Geoffrin in France, reminded her of the incident. Such was the place which the quiet bourgeoise held in the esteem of society that the smallest details of her journey to Poland and the letters she wrote to her friends at home occupied the Parisian world during her absence.

VIII.

Mme de Geoffrin died in the autumn of 1777, being then in the seventy-eighth year of her age. The deaths of Hume, Mlle. de Lespinasse, and Mme. Geoffrin, occurring, as they did, within the space of one year, were serious losses to the philosophic party, which gradually declined in strength as a compact body, although it daily acquired new power by disseminating its doctrines more widely. The bureau d'esprit of Mme. Geoffrin may almost be considered the last of its class. It is true that she was outlived by Mme. du Deffand, but the latter's society was toward the end only the shadow of what it once had been; the ill temper of the selfish, blind old woman repelled even her most intimate and attached friends. The influence of Mme. Geoffrin seems to be fairly enough described as extensive, but not deep. She repressed the imprudence of some views expressed by her protégés, but, conscious of her own deficiencies, abstained from substituting any opinions of her own. At the same time there is no doubt that she proved an auxiliary of value to the encyclopædists, for the furtherance of whose work she is said to have spent very large sums.

As for the influence of the King's mistresses, whose power existed contemporaneously with that of the bureaux d'esprit during the reign of Louis XV., this was exercised on political affairs rather directly through the appointment of Ministers than indirectly through public opinion. Not even Mme. de Pompadour can be said to have left any deep mark upon French art or literature. Neither can it be said that Marie Antoinette was at any time an appreciable factor in the artistic or literary evolution of France. If, after the accession of Louis XVI., the bureaux d'esprit disappeared, it was because they were no longer needed. The public opinion which they had created no longer required the shelter beneath which it had been evolved. There were, to be sure, many Paris salons during the period between the death of Louis XV. and the deposition of his grandson, but they were of little importance compared with the typical bureaux d'esprit to which we have referred. Mme. Necker, and, after the triumph of the revolution, Mme. Roland, Mme. Tallien and Mme. de Staël successively endeavored to convert their drawing rooms into centres of public opinion, but their influence was insignificant compared with that of their predecessors. On the establishment of the Consulate, the last vestige of feminine influence vanished, so far as any serious effect on politics was concerned. There was obviously no room in France for the author of "Corinne" when Bonaparte informed her that to have plenty of babies was the highest mission of her sex. M. W. H.

THE LONGEST RAILROAD.

Five Thousand Six Hundred Miles Without Changing Cars.

From the San Francisco Chronicle.

A wealthy Russian who has the contract for building a part of the great Siberian railway, arrived with several of his countrymen on the last Pacific Mail steamer. This gentleman is J. J. Galetzski. He and his friends are quartered at the California Hotel. The others in the party are Mr. Koraloff, who has been operating Siberian mines, and two civil engineers named Ivanoff and Alimoff. They are on the way to St. Petersburg.

The Siberian railway, which Mr. Galetzski is now engaged in constructing, is a costly enterprise, and when completed it is expected that it will have an important effect on commerce and civilization. It will be the longest line of track ever laid. A person can get on a car and ride more than 5,600 miles without change when it is built. At the inception of the work the supposition was that it would be finished in 1895; when some progress had been made the belief was that the last spike would not be driven until 1897, and now Mr. Galetzski has informed acquaintances here that in 1900 the Transsiberian Railway may be completed. As the difficulties are greater than anticipated when encountered, it may be that the project will be accomplished at the beginning of the century.

Mr. Galetzski began work on his part of the line two years ago. On the 24th of May, 1891, the Czarowitz turned the first sod, laid the first rail, and drove the first spike at Vladivostock. Work was then pushed at both ends of the line. In Russia the railway starts from the station in the Ural Mountains where the European line now terminates, and on the railway, by means of a junction, a continuous journey can be made to Moscow and to other European cities. Mr. Malowansky said that about 200 versts of the road had been finished by Mr. Galetzski, 400 more are partially finished, and the surveyors are in advance for 400 additional versts. A verst is a Russian mile, being equivalent to two-thirds of a mile in this country. Ten thousand Chinese and Coreans are employed by the contractors, they being considered as handy for railroad building in bleak Siberia as in America. The other workmen are convicts and ticket-of-leave men. The price paid per verst by the Government is 60,000 rubles, amounting to about $3,000,000 for the section under Mr. Galetzski's charge.

The work is very expensive, as a great deal of blasting of solid rock must be done. Whole mountains of rock have to be moved and deep gorges have to be made. Much difficulty was experienced in getting the material to Siberia. A large part of it had to be shipped to the Pacific coast and then up to Vladivostock. Transportation across Siberia under existing conditions is slow and cumbersome. The deep snows in winter impede and stop work. These facts make the magnitude of the Russian Government's huge undertaking more impressive than the mere statement of the line's extraordinary length. The steppes are uninviting in appearance, and dangers abound. Tigers and other wild animals have been shot along the line not far from Vladivostock. To now reach a city of European Russia takes forty days from Vladivostock, and when the railway is running one can go to St. Petersburg from that Siberian port in twelve days.

The idea of having this railroad was in the mind of the Czar twenty years before work was begun. A commission which was appointed by the Emperor in 1887 unanimously recommended the project on commercial and strategical grounds. It was foreseen that the cost would be immense, but the Russian Government decided to bear it alone, accepting no foreign capital. The benefits that will accrue to Russia are expected to more than repay the expenditure. Among the advantages which the railway will bring about are the colonization of Siberia, which is a vast unpopulated portion of the earth; the development of agriculture and of the Siberian mines; the opening up of new markets for Russian industries, and, in short, to make Asiatic Russia a source of revenue instead of constant expense, besides increasing Russian influence in countries bordering on Siberia. By building up Siberia the railway will aid Russian extension in Asia. Part of the trade of China, Japan, and Corea will be diverted to Russia.

To transport freight from Shanghai to Vancouver, thence over the Canadian Pacific and across the Atlantic to Europe, takes thirty-five days. Through the Suez Canal to Genoa and Marseilles requires forty-three to forty-six days. When the Siberian railway is finished freight can be transported from Shanghai to Europe in eighteen to twenty days, and this saving of time will divert trade to the new line. Russia thus expects to cut into the business that now falls to the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, and Germany. Russia had once a great caravan route across the desert, but the increase of facilities for ocean carrying caused it to fall into disuse. One drawback for the Siberian line is that the port of Vladivostock, to which all of its freight must come, is closed by ice during several months of each year.

The estimate by the Russian engineers was that the railway would cost from $30,000 to $67,000 a mile. Some parts are to pass through a country where engineering difficulties are great. The outlay is to be from 350,000,000 to 400,000,000 rubles. The line will run close to the fifty-fifth parallel of north latitude from Zlatausk and Minsk as far as the Yenisei River. Branches will there extend for about sixty miles to connect with the important towns of Tomsk and Omsk. The road will then follow a more southerly course to Irkutsk, go along the southern shore of Lake Baikal, and through the valley of the Seeling River, cross the valleys of the Lena and the Amur to Lake Colian, where excellent coal has been found; thence run eastward to the steamboat station of Srejetinsk on the Amur River and along that stream southeastward to Khabarofka. There it will turn southward along the right bank of the Ussuri, run to Graffsky, and terminate at Vladivostock, in latitude 43°.

Some doubters say that this road will be a constant drain on Russia for years after it is built, and that it will not begin to pay for half a century; but even if it brings in no direct financial profits it is certain to be productive of good to the Russian empire. Although Siberia contains barren and almost useless waists it has millions of acres of fertile soil, which with easy cultivation will yield immense harvests. One purpose of the Government is to relieve the crowded districts of European Russia, so that when the crops fail the famine may not affect as many as it has in the past. Hundreds of thousands of toilers can hardly keep body and soul together in Russia, and if this surplus labor were put on the fertile areas of Western Siberia, that country would be developed, European Russia would be relieved of so much human weight, and the emigrants to Siberia could maintain themselves much more comfortably than now. Thus the interests of the empire would be advanced.

One part of Western Siberia which is capable of being converted into a garden is as large as France, and its soil is rich enough to support as large a population as that country has. Such districts are badly needed by Russia, for it has been found that in some of its European districts the agricultural population has increased far beyond the ability to secure freeholds. This superfluity of the Russian population has aggravated the sufferings during each famine. The Siberian farms that are awaiting such settlers are inaccessible now, but the railroad will bring them within reach.

The mining regions of the Altai Mountains will also be aided by the railway. Mr. Koraloff, who is with Mr. Galetzski, is credited with the belief that gold mines will be developed there which will compare well with those of California, Australia, and the Transvaal. Steam communication will give an impetus to this district, where enormous quantities of precious metal are supposed to be concealed.

One of the remote regions to which the railway will probably bring population is the valley of the Salenga River, on the southeast shore of Lake Baikal. It is the warmest district in all Siberia and has been called the Siberian Italy. Its fertility is unsurpassed, yet because of the lack of carrying facilities the ground there is unused.

An Unstable Boundary Line.

From the Cleveland Leader.

"You have heard of smuggling, I presume," remarked a guest at one of the hotels yesterday. "Well," he continued, "I ran against the most stupendous scheme in that line last summer I ever heard of. You are doubtless aware that ordinary every day smugglers are content to transport their goods over the line from one country to another, the object being, of course, to evade the payment of the customs duties. The people with whom I came in contact were superior to such common methods, which might do for low pirates and outlawed brigands, but not for a live, wideawake Yankee, and especially a Canadian Yankee. They didn't move the goods. They moved the line.

"Up in the furthest easterly part of Maine there comes a place where Maine stops and New Brunswick begins. That is the boundary line between the two countries. That is also where the Canadian Yankees spoken of have their homes. They are naturally given to farming, some of these people, and even if McKinley did put a duty on grain, poultry, and other things, it didn't make any difference with some of the sturdy yeomen who live alongside the line. The publication of the news of the passage of the tariff bill didn't cause them a moment's uneasiness. They simply went on raising their Canadian wheat and their Canadian oats. At the same time they kept their eyes on the boundary line—what they could see of it. The visible portion of this remarkable boundary consisted of upright iron posts, set at intervals of one mile through the land. Not being clinched on the other side of the earth, these posts are responsive to influences placed on them on the Canadian side. In other words, they can be taken up and reset.

"About the time these upright and honest farmers over the line have their crops in condition to harvest a peculiar thing happens. Some dark night, a half dozen of them go coon hunting, and when they return to their firesides they are on American soil, they and their grounds, and with them the crops. The boundary line has moved and is located a half mile or so further toward the Arctic Ocean. These guileless tillers of the soil then dispose of their products at United States prices, and some time during the winter, in some unknown manner, the boundary line takes a backward leap, leaving them again on Canadian soil."