

**MADAME
DE SEVIGNE**

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Madame de Sevigne by Mrs. Richmond Ritchie

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MRS. RICHMOND RITCHIE

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BY

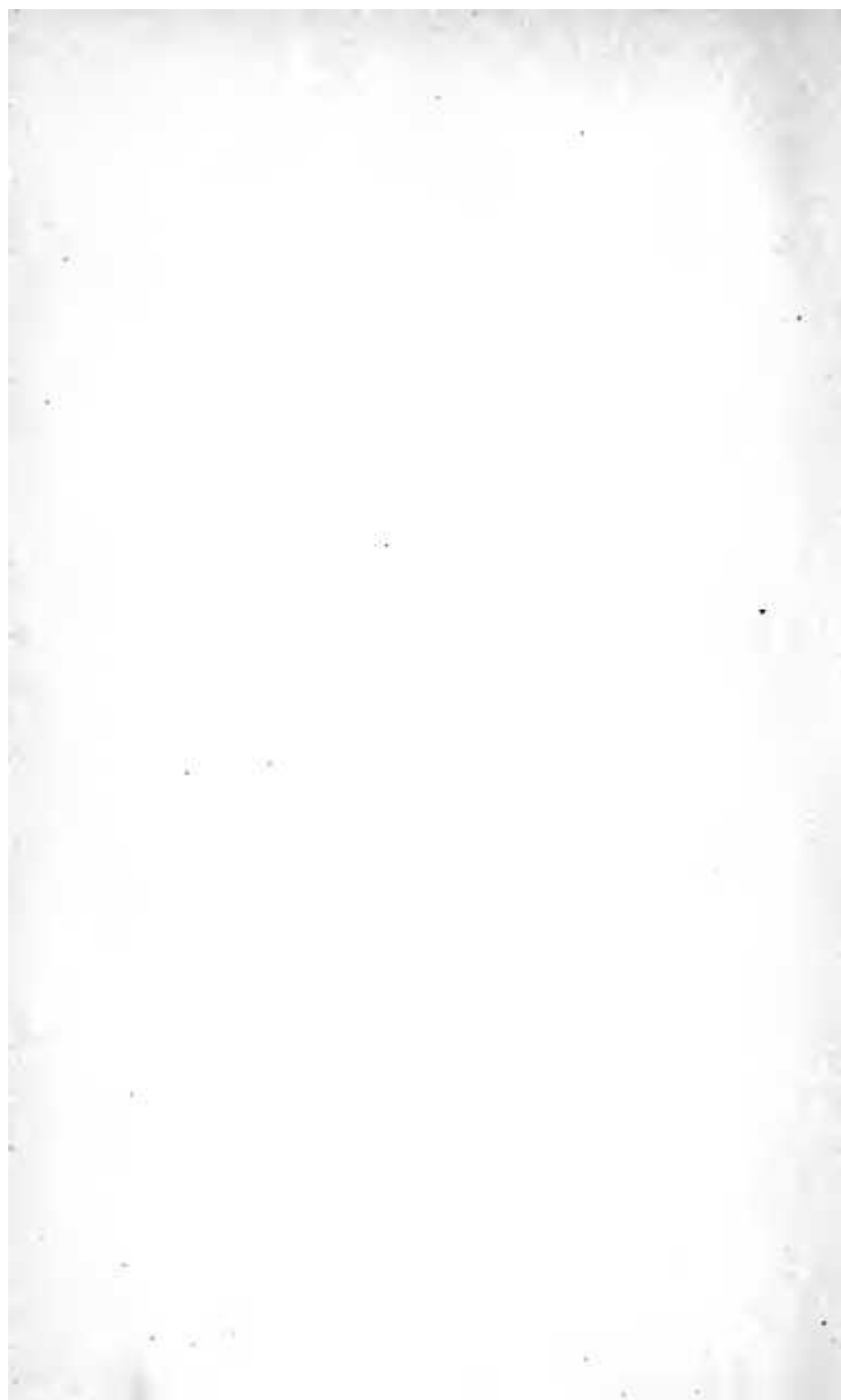
MISS THACKERAY

(MRS RICHMOND RITCHIE)

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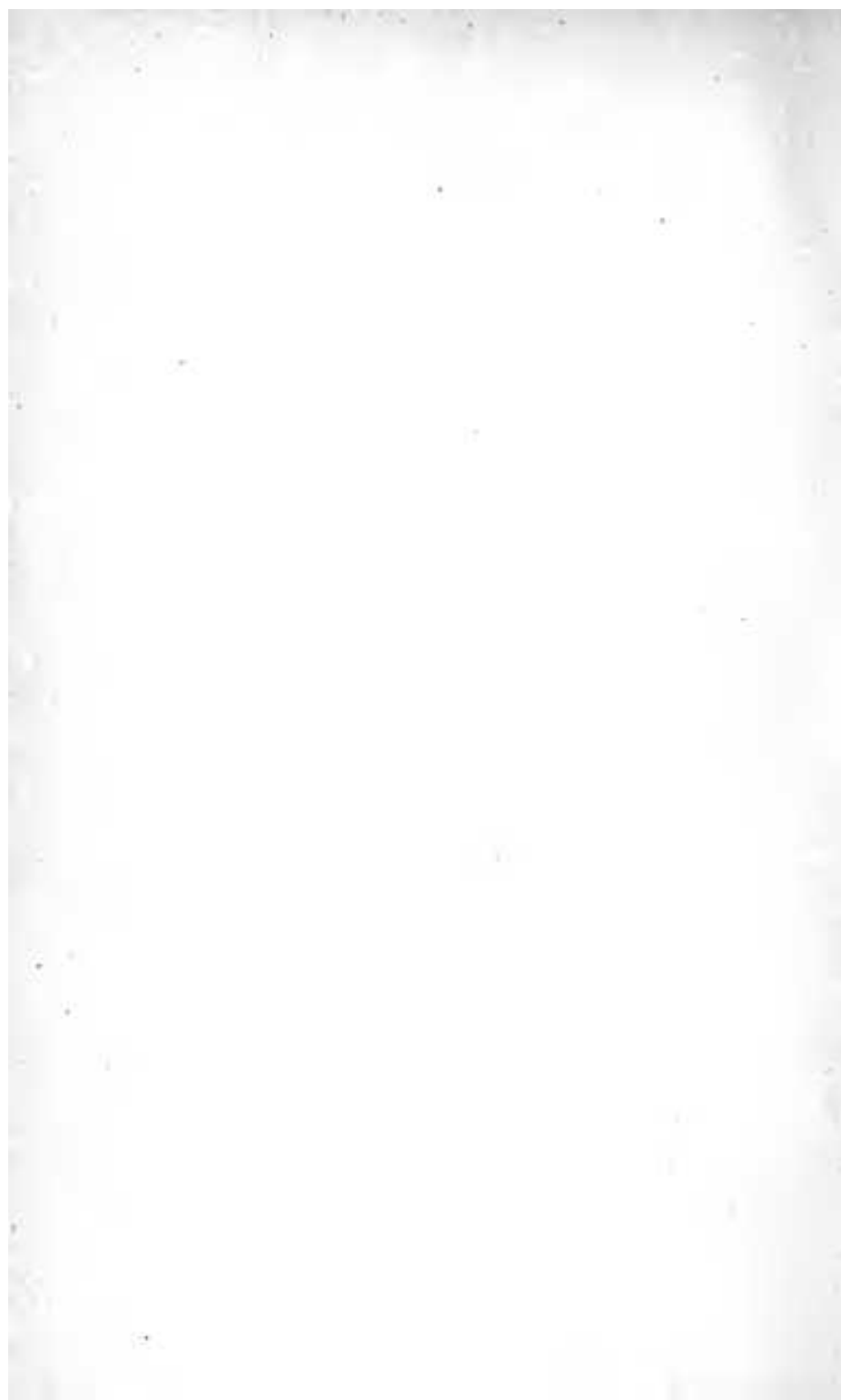
TO

HESTER AND WILLIAM DENIS RITCHIE

THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED

BY THEIR MOTHER

KENSINGTON, March 18, 1881.



NOTE.

THERE are several well-known editions of Madame de Sévigné's Letters. Chief among them are M. de Monmerqué's comprehensive and admirably edited volumes. Besides, there are selections for the use of schools, of which Madame Tastu's is, I believe, the standard. An excellent edition, published by Messrs Firmin Didot, has been chiefly used in the compilation of this little handbook. It is preceded by a short memoir by M. Jacquinet, in which it is stated that Madame de Sévigné's Letters had always been admired, and were constantly handed about and copied by her friends, but that it was not till 1726 that the first edition was printed by the Abbé de Bussy, to whom "Pauline"—Madame de Simiane—had given transcripts of many of the originals. The Abbé must also have inherited from his father, Bussy de Rabutin, papers containing the original correspondence between the two cousins.

In 1754 Madame de Simiane commissioned the

Chevalier Perrin, an intimate friend, to bring out an edition authorised by the family, on condition that he omitted any passages reflecting on Madame de Grignan. He was also to leave out any private names and details likely to wound any of the survivors of those people mentioned in the original correspondence. M. de Perrin, in accordance with these directions, snipped and changed, and interpolated to his own fancy, and not a little to the indignation of subsequent critics (Sainte-Beuve being not the least among them). M. de Monmerqué has, by great labour and patience, been able to restore the original text, and much of the matter which Madame de Simiane (with a feeling which cannot be blamed) is supposed to have done her best to suppress.

Of the letters here quoted, the Vatel letter and the story of Picard are translated by Miss Ritchie; and some other translations are by Mrs Cracroft. I have also to acknowledge Mr Cracroft's kind help in giving me the notes and books he collected for his own interesting account of Madame de Sévigné, and that of Monsieur Jules Andrieu, whose great knowledge and familiarity with French literature are well known. I have put his initials to some notes which he has given me. Among the best commentaries upon Madame de Sévigné's text are the pictures which naturally belong to it. Petitot's portraits give a whole gallery of her historic characters. Madame de Sévigné herself is there in mid-age, as well as young and brightly beautiful; Ma-

dame de Grignan, with regular features, prim and coldly chiselled; Maintenon in her youth, more lovely than the lovely Marie de Sévigné herself; Ninon, with her strongly marked countenance. There, too, is the stately Grignan; La Rochefoucauld, magnificent and portly; the majesty of the King in its periwigged apotheosis; the romantic Mademoiselle, with her big features; and poor young Madame, with a likeness to her father, Charles I. Of all the pictures I have ever seen of Madame de Sévigné, the most interesting is one at Wykehurst belonging to my friend Mrs Huth. The grandmother is painted smiling and *débonnaire*, and holding up an oval portrait of her daughter, who looks white and red, and brown-haired, and conscious; while little Pauline, of the square nose, is staring up with her dark eyes. The celebrated pearl necklace is there, which is so often mentioned in the Letters.

Mr Hamilton Aïdé tells me of two charming miniatures. He has also, by the kindness of Lady Waterford, the possessor of the original picture at Beckett, given me a photograph of a portrait of Madame de Sévigné holding her baby-daughter on her knee: the child half turns with a childlike action, glancing as she turns aside. The mother sits bright, beautiful, and stately, with an air of lovely youthful domination and happiness.