

Choice 16

Tonton's Snuff-Box

Walpole escaped to Paris in November 1765 after the most mortifying disappointment of his life, the failure of his friends, especially of Conway, to offer him a place in the first Rockingham Ministry which he had helped to form. He would not have accepted a place, but his pride would have been satisfied by refusing it. "Falsehood, interest, and ingratitude, the attendants of friendship, are familiar to me," he wrote Mann bitterly; but no Englishman ever went to Paris with more friendly letters of introduction to its great world or enjoyed more of a success when he got there. He wrote Gray, "Like Queen Eleanor in the Ballad, I sunk at Charing Cross, and have risen in the Faubourg Saint Germain" where he was drawn speedily into Madame du Deffand's circle. She, whom he described to Conway as "an old blind débauchée of wit," became infatuated with him although twenty years his senior. Forty years earlier she had been a mistress of the Regent Orléans and that gave her a certain panache even though the connection had lasted only two weeks. To her Walpole was a radiant newcomer who exorcised the devil ennui that possessed her. Before long they were meeting daily. His delight in her company and his pride in having made a Platonic conquest of the wittiest woman in Paris fused with his indignation at the "barbarity and injustice" of those who ate her suppers when they could not go to a more fashionable house, who laughed at her, abused her, and tried to convert her nominal friends into enemies in what she called their "société infernale."

Walpole kept a journal of his five visits to Paris from 1765 to 1775. It records what he did every day, whom he saw and where. This was one of the great prizes in the first Waller Sale when it was bought by Maggs, sold to Percival Merritt of Boston, and bequeathed by him to Harvard. It has been edited in an appendix to the du Deffand correspondence in the Yale Walpole. Two typical entries are: "30th March 1766: To Mme du Deffand. Mr [Adam] Smith came. With Sir H. Echlin to Lady Macclesfield. To Madame de Mirepoix. To Mme de Rochefort, Duchesse de

Choiseul, Mme de Gacé and others there. Supped at Mme du Deffand's with Mmes d'Aiguillon, Forcalquier and Crussol, Messrs de Sceaux, d'Ussé, d'Ambreville, Damas, and M. and Mme de Broglie." On the following day, "Mr Buckner came. To Mme d'Aiguillon, young duchess there and an old Lord Alford. Made visits to take leave. To Mme Geoffrin. To Baron d'Holbach. Played at cavagnole and supped at Madame du Deffand's, with Mesdames de Ségur, Maurevel, St-Maur, Flavacourt, Valbelle, Mlle de Courson, Contesse Czernieski, and M. Fervantcour." Such was life in the Faubourg Saint Germain in 1766. The final entry in Mme du Deffand's last journal, which she left Walpole and which is now at Farmington, shows that she carried on until she died at the age of 83: "10th September 1780," she wrote, "Sunday. Supped at home with the usual people. M. de Choiseul arrived. The Briennes left after supper for Brienne. M. de Toulouse has returned."

Walpole's initial success grew even greater after his contribution to the *société infernale*. This was a pretended letter from the King of Prussia to Rousseau in which the King offered Rousseau asylum to be as unhappy as he pleased. Copies of the letter were handed about Paris; Walpole himself sent several to England where one got into the *St. James's Chronicle* and helped destroy the friendship between Rousseau and Hume, his English benefactor.

When Walpole returned to England in 1766 he and Mme du Deffand began the correspondence which went on until she died fourteen years later, some 850 very long letters on each side. Walpole got her to return his letters and presumably directed Mary Berry, his literary executrix, to make extracts from them as footnotes to a posthumous edition of Mme du Deffand's letters to him, after which Miss Berry was to destroy his side of the correspondence. One reason for doing so was that he was uneasy about his French although Mme du Deffand assured him that "no one, but no one, expresses himself better than you" and continued to say so over and over again to reassure him. His reputation as a person has suffered from our knowing little of what he actually wrote; only seven of his letters to her (they are at Farmington) have survived. Her letters to him are emotional and demanding; she clamored on about love and coldness; she flung herself into luxurious analyses of him and of herself, all of which he found embarrassing, especially when he learned that their letters were being opened at the post office. He begged her to stick to proper names. She was hurt, angrily defended herself, and obeyed for a while. Then she burst out again in a fresh flood of emotion, and the

pattern was repeated. We have both sides of the conversation for only the month of January 1775, but in it the cycle is complete. It shows her exaggerated reaction to his mild expostulations, and how mistaken it is to condemn him as an unfeeling scold from her letters alone. He made four laborious trips to see and entertain her and to bring her what comfort and pleasure he could until war was declared between France and England. When her income was cut he offered to make up the loss from his own pocket, but she would not let him do it. Although she wanted to leave him all she had, he accepted only her manuscripts and her little black spaniel, Tonton, who was not house-broken and who bit people. She included the gold snuff-box made by the king's jeweller with Tonton's portrait in wax by Gosset that a friend gave her as a New Year's present in 1778. The Chevalier Boufflers wrote verses on Voltaire and Tonton that Mme du Deffand sent to Walpole.

Vous les trouvez tous deux charmants,
Nous les trouvons tous deux mordants;
Voilà la ressemblance:
L'un ne mord que ses ennemis,
Et l'autre mord tous vos amis,
Voilà la différence.

The manuscripts were kept in a cedar chest in the library at Strawberry until sold in 1842 to Thorpe the bookseller for £156.10s. Sir Frederick Madden of the British Museum recorded that "directly after the conclusion of the sale the chest was purchased by Dyce-Sombre who came down in a carriage and four accompanied by his wife, and the latter taking a fancy to these letters her wealthy husband gave Thorpe 20 guineas additional for them and carried them off." The lady bequeathed them to her nephew, W. R. Parker-Jervis of Staffordshire. They were resold through Sotheby's in 1920, just four years before I began collecting Walpole. Paget Toynbee bought Mme du Deffand's letters to Walpole for £20 and gave them to the Bodleian; Seymour de Ricci bought her letters to Voltaire and gave them to the Bibliothèque Nationale. Most of the rest went to Maggs, who in December 1933 let me have them for £50 to make me, as they said, "A Christmas present." In 1938 they retrieved for me the most interesting book in the collection, which had been bought by another dealer in 1920. This was Mme du Deffand's "Recueil de divers ouvrages," over 270 pages, 4to, with 45 "portraits" of her friends magnificently bound in red morocco. Walpole wrote inside



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the front cover that the book had been bequeathed to him by Mme du Deffand with her other manuscripts and he pasted in seven and a half pages of notes that included his "portrait" of her, which is in English.

Portrait de Madame la Marquise du Deffand, 1766,
Where do Wit and Memory dwell?
Where is Fancy's favourite cell?
Where does Judgment hold her court,

and continues for 27 lines of conventional compliment until the close:

Together all these Virtues dwell:
St Joseph's convent is her cell:
Their sanctuary Du Deffand's mind—
Censure, be dumb! She's old and blind.

Far from being wounded by the last line Mme du Deffand was flattered because it proved, she said, the sincerity of what went before.

Her "Portrait" of Walpole, which he asked her to write, is the most important summary of him ever written. This translation of it is by Catherine Jestin, Librarian of the Lewis Walpole Library.

No, no, I cannot do your portrait. No one knows you less than I do. You appear sometimes as I wish you were, sometimes as I fear you may not be, and perhaps never as you really are. It is obvious you are very intelligent in many ways. Everyone knows this as well as I, and you should be aware of it more than anyone.

It is your character that should be portrayed, and that is why I cannot be a good judge: indifference, or at least impartiality, is essential. Yet I can vouch for your integrity. You are principled and courageous and pride yourself on firmness of purpose, so that when you make a decision, for better or worse, nothing can make you change your mind, often to the point of obstinacy. Your friendship is warm and steadfast, but neither tender nor yielding. Fear of weakness hardens you; you try not to be ruled by emotions: you cannot refuse friends in dire need, you sacrifice your interests to theirs, but you deny them smallest favours; you are kind to everyone, and to those to whom you are indifferent, yet for your friends, even where trifles are concerned, you hardly bother to exert yourself.

Your disposition is very pleasing although not too equable. Your manner is noble, easy and natural; your desire to please is without affectation. Knowledge and experience of the world have made you scorn humanity and yet you have learned to adjust; you know that outward expressions are merely insincerities;

you respond with deference and good manners so that all those who do not care in the least whether you like them or not have a good opinion of you.

I do not know if you have much feeling; if you do, you fight it, for you think it a weakness; you allow yourself only the loftier kind. You are thoughtful, you have absolutely no vanity although plenty of self-esteem, but your self-esteem does not blind you: it leads you to exaggerate your faults rather than to hide them. You give a good opinion of yourself only if forced to do so when comparing yourself with others. You have discernment and tact, perfect taste and faultless manners. You would have been part of the most fashionable society in centuries past; you are so now in this, and would be in those of the future. Your character derives much from your country, but your manners are equally correct everywhere.

You have one weakness which is inexcusable: fear of ridicule. You sacrifice your better feelings to it and let it regulate your conduct. It makes you harken to fools who give you false impressions that your friends cannot rectify. You are easily influenced, a tendency you recognize and which you remedy by adhering too strictly to principle; your determination never to give in is occasionally excessive, and at times when it is hardly worth the effort.

You are noble and generous, you do good for the pleasure of doing so, without ostentation, without hope of reward: in short your soul is beautiful and good.

Addition to the Portrait, 30 November 1766.

Only truth and simplicity please you; you distrust subtleties, you hate metaphysics; large ideas bore you, and you don't much enjoy deep reflection, you think it of little use; your philosophy teaches you that it is better to suppress your emotions than to fight them. You want to do so by diversions, you mock everything and, new Democritus, the world is nothing for you but a stage whose actors you hiss; your bent is irony, you excel in fields that demand much wit, grace, and lightness. You are naturally light-hearted, but you are too sensitive and sensibility often hinders gaiety. To remedy this you seek out-of-the-ordinary ways to occupy and amuse yourself. You build exotic houses, you raise monuments to a king of brigands, you pretend to have forbearance, etc. etc. Lastly, you seem a little mad in your eccentricities which are, however, the product of reason.

I cannot say anything about your dislike of friendship; it is apparently founded on some deep sorrow, but as you are only vague about this, one is led to believe that you are afraid, or else wish to establish a rule of conduct, as little without foundation as all your rules which you do not follow despite your eloquence, because your precepts are not backed up by your practice.

You have friends, you are entirely devoted to them, their interests are yours; all your talk and all your reasoning against friendship fail to convince them that you are not, of all people in the world, the most capable of it.

Mme du Deffand was afraid Walpole was unhappy about his portrait and a week after she sent it ordered him to make certain amendments, but we don't know what he really thought of it.

The runner-up to Tonton's snuff-box is Walpole's copy of Gramont's *Mémoires*, 1746, the copy he used when editing and printing the Strawberry *Grammont* in 1772. He made an index for this copy and added notes throughout it, all of which he used in the Strawberry edition, his copy of which is also at Farmington, annotated and extra-illustrated by him. He dedicated it "A Madame——. L'Editeur vous consacre cette Edition, comme un monument de son Amitié, de son Admiration, & de son Respect; à Vous, dont les Graces, l'Esprit, & le Goût retracent au siècle present le siècle de Louis quatorze & les agremens de l'Auteur de ces Memoires." In his copy he wrote Mme du Deffand's name after the blank her modesty insisted upon and added two charming little engravings; the upper one of three putti crowning a book with laurel, the lower of a monument embowered with flowering shrubs. No collector ever enjoyed adorning his books more than Walpole. Of the hundred copies he printed of the *Grammont*, twelve are at Farmington; they include presentation copies to the Duchess of Bedford, Lord Nuneham, George Montagu, Mrs Damer, and Richard Bull, who extra-illustrated his copy lavishly, as usual.

The single object at Farmington that brings the two friends most strongly together is not the dedication copy of the *Grammont* or "Recueil de divers ouvrages," but the very beautiful circular gold snuff-box made by Roucel, the king's jeweler, that gives us Tonton in his plump latter days sitting on a cushion with his right front paw uplifted appealingly. Inside the lid, his master had inscribed, "This box with the portrait of her dog Tonton was bequeathed by Madame la Marquise du Deffand to Mr Horace Walpole, 1780," but before I talk about Tonton I should speak of his predecessors.

Walpole's devotion to dogs appears in his first letter to his Mama and never ceased from Tory to Tonton. Tory was a little King Charles spaniel that Walpole took on the Grand Tour, "the prettiest, fattest, dearest creature! I had let it out of the chaise for the air, and it was waddling along close to the head of the horses, on the top of one of the highest Alps, by the side of a wood of firs. There darted out a young wolf, seized poor dear Tory by the throat, and before we could possibly prevent it, sprung up the side of the rock and carried him off."

Tory's successor was Patapan, which Walpole got in Rome and took to England. He was a small white spaniel trimmed in a manner unfamiliar

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to the rustics of Norfolk whither his master brought him after Sir Robert's downfall. Walpole passed the summer of 1742 at Houghton writing *Patapan or the Little White Dog, a Tale imitated from Fontaine*, a work he mentioned in his "Short Notes," adding "it was never printed." His manuscript of it is in the Second Common Place Book at Farmington and runs to fourteen folio pages, half in verse. It turns out to be a satire on Arthur Onslow, the Speaker of the House of Commons with whom Walpole had an altercation in the House. It has disappointingly little about Patapan, but there is much about him in the Mann correspondence and both Chute and Walpole addressed verses to him. Patapan was succeeded in due course by Rosette, a black and tan spaniel, which Walpole believed saved his life by warning him of a chimney fire. In August 1773 he wrote Lady Ossory, "My poor Rosette is dying. She relapsed into her fits the last night of my stay at Nuneham; and has suffered exquisitely ever since. You may believe I have too—I have been out of bed twenty times every night, have had no sleep, and sat up with her till three this morning—but I am only making you laugh at me: I cannot help it, I think of nothing else. Without weaknesses I should not be I, and I may as well tell them, as have them tell themselves." When Rosette died he sent Lord Nuneham her epitaph; "it has no merit," Walpole wrote, "for it is an imitation, but in coming from the heart, if ever epitaph did, and therefore your dogmanity will not dislike it.

Sweetest roses of the year
Strew around my Rose's bier.
Calmly may the dust repose
Of my pretty faithful Rose!
And if, yon cloud-topp'd hill behind,
This frame dissolved, this breath resign'd,
Some happier isle, some humbler heaven
Be to my trembling wishes given,
Admitted to that equal sky,
May sweet Rose bear me company!"

Mme du Deffand's first of 69 references to Tonton was when he, aged four months, was sitting on her shoulder while she dictated her letter. A year later she asked Walpole, even before Walpole had seen him, to take him after her death. Tonton was very pretty, she said, and Walpole would love him, but she did not add that he wasn't house-broken and bit people. Thomas Walpole proved his friendship by bringing Tonton to England when his mistress died, a kindness that must have added much

to the hardship of those four exhausting days of travel. Walpole doted on Tonton. "You will find that I have gotten a new idol," he wrote Mason,

in a word, a successor to Rosette and almost as great a favourite, nor is this a breach of vows and constancy, but an act of piety. In a word, my poor dear old friend Madame du Deffand had a little dog of which she was extremely fond, and the last time I saw her she made me promise if I should survive her to take charge of it. I did. It is arrived and I was going to say, it is incredible how fond I am of it, but I have no occasion to brag of my dogmanity. I dined at Richmond House t'other day, and mentioning whither I was going, the Duke said, "Own the truth, shall not you call at home first and see Tonton?" He guessed rightly. He is now sitting on my paper as I write—not the Duke, but Tonton.

At just this time Walpole wrote in his pocket notebook mentioned in Choice 4,

"Charade on my dog Tonton

The first part is thine, the second belongs only to people of fashion; but the whole, tho doubly thine, belongs only to me."

When Tonton died Walpole wrote Lady Ossory that his death was merciful, for

he was grown stone deaf, and very near equally blind, and so weak that the two last days he could not walk upstairs. Happily he had not suffered, and died close by my side without a pang or a groan. I have had the satisfaction for my dear old friend's sake and his own, of having nursed him up by constant attention to the age of sixteen, yet always afraid of his surviving me, as it was scarce possible he could meet a third person who would study his happiness equally. I sent him to Strawberry and went thither on Sunday to see him buried behind the Chapel near Rosette.