

ing this to his assembled friends, Arnauld exclaimed, 'That is excellent! that will go down; we must have it printed immediately.'

"Pascal had, in fact, with the native superiority of genius, pitched on the very tone which, in a controversy of this kind, was calculated to arrest the public mind. Treating theology in a style entirely new, he brought down the subject to the comprehension of all, and translated into the pleasantries of comedy, and familiarities of dialogue, discussions which had till then been confined to the grave utterances of the school. The framework which he adopted in his first letter was exceedingly happy. A Parisian is supposed to transmit to one of his friends in the provinces an account of the disputes of the day. It is said that the provincial with whom he affected to correspond was Perrier, who had married one of his sisters. Hence arose the name of the *Provincials*, which was given to the rest of the letters."

The Letters were published on separate sheets, and were at first known by the name of the "Little Letters," on account of their brevity. The first appeared January 13, 1656; the second, January 29; and the rest were issued at intervals, varying from a week to a month, till March 24, 1657, which is the date of the last. They were published anonymously, under the fictitious signature of Louis de Montalte, and the greatest care was taken at the time to preserve the secret of their authorship. In preparing them, Pascal employed incredible pains.—Though Arnauld and other Jansenist friends assisted him by furnishing extracts from the works of Jesuits, he never took them on trust, but examined and verified every extract for himself. Nicole says that "he was often twenty whole days on a single letter, and some of them he recommenced seven or eight times before

bringing them to their present state of perfection." He wrote over the eighteenth letter thirteen times; and he apologised for the length of the sixteenth, because, in consequence of a search that was made after it in the printing office, "he had found no time to make it shorter."

"All accounts agree," Mr. M'Crie observes, "in stating that the impression produced by the Provincials, on their first appearance, was quite unexampled. They were circulated in thousands in Paris and throughout France. Speaking of the first letter, Father Daniel says: 'It created a fracas which filled the fathers of the Society with consternation. Never did the post-office reap greater profits; copies were despatched over the whole kingdom; and I myself, though very little known to the gentlemen of Port-Royal, received a large packet of them, post-paid, in a town of Brittany where I was then residing.' The same method was followed with the rest of the letters. The seventh found its way to Cardinal Mazarin, who laughed over it very heartily. The eighth did not appear till a month after its predecessor, apparently to keep up expectation. In short, everybody read the 'Little Letters,' and, whatever might be their opinions of the points in dispute, all agreed in admiring the genius which they displayed. They were found lying on the merchant's counter, the lawyer's desk, the doctor's table, the lady's toilet; and everywhere they were sought for and perused with the same avidity. The success of the Letters in gaining their object was not less extraordinary. The Jesuits were fairly check-mated; and though they succeeded in carrying through the censure of Arnauld, the public sympathy was enlisted in his favour. The confessionals and churches of the Jesuits were deserted, while those of their opponents were crowded with admiring thousands. 'That book