

INTRODUCTION

PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF THE LETTERS TO WALPOLE

THE *graces of the most polished style, which, however, are less beautiful than the graces of the wit they clothe—* with these words, Madame du Deffand was introduced as a letter-writer by her first editor, publisher, and printer, who was Horace Walpole himself. She said that she had written better letters than the one which he chose,¹ and later editors, apparently agreeing with her, have until now omitted it from the text of her correspondence. After Madame du Deffand's death, Walpole thought of paying her a further tribute 'in the manner of the French *éloges*,' as a preface to a selection of her letters and papers. Various things deterred him:

There are many reasons against printing them at present—and what blindness would it be in me to talk of *some time hence*? I am not only past sixty-four, but nervous and lame. . . . When the body grows so weak, would not it be vanity to suppose that the faculties are unhurt? . . . I have not been in France these five years, have lost the habitude of the language, and have now no communication at all there, nor any one to consult for assistance. Indolence and diffidence of myself increase these objections. I may perhaps select the best papers and letters, and arrange them so, that they may be published hereafter; which I should also prefer, as I have a thorough aversion to hurt anybody living by making public anecdotes in which they are concerned.²

After apologizing for his French, he adds that 'an English preface and English notes to a French book would be a strange patchwork.' Nevertheless, it was just this patchwork which his literary executrix produced in her edition of Madame du Def-

1. Her letter to him in Madame de Sévigné's name, first printed in Walpole's *Description of Strawberry Hill*, 1774.

2. Walpole to Lort 2 Nov. 1781. Walpole's rough draft of his 'éloge' is doubt-

less the essay which he wrote in Madame du Deffand's MS *Recueil de divers ouvrages*, and which is printed here as Appendix 3f.