

The French Academy is thus not only the supreme court of French belles-lettres, assigning a place and rank to the works which fall within its jurisdiction, and from whose decrees there is seldom a successful appeal to the *vox populi*, but also its patron and minister, dispensing rewards and crowning with honors. The literati who are not of "the forty" are fain to sneer at it, to call it antiquated and mediocre, a self-elected oligarchy, a coterie of divine-right legitimists in the world of letters; yet the fact remains that a chair in the Academy confers "the blue ribbon of French culture;" and hitherto no man of genius, when offered the distinction, has held himself too dear to accept it. Sainte-Beuve had too well poised a mind to permit himself extravagance of speech, even when speaking of the Academy, of which he was proud to be a member. He says that with all its faults, errors, and fluctuations, "the Academy remains an institution to be revered—which not only has a noble and interesting past, but which, well directed and advised, excited, re-awakened, renewed, may render great services in the midst of the universal literary diffuseness and dispersion."

Of the other four academies, which hold somewhat the same comparative rank to the French Academy that the heads of bureaus do to cabinet ministers, there is space to speak but briefly. The departments of learning over which the Academy of Inscriptions, which is composed of forty members, presides include languages, antiquities and monuments, translations, and archæology. This body, like its elder sister, awards various prizes, among them one for numismatics and one for works on French history. The Academy of Inscriptions issues certain publications, such as its "Memoirs," notices of manuscript memoirs on the antiquities of France, the literary history of France, collections of French histories, charts and documents relative thereto, letters of the French kings, and various catalogues. The Academy of Sciences, containing sixty-eight members, and divided into eleven sections, deliberates on topics of geometry, mechanics, astronomy, geography, navigation, general natural philosophy, chemistry, mineralogy, botany, rural economy, anatomy, zoology, medicine, and surgery. Many prizes are awarded by this academy, which also publishes regularly the reports of its meetings, the memoirs of its former transactions and researches, and, in general, such works of savants, not members, pertaining to its especial topics as it sees fit. The Academy of Fine Arts is composed of forty-one members, and is divided into five sections, whose respective subjects are painting, sculpture, architecture, engraving, and musical composition. The Academy of Moral and Political Sciences contains forty members, and its

sections are charged with considering philosophy, moral philosophy, legislation, public law, jurisprudence, political economy, statistics, history, and its philosophy. These academies have each weekly sessions, and on the occasion of the induction of a new Academician, whose inaugural essay is invariably a eulogy upon his predecessor, a favored portion of the public is admitted by tickets to the grand hall. The Parisians are as eager to attend one of these public sessions as to see a new play of Sardou or Dumas *filis*; for the audience is always select, the group of Academicians a distinguished one, and the addresses usually interesting. The tickets of admission are distributed on recommendation by the secretary of the Institute. At these public sessions, and at state ceremonies, the members of the Institute are dressed in black broadcloth suits embroidered with olive leaves in green silk.

Such, in brief, are the Institute of France and the academies which form its federal literary commonwealth. It was a conception worthy of a Greek imagination, and gives the first revolution one more title to the respect of posterity. The Institute has accomplished many valuable uses, not the least of which are the constant bringing together of scholars, occupied in widely different spheres of thought, in a familiar way, and the proffer of an honor, inciting young aspirants for the laurel to greater industry and mental effort, in order to attain a place among the "forty immortals;" its roll of names is illustrious, and includes all, or nearly all, the most famous French minds of the present century; and surviving as it does every political and religious convulsion, and flourishing as it does under whatever régime popular caprice imposes upon the nation, it seems destined to a long life and a fruitful career—and this can be predicted, unhappily, of but few French institutions.

WONDERS OF THE LOWLANDS.

JUST below Memphis, on the eastern shore of the Mississippi, there are two lofty mounds, one on the very verge of the elevated plateau on which the city stands, the other two hundred yards away. Of these the reader will find an accurate delineation in the great painting that adorns a broad space within the Rotunda of the Capitol at Washington. This work of art is designated "The Discovery of the Mississippi by De Soto." On the level plain at the base of the mound, one hundred feet above the river's surface, mail-clad warriors of Castile are gathered about the martial, towering figure of De Soto, while an Indian chieftain, surrounded by his warriors, does obeisance to the haughty Spaniard. One broad arm of the "inland sea" flows directly toward the setting sun, and another due

south. Between these is President's Island, six miles away, once the estate of General Andrew Jackson. The green depressed surface of the island, covered with endless corn and cotton fields, seems a glowing emerald imbedded in the very bosom of the mighty river. On its western shore, directly west, and more than two miles from "De Soto's Mound," there stood, until fifteen years ago, another mound that rose to a level with the lofty eastern shore.

The course of the river through a series of years was deflected more and more from its southern to a western course, and thus the Arkansas mound slowly disappeared. While it was abraded and dropping into fathomless depths, the curious in such matters were accustomed to gather pipes, urns, bronze or copper implements and ornaments, flint arrow-heads and hatchets, from the graves of the mound-builders. Skulls and bones were found, but pulverized simply by exposure to the air. This tumulus, erected upon the alluvium swept down from western mountains, was densely covered with great forest trees. But the lowlands themselves were recently produced. Within a brief geological period the ever-changeable current of the river has occupied every point from the heights on which Memphis stands to those forty miles west, known as Crowley's Ridge, at the base of which flows the St. Francis River. The Mississippi at no remote date, just as it does to-day, swept over the precise spot whereon the lofty mound was erected. The length of the period through which a given point in the lowlands may remain untouched by the river current can not be accurately estimated.

The trees that grow upon mounds have been preceded by others older than they. There may have been many preceding generations of trees, and therefore nothing is determined by inquiries of a character to which agents of the Smithsonian Institution constantly resort. I have begun a system of investigations which must lead to approximately accurate results. In the vicinity of Osceola, at Dr. McGavock's plantation, above Memphis, in Arkansas, and near Fulton, in Tennessee, traces of the mound-builders' civilization are found every where. Near the great mound not far from Osceola there is a threshing-floor, paved with *adobe*, having an area of quite ten acres. The wheat of wide districts must have been threshed on this spot, and stored in bins made of the same material, the remains of which are still visible. This threshing-floor is buried quite two and a half feet beneath the country's surface by a black loam. It is very needful to ascertain the average depth of



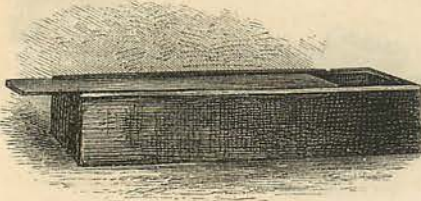
MOUND-BUILDERS' PIPE.

this annual deposition made by decaying vegetation, and then to learn by repeated experiments and observations in the same districts the thickness of the loam annually deposited by the same forest trees.

Mr. Fassett, an old citizen of the county, is engaged in making accurate observations of this character, and will be enabled at an early day to give results that may determine chronological facts in reference to which writers have differed by from ten to twenty centuries. If, as generally conceded, the mound-builders were of the same race that wrought in Lake Superior copper mines, built the pyramids of Mitla and Coahuila, monoliths at Copan, the temples in Arizona, and in Yucatan, Mexico, and Peru, the importance of the inquiry which Mr. Fassett is making can not be exaggerated. If American mounds and Mexican pyramids and the ancient temples of Central America were constructed by the same race, that race lived and flourished and was rich and powerful since the Mississippi dug for itself its present channel at the base of the Chickasaw Bluffs, on which Memphis stands.

The lofty mound on the western shore was destroyed only fifteen years ago by a steady deflection of the river's current toward the west. At different points in the lowlands, forty miles wide, west from Memphis, there are depressions and elevations parallel with one another which constituted the river's old channels as it gradually found for itself the deep bed in which it runs to-day at the foot of the heights of Memphis. After the river dug its present channel (the old channel is plainly defined five miles west) the mound-builders reared the speechless monument to their dead which the restless arm of the sea embraced at last and bore away before our eyes to the ocean. The changes in the river's route have been effected in modern times, and are steadily progressive. How old this channel may be, or that five miles further west, can only be approximately determined. Within a given period the current flowed at every point between the heights at Memphis and those forty miles west, along the base of which runs the St. Francis River. There are mounds and *aguadas* every where between these two streams, and the date of their construction, as a geological fact, must be recent.

The mound in the lowlands just across



WARRIOR'S PAINT-BOX.

the river, west from Memphis, was probably reared when the Mississippi occupied a channel, still clearly defined, five miles west of its present bed. If the regular natural diversions of the river were observed through a series of years, we might determine proximately the antiquity of these wonderful mounds and canals and highways telling of dense industrious populations that selected as an abiding-place the richest spot on the continent.

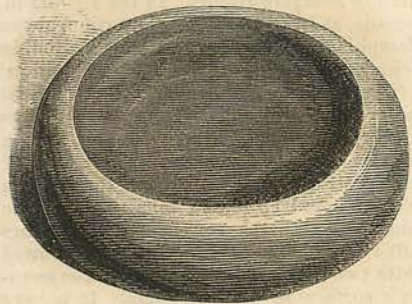
While ever-changeable channels of the Mississippi tell no definite chronological story, the moving mouth of the great river actually speaks, eloquently and accurately, of the lapse of years. The river is lengthened annually two hundred yards. Each eight years the river adds one mile to its length. There are no traces of mound-builders' works below Baton Rouge. Since this strange people followed the course of the river, and left along its banks every where from Cairo to the vicinity of Natchez and Baton Rouge evidences of their industry, and since there are no tumuli south of these places, we may conclude that the Gulf of Mexico in the age of the mound-builders laved the base of the heights on which Natchez stands. Baton Rouge is 300 miles by water from the sea. The river, as we have said, lengthens itself two hundred yards annually by the ejection of mud at the Balize. In other words, the river has grown 325 miles in length since the mound-builders ceased to follow its course downward from Lake Superior copper mines to the Mexican Gulf, and thus the conclusion is deduced that quite 3000 years have elapsed since the people known as mound-builders utterly disappeared.

No one has traversed the prairies between White and Arkansas rivers, along the route of the Memphis and Little Rock Railway, and failed to note the number and uniformity of mounds that dot the country's surface. These prairies were sites of populous cities, whose outlines may be readily traced. One may even estimate with some degree of accuracy the number of inhabitants by the number of dwellings that surely adorned these productive plains. Little hillocks, elevated from one to three feet above the level of the plain, are every where visible. They are generally collocated in pairs, the larger

fronting on the broad avenue, and the smaller twenty to thirty feet in the rear. The arrangement of the houses, of which these hillocks are the débris, was much the same with that to which Southern planters were wont to resort, the costly residence occupying the prominent place in each village, the other being made up of modest domiciles denominated the "kitchen" and "negro quarter." The soil that constitutes these little prairie mounds is different from that of the rest of the plain, and even yet the vegetation upon these hillocks, usually forty by twenty feet square, is denser and greener and more vigorous than upon the plain. The countless mounds along this railway from Memphis to Fort Smith, in the richest districts of the State, suggest the incontestable conclusion that countless myriads of people dwelt here as well as in the lowlands. It is the land of ruins, prehistoric Cyclopean, Phœnician, Egyptian, Malayan, Israelitish, Etruscan, or Assyrian. As the English captain and recent explorer Barton asserts of ancient Syria, "its towers and cities have been so numerous that the country must have been one endless city."

When Irishmen, a few years ago, were constructing the levee in Mississippi County, above Memphis, in Arkansas, they encountered countless skulls and bones, and finally refused to desecrate this burial-place of mound-builders, and negroes were employed in their stead. The number of skeletons was illimitable, and the extent of the graveyard unknown. Skulls and thigh-bones of giants were unearthed, and even skulls of peculiar shape. Here and there was a head artificially flattened, and again there were skulls discovered marked by curious knots, like that which Homer tells us surmounted the cranium of the querulous Thersites.

Every where in the lowlands between the Mississippi and St. Francis rivers, a district forty by ninety miles in area, there are mounds varying in altitude from four to forty and even sixty feet. Very many were constructed like stone Nilometers of Egypt, to record the height of the river floods during different periods. In the



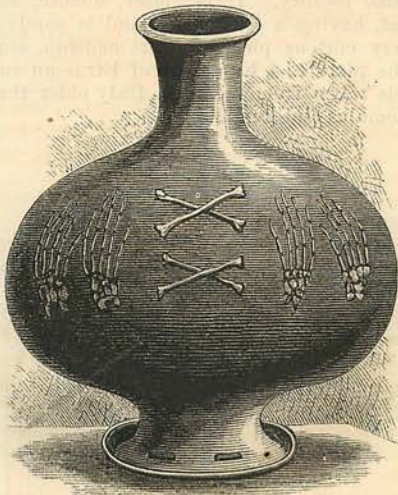
MORTAR FOUND IN A MOUND.

swamps are found remains of brick structures buried beneath decayed vegetation. Especially did these abound along the old military road. This highway constitutes the original route of civilization from Memphis across Arkansas to Little Rock and Fort Smith. It was also the route of the mound-builders. General Edmund P. Gaines simply re-opened the old highway. Trees and dense vegetation had obstructed it, but it was lifted above the flood-tide of the Mississippi by the old race. This old road constitutes an artificial ridge across the lowlands from the Mississippi to the St. Francis.

About twenty years ago Elijah Cheek, who during the late war sought the Chief Magistracy of Arkansas at the hands of President Lincoln, was engaged in constructing a plank-road from Mound City, five miles above Memphis, to Marion, the capital of Crittenden County, ten miles west of Memphis. In making excavations and embankments Mr. Cheek discovered strangely shaped bricks, of which specimens were sent to the writer of this memoir. They were made of grayish clay, nine by twelve inches in width and length, and four inches thick. Mr. Cheek supposed from the number of ruins which he found every few rods along the route of this old military road that Spaniards, when they held the country, built palaces every where, and grew enormously rich by cultivating the lowlands. He finally accepted the conclusion, after hearing a curious recitation of mound-builders' history written by the late Cornelius Mathews, of New York, that the old military road was not the product of modern but of ancient skill and toil. He then saw how the ridge it traverses is artificial, how it is wider where the richest mound-builder built his domicile, and how it is true that these people

lifted up in the lowlands not only countless mounds and dug countless canals and agnadas, but absolutely created, by uplifting the earth that constituted them, broad farms of hundreds and even thousands of acres. We of modern times are boastful of the triumphs of engineering skill that bridges rivers, upheaves levees, and builds railways. These mound-builders achieved mightier tasks, and constructed road-beds that stagger credulity, and dug canals infinitely more serviceable than railways every where in the lowlands. Floods ruinous to civilization and wealth were rendered by them wholly impossible. Canals were not only the cheapest agencies of commerce, but the area of water surface exposed to the action of the sun's rays was not materially lessened, as would occur if levees could effect their purpose and wall in the river. No such changes in climatic or hygrometrical laws resulted as would render, by producing wet and dry seasons, the successful cultivation of cotton impossible. These mound-builders were wiser than we. They cultivated the lowlands, first regulating the distribution of water, and making the country healthful by this useful system of drainage; and then doubtless there were at Memphis, as at St. Louis and Louisville, and other points designated by remains of the mound-builders' greatest works, magnificent cities.

Throughout the prairies dotted with little mounds, of which I have spoken, the debris of ancient structures would assign to no autocrat more than fifty acres. The space allotted to two abodes, the larger and smaller, as defined by the two hillocks, is not larger than ten acres. I could discover no



MOUND-BUILDERS' WATER-COOLERS.



THE IDOL.

marks of wells or cisterns, but have a water-cooler, indicative of the fact that there were no ice-houses in those primeval days.

The vessel is thirteen inches high, having on its surface raised figures of the shin-bones, and skeleton hands, four pairs of each. It is of grayish clay, and very thin and light. For many months this vessel was upon my desk. One day a weather-beaten sailor entered, asking for money that his hunger might be appeased. His attention was suddenly arrested by the urn dug from a grave near Osceola, Arkansas. He examined it closely, and was amazed, as he said, that I should have here on the banks of the Mississippi the water-cooler of a Malay Islander. The burly sailor explained that the urn was suspended by straps passed through the openings in the rim below, in the open air, beneath a lateen-sail, on a hot summer day, and that evaporation through the thin porous clay was so rapid that water in the urn was almost frozen. I applied the test of utility, and found the sailor's story veracious. The urn was an excellent water-cooler, and ice was quite needless on the plains and in the lowlands of Arkansas.

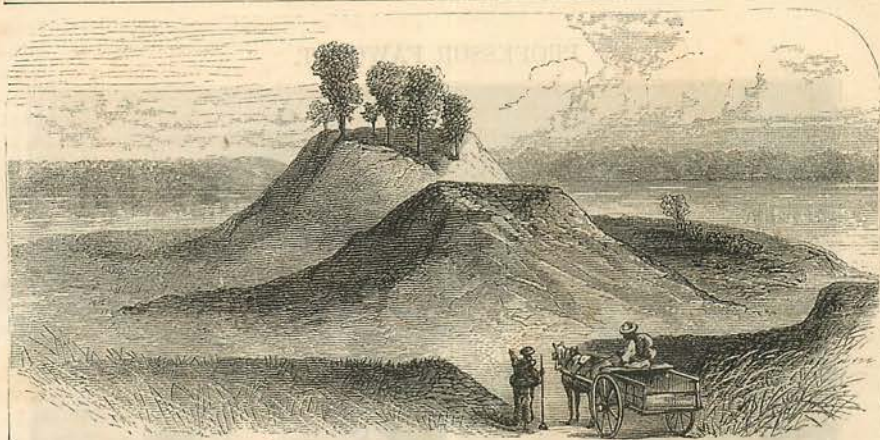
I have a more wonderful specimen of mound-builders' skill, which is shown in another engraving. I am very sure that this was imported, and even from Japan. Mr. Seward and other travelers have described Japanese idols of which this is a perfect reproduction. It was taken from a mound near Fulton, in Tennessee, a central seat, like Memphis, of mound-builders' wealth

and art and glory. The mound-builders' idol is of bronze, and the oldest specimen of this metal, without doubt, that exists on this continent. I do not assert it to be the product of mound-builders' workmanship. It is too artistic, too ornate, too perfect, and the face is purely Asiatic. There are several holes eaten through the hollow metal by canker, and several little angular points have been broken or worn off. How came this wonderfully perfect specimen of moulding in bronze in the lowlands of the Mississippi? Who bore it hither? It is no fraudulent device manufactured in Birmingham or Sheffield, and shipped to the Celestials as a "joss." It is unquestionably a genuine Japanese or Malacca god. How it came to Tennessee, and why it was deposited in a mound, at its very base, and by whom, are mysteries profounder than any that ever perplexed the brain of the credulous Father of History.

From this same mound a little earthen box, the lid fitting perfectly, was taken. Tell it not in the schools of Philadelphia, but this little box was half filled with pills, and beside it lay very quietly the skeleton of the victim. So thoroughly had the old mound-building patient been killed by the villainous drug that he became himself, at the very moment of his exposure to atmospheric action, an "impalpable powder." This box, with its contents, was sent to Cincinnati, that the pills might be analyzed. I never heard the result of the chemist's labors. I have a crucible taken from a grave. It contains glistening marks of molten metal, and was evidently much used. There are four projecting perforated handles, much worn by brass wires with which the crucible was suspended. I have, too, a beautifully shaped vessel from the same locality. It is glossy, smooth, and flat, having a long neck, and is surely a very curious piece of workmanship, very like pictures I have seen of Etruscan vessels taken from tombs in Italy older than Romulus and Remus.



VESSELS FROM THE MOUNDS.



THE MOUNDS EAST OF LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS.

The broadest threshing-floor discovered is at the great mound near Osceola. To this reference has been made, and I recur to it because a memorable recital of facts interesting in this connection is given in the Bible. It will be remembered that David sinned, as stated in the eleventh chapter of Chronicles, in numbering the people, and a plague was sent upon Judæa, and David, as instructed by an angel, visited Ornan, or, as designated in the last chapter of II. Samuel, "Araunah the Jebusite," to buy his threshing-floor, whereon Araunah, alias Ornan, "was at the time threshing wheat." There is nothing marvelous in all this. There is nothing here discovered to connect the two peoples of the two worlds, Eastern and Western, with one another; and it is only remarkable that races, perhaps coeval, David living one thousand years before Christ, and both in the midst of mound-builders, should have these peculiar threshing-floors. There are none like these or of subsequent ages, and not often in the oldest books are they mentioned.

Even now I have before me heads of wheat grown on the eastern side of the Mississippi, within ten miles of Memphis, from grains taken from an ancient Egyptian sarcophagus, sent some years ago by the American consul at Alexandria to the Patent-office at Washington. The stalks and leaves are very like those of Indian corn, though smaller, and the heads or grain like that of sorghum or broom-corn. Strange but true it is that this very wheat, degenerate but perfect in all its incidents, still grows among the weeds and grass that cover mounds in the lowlands eighteen miles west of Memphis. How many centuries since these kindred products of Egyptian agriculture were separated, the one to move slowly, perhaps with nomadic tribes, around the globe, crossing Asia and the Pacific; and the other moving west, in our time, across the Atlan-

tic, and both growing green even here, in the year of our Lord 1873, beneath the shadows of another Memphis on the shores of another Nile? Collocate these curious facts, and observe that Araunah's threshing-floor covered the broad summit of Mount Moriah, and that this, of which I write, near Osceola, is of the area of ten acres, and then that the same peculiar grain grew beside both peculiar threshing-floors, and the deduction necessarily arises that the same race of people cultivated the same crops and garnered them in the same peculiar manner.

The mound to which reference has been already made, sixteen miles east of Little Rock, is perhaps the loftiest in America. Mound Lake is the excavation from which the earth was taken to construct the great tumulus. The sheet of water is three and a half miles long and a fourth of a mile in width. The property was owned and originally entered by General Jackson, who transferred it to the late Andrew Jackson Donelson. General Jackson was induced to visit the place because of the existence of these wonderful mounds. A broad deep ditch about them incloses an area of quite ninety acres. The loftier mound is about two hundred and fifty feet in height.

The larger of the two great mounds is conical, with many lofty forest trees growing on its sides. A grand old elm on the summit has towered above the rest for four hundred years. Eagles have an aerie in the topmost branches, whence they descend, like flashing bolts of light shot from the clouds, to wrest from birds that skim the lake's surface their quivering, glittering prey. The lake is a famous resort of fishermen, and was well stocked by some Izaak Walton who flourished in the age of mound-builders. A smaller mound hard by the greater is perfectly square; the altitude of the smaller monument is quite one hundred feet. The summit is flat, and an acre in area.