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## THE INSTITUTE OF FRANCE.

BY THEODORE CHILD.

THE temperament of the French is characterized by a love of precision, and of the logical and artistic presentation of men, things, and ideas. It is their love of order, their delight in classification, and their sense of completeness which have engendered their street architecture, their bureaucracy, and their national Institute, whose five Academies represent the various branches of art, science, and literature. The title of Member of the Institute is the highest distinction to which a Frenchman of culture can aspire; it is the crowning honor of his career; the canonization which makes his life a rounded whole; the supreme glorification of the savant, of the sowers and propagators of ideas, of the soldiers of thought, who are esteemed to be as true representatives of the French race and genius as the peasant in his field and the soldier at the frontier.

The Institute, to quote the words of M. Ernest Renan, "is one of the most glorious creations of the Revolution—a thing peculiar to France. Many countries have academies which can vie with ours in the illustriousness of their members and in the importance of their works; France alone has an Institute, where all the efforts of the human mind are, as it were, bound into one whole; where the poet, the philosopher, the historian, the philologist, the critic, the mathematician, the physicist, the astronomer, the naturalist, the economist, the juriconsult, the sculptor, the painter, the musician, can call each other colleagues. Two ideas actuated the great and single-minded men who conceived the plan of this novel foundation: the one idea, admirably true, is that all the productions of the human mind are jointly and severally dependent upon each other; the other idea, more open to criticism, but still grand, and in any case thoroughly and profoundly French, is that science,

letters, and art are a state thing—a thing which each nation produces in a body, and which the father-land is charged with fostering, encouraging, and regarding. The object of the Institute is the progress of knowledge, the general utility and glory of the Republic."

This is the ideal. The reality is less wonderful; and, as usual, the French themselves are the first to criticise and the most eager to depreciate an institution which is, after all, one of the glories of their country. "Between ourselves," said Sainte-Beuve, in a private letter, "all these academies are mere child's play; at least the French Academy is. The shortest quarter of an hour of solitary thought, or of serious talk, tête-à-tête, in our youth was better employed; but as one grows old one becomes once more subject to these trifles—only it is well to know that they are trifles."

These two extreme expressions of opinion will serve to prepare our minds for the best and for the worst, and help us to approach our subject in an attitude of adequate impartiality.

Without going deeply into the history of the matter, we may say that the idea of organizing a sort of intellectual mandarin in France was first conceived by Colbert, as a part of the vast scheme of centralization which Louis XIV. realized during his long reign. The idea of the "Roi Soleil" and of his great minister was to organize literature and the arts, and to associate them with grand institutions whose function was to carry everything to its highest degree of perfection. Thus were founded the Comédie Française, the Opéra, the French Academy, and the other Academies of the old régime, namely, the Academies of Sciences, of Inscriptions and Medals, of Painting and Sculpture, and of Architecture. This scheme was revived by the Directory, and

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ACADEMICIAN—SECTION OF CONCHOLOGY.

the Institute was founded on lines which have since been greatly modified, but of which the leading idea was the centralization of all branches of knowledge. The present organization of the Institute, which is in the main that given to it at the time of the Restoration, consists of five Academies, taking rank according to the order of their historical foundation, namely, the Académie Française, founded by Richelieu in 1635; the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, founded by Colbert in 1663; the Académie des Sciences, founded by Colbert in 1666; the Académie des Beaux-Arts, founded between 1648 and 1671 by the amalgamation of the three academies of painting, sculpture, and architecture; and the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques, reconstituted in 1832. It is to be remarked, however, that the filiation of these Academies is purely fictitious. At the time of the Revolution all the Academies were suppressed and ceased to exist; the chain remained broken for a period of years; and the present Institute is as purely a growth of the Revolution, the Empire, and the Restoration as the old Academies were the growth of the monarchical régime which pensioned Corneille and refused Christian burial to the bones of Molière.

Of the five classes or Academies which form the Institute two are particularly famous, namely, the Académie Française and the Académie des Sciences. Of these we shall speak at some length, but first of all let us devote a few lines to the three others. The Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres is composed of forty members, ten unattached members, ten foreign associates, and fifty corresponding members. It derives its title, not from the study of inscriptions, but from the fact that the origin of this Academy was

a commission formed in the Académie Française, and charged with composing inscriptions for the commemorative medals struck by Louis XIV.; hence its old name was Académie des Inscriptions et Médailles. The domain of this Academy is the learned languages, antiquities, monuments, Oriental literature, history both diplomatic and literary; and its chief object is to continue the execution of the vast scheme of erudition and research begun by the Benedictines in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is an Academy about which the general public hear very little, but which nevertheless does great and durable work by its publications concerning the history of France, and by preparing documentary monuments like the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, of which the guiding spirits are MM. Renan and Oppert.

The Académie des Beaux-Arts is composed of forty members, divided into five sections, fourteen painters, eight sculptors, eight architects, four engravers, and six musicians. Besides the titular members there are ten unattached members, ten foreign associates, and fifty corresponding members.

"Do you often attend the sittings of the Académie des Beaux-Arts?" I asked one of the most distinguished of its members. "What takes place at the meetings? What is the use of the Academy?"

"I attend perhaps once or twice a year," was his reply. "The sittings offer no interest whatever, and that is why



TYPE OF A MEMBER OF THE ACADEMY OF BELLES-LETTRES.

I never go. The Academy is supposed to work at a dictionary of the fine arts, but this is more or less a myth. The Academy, as you know, controls and awards the Prix de Rome and a few other prizes."

"But as an Academy," I resumed, interrogatively, "one may say that it has only an honorific existence?"

"Certainly. At least so it seems to me, though I have no doubt all my colleagues would not agree with me. Some of them attend meetings regularly and read papers. Meissonier, I believe, is assiduous. I remember last year seeing the great man going up the staircase as if he was a youngster of twenty. Some of the men who have leisure like to go there to gossip."

The Academy of Moral and Political Sciences

numbers forty members, who are divided into five sections, which deal with the subjects headed respectively Philosophy, Morals, Jurisprudence, Political Economy and Statistics, and General and Philosophical History. This Academy has six unattached members, six foreign associates, and forty-eight corresponding members, amongst whom is the historian Bancroft. It may be remarked that the above classification is not the best that could be made or the most modern. Philosophy nowadays is not so much a science by itself as the spirit of all the sciences. Morals or ethics, again, are scarcely a science. As regards History likewise, it may be asked what advantage there is in separating the study of the original documents from the literary and philosophical study of the subject. This Academy publishes Mémoires containing its official labors and reports, and a periodical Bulletin which contains the studies undertaken by members on their own initiative.

When the Institute was founded the Academy of Physical and Mathematical

Sciences was called the First Class, and comprised sixty members, while the class of Moral and Political Sciences comprised thirty-six, and the class of Literature and Fine Arts forty-eight members. Thus the scientific men were assured a certain preponderance over the others in the general deliberations of the Institute—a fact which testifies strongly to the rationalist ideas of



A LEARNED MEMBER OF THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

the authors of the renovation of French society. This Academy was divided into ten sections, and nowadays its organization remains very much the same as it was nearly a century ago, although in the mean time the relative importance of the different sciences has greatly changed. The present Academy is composed as follows: two perpetual secretaries; eleven sections, under the titles of Geometry, Mechanics, Astronomy, Geography and Navigation, General Physics, Chemistry, Mineralogy, Botany, Rural Economy, Anatomy and Zoology, Medicine and Surgery, each section composed of six members, making in all sixty-six. To this number must be added eight foreign associates, ten unattached Academicians, and one hundred corresponding members.

From the point of view of its connection with the history of the progress of science in France we may overlook the few years of interruption occasioned by the events of the Revolution, and thus we shall find that the Academy of Sciences has had a regular existence and continu-

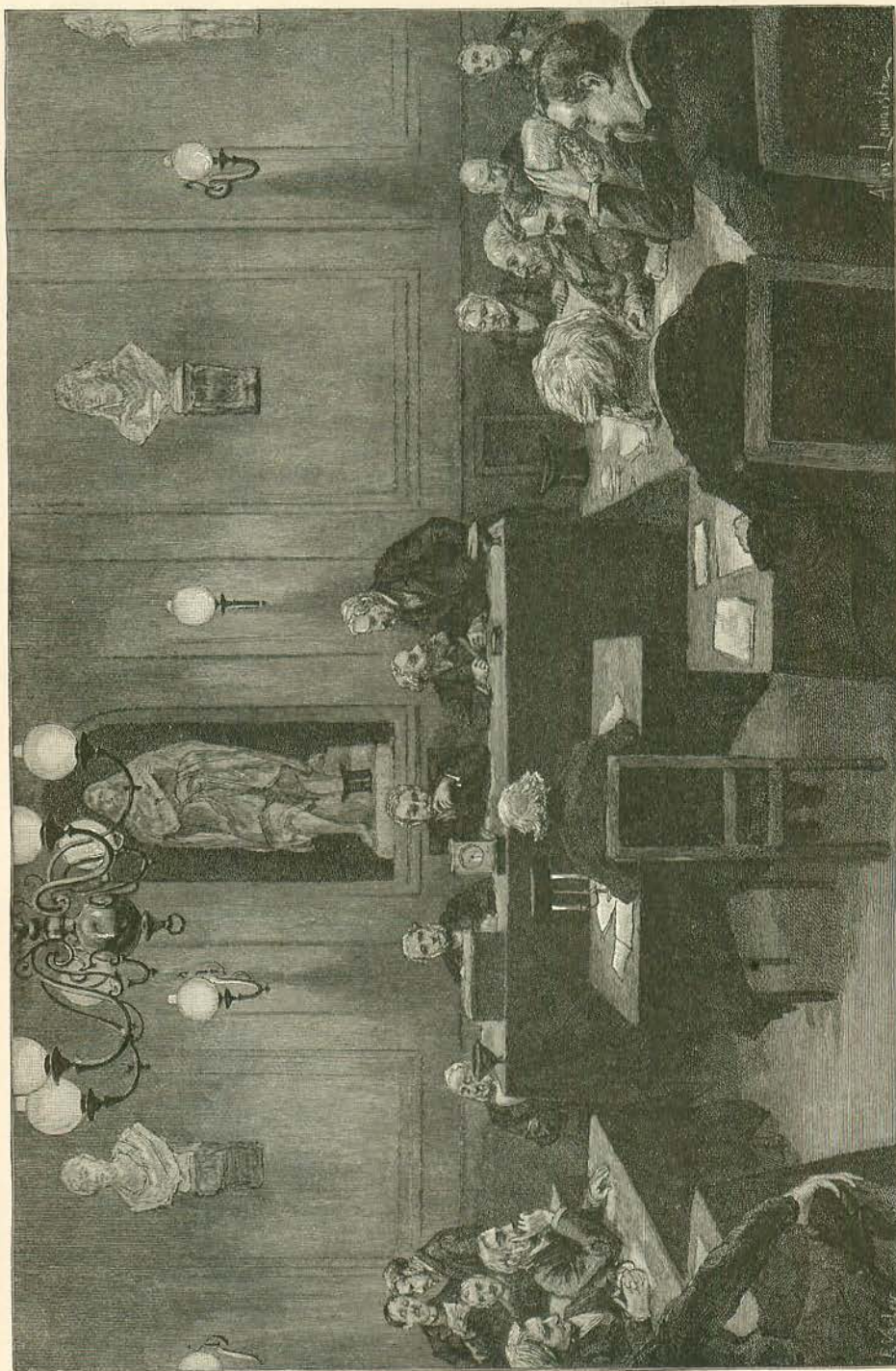
ous archives for more than two hundred years. Originally a group of scientific men, amongst whom were Gassendi, Descartes, Blaise Pascal and his father Étienne Pascal, used to meet privately on stated days at the house of one of their number; their works attracted public and royal attention; and in 1666 Colbert, who was then elaborating his grandiose schemes for the advancement of the arts and sciences, gave these savants an assembly-room in the King's library in the Rue Vivienne, and attached thereto certain moneys, to be devoted to pensions and to the payment of the cost of experiments. The first regular meeting of the Royal Academy of Sciences took place on December 22, 1666, and, thanks to the enlightened protection of the King, guided by Colbert, the Academy at once prospered, and began the publication of that series of *Mémoires de l'Académie des Sciences* which contributed so remarkably to spread the taste and forward the development of scientific research both in France and in all other civilized countries. In 1699 his Majesty gave this Academy a definitive constitution and new rules, and also more spacious and magnificent rooms for its assemblies and its growing collections in his own palace of the Louvre, where the Académie Française, the Academy of Inscriptions and Medals, the Academy of Painting and Sculpture, and the Academy of Architects already held their meetings. The rooms occupied by the Academy of Sciences were those at present known as the Salle Henri II., the Salon des Sept Cheminées, and another room occupied by the Musée Campana. The visitor, as he passes through these rooms, where the pictorial and antiquarian treasures of the Louvre are now displayed, may amuse his mind for a moment with the souvenir that it was between these walls that the old Academy held its most glorious sittings, when it counted amongst its members men whose names were Malebranche, Fontenelle, Condorcet, Buffon, Lavoisier, Laplace, Turgot, the Cassinis, Lamarck, Jussieu; and amongst its foreign associates Huygens, Leibnitz, Euler, Priestley, Hunter, and Benjamin Franklin. It was in these rooms that the famous Mesmer attempted in vain to submit his experiments in animal magnetism to the illustrious company—an attempt which enabled him to write the only graphic description which we

possess of a séance of the old Academy. The director of the Academy, Le Roi, undertook to present Mesmer, who thus narrates the incident:

“As the Academicians arrived they formed themselves into private committees, where I presume different scientific questions were discussed. I imagined that when the Assembly was large enough to be considered complete, the divided attention of the members would be fixed on one single object. I was mistaken; each one went on with his particular conversation; and when M. Le Roi wished to speak he begged in vain for attention and silence. His perseverance in this prayer was even sharply taken up by one of his colleagues, who told him that he would neither listen nor be silent, and that he might as well leave the memoir on the bureau, so that those who pleased might read it. M. Le Roi was not more successful in the announcement of a second novelty. A second colleague prayed him pass to a less hackneyed subject, for the peremptory reason that he was making himself a regular bore. Finally a third announcement was brusquely qualified a charlatanism by a third colleague. Happily there had been no mention of me in all this. I lost the thread of the séance, and reflecting over the sort of veneration which I had always had for the Academy of Sciences of Paris, I concluded that it was essential that certain objects should be seen only in perspective. Reverenced from afar, they are not much when seen in close quarters.”

During the Revolutionary period the Academy, besides its usual work, was consulted by the government on all kinds of questions concerning education, finance, war, naval affairs, and agriculture, and its most considerable work was the elaboration of a new system of weights and measures, the uniformity of which had been ordained by a law passed in 1790. But finally, in 1793, the Academy of Sciences was suppressed by decree of the Convention.

Two years later, 25th October, 1795, the Institute was created, on bases which resembled in many points the grand project conceived by Colbert more than a century before, and after sitting for a few years in the old rooms in the Louvre, the different Academies were finally installed in 1806 in the Palais des Quatre Nations, or Collège Mazarin, where they now sit.



Renan. Hervoy de St. Denis.

Michael Bréal, President.

A LECTURE AT THE ACADEMY OF INSCRIPTIONS AND BELLES-LETTRES.



M. FAYE, ASTRONOMER.

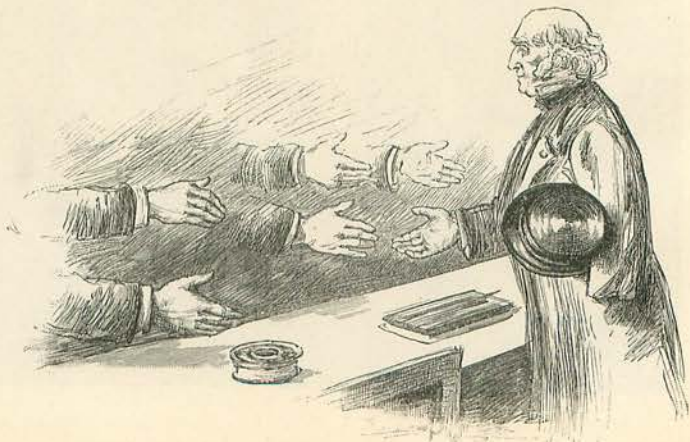
The question may be raised: in what does the work and utility of this Academy consist? What is its collective influence on the development of science?

In the schemes of the centralization of the labors of the human mind which presided over the foundation of the Institute, the physical and mathematical sciences were allotted to the Academy of Sciences, and its object and attributions were defined thus: "To perfect the sciences and arts by uninterrupted researches, by the publication of discoveries, by correspondence with learned societies abroad; to follow up all scientific works that may conduce to general usefulness and to the glory of the Republic."

In every point this is an antiquated and quixotic conception of things. Collective researches,

according to official indications, have rarely resulted in great success. The old Academy of Sciences wasted thirty years of collective efforts in the chemical study of plants by dry distillation before it perceived the nullity of its method. Afterward it devoted itself with more success to encyclopedic work; that is to say, to describing known facts and recording acquired truths. The really great services that the old Academy of Sciences rendered were above all in its astronomical and geodesic labors, which were really executed by a few specialists of genius, like Cassini.

The principal business of the present Academy is to meet every Monday in order to hear about the work of its members, to listen to reports on the work of foreign savants, and to receive communications, whether from corresponding members or from outsiders. These meetings are public, and generally very animated and interesting, if only for the variety of the faces and the distinction of their owners. As it was in Mesmer's time, so nowadays, every meeting of the Academy of Sciences begins in a confusion of greetings and conversational groups. M. Chevreul, the famous chemist, is invariably the first to sign the presence list, and the weather must be very severe indeed if the wonderful centenarian does not attend the meeting of his Academy. Vice-Admiral Paris, keeper of the Marine Museum in the Louvre, enters the room smiling and hearty, and immediately a score of hands are extended to shake the one hand which the fortunes of war have left the brave sea-



VICE-ADMIRAL PARIS SHAKING HANDS.

man. Then follow the astronomers Janssen and Faye; Lesseps, who shakes hands with everybody; Freycinet, ex-Minister,

learned in alchemy; and a score of others, each one eminent in his specialty. But, just as in Mesmer's time, each one



JETON DE PRÉSENCE—M. CHEVREUL SIGNING THE PRESENCE SHEET.

whose aspect and movements have given him the sobriquet of "the white mouse"; Pasteur, of microbe renown; Berthelot,

seems to pay no attention to the official business of the séance; the president and the secretary read reports, but nobody

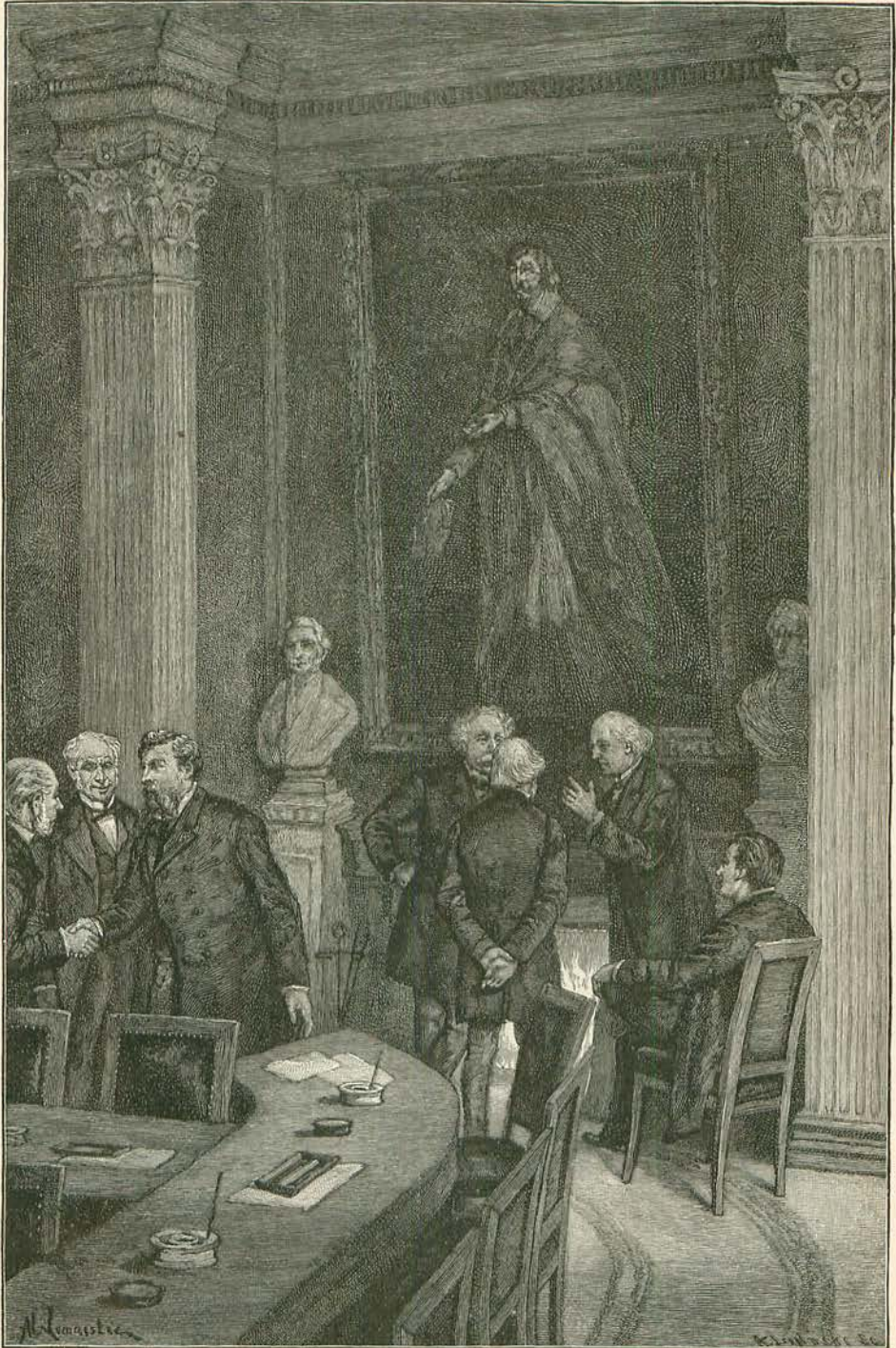
seems to listen; this one is busy distributing his latest pamphlet; another one is writing letters with feverish haste; others are talking in groups; others are wandering round the labyrinthine tables and greeting their colleagues. On great occasions, of course, the aspect of the séance is different, and practical demonstrations, such, for instance, as Dr. Brown-Séquard's explanation of his apparatus for analyzing the air breathed by consumptive patients, will rivet the attention of the majority of the members present. But generally the sittings of the Academy of Sciences strike the visitor as rather incoherent and useless, and after vainly trying to follow the proceedings, he will finally amuse himself by observing the wonderful diversity of craniological formation which the heads of the distinguished company offer to his view.

At the meetings of this Academy there are seats set apart for the journalists who report the proceedings for the daily papers. Indeed, the newspaper men have been the cause of great transformations in the spirit and action of the Academy of Sciences; one may even say that the press has rendered many of its attributions antiquated and useless. When Arago first obtained the admission of the press to the sittings of this Academy, fifty years ago, and when the publication of a weekly Bulletin was begun about the same time, the Academy at once gained largely in notoriety, and acquired a wide-spread fame as an oracle; but at the same time the great publicity given to its acts enabled public opinion to criticise those acts with more or less competency, and to break down the barrier of respect which had hitherto surrounded the institution. The presence of the journalists interfered with free and unceremonious discussion; the publication of the press notices and of the weekly Bulletin and of the long articles of specialist journals has almost entirely put an end to the reports which used to be read on the works and memoirs submitted to the Academy. In the natural course of things the daily, and particularly the scientific, press has, so to speak, taken the bread out of the mouth of the Academy of Sciences; on the other hand, the publicity given to the proceedings has caused the results of scientific research to converge toward the Academy; but the Academy, although its opinions carry great weight, is no longer absolute judge of

those results. Competent men disseminated over the surface of the earth are able to form their own opinion with the facts laid before them by the scientific press, and have no need to wait for the tardy publication of the costly and antiquated memoirs of the Academy. The correspondence of the Academy with native and foreign savants is likewise a superannuated legacy of the past. The press has rendered useless this system of correspondence, which had its *raison d'être* when Louis XIV. was King, when there were few scientists in the world, no periodicals, and no well-organized post-office system. Thus it appears that the actual labors of the Academy of Sciences have diminished greatly in importance in consequence of the national progress of things, and chiefly on account of the growth of the newspaper and specialist press. So far as concerns research, the Academy of the present day is not nearly so important a body as it was in the last century; its influence on the movement of science is exercised nowadays by the prizes that it gives, and by its elections, which are also in a way the recompense of scientific merit. The present rôle of the Academy of Sciences is to encourage talent and to absorb it. Indeed, the authority of the Academy depends not upon any traditional prestige, but upon its actually counting amongst its members all the distinguished French scientists of the day, all the men who are accomplishing great work in science. In the opinion of one of its most distinguished members, M. Berthelot, the Academy of Sciences, "if it no longer has the initiative of discoveries, at any rate presents a dike against charlatanism, and opens liberally its wide publicity to the works of French and foreign savants. It subsists with the majesty of an old institution, strong in the glory of its members and in the souvenir of the services that science has rendered and still renders every day to human societies."

The budget of the Academy of Sciences at the time of its foundation by Louis XIV. was 12,000 francs a year, which sum was devoted to making experiments, buying books, and paying various expenses. As for the members of the Academy, they figured on the King's pension list for annual allowances of from 800 to 2000 francs. On the same list of "*Pensions et gratifications accordées aux gens de lettres*" fig-





Nisard. Doucet. Palleron.

Dumas. Legouvé. Leconte de Lisle.

Coppée.

MEETING OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY.

ured the names of Molière, 1000 livres a year, and Corneille, 2000 livres. In 1666 Louis XIV. spent 42,300 livres on pensions and gratifications given to native talent, and to "divers foreigners who excel in all kinds of sciences, whose merit his Majesty wished to recompense." During the last century the budget was considerably increased; the pensions of Academicians were regularized at the figures of 500, 1200, 1800, and 3000 livres; the system of "jetons de présence" was established; and

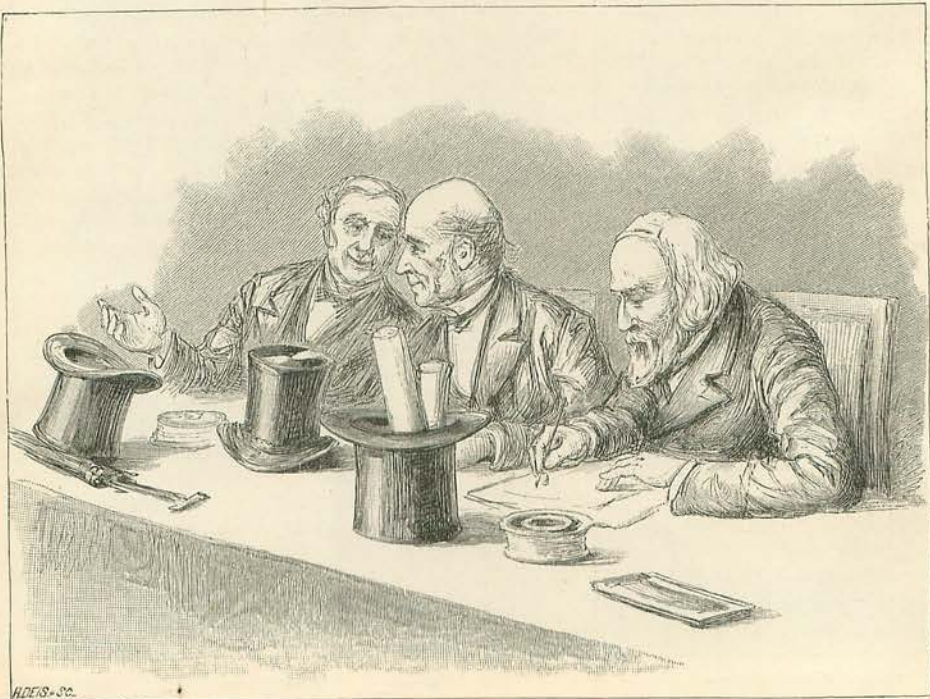
in 1792 the budget of the Academy, pensions and all expenses included, reached the sum of 95,370 livres 10 sols.\*

Each of the Academies forming the Institute of France holds weekly meetings in the Palais Mazarin, and once a year, on October 25th, the five Academies hold a public meeting in common. The Institute is under the supreme patronage of the Minister of Public Instruction, whose budget makes provision for the salary of members, for the presence fees, for prizes,

\* At the present day the budget of the Academy of Sciences stands as follows:

	francs.
1. The members of the Academy are divided into the eleven sections which compose it, at the rate of six members per section; the Academy is therefore composed of sixty-six members and two perpetual secretaries; each of these members receives an annual indemnity of 1500 francs .....	99,000
2. Besides the titular members, there exists, since 1816, a class of 10 free Academicians, who receive no indemnity except the presence fee, or "jeton de présence." For each member this fee is reckoned at an annual total of 300 francs .....	3,000
3. The indemnity paid to each of the perpetual secretaries is 6000 francs .....	12,000
4. The Academy receives for the publication of its Mémoires and of its Comptes Rendus a sum of .....	54,000
5. The publication of the <i>Mémoires des Savants étrangers</i> requires .....	14,000
6. The above publication enjoys at the Imprimerie Nationale for gratuitous printing a credit of .....	4,000
7. The budget provides for a prize of .....	3,000
The total budget of the Academy of Sciences in 1887 was .....	189,000

As regards clerks' work, the Academy of Sciences, like the other Academies, depends on the Secrétariat of the Institute, which is composed of a chief, five clerks, two ushers, and two servants, who divide between them about 30,000 francs a year. The above total of the budget of the Academy does not include its prize fund, which will be mentioned further on.



BROWN-SÉQUARD PREPARING HIS SPEECH, ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.



BROWN-SÉQUARD EXPLAINING AN EXPERIMENT AT THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

and for all the current and regular expenses of the five sections. Each of the Academies manages its own special property and funds through the intermediary of commissioners chosen amongst the members, and acting under the authority of the Minister of Public Instruction.

The Academic prizes form quite an important element in French literary and scientific life, because most of them are destined to encourage and reward researches and works of erudition which no author could undertake if he had to depend on the profits of his book alone. Then the Institute awards, every two years, a prize of 20,000 francs on the proposition of each of the five Academies alternately, so that in turn this prize will be given to a historian, a reader of hieroglyphics, a scientific man like Pasteur, or an artist like the sculptor Mercié. The Academy of Sciences awards every year nearly fifty prizes, representing a money value not far short of 200,000 francs. The Académie Française has thirty foundations, representing annually some 130,000 francs. The three other Academies dispose of prizes to the value of nearly 200,000 francs. Thus the prizes annually distributed by the five sections of the Institute exceed in total value half a million francs. To these existing foundations will eventually be added a part of the enormous revenues accruing from the domain of Chantilly, by which the

prize fund will be probably doubled. It will be curious then to see what the members of the Institute will do with their money. The natural thing will be for them to ameliorate their own lot first of all by increasing their appointments, for evidently the management of such considerable funds and the task of awarding so many prizes will justify them in demanding more than their present salary, which is that of a century ago. This salary of members of the Institute, of whatever Academy or section, was fixed by the Conseil des Cinq-Cents by a law dated 19 Messidor, an IV. (7th July, 1796), and the same body determined the manner of payment, namely, 1200 francs by right and 300 francs by presence fees. These latter fees are lumped together in each class, and divided amongst those present only. In the different Academies this presence fee amounts nominally to about six and a half francs. At the Académie Française, for instance, if all the forty members were present, each one would receive this sum, but as all the members rarely attend at one time, the *jeton de présence* becomes worth more, thanks to the lumping together and division; finally, on wet days, in normal times, the presence fee will be worth as much as two napoleons, so few Academicians will come to share the spoil. I remember the only time I ever dined in company with Labiche—it was a Thursday in midwinter—that fa-



VOTING AT THE INSTITUTE.

mous comic writer was boasting that he had that afternoon braved snow and sleet to attend the weekly meeting of the Académie. "Tout de même, j'ai gagné mes quarante francs aujourd'hui," he said, gleefully.

Of all the sections of the Institute the Académie Française is the best known and the most popular: I had almost said the most fashionable, and the epithet would not be entirely misplaced, for the Academy plays a social rôle perhaps more prominent even than its literary rôle. The history of the Academy is too well known to need repeating. For our purpose it suffices to say that the old Academy founded by Richelieu perished with the throne of Louis XVI.; it was suppressed and destroyed like all the other Academies in 1793; but as soon as the National Convention had leisure to think of literature and the arts of peace, after the more imperious cares of the Reign of Terror and the proscriptions, aspiring to leave to posterity a durable and enlightened Republican régime, it founded the Institute in 1803 by these words:

"There is for the whole Republic a National Institute charged with centralizing discoveries and perfecting the arts and sciences."

Concerning the Academy particularly, the decree of the Convention says:

"It is especially charged with making a dictionary of the French tongue; as regards language, it shall examine important works of literature, history, and science. The collection of its critical ob-

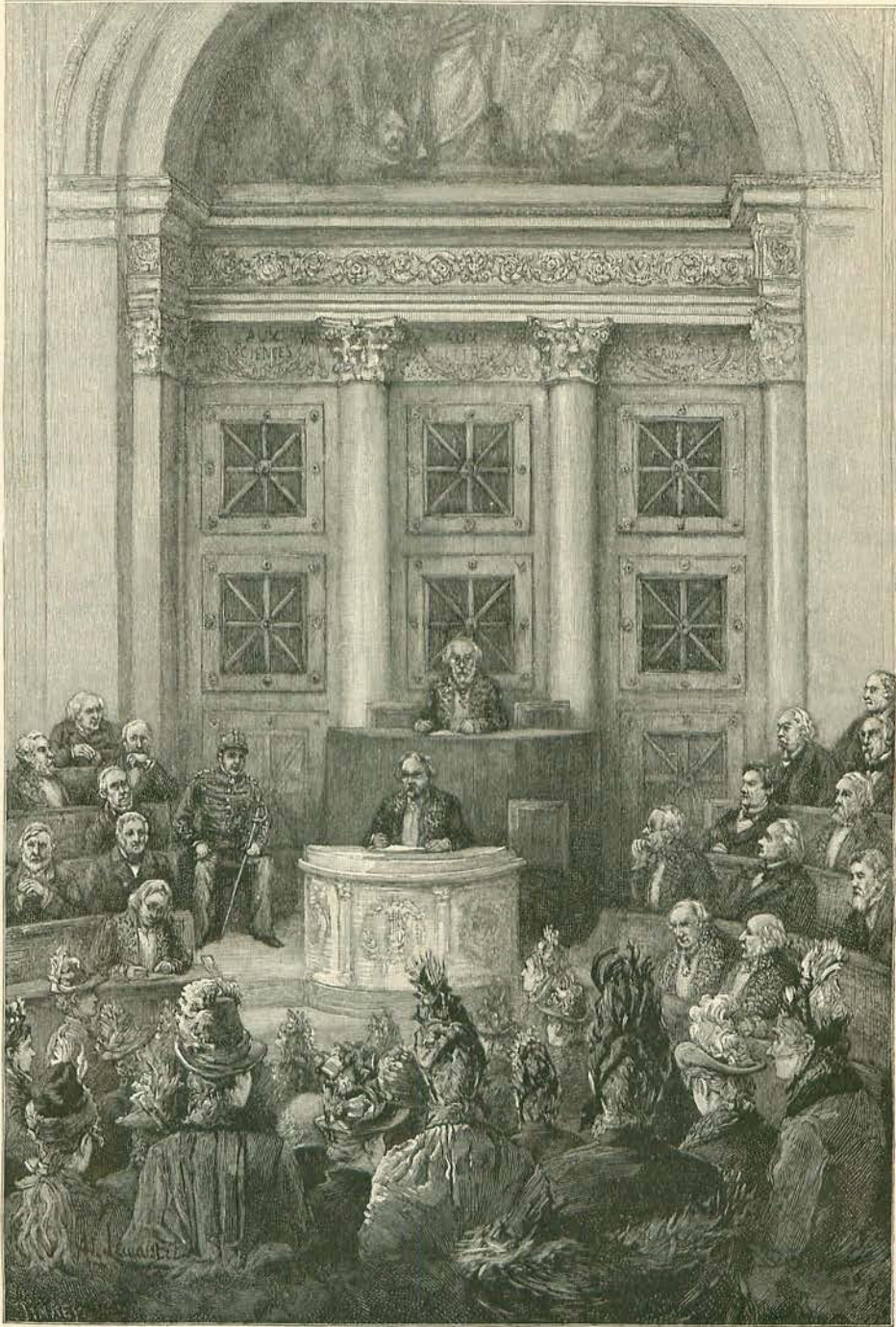
servations shall be published at least four times a year."

The laws of the Academy are almost the same now as they were under the old régime. It is composed of forty members, whose officers are a director and a chancellor, who are elected for three months, and a secretary, elected for life, who bears the title of Perpetual Secretary. Its sittings take place every Thursday, and in

May it holds a public sitting for the distribution of its prizes, on which the Perpetual Secretary reads an extended report. The Perpetual Secretary of the Academy, who is at present M. Camille Doucet, has great influence; he may, if he wishes, be virtual governor of the institution; for he never misses a séance, while the ordinary Academicians attend irregularly or absent themselves altogether in the summer. The Perpetual Secretary knows all the questions that will be submitted at a meeting; it is he who prepares them, who proposes them, and who, if he has tact, influences their solution by the way in which he colors them. He has the first and last word in all discussions; he is the guardian of the traditions of the Academy, which he may remember or forget, as he thinks proper; he draws up the minutes of the meetings; in the public séances he is the official mouth-piece of the company; his salon is the salon of the Academy itself; in brief, the Perpetual Secretary is the personification of the Academy.

So much for the organization and ideal programme of the Academy. Now let us come to the reality. The Academy does not publish critical observations on anything; and as for its historical dictionary of the French language, which was begun in 1852, and is still in preparation, M. Renan himself has publicly announced that it will be ready for issue in twelve hundred years only, according to the most moderate calculations.

Then what does the Academy do? It holds meetings, it distributes prizes, and



PUBLIC MEETING OF THE FIVE ACADEMIES OF THE INSTITUTE, JOSEPH BERTRAND PRESIDING.



M. HÉBERT, SCIENTIST.

fulfils its social duties. The Academy, it has been said, is the most select club in Paris, and around its fireplace may be heard some of the best talk of the day. The pity is that this talk can only be heard by members of the Academy. The echoes of it that reach the outer world are vague and distorted, and often calumnious; at least so we are told by the Academicians themselves, who are naturally jealous of the reputation and authority of their body.

But in what does this authority consist? Is the Academy the acknowledged guardian of the purity of the French tongue? Are its judgments in literature beyond appeal? Does the public pay heed to the sentences of the Forty? During the first quarter of the present century the authority of the Academy was uncontested. Traces of a polemical spirit begin to be manifested in its reports only toward 1824, when, having come to regard itself as an orthodox sanctuary, the Academy as a body denounced the new movement which was growing up under the vague and complex title of "romanticisme," or of the romanticist school. Members of the Academy in these circumstances made use of the ecclesiastical terms "orthodoxy," "sect," and "schism," and so began that long war between the classicists and the romanticists. Ever since, the Academy has held a conservative attitude full of suspicion toward novelty and audacity, accepting only after years of resistance reputations

which the public has long acclaimed, and gradually abandoning its strictly literary composition in order to admit elements of purely conventional distinction. Politics, too, have played a certain rôle in the history of the Academy. Since the reorganization of the Institute in 1803, France has experienced six different governments, the Empire, the Restoration, the reign of Louis Philippe, the Republic of 1848, the Second Empire, and the present Republic. Of these the Academy seems to have preferred the first three; and even now that the Republic is so firmly fixed in France, the Academy still manifests Platonic leanings toward Orleanism, and a certain distrust and dislike of democracy. But this phenomenon will not excite astonishment when it is remembered that one of the most active and influential of Academic "whips" is the grandson of Madame de Staël, "his Impertinence," the Duc de Broglie, whose chief joy in life is to envelop every election in meshes of intrigue so fine and subtle that his Italian ancestors from their Elysian retreat must look down with pride and satisfaction at their Machiavelian successor. Since the failure of his *coup d'état* under Marshal Macmahon, the ambassador and conspirator of the early years of the Republic has been reduced to a condition of *strenua inertia*; but being a man of Italian suppleness and gayety, he consoles himself with society, gossip, and a certain dry taste for letters, and by listening to his



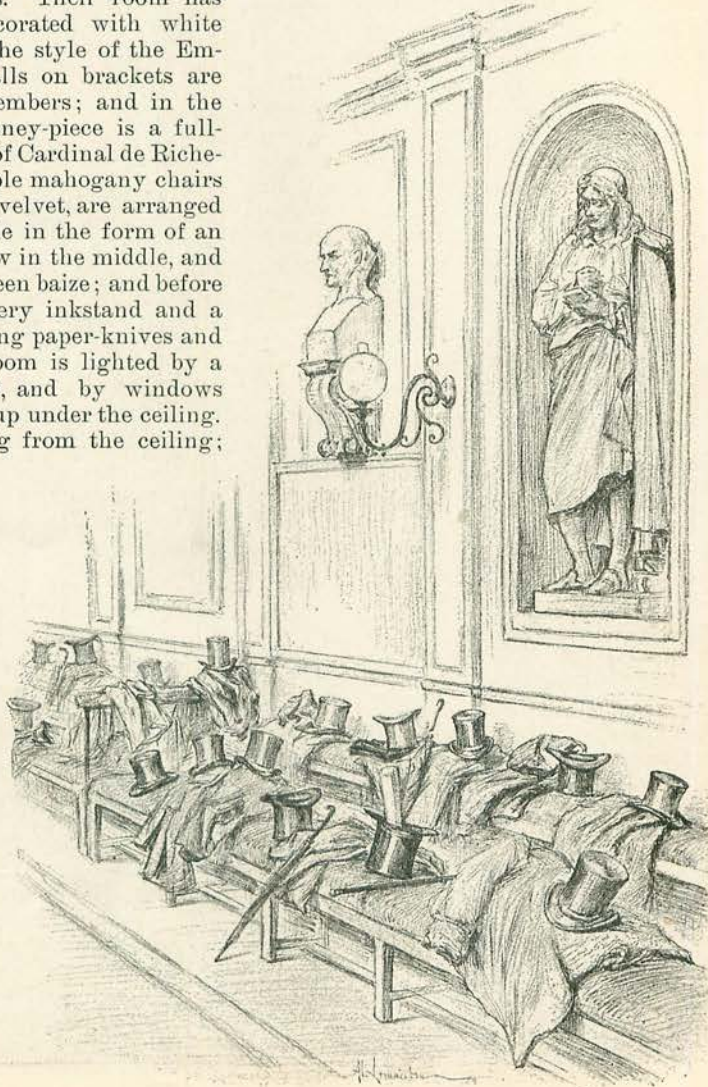
DR. CHARCOT.

own grating, shrill, and spluttering voice in the salon of the Rue Solferino, over which presides the Princess Victor de Broglie, the dauphine of the house, the duke himself being a widower.

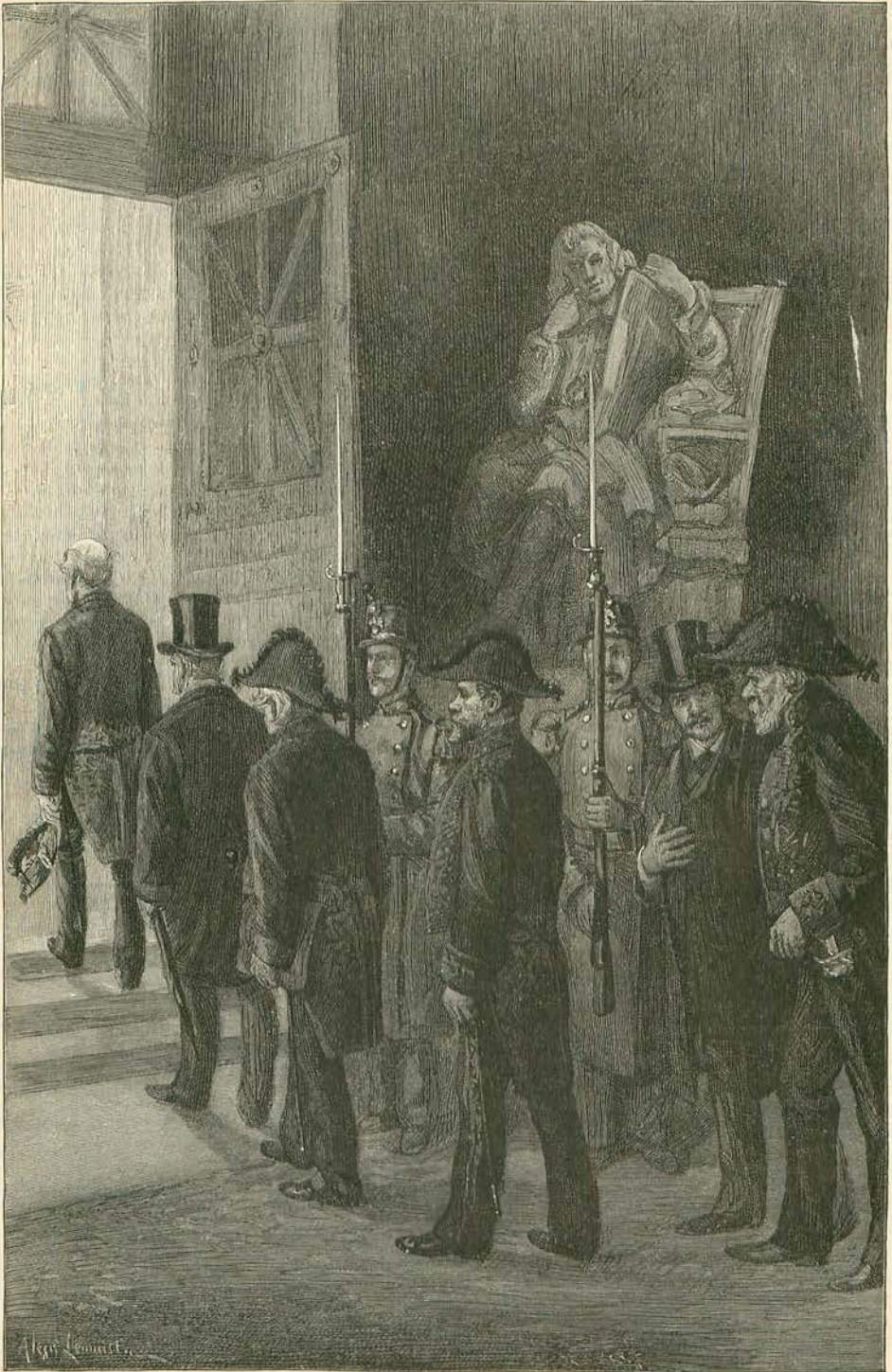
The French Academy holds two kinds of séances, the first for itself, the second for a privileged section of the public. The ordinary weekly meetings are held every Thursday, in a room on the first floor of the Institute building communicating with the larger room where the Academy of Sciences sits. As they go in, the forty immortals generally deposit their hats and coats on the benches of the Academy of Sciences. Their room has an arched roof, decorated with white stucco "rosaces" in the style of the Empire; around the walls on brackets are busts of deceased members; and in the recess over the chimney-piece is a full-length portrait in oil of Cardinal de Richelieu. The seats, simple mahogany chairs upholstered in black velvet, are arranged around a narrow table in the form of an elongated oval, hollow in the middle, and covered with faded green baize; and before each seat is a crockery inkstand and a wooden tray containing paper-knives and pen-holders. This room is lighted by a window in the roof, and by windows along one wall high up under the ceiling. Two gas lustres hang from the ceiling; but the Academicians, being old-fashioned and aristocratic, prefer candles, and in an adjoining closet the inquisitive visitor may see a green card-board box with an inscription in a clerkly hand, "Chandeliers," and on opening the box he will find it full of silver candlesticks. This is all that an outsider can say about the ordinary meetings of the Academy, for they are secret and mysterious, and all the information that the best reporter can obtain may be summed up in the

stereotyped paragraph: "The French Academy held its usual weekly meeting yesterday afternoon. Messieurs X., Y., and Z. were present. *Ces messieurs* worked at the Dictionary."

The public meetings of the Académie Française are held three or four times a year, on the occasions of the reception of new members, and of the spring distribution of prizes, whether for literary merit or for impecunious virtue. On these galadays the Dictionary is hidden away. Many of the Academicians don their embroidered uniforms, which they them-



THE HATS OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY.



Bonnat.

Massenet. Ambroise Thomas.

L'ENTRÉE DES ARTISTES.



selves irreverently call "wearing parsley," gird on their little swords with mother-of-pearl handles, have their hair nicely combed and curled, and prepare to withstand the scrutiny of a fair and fashionable audience. The meeting is held in what was formerly the chapel of the Collège des Quatre Nations, a very small amphitheatre with tribunes and galleries—altogether a most primitive, incommodious, and chilly place, the general aspect of which reminds one strongly of a mausoleum.

If you are a simple mortal without influence or protection, you will be able at best to obtain only an unnumbered ticket for a gallery; and in order to get a decent place you will have to stand outside for hours, awaiting the opening of the doors; and then, when the fatal moment comes, you will make a rush for the front seats at the risk of breaking your neck in the dark staircase. Whenever a reception excites especial curiosity the *queue* at the doors of the Institute begins to form at seven or eight o'clock in the morning, although the doors are not opened until one o'clock. Many send their servants, or hire commissioners, to keep a place in the *queue*, which they themselves come and occupy in time to join in the rush. It would be easy, of course, to avoid this cruel *queue* by numbering all the places in the room, and by giving only just so many tickets as there are places; but the tradition of the Institute is opposed to such a change. If, on the other hand, you are fortunate enough to enjoy the esteem of Pingard, the factotum of the Institute, or if you are acquainted with a member of the Academy, you will receive a ticket for the amphitheatre or hemicycle, in which case you may lunch at leisure, see all the fun, and enter the room at the last moment, through what we may call the *entrée des artistes*, with the ambassadors and the blue-stockings of the first grade. In the court-yard of the Institute the carriages arrive and deposit Academicians and fine ladies at the foot of the mossy old steps; there are greetings and bowings and silvery feminine laughs; the vestibule fills with celebrities of both sexes, who crowd the infantry soldiers drawn up in line at the foot of the statues, and ready to present arms when the big dignitaries of the Academy arrive; amongst the privileged are some who have come to a reception for the first time, and

who linger to admire the fine statues that are hidden away in the dark corners of this long and cobwebby antechamber, La Fontaine, Molière, Corneille, d'Alembert, Napoleon in his imperial robes, and Montaigne in no robe at all.

An usher with a silver chain round his neck discreetly opens a door, you descend a few carpet-covered stairs, and behold you are beneath the dome of the Institute, and Pingard, with insinuating gestures, invites you to sit on a very narrow bench.

The light striking down from the windows in the drum of the cupola is pale and cold; the atmosphere is slightly charged with suave perfumes of heliotrope, iris, and Spanish leather; there is a perpetual frou-frou of feminine vestures and a whispering of indistinct conversations. Everybody seems penetrated with respect. You examine the room. How chilling and severe! The very statues of Bossuet, Fénelon, Descartes, and Sully seem to be shivering in their niches. And that little curly-headed bust high up on one wall facing the bureau, with the inscription, "À la vertu," why is it there? And those three doors over which are written the words, "Sciences, Lettres, Arts," are we to attach any significance to the fact that the central door, the door of "Lettres," is barred by the bureau of the Academy, and therefore inexorably and inevitably closed?

Half the amphitheatre reserved for the members of the Institute is deserted and silent, for these great men are still gossiping in the court-yard; the other half is occupied by a worldling and literary public, in which the women predominate. As you look around you see nothing but pretty faces, pretty hats, pretty smiles, waving fans, opera-glasses raised to recognize a friend, and lowered to acknowledge a salute. Everybody knows everybody, at least by sight. Here is the famous blue-stocking and poetess Madame A., and the celebrated novelist Madame B., who will never be allowed to enter Paradise even if they become as mighty geniuses as George Sand, who, by-the-way, held that the Academy is a remnant of literary feudalism, useless both for men and women alike. Here are the society ladies who receive Academicians—Madame Buloz, whose salon is that of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and the traditional vestibule of the Institute; the Mar-

quise de Blocqueville, in whose old-world rooms on the Quai Malaquais the Academicians invariably go to take tea after their weekly sittings; the Comtesse Potocka, who has an Academic lunch party on Sundays; and Madame Auberon, who rules conversation with a silver bell, against which even M. Renan does not venture to rebel. Hence the story that in the course of one of these Academic dinners, while some other celebrity was speaking, M. Renan made as if he would utter articulate sounds, but the hostess promptly suppressed him. Then when his turn came round Madame Auberon tinkled her bell and gave M. Renan leave to speak. "Alas, madame," replied the great sceptic, "it is too late; I wished to ask for a second helping of spinach."

Here and there are novelists, poets, dramatists who are paying court to the Academy, and hoping to get elected one of these days. Here is B., who has just had a feeble novel jobbed into the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. B. has married a rich and pretty wife with a view to opening an Academic salon, and so achieving immortality. His pretty wife is beside him in a delicious toilet, specially created for the occasion by that great artist Epinglard. She is particularly gracious to Z., who has written a few witty pieces, and who, being rich and an epicure, is "running for" the Academy on the strength of his good dinners. Z. is a rival who must be conciliated. Next to Z. are some pretty American girls, whose piquant beauty and vivacious talk have won them the protection of the belle Madame P., who also receives Academicians at dinner, and talks literature with an awkwardness as charming as the natural *gaucherie* with which women play at billiards. Madame P. is conspicuous with her royal blue velvet robe, but she is not dressed with such good taste as her neighbor Mlle. R., of the Comédie Française, who happens to be sitting near two equally obese and famous men, Blowitz, the correspondent of the *Times*, and Sarcey, the dramatic critic. Sarcey has been present at every Academic reception during the past twenty years, and in the evening he always delivers a public lecture on the event, and re-reads fragments of the reception speeches as he thinks they ought to be read.

But one o'clock strikes; a thrill of impatience runs through the audience; a

movement is heard in the lobby. "*Presentez Arrrrmes!*" The door opens, and the Academicians and various members of the Institute enter, the dignitaries passing first, clad in gala costume. There is a little tumult, some hand-shakings, a certain haste to find a seat, some salutations waved gracefully to certain great dames amongst the audience, which cranes its neck and seeks to recognize the immortals; and there is Dumas, looking handsome and haughty; there is Sardou, posing for a Holbein; Renan, whose features call to mind those of the regretted comedian Hyacinthe of the Palais Royal; Taine, whose obliquity of vision has helped him to take queer views of Napoleon and other historical characters; Gaston Boissier, the mellifluous cicerone of ancient Rome; John Lemoine, Jules Clarétie, and Édouard Hervé, who represent journalism; Leconte de Lisle, Coppée, and Sully Prudhomme, a trinity of poets; Augier, whom the indulgent call the modern Molière; Pailleron and Halévy, who personify the lighter stage; Jules Simon, Octave Feuillet, Camille Doucet, and Legouvé, who consider the Academy to be the centre of the universe, and nothing less than Paradise; Rousse, Duruy, Cherbuliez, Mgr. Perraud, de Lesseps, d'Haussonville, Mézières, and the other Academicians whose names the public can never remember.

But enough of the spectacle in the house and of the spectacle on the stage. Let us come to the ceremony of the reception itself. And here let it be remarked that the traditional "fauteuil" is an archaeological snare; the members of the Academy and of the different sections of the Institute do not sit in arm-chairs, or even in chairs without arms; the only sitting accommodation they have consists of benches covered with faded green velvet. The Academic "fauteuil" is a fiction based on a fact. In the old Academy founded by Richelieu, Louis XIV. desired that the most perfect equality should reign between all the members, whatever their social rank or condition might be. For a long time the Academicians used to sit in simple chairs; but one day the old Cardinal d'Estrées, having asked for an easier seat, the King gave orders for forty arm-chairs exactly alike to be placed in the Academy, so that no member should be in any way distinguished from his colleagues. Such was the origin of the "fauteuil," the traditional symbol of the Aca-

demic dignity. So then we will suppose that the immortals and the other members of the Institute have settled themselves on the benches. In the centre of the hemicycle is the bureau of the Academy, the director and his assessors, the perpetual secretary, M. Camille Doucet, the récipiendaire, or victim, and his two sponsors, all clad in strange attire, embroidered with brilliant green leaves, and carrying cocked hats and innocuous swords, according to the model devised by Napoleon I.

The sitting having been opened, the "récipiendaire" rises and reads a eulogy of his deceased predecessor, which lasts about an hour, but which he has taken a year to prepare. Then the Academician charged with receiving the new-comer rises in his turn, and during another hour says disagreeable things to him, always in the politest terms. Verily the art of bitter insinuations and perfidious euphemism has been brought to a high pitch of perfection beneath the cupola of the Institute.

At about three o'clock the ceremony is over. The court-yard of the Institute and the Quai Conti present a gay and animated appearance. Some of the Academicians go away on foot, others in cabs, others in smart coupés, while the heroes and the orators of the séance are surrounded by groups of charming ladies, who congratulate them and invite them to dinner; for a new Academician is always overwhelmed with invitations—a fact which caused Labiche to say, after he had been elected and received at the Academy, "Tiens! je ne savais pas qu'on était nourri" (I did not know that we were boarded into the bargain).

Such, in its main outlines, is the aspect of a reception at the French Academy. So far as concerns the public and the actors, the annual public meeting of the Academy, held in May, is much the same; the programme, however, is more varied.

We may safely say, I think, that the Anglo-Saxon regards with considerable respect the Institute of France and its best-known section, the French Academy. In their heart of hearts the French themselves respect it too, but nevertheless they have persisted in scoffing at it ever since its foundation. Saint-Evremond began the game with his comedy *The Académiciens*, and since then the fire of epigrams has never ceased except during the Revolution, when the target was suppressed.

On the other hand, Sainte-Beuve in his correspondence depicts the true man of letters as pursuing his career "with love and dignity, with happiness in producing, with respect for the masters, welcome for the young, and friendly intimacy with his equals, and so arriving at the honors of the profession, that is to say, the Institute." But the trouble is that a Frenchman can rarely enter the doors of the Institute, or, at any rate, of the French Academy, without sacrificing something of his independence. When the poet François Coppée was elected to the Academy he was obliged to give up his weekly theatrical article in *La Patrie* newspaper in order to avoid criticising the works of his colleagues of the Académie—Augier, Dumas, Sardou, Pailleron, and Labiche. Auguste Vacquerie has repeatedly refused to become a candidate at the Academy, although his election was certain: he will not sacrifice one atom of his independence of thought and of pen. The same is the case with Alphonse Daudet and half a dozen other distinguished French writers, who will never become members of the French Academy so long as its organization remains what it is. "The Academy," said Sainte-Beuve, in a private conversation, "is horribly afraid of Bohemians. If the Academicians have not seen a man in their salons, they will not have anything to do with him. They dread him. He is not a man of their sphere." It was for social and sartorial reasons of this nature that the Academy des Beaux-Arts refused to have anything to do with the sculptor Rude. One of the reasons which the French Academy alleged for refusing Balzac was that he had debts; and Alfred de Musset was for a long time kept waiting at the door because his cravats were not tied as correctly as the Academicians desired. The great Dumas was rejected because he had collaborators, although the same fact had not stood in the way of Monsieur Scribe; Baudelaire and Flaubert were pronounced ineligible because their books had no immediate moral utility; and the only reason found for not encouraging Gautier was that he had long and abundant hair, whereas a perfect Academician ought to be baldish at least. Indeed there is a good deal of truth in the paradoxical definition of the Academy as the most exclusive club in Paris, a place where fine manners and courtly bearing enable a man to shine

with more brilliancy than talent and originality.

When the old Academy was first founded it was not necessary for candidates for election to solicit the suffrages of the body; but one Armand d'Andilly having been elected, and having declined the honor, it was decided that in future, in order to avoid a similar humiliation, none should be elected unless he had solicited election. This rule was maintained when the present Academy was founded;\* and now every man who considers himself distinguished enough to merit immortality is obliged to put on his hat, coat, and gloves, hire a cab by the hour, and go from house to house to make thirty-nine, thirty-eight, or thirty-seven visits, according to the number of Academicians who have died in the course of the year.

During its existence of 250 years the French Academy, the old and the new, has numbered many illustrious Frenchmen in its ranks; but there has always been an imaginary forty-first arm-chair in which public opinion has seated an illustrious victim of the neglect or caprice of the occupants of the forty real arm-chairs, or some independent spirit who could not force himself to solicit the honor of admission. The occupants to whom public opinion has attributed this imaginary arm-chair have been Descartes, Pascal, Scarron, Molière, Jean Baptiste Rousseau, Bayle, Saint-Simon, Regnard, La Rochefoucauld, Le Sage, the Abbé Prévost, Vauvenargues, Piron, Jean Jacques

\* In modern times Thiers is the only exception to this rule. Being in 1833 Minister of the Interior, and in the full glory of his political career, the author of the *Histoire de la Révolution* abstained from all visits, and simply charged his friends with informing the Academy of the honor that he was disposed to show that body by allowing himself to be elected.

Rousseau, Diderot, Joseph De Maistre, Mirabeau, Beaumarchais, André Chénier, Rivarol, Paul Louis Courier, Lamennais, Stendhal, Louis Veillot, Michelet, Balzac, Théophile Gautier, Alexandre Dumas the elder, and amongst the living Edmond de Goncourt, Alphonse Daudet, and Théodore de Banville.

An establishment like the Institute of France, with its various Academies, it is said, has no practical use; all the branches of art and science which it was destined to protect have become emancipated; the painters and sculptors were the last to shake off the trammels of state protection and the rule of the Institute; now all work freely. The Institute is a grand relic of the past, ornamental, if you please to find it so, and capable of conferring honor, provided it does not set itself in opposition to the life and youth of the country. So say the innovators.

On the other hand, whatever may be her taste and desire for liberty, France is a country where authority does not displease when it has the prestige of antiquity and form. The authority of the various Academies of the Institute is exercised in an almost entirely honorary and remuneratory measure which can scarcely give permanent umbrage. Then, again, the Institute, by the gift of Chantilly, is destined to become very rich, and riches may induce the most independent spirits to bow the knee. Nevertheless, come what may, the conditions of modern intellectual life are such that no institute and no academy can confer such honor as simple and spontaneous public opinion. Nobody desires to demolish the Institute; but it is more than doubtful if modern democracy would think of creating an institute if one had not already been conceived and established.

## COMMENTS ON CANADA.

BY CHARLES DUDLEY WARNER.

### I.

THE area of the Dominion of Canada is larger than that of the United States, excluding Alaska. It is fair, however, in the comparison, to add Alaska, for Canada has in its domain enough arctic and practically uninhabitable land to offset Alaska. Excluding the boundary great lakes and rivers, Canada has

3,470,257 square miles of territory, or more than one-third of the entire British Empire; the United States has 3,026,494 square miles, or, adding Alaska (577,390), 3,603,884 square miles. From the eastern limit of the maritime provinces to Vancouver Island the distance is over three thousand five hundred miles. This whole distance is settled, but a considerable por-