

former name. The Restoration gave back the ancient privileges, and the second empire and third republic brought no more changes to this famous society.

Thus, to-day, the Academy forms a part of the Institut national, but preserves its primitive appellation. It is composed of forty members, often called "The Forty Immortals," probably from the motto on their crest, "À l'immortalité." They are elected by the company, but they must themselves seek that honor. A refusal must be a hard blow, yet we see that Zola is not yet discouraged though he has made thirteen attempts to gain admission. To become a member is this epicurean novelist's greatest ambition. As he thinks his work entitles him to that distinction, he says that he will present himself on each successive vacancy. But the society has too much decency to accept him. Neither Zola nor Daudet can succeed in their attempts. Only eminent talent or indefatigable labor opens the doors of the academy. Thus the greatest honor that can be conferred on a French writer is to be elected a member of it. If the institution can be accused of having sometimes (and it is very seldom), admitted authors unworthy of such distinction, chiefly on account of their rank and political influence, it can on no ground be blamed for having accepted those who have worn the green coat and cocked hat since the establishment of the republic of our days. These are writers of undeniable merit, whose works form by themselves a whole literature.

The Academy's first object was to purify the French language. In this task it has nobly succeeded. The first edition of its celebrated Dictionary appeared in 1694, and the sixth, which is also the last, in 1895. Each word of it was discussed by the members, so that the work was exceedingly long, but the innumerable services it has rendered, have amply repaid the labor spent in its composition. The speeches of reception, of which one is made on the admission of each member, have afforded many masterpieces of modern eloquence. But do these orations, and the other works of the laureates, or even the Dictionary itself, give the true measure of the grandeur and utility

of the company? No, we must not consider it under this head, if we wish to estimate justly of what use it has been, and is yet to-day. In a country where letters have had such an extraordinary influence, it is at the Academy that they have found the most complete organization, as well as the most striking and lasting association of their strength. A public character, a regular and well-recognized authority, independence, dignity, all these conditions of power the Academy has possessed and through it they have been insured to letters. This is really the great work of the Academy. By its constitution, by its liberties, by the spirit it has given to letters, by the place it has conquered for literature in French society, it has bestowed invaluable gifts on literature. Besides it encourages in the nation the taste for intellectual effort. What young writer, thinking that perhaps he may one day become a member of that renowned society, does not exert himself to the utmost to create a masterpiece? What honor for him when he has produced a noble effort, to see it crowned by the Academy? Already a few of our French Canadian writings have obtained that distinction. Is not this the greatest commendation they could receive? It may be well to say in reference to the crowning of a book, that two conditions are necessary, besides, of course, the rare merit it must possess; firstly the author must be living, secondly, the work must be in its first edition.

The most famous exponents of French literature have entered the portals of the Academy and immortalised it. We name but a few; Corneille, Racine, Voltaire, Boileau, la Fontaine, Bossuet, Massillon, Fenelon, Lacordaire, Mirabaud, Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo, Lamartine, Alfred de Musset, Dupanloup. Strange to say, many eminent authors, for some reason or other, have never belonged to it. Such are Molière, Descartes, Pascal, Piron, J. B. Rousseau. The Academy, however, repaired the injustice done to Molière, by having his bust placed in its room with the inscription:

Rien ne manque à sa gloire; il manquait à la nôtre.