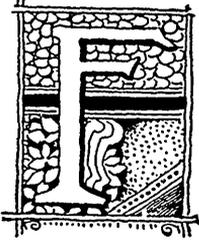


THE FRENCH ACADEMY.



FOR centuries past a famous institution has exerted an immense influence on the literature of France. Established with the view of making of letters a last-

ing national monument, the French Academy has gloriously achieved its purpose. When the society was founded, the nation had already produced several remarkable authors. Rabelais and Montaigne in prose, Marot, Rousard and Régnier in poetry, had displayed a witty and sparkling style. However they had that particular disadvantage of writing in a language that was yet in its period of formation. A standard authority was needed to give it the finishing touch. Then arose the Academy which, removing the literary barrier, was the vanguard of that wonderful Augustan-age army that was to cast such immortal splendour on the reign of Louis XIV.

It is interesting to see how the Company originated. Already in the most brilliant salons, French litterateurs had discussed the existing evil. The Hotel de Rambouillet had seen gathered in it the most illustrious men and women of the seventeenth century. Rousard and Malherbe had each been the head of a school devoted to the same cause. But the task was too arduous and too long to be finished by these single efforts. It was reserved to the Academy to become the authority by which all difficulties concerning language were henceforth to be settled. When Richelieu, that enterprising politician, heard that a literary club had been founded by Conrart and his friends, he asked if these persons would not assemble regularly and under a "public authority."

It was evidently not an institution of short duration that the Cardinal wished to establish, nor an elegant salon where letters are not at home. The state was to recognise it as a new order in the kingdom. The offer was accepted, the society took the name of "l'Académie Française" and Richelieu was appointed protector. The patent letters were received early in 1635.

Thus that penetrating genius, perceiving that the intellectual grandeur of France was about to take gigantic strides, came to its assistance and led it in the path of fame. If in all his actions the domineering spirit was seen, yet Richelieu had a patriotic instinct of what tended to his country's glory. The founding of the Academy would have been of itself sufficient to immortalize him. And the Cardinal's hopes have been realized. Two centuries and a half have consecrated the Academy in the respect and admiration of the world. It would be too long to give even its abridged history; in fact it is that of French literature. Let it suffice to point out the changes which this illustrious company had to undergo. After the death of Richelieu, the protectors were successively Ségnier, Louis XIV., Louis XV., and Louis XVI. The revolution, which then broke out, showed no more regard for literature, than it had done for the king and for religion. The Academy, suspected of fostering monarchical ideas, and accused of constituting an intellectual aristocracy, was suppressed in 1793, by order of the Convention. Two years later, however, the "Institut national" was founded, which, incorporating the Academy, gave also a part to arts and science. Yet such was the enmity held towards everything of Bourbon origin, that the academy was not allowed to take its