

AT THE ACADEMY.

Session of November 23, 1843.

CHARLES NODIER.--The Academy, yielding to custom, has suppressed universally the double consonant in verbs where this consonant supplanted euphoniously the d of the radical ad.

MYSELF.--I avow my profound ignorance. I had no idea that custom had effected this suppression and that the Academy had sanctioned it. Thus one should no longer write atteindre, approuver, appeler, apprehender, etc., but ateindre, aprouver, apeler, apréhender?

M. VICTOR COUSIN.--I desire to point out to M. Hugo that the alterations of which he complains come from the movement of the language, which is nothing else than decadence.

MYSELF.--M. Cousin having addressed a personal observation to me, I beg to point out to him in turn that his opinion is, in my estimation, merely an opinion and nothing more. I may add that, as I view it,

"movement of the language" and decadence have nothing in common. Nothing could be more distinct than these two things. Movement in no way proves decadence. The language has been moving since the first day of its formation; can it be said to be deteriorating? Movement is life; decadence is death.

M. COUSIN.--The decadence of the French language began in 1789.

MYSELF.--At what hour, if you please?

October 8, 1844.

This is what was told to me at to-day's session:

Salvandy recently dined with Villemain. The repast over, they adjourned to the drawing-room, and conversed. As the clock struck eight Villemain's three little daughters entered to kiss their father good night. The youngest is named Lucette; her birth cost her mother her reason; she is a sweet and charming child of five years.

"Well, Lucette, dear child," said her father, "won't you recite one of Lafontaine's fables before you go to bed?"

"Here," observed M. de Salvandy, "is a little person who to-day recites

fables and who one of these days will inspire romances."

Lucette did not understand. She merely gazed with her big wondering eyes at Salvandy who was lolling in his chair with an air of benevolent condescension.

"Well, Lucette." he went on, "will you not recite a fable for us?"

The child required no urging, and began in her naïve little voice, her fine, frank, sweet eyes still fixed upon Salvandy:

One easily believes one's self to be somebody in France.

1845.

During the run of M. Ponsard's "Lucrece", I had the following dialogue with M. Viennet at a meeting of the Academy:

M. VIENNET.--Have you seen the "Lucrece" that is being played at the Odéon?

MYSELF.--NO.

M. VIENNET.--It is very good.

MYSELF.--Really, is it good?

M. VIENNET.--It is more than good, it is fine.

MYSELF.--Really, is it fine?

M. VIENNET.--It is more than fine, it is magnificent.

MYSELF.--Really, now, magnificent?

M. VIENNET.--Oh! magnificent!

MYSELF.--Come, now, is it as good as "Zaire"?

M. VIENNET.--Oh! no! Oh! you are going too far, you know. Gracious!

"Zaire"! No, it is not as good as "Zaire".

MYSELF.--Well, you see, "Zaire" is a very poor piece indeed!

AN ELECTION SESSION.

February 11, 1847.

Thirty-one Academicians present. Sixteen votes are necessary.

First ballot.

Emile Deschamps 2 votes.

Victor Leclerc 14 "

Empis 15 "

Lamartine and M. Ballanche arrive at the end of the first ballot. M. Thiers arrives at the commencement of the second; which makes 34.

The director asks M. Thiers whether he has promised his vote. He laughingly replies: "No," and adds: "I have offered it." (Laughter.)

M. Cousin, to M. Lebrun, director: "You did not employ the sacramental expression. One does not ask an Academician whether he has *promised* his vote, but whether he has *pledged* it."

Second ballot.

Emile Deschamps 2 votes.

Empis 18 "

Victor Leclerc 14 "

M. Empis is elected. The election was decided by Lamartine and M. Ballanche.

On my way out I meet Leon Gozlan, who says to me: "Well?"

I reply: "There has been an election. It is Empis."

"How do you look at it?" he asks.

"In both ways."

"Empis?---"

"And tant pis!"

March 16, 1847.

At the Academy to-day, while listening to the poems, bad to the point

of grotesqueness, that have been sent for the competition of 1847, M. de Barante remarked: "Really, in these times, we no longer know how to make mediocre verses."

Great praise of the poetical and literary excellence of these times, although M. de Barante was not conscious of it.

April 22, 1847.

Election of M. Ampere. This is an improvement upon the last. A slow improvement. But Academies, like old people, go slowly.

During the session and after the election Lamartine sent to me by an usher the following lines:

C'est un état peu prospere
D'aller d'Empis en Ampere.

I replied to him by the same usher:

Toutefois ce serait pis
D'aller d'Ampere en Empis.

October 4, 1847.

I have just heard M. Viennet say: "I think in bronze."

December 29, 1848. Friday.

Yesterday, Thursday, I had two duties to attend to at one and the same time, the Assembly and the Academy; the salt question on the one hand, on the other the much smaller question of two vacant seats. Yet I gave the preference to the latter. This is why: At the Palais Bourbon the Cavaignac party had to be prevented from killing the new Cabinet; at the Palais Mazarin the Academy had to be prevented from offending the memory of Chateaubriand. There are cases in which the dead count for more than the living; I went to the Academy.

The Academy last Thursday had suddenly decided, at the opening of the session, at a time when nobody had yet put in an appearance, when there were only four or five round the green table, that on January 11 (that is to say, in three weeks) it would fill the two seats left vacant by MM. de Chateaubriand and Vatout. This strange alliance, I do not say of names, but of words,--"replace MM. de Chateaubriand and Vatout,"--did not stop it for one minute. The Academy is thus made; its wit and that

wisdom which produces so many follies, are composed of extreme lightness combined with extreme heaviness. Hence a good deal of foolishness and a good many foolish acts.

Beneath this lightness, however, there was an intention. This giddiness was fraught with deep meaning. The brave party that leads the Academy, for there are parties everywhere, even at the Academy, hoped, public attention being directed elsewhere, politics absorbing everything, to juggle the seat of Chateaubriand pell-mell with the seat of M. Vatout; two peas in the same goblet. In this way the astonished public would turn round one fine morning and simply see M. de Noailles in Chateaubriand's seat: a small matter, a great lord in the place of a great writer!

Then, after a roar of laughter, everybody would go about his business again, distractions would speedily come, thanks to the veering of politics, and, as to the Academy, oh! a duke and peer the more in it, a little more ridicule upon it, what would that matter? It would go on just the same!

Besides, M. de Noailles is a considerable personage. Bearing a great name, being lofty of manner, enjoying an immense fortune, of certain political weight under Louis Philippe, accepted by the Conservatives although, or because, a Legitimist, reading speeches that were listened to, he occupied an important place in the Chamber of Peers; which proves that the Chamber of Peers occupied an unimportant place in the country.

Chateaubriand, who hated all that could replace him and smiled at all that could make him regretted, had had the kindness to tell him sometimes, by Mme. Récamier's fireside, "that he hoped he would be his successor;" which prompted M. de Noailles to dash off a big book in two volumes about Mme. de Maintenon, at the commencement of which, on the first page of the preface, I was stopped by a lordly breach of grammar.

This was the state of things when I concluded to go to the Academy.

The session which was announced to begin at two o'clock, as usual, opened, as usual, at a quarter past three. And at half past three--

At half past three the candidacy of Monsieur the Duke do Noailles, *replacing* Chateaubriand, was irresistibly acclaimed.

Decidedly, I ought to have gone to the Assembly.

March 26, 1850. Tuesday.

I had arrived early, at noon.

I was warming myself, for it is very cold, and the ground is covered with snow, which is not good for the apricot trees. M. Guizot, leaning

against the mantelpiece, was saying to me:

"As a member of the dramatic prize committee, I read yesterday, in a single day, mind you, no fewer than six plays!"

"That," I responded, "was to punish you for not having seen one acted in eighteen years."

At this moment M. Thiers came up and the two men exchanged greetings. This is how they did it:

M. THIERS: Good afternoon, Guizot.

M. GUIZOT: Good afternoon, Monsieur.

AN ELECTION SESSION. March 28, 1850.

M. Guizot presided. At the roll call, when M. Pasquier's name was reached he said: "Monsieur the Chancellor--" When he got to that of M. Dupin, President of the National Assembly, he called: "Monsieur Dupin."

First ballot.

Alfred de Musset 5 votes.

M. Nisard is elected.

To-day, September 12, the Academy worked at the dictionary. A propos of the word "increase," this example, taken from the works of Mme. de Staël, was proposed:

"Poverty increases ignorance, and ignorance poverty."

Three objections were immediately raised:

1. Antithesis.
2. Contemporary writer.
3. Dangerous thing to say.

The Academy rejected the example.