The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE


Founded by Edward C. Hegeler

THE SHIELD OF ATHENE

Upon which the great sculptor Phidias incorporated his own portrait.

(See page 312.)

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THE GOLDEN AGE OF GREECE.

Mural Painting by Kaulbach in the New Museum at Berlin.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.
THE THIERS FOUNDATION.¹

A UNIQUE FRENCH INSTITUTION.

BY LUCIEN ARRéAT.

NEVER has the subject of education received more attention than in our day, but too often has this important social problem been wrongly stated. For instance, it has been proposed that there is no need of taking into account either the duties of the time or the qualities of the race; it has been thought that we could instantaneously mold brains and make them fruitful simply by artificial methods. The psychological conditions of genius, or to express it more moderately, of invention and work, remain the same as formerly. But the economic conditions of life, the means of study and the very needs of science have changed, since science itself has become so complex and so prolific that a division of intellectual labor has resulted which has been carried to the point of compromising the vitality and range of intelligence by the dispersion of forces or by the requirements of specialization.

These changed conditions demand new institutions. The danger of too great a dispersion of forces must be prevented by grouping and relating men's minds even if we are hardly able to combine or carry on several departments of science at once.

The Thiers Foundation in Paris, however, is an institution which does this—an institution I mean whose object is to respond to these new needs and to create useful relations among young men chosen from a select number. The attention of foreign nations has begun to be directed to it, especially of intellectual leaders in Ger-

¹ Translated by Lydia G. Robinson.
many, as is testified by a work of Prof. Hermann Diels (Volume I of the publication *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*, Berlin and Leipsic, 1906) and also by a recent article by Prof. H. Schoen in the *Deutsche Rundschau* (September 1911); and even from the United States, although itself so fertile in new ideas, come interested inquiries regarding the origin, management, purpose and results of this institution.

LOUIS ADOLPHE THIERS.
Historian and Statesman.

The Thiers Foundation bears the name of the statesman of world-wide fame who played the most conspicuous part\(^2\) in France in the second half of the nineteenth century. Its existence is due to the affectionate offices of Madame Thiers and her sister, Made-moiselle Dosne.

In the closing days of her illness which proved to be her last, Madame Thiers, actuated by the desire to honor the memory of

\(^2\) A part, moreover, which has been most variously judged.
her illustrious husband in a worthy manner and by a lasting memorial, sent for their oldest friend, M. Mignet, and in the presence of her sister laid before him the plan which she had worked out in great detail. This project, involving as it did considerable expense, was not to be put into execution until after the death of Mlle. Dosne who was her only heir.

But Mlle. Dosne preferred to carry out her sister’s plans in her own lifetime. After the death of Madame Thiers, she gathered together the friends of M. Thiers, Messieurs Mignet, Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire and Jules Simon, and together they discussed plans for the Foundation, drew up by-laws and appointed an administrative council. By a deed dated December 17, 1892, Mlle. Dosne presented the Foundation with a fine estate situated at the Rond-Point Bugeaud at the entrance of the Bois de Boulogne on which the building, planned by the architect Aldroff, was almost completed. At the same time she endowed it with sufficient capital to provide for carrying on the establishment besides presenting it with the
library, maps and engravings which the statesman had left. April 29, 1893, the Foundation was formally recognized as an institution of public utility. On the first day of the following May its doors were opened to its first beneficiaries.

According to a note dated April 6, 1882, and signed by M. Mignet and Mlle. Dosne, Madame Thiers “intended that young men already distinguished by their learning and intelligence should be admitted into this school to complete their education and to per-

fect themselves in the study of science, philosophy and history, to which M. Thiers had devoted himself with so much zeal whenever his consecration to the interests of his country allowed him sufficient leisure.”

The manner in which the beneficiaries are chosen satisfies these conditions as we shall see. We find among their number philosophers, historians, geographers, jurists, philologists, chemists, literary men and mathematicians. Catholics, Protestants and Israelites meet each other there, and it seems that the petty political passions

MADEMOISELLE DOSNE.
THIERS FOUNDATION.
Front view from the Rond-Point Bugeaud.

THIERS FOUNDATION.
Taken inside the gate.
which are the poison of our country and our time have hitherto not exercised any influence in their selection. Moreover this was one of the conditions expressly stated by the donor.

As to the thought which primarily gave rise to this school, it may be that the personal affairs of Thiers provided the first impulse. Born at Marseilles in 1797, of tradespeople impoverished by the revolution, he had known in his youth the vexations of moderate circumstances. He was admitted to the bar at Aix-en-Provence in 1820, but did not stop to practice, looking at once for higher situations to which the rich gifts of his mind enabled him to aspire. It was at Aix-en-Provence that he became acquainted with Mignet who was a native of that city and his elder by several years. Together they went to Paris where fortune called them, each carrying with him the manuscript of a "History of the French Revolution." Thiers took up journalism, and later engaged actively in politics. His efforts were directed toward the reinstatement of the younger branch of the Bourbons, and he was made one of the leading ministers of the July monarchy. During the eighteen years of the second empire he took no part in public affairs. Every one knows the part it was given him to fill after the war of 1870 as chief executive and first president of the republic. His "History of the Revolution" and especially his "History of the Consulate and of the Empire" remain reference works of note. In addition to these we must mention writings on political and social economy, such as the little volume "On Property" which he wrote in opposition to the communist theories of 1848.

Accordingly, it is not at all surprising that when Thiers looked back upon the beginning of his career he should have conceived the idea of an institution which would assure a select number of gifted young men for some years an independence equally advantageous to the quality of their work and to the dignity of their character. Nor do I agree with Professor Schoen in thinking it necessary to have recourse to the inspiration of Fichte—although I do not disregard his great significance in this respect—in order to find the origin of the Foundation, whether the idea was due to Thiers himself or was suggested to Madame Thiers by one of their friends. Every fact is related to every other fact and comes in its own time. Moreover these questions of priority are of but very slight importance, and it is the institution itself which we shall here try to understand and describe.

The Foundation has been given an annual appropriation of 150,000 francs in order to assure its operation and to render it inde-
pendent of the state, an essential condition of internal liberty and of fidelity to the thought of the founders. Beside the danger of trouble-
or, more correctly, by the spirit of the Higher Normal School. It has escaped this danger by the personnel of the administrative board which connects it more closely with the Institute of France so that it is permeated by a much broader atmosphere.

The first council consisted of M. Hauréan, the first superintendent, member of the Academy of Inscriptions and Literature; Georges Picot of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences; Léon Aucoc of the same academy, formerly division-president in the State Council; Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire of the same academy, formerly minister of foreign affairs; and Octave Gréard, member both of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences and of the French Academy and vice-rector of the Academy of Paris.

M. Jules Girard, of the Academy of Inscriptions and Literature followed M. Hauréan as superintendent (1896-1902). He in turn was succeeded by the present superintendent, M. Emile Boutroux of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, who is fitted to fill this delicate position by his prominence as a philosopher and his distinguished personality.

Besides the superintendent, the present council consists of a university man, M. Croiset; a politician who is now a minister of state, M. Alexandre Ribot; a savant, M. Lippmann; and a journalist, M. Francis Charmes, editor of the Revue des Deux-Mondes.
This board of five members meets at least once a month, a fee of 100 francs for attendance being allowed to each of its members. At the beginning of each year it chooses five from the many candidates for the annual appointment. It receives the superintendent's report of the work of the present beneficiaries and inquires into the needs and labors of former ones.

The election of the superintendent takes place every five years. He is taken from the membership of the council and can be re-elected. Mademoiselle Dosne herself appointed the members of the first council. Since her death in 1906, when a member of the council dies four electors are added to the remaining members, and these electors are chosen in rotation from the secretaries of the five academies composing the Institute of France, the deans of the four faculties (letters, science, law and medicine) and the heads of the Collège de France, the Higher Normal School, the Charter School, the School of Fine Arts, and the School of Moral and Political Sciences. Each new member of the council is elected for four years; he may be, and always has been, reelected.

The superintendent, who is always a member of the Institute, receives an annual salary of twenty thousand francs. A treasurer and a librarian live with him in the same house.

It must be remembered that the institution has not been established for the purpose of assisting poor young men; it is intended to form a select group of scholars, and the candidates are chosen according to their qualities alone. They must be of French nationality, not exceeding 26 years of age; they must have performed the requisite military service, and must not be married. Most of them have already passed the difficult competitive examinations for fellowships; many are doctors or licentiates, or are provided merely with a certificate of the higher studies; some are simply Bachelors of the Institute or are recommended because of former work. In short, the ability of the candidates is the only thing that counts. The examinations that they have to pass serve merely as evidence of the qualities required of them.

As we have said, five beneficiaries are appointed annually. They remain at the Foundation for three years. Therefore the house usually contains fifteen students. Each of these receives an annual allowance of twelve hundred francs, and disposes annually of six hundred francs more for scientific travels or other expenses connected with his work. Being thus provided for, he is not allowed to give lessons nor to write for periodicals except with the express permission of the superintendent. The value of this last restriction
can not be overestimated. The time of these young men belongs to science, and it is necessary to guard against the habit of hasty journalism which would tend to divert them from it.

The Foundation has its traditions, and these are preserved and transmitted by the presence of the older members. Much liberty is allowed. No special costume or uniform is required. They are allowed to come and go, to move freely within the house and gardens, to take meals outside, and even to stay out until an hour and a quarter after midnight. Within the house there is no restraint. I hardly need to add that each has his own spacious and airy bedroom and sittingroom to himself, and the institution contains gymnasium, billiard room, baths, etc.

The library, which to-day contains fourteen thousand volumes, has grown from a nucleus of seven thousand belonging to Thiers, many of which are annotated by his own hand. Otherwise the library is designed not so much to contain many or rare books as to provide a very complete bibliography and sufficient means for information and research.

The Thiers Foundation was not designed, as I said before, to aid the deserving poor.\(^3\) No more was it intended to be simply a

\(^3\) There are already enough and even too many institutions which serve this end. Our old orders of society very imprudently swelled the numbers of the proletariat and increased the parasitic character of the so-called liberal professions.
“professorial seminar”; at least it was to guard against becoming one. I am certainly well aware of the necessity of having good professors, but independent workers are as influential leaders of men in their way as are teachers. Thiers, Mignet, and Littre were not professors, and long indeed would be the list of eminent men who have exercised a great influence on education even though they have not taught from the elevation of a rostrum.

It is true that from the halls of the Thiers Foundation have gone many teachers in special lines who are to be found in France, in foreign lands or in the colonies. But there are other young men who have followed a different path. Of the 96 beneficiaries received by the Foundation up to January 1, 1911, we can count (with due allowance for error) two men of letters, three physicians, one lawyer, one magistrate, three managers, three librarians, and one deputy; many are designated simply as doctors of literature or doctors of law.

To sum up, the Foundation welcomes young men of very different abilities. M. Boutroux has rightly emphasized in an article in the Internationale Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik, August 28, 1909, the advantages of this sort of collaboration, in which workers devoted to very different lines of study mingle with each other every day. He says that in this way they are prevented from becoming narrow specialists, ignorant of the work and mentality of others, and of the value of the many different groups of men which make up society.

The Thiers Foundation has been in existence eighteen years. What results can it show? What men has it produced? These are questions which will doubtless be asked by certain philanthropists who can not see beyond the present moment, and who are ambitious to receive returns from their pecuniary outlay in the first year, just as they receive the interest from capital invested in an industrial enterprise. No, we can not create superior men at will. There is neither any method nor institution by which it can be done, and the system of pedagogy which pretends to do so is as deceptive as it is dangerous. We must have favorable soil; that is to say, the cooperation of the times, as I said above. The Thiers Foundation has counted among its number many distinguished members whose works I might enumerate; the majority, moreover, have not yet completed their full contribution. But the value is one whose effects can not be appreciated all at once and yet are not for this reason less important. It is the value of individuals taken collectively. It leaves traces which are not visible; it helps to prepare a rich soil
to bring forth in due time the harvest which can not be hastened or produced by artificial means, and it is this harvest alone which never fails.

It is with sociology as with geology, with the development of our societies as with the formation of the globe. Slow operations, those which can not be discerned at the first glance, count more in this field than violent or sudden operations, although these are the only ones which strike the eye of the mass, or even at times retain the somewhat clumsy attention of the historian.