# OLD NEW YORK AND ITS HOUSES.

NUMBER 7 STATE STREET.

If the gay young people who now happen to live in New York, and who have their homes and their places of pleasure between Union Square and the Central Park, were told that, within the easy memory of people who have not ceased to be gay, and some of whom have few silver streaks or none in their hair, the Battery was a fashionable promenade, and some of the wealthiest and most socially distinguished people in the town lived in the lower part of Greenwich street, in State street, and around the Bowling Green, they would listen with incredulity. Not improbably many of them are ignorant where State street is, or even of its very existence. There is not a city in the world that within fifty years has so changed in its general appearance, in the aspect of particular neighborhoods, and in the character of its various quarters; and of these changes, the last fifteen or twenty years have seen some of the most deplorable and obliterative. A lad of fourteen or fifteen years of age who, born and bred in New York, had gone to Europe or to China in 1850, and had been detained there until now, would on his return be absolutely unable to recognize the place of his birth and his early education, except by the course of its principal streets, and by a very few public buildings and churches. He would come back not yet fifty years old to find the place of his nativity, although it was a great city when he left it, so changed that for him it had practically disappeared. Cities before this have been destroyed, or wrecked by war, by decay, or by convulsions of nature; and been rebuilt, but old New York has been swept out of existence by the great tidal wave of its own material prosperity. Other cities are changed chiefly by additions. New York not only adds to itself, but incessantly rends itself in pieces. Nor is this violence confined, as might be supposed, to the invasion of domesticity by trade; it goes unremittingly on in the oldest trading quarters. A man whose business life has been passed in and about the Rialto of Manhattan told me lately that within his memory Wall street had been three times entirely rebuilt, with the exception of about half a dozen houses. Such changes as these in a city which was a "metropolis," with a character of its own, more than a hundred years ago, are not in all respects advantageous, although, as has already been said, they are worked by the hand of prosperity. In such a city, adventurous men may push their fortunes, and they and the women and children who belong to them may lead a certain sort of prosperous life, accompanied by the enjoyment of certain sorts of pleasure. But such a city cannot be an assemblage of true homes; and it must lack certain admirable and respectable traits—outward, if not inward—which go with stability.

These transformations have not only changed the whole internal appearance of the town and its very look from the streets, even in the old quarters; they have affected the immediately surrounding country on all sides; and the very water seems unlike that over which now mature New Yorkers passed in the steam-boat journeyings of their early youth. The Bay of New York was once one of the famous natural objects of the world's admiration. It was the pride of those who dwelt about it; and traveling strangers who had seen the Bay of Naples and the Golden Horn did not stint their praises of the beauty

HOUSE CORNER OF BRIDGE AND STATE STREETS.

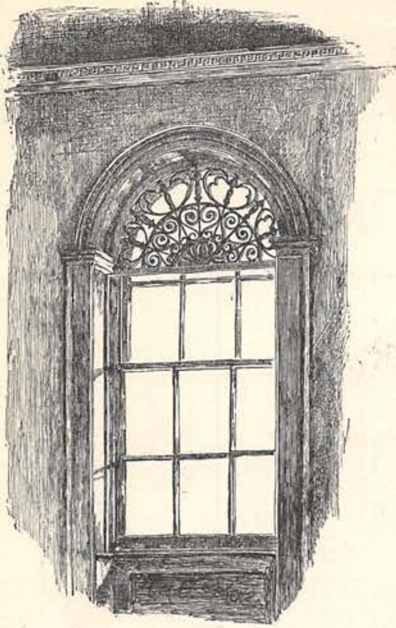
surrounded by which New York sat like a Western Venice upon the waters,—waters at once the source of her wealth and the occasion of her deterioration. But this is all no more. The European traveler no longer compares the Bay of New York to the Bay of Naples; and although even of old there was in this some element of surprise and some stretch of courtesy (for where is our Vesuvius and where our Capri?), it must be confessed that candor cannot condemn his silence. At the time when he was vocal with praise, the approach to New York on all sides was undeniably very beautiful. It had not grandeur, excepting that which always accompanies the visible inclosure of a vast expanse; and the flatness of the scene, even in the remote distance, caused a regret that the hills of Staten Island could not have been heaved up three or four thousand feet, instead of three or four hundred. This defect excepted, however, there was not, nor indeed does it seem that there could be, in the world a more delightful and inspiring sight than the approach to New York was formerly, whether from sea, or sound, or river. On a summer morning, it seemed nature's expression of a universe's joy; on an autumn evening, when the heavens mantled with ever-changing gold and color, and the woods and fields in their rich color were but a paler reflection of the sky, it was Queen-mother Earth in her imperial decoration; and even in winter, when frost-bound shores and surrounding country were white with snow, there was a vast splendor in its icy outlines. The same rivers, the same shores, the same islands are there; the same water in the same bay; but the beauty is gone, or, if not quite all departed, is sadly and meanly minished. Why, it should seem, need not be told. Mere water has no beauty, except as a substance. A spring has in its water the beauty of clearness, but no more; all the other beauty connected with it is that of its position and its surroundings. The blue expanse of the Mediterranean or of the Gulf of Mexico has all the possible charm of a monotone of color; but water of itself, without the beauty given of movement, is but a wet, flat surface, a dead level of dampness, a cruel threat of suffocation, at once a bore and a source of horror. This is depressingly felt on the great lakes—Ontario, for instance—and on the St. Lawrence, when it becomes so wide that its shores are hardly visible. Nothing in nature is drearier. The beauty of a lake is in the form and color of its shores; that of a river in its banks, and in the manner and direction in which the valley, great or small, that holds it determines it shall flow. And thus the beauty of a bay is merely that of the country upon which its waters have intruded, and the objects upon the land, of which an unobstructed view from the level surface of the water, accompanied by the sense of motion, gives a peculiar pleasure. Nothing that could be called a picture would be so wholly void of beauty and of interest as a painting of water without shores, without motion, without ship or boat, and with an unbroken sky; but any good painting of land, even the flattest and most uninhabited, may be beautiful, and full of interest and even of sentiment, which is shown by thousands of examples in landscape art. Obvious this, it should seem, and so unmistakable to every beholder as to be trite; and yet what we read and what we hear tell us that it is neither obvious nor unmistakable.

Now, within the last thirty or forty years, the beauty of the shores of New York bay has been utterly and hopelessly destroyed. Never grand or of a highly distinguished character, it yet had the charm of a pleasing variety of nature modified by human presence. It has become wholly artificial and monotonous, and, moreover, thoroughly and basely vulgar,—vulgar beyond the power of expression in language; because its very vulgarity is without any individual character, and is simply tame and commonplace. This change has been wrought by what is called the prosperity of NewYork,—prosperity meaning increase in wealth and size.

Before this happened, the traveler who sailed up through the Narrows saw on his right the green shores of Long Island almost in nature's beauty decorate, with here and there a farm-house or a villa; on his left, the hills of Staten Island in like verdure rose from a natural shore-line, broken only by the village

of Stapleton, with the buildings of the quarantine. On either side, the peaceful tone was relieved by the emphatic note of the two forts that guarded the harbor. Before him, as he advanced, the bay stretched out, opening like the mouth of a trumpet from the narrow strait through which he was passing. As his eye pierced the distance, he saw the verdure of the shores coming down to the water's edge, except where it was broken by a house or a rare clump of houses here and there. Some half a dozen tide-mills, brown with age, and two or three diligent, hard-working windmills, varied the scene with the most picturesque mechanical agents of thrift. Red Hook, so called from the color of the soil of its little grove-crowned promontory, curved around below Gowanus Bay; and on its point was an old red brick powder-house, which furnished ammunition to Governor's Island, and where the keeper, good-natured, like most soldiers and sailors, sometimes with gift of condemned cartridges made glad the hearts of Brooklyn school-boys who walked out so far upon their happy Saturdays; dreaming in their yet untroubled souls that heaven was something like one bright eternal Saturday,—surely not like one eternal Sunday of those times. Similar views continued on either side until Governor's Island was reached and passed; and Governor's Island was beautiful, with its great fort and sweeping green glacis, and the tiny south battery, and Castle William frowning in picturesque uselessness. Besides these there was little more than the commandant's house and the barracks; all else was grass

MANTEL IN A PAWN-SHOP. (NOW DEMOLISHED.)



WINDOW IN WASHINGTON HOTEL, NUMBER 1 BROADWAY.

and trees. Along the shallow shores of Buttermilk Channel on either side, the lazy kine waded in on warm summer days, and stood cooling themselves and whisking with their tails the gently eddying tide. Then the city came in view, piercing the waters like a huge wedge of masonry at its point, Castle Garden, with the great elms of the old Battery. The dark, sharp spire of Trinity—old Trinity—shot up, and although only to a moderate height, yet with enough incisiveness and self-assertion to give character to the sky-line of the city, relieved still further on by the steeples of St. Paul's, St. John's, the Old North Dutch, the tower of St. George's, and the cupola of the City Hall. Both sides of the city were seen to bristle with a great multitude of masts, which stood so close that they looked like the canes of some Brobdingnagian brake. On the west, the broad Hudson, proudest of all domesticated rivers, separated the city by its calm expanse from the Jersey shores where little Hoboken stood, not yet unseparated by green meadows from its ambitiously named neighbor; and beyond were the Elysian Fields, and Weehawken Heights, with the serried front of the Palisades in the dim distance. At the east stood Brooklyn on its heights, from which it had not yet descended to spread itself over the sandy acres in all the ugliness of commonplace; becoming thus in size the third city in the Union, and remaining the least in importance. The effect which Brooklyn Heights then had upon the beauty of the Bay of New York is, and must remain, altogether unknown to those who did not see them before their hideous and deplorable transformation. That they should have been changed from what they were to what they are is a perpetual evidence to coming ages of the absolute control of Philistinism and Mammon-worship to which all things animate and inanimate in and about New York became then subjected. Some change was necessary for their regulation and orderly preservation; but such a change as they underwent would have shamed a community of Yahoos. They stood as nature had left them, rising in some places directly from a little road along the shore (then, as now, called Furman street); but they were partly broken by a natural terrace, green-swarded, as they were, along the top. On these heights stood handsome villas, half hidden in trees and shrubbery; but these were far back from the edge of the heights, between which and their garden palings there was grass, and then a road, and then grass again. At the southern end, near Joralemon street, was a thick grove of cedars. On or near the heights chiefly dwelt the small, refined, and very exclusive society then dominant in Brooklyn. These heights, notwithstanding their raggedness, formed, I believe, the noblest promenade in the world, and, I am sure, one of the most beautiful. Few in the world are so commanding. From the heights, the whole bay, from the Narrows to Hoboken, was visible; and at that time through the bay, and even through the East River, directly under the heights, great ships sailed in and out under canvas. The city itself was seen as in a bird's-eye view; and, looking over the city, the delighted eye rested upon the beautiful blue Orange hills in the far distance. At the foot of these heights toward the south there was a sandy, pebbled beach, where, however, bathing was not allowed, unless early in the morning and in the evening. The pebbled beach must needs have given place to the requirements of commerce; but the destruction of such a promenade and of such a noble feature of a great city's harbor, and the conversion of its sides into warehouses, and, worse, the crowning of its summit with Philistine domiciles is a sin against heaven.

Another beauty of the New York waters then was the view up the East River. There, beyond the Wallaboght, and at the turn of the river, lay the little village of Williamsburgh, a small cluster of houses in the midst of wide meadows, from which one spire rose so modestly that it seemed to shrink from the attention it provoked. Seen from the lower stretch of the river, as one was passing from brick-built shore to brick-built shore, this rural vista was like an embodied poëm; and often,

A DINNER PARTY IN 1800.

nay almost daily, as I crossed the river twice a day on my way to school and college, I thought of the line,

"Green fields beyond the swelling flood," *

which had already (thanks to my elders) become one of the sweet treasures of my poorly dowered poetical memory. Now the East River, from Buttermilk Channel to Blackwell's Island, is merely a tug-vexed water-way between wharves and warehouses. Williamsburgh has disappeared as an individual, and has become, as the Eastern District, a part of the vast, sleepy dormitory by which it has been swallowed up; and from its loathed vicinage reek hideous smells and horrid fumes and greasy stinks.

What has befallen Williamsburgh has befallen the whole bay. Once largely, brightly, almost nobly beautiful, it has now become, save for its mere size, the most commonplace of scenes, a miserable panorama of wharves and warehouses, factories, breweries, shops, and shanties: everything that gave it charm and dignity has disappeared, to be replaced only by sordid ugliness. The very islands, which sat like little gems upon its waters, roughly enameled with bits of warlike masonry, are now concealed with shapeless brick and mortar, of which the only merit is that it protects something from the weather. And on one of these it is now proposed to erect a huge, sham-sentimental, melodramatic image of bronze, that will merely illustrate its own absurdity and light up the surrounding poverty of prosperity.

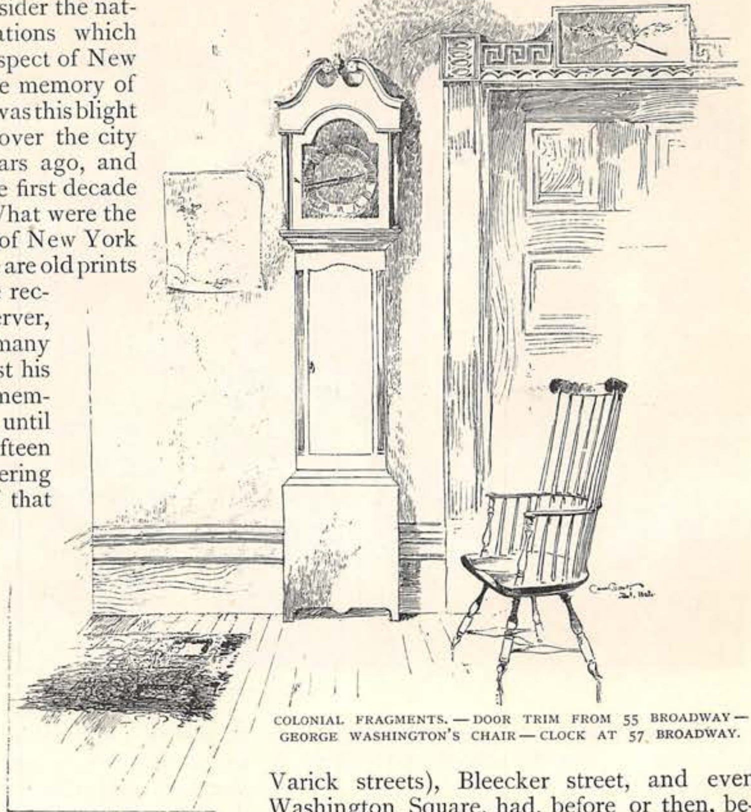
The aspect of the city itself has deteriorated, except for eyes in which bigness is beauty. For New York, no hope of the air-dwelling beauty of spire, and dome, and tower; and of the little it once had of this, there is now only a poor, crushed-down remembrance. Even the new and higher spire of Trinity, as well as the older and more modest Wren-steeples of St. Paul's and St. John's (Old St. George's and the North Dutch are gone), are rivalled and almost dwarfed by huge, formless structures that push their clumsiness up into the air with awkward and obtrusive impudence, to affront heaven with man-made deformity;

* From I know not what. I have gone on all my life with the notion that it was Milton's. To find that I am wrong troubles me not at all: for I care little about such knowledge — the line must be from some psalm or hymn.—AUTHOR.

[See Watts's hymn,
"There is a Land of Pure Delight."—ED.]

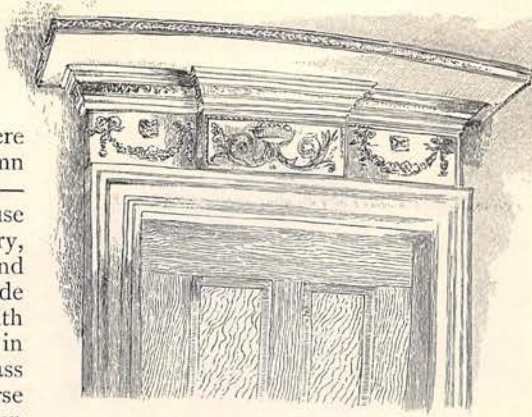
structures of which the only merit is that their gross bulk squeezes from the ground on which they stand fifty dollars for every one it paid before.

From sky and water let us now come to earth, and consider the nature of the transformations which have so changed the aspect of New York almost within the memory of one generation. What was this blight which began to pass over the city some forty or fifty years ago, and to pass away within the first decade after the Civil War? What were the houses and the streets of New York like in 1830–40? There are old prints enough to help out the recollection of a boy observer, who finds that after many years he can safely trust his observation and his memory. Nor, indeed, is it until within the last ten or fifteen years that a few lingering characteristic traces of that former time have been obliterated.



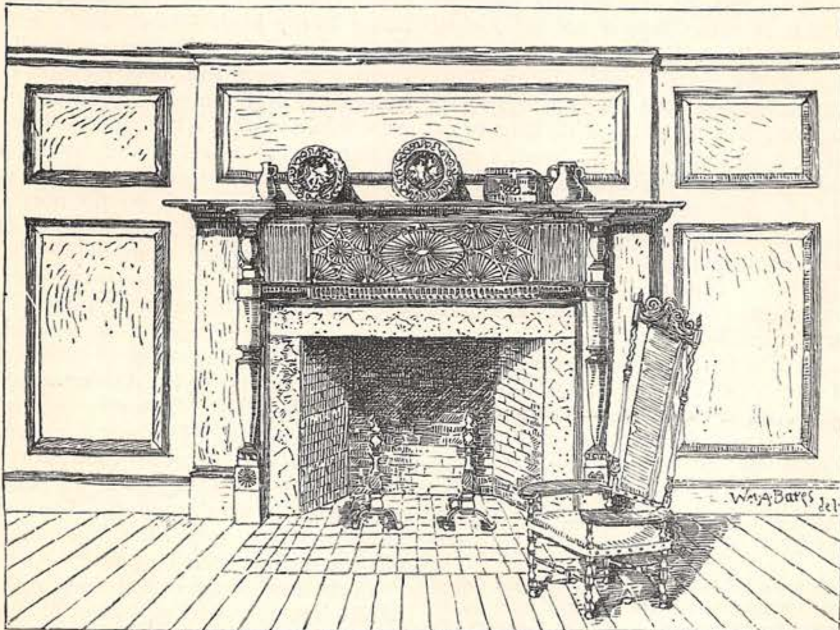
COLONIAL FRAGMENTS. — DOOR TRIM FROM 55 BROADWAY — GEORGE WASHINGTON'S CHAIR — CLOCK AT 57 BROADWAY.

Many circumstances united to make that part of the town about the beginning of Broadway the chosen residence of persons of fortune and social distinction. Three of these were of themselves all-sufficient: it was the oldest quarter; from the beginning it had been the place of residence of persons in authority; it was near the Battery, which very early in the history of New York became a delightful promenade. Considering the commercial character of the place, its rapid growth, and the great changes it underwent, the long period during which this quarter preserved its distinction is remarkable. It was not until between 1835 and 1840, more than a century and a half after the neighborhood became "the court end of the town," that there was any noteworthy modification of its character. Before that time, of necessity, elegant people began to live in other quarters; but this did not affect the status of the neighborhood of the Battery and the Bowling Green. The large granite dwelling-house on the Bowling Green (No. 17 Broadway) was built as late as 1845-50, by Mr. Robert Ray, then one of the wealthiest men in New York. He chose the site as the best that could be found for an elegant residence; and the house was thought at the time to be the handsomest in the city. Park Place, St. John's Square (between Hudson, Beach, Laight, and Varick streets), Bleecker street, and even Washington Square, had, before or then, become centers of fashion; but there was a clinging to the Battery. Even after the uptown movement began, which was about this time, people who were already housed near the Battery, or who could afford to get houses there, lingered lovingly around it. And well they might do so; for, except upon old Brooklyn Heights (and even then that was only "in Brooklyn"), a place of city residence more delightful or more convenient could not be found. Within five or ten minutes' walk of Wall street and of South street (where the great merchants — real merchants, who traded in ships with Europe and China and the South — had their counting-houses), it was yet entirely removed from business; and its surroundings made mere living there a pleasure. State street, which is the eastern boundary of the Battery, was unsurpassed, if it was ever equaled, as a place of town residence; for living there was living on a park with a grand water view. The prospect from the windows and balconies of the old State street houses across the green-

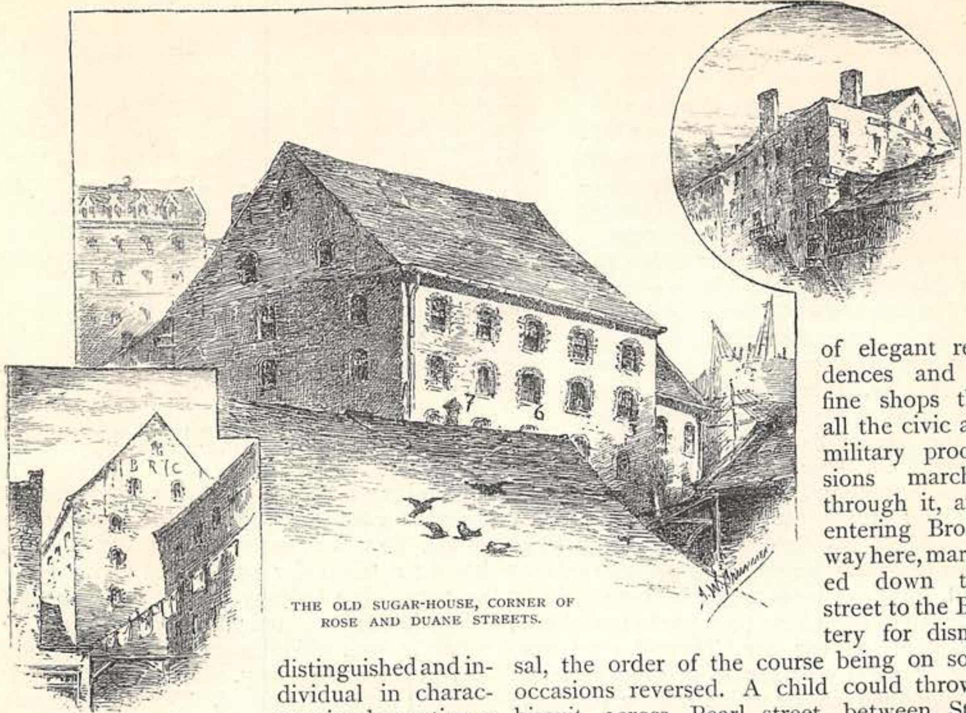


ENTABLATURE IN THE HOUSE OF THE THIRD MAYOR OF NEW YORK, CORNER OF WHITEHALL AND STATE STREETS.

sward and through the elms of the Battery included the bay, with its islands and the shores of New Jersey. In summer, the western breezes blew upon these windows straight from the water. The sight here on spring and summer and autumn evenings, when splendid sunsets—common then, but rare now, because of changes in the surrounding country, which have affected the formation and the disposition of the clouds—made the firmament and the water blaze with gold and color, seemed sometimes in their gorgeousness almost to surpass imagination. It was matter of course that such a place should be chosen as the site of the homes of wealthy people. Of these houses, not a few are still standing. But how changed! Outside and inside they have been as much "translated" as Bottom found himself to be when his own wise poll gave place to an ass's head. Many of them are almost concealed by signs; all of them have been put to sordid uses, and fitted to their fate. These houses were most of them very simple in their exterior; but they had an air which will be sought in vain all along Fifth Avenue; an air of domesticity—of large and elegant domesticity, it is true; but still, they looked like homes, the homes of people of sense, and taste, and character. One of the last of these houses to be deserted as a residence was occupied during its later domestic life by a gentleman well known for his elegant taste and his patronage of art. It was attractively irregular in form, having a triangular porch, and above this a corresponding balcony, over which the roof of the house projected; the support being by pillars in front and pilasters at the side. Upon this porch and balcony, side windows as well as front windows opened. The entrance was approached by double lateral steps, guarded by wrought-iron railings. The effect of this was very elegant and yet very home-like. The house was almost noble in appearance; and within it was even more attractive than it was without: ample, comfortable, highly




OLD MANTEL, IN A HOUSE IN ROSE STREET.



THE OLD SUGAR-HOUSE, CORNER OF ROSE AND DUANE STREETS.

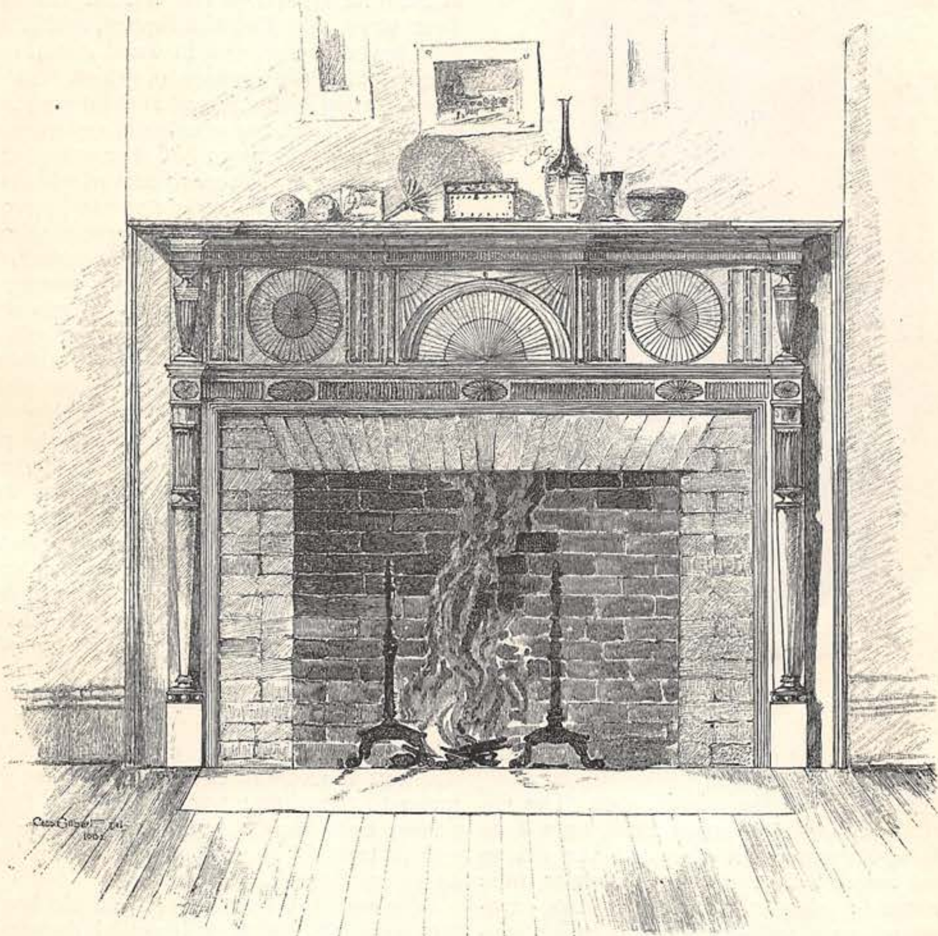
distinguished and individual in character; its decoration a fine example of that which was prevalent in New York at the beginning of this century. Of this style, in which domesticity and chastened elegance are the dominating motives, existing examples are of very great rarity.

Trending due east from State street and cutting it at right angles are two little passageways, which in these days would be looked on almost as alleys. But one of them is the beginning of the once great thoroughfare, Pearl street, known first as Queen street,* which, starting here in a line with Broadway, and within a few yards of its head, curves round toward the East River (from which it was originally the first street westward, so much have the waters of the harbor been encroached upon), and, expanding, like a river in its pools, first at Hanover Square (formerly the great shopping center of fashion) and then at Franklin Square, enters Broadway next above Duane street, and directly opposite where the gray walls of the New York Hospital were seen only some sixteen or eighteen years ago, removed from the rush and roar of the great thoroughfare by an avenue through grass that seemed ever green and under elms that overtopped the highest houses. So late as 1830-35, Pearl street was so much a street of elegant residences and of fine shops that all the civic and military processions marched through it, and, entering Broadway here, marched down that street to the Battery for dismissal, the order of the course being on some occasions reversed. A child could throw a biscuit across Pearl street, between State street and Whitehall; yet there, until within a very few years, stood houses of a stately elegance which would now be sought in vain between Washington Square and the Central Park; albeit the carving within and without of some of these latter cost more than the entire construction of the others. Indeed, the house in the Fifth Avenue which is the most distinguished in appearance of all in that quarter, at once the most elegant, the most home-like, and the most suggestive of well-established wealth, is the plainest house there. It stands in that part of the avenue in which these qualities are most remarkable (that below Fourteenth street), on the north-western corner of Ninth street. The building of Chickering Hall removed from the Fifth Avenue some eight years ago the only other eye-pleasing and habitable-seeming houses it could boast; thousands must now remember with regret what they once looked upon with envy. Of the old houses in Pearl street which I have mentioned, two fine examples remained until within a few years. One was pilastered to the eaves; the other had at each story sunken arches and projecting cornices, which were supported by slender pillars. The cost could have been but very little, but the resulting effect was of singular elegance.

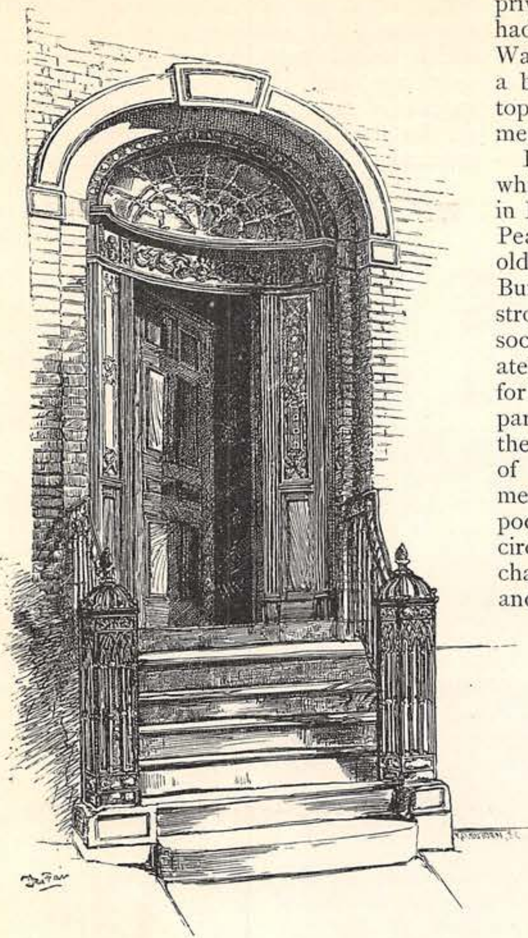
Little Bridge street was lined with houses of like structure, and of these a fine specimen still remains on the corner of State street.

* But between Whitehall and State streets (which themselves seem not to have received these names until after the Revolution), it was at the very first called Dock street.

It is of much larger dimensions than any of those already mentioned, larger even than the modern house on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Ninth street, and is truly worthy of the epithet "mansion," which is so freely and so absurdly misapplied in the newspapers. Its rising, well-spread roof; its inviting entrance, which seems to promise welcome and refined entertainment; its double-bowed front on either side, suggestive of the amplitude of space of which it really was the sign; its two balconies, whence we know fair women had often smiled upon brave men, give it a charm that does not sit ill upon its simple dignity. Look at it, and see if, in all New York, beyond the regions of trade, there is one house of which the outside shows such a promise of gentle breeding within. Then look upon the poles and wires which the artist, with hardy faithfulness—perhaps with vengeful motive—has preserved in his view, and see in this offensive incongruity one illustration of the spirit which seized upon New York some forty years ago, and left it a vast assemblage of engines of rapacity and architectural horrors. In the fine houses, of which this is a fair specimen, there were beautiful effects produced by approaches, stair-ways, and various uses of well-ordered space; of which this house is not without examples. Philadelphia is at present richer than any other city in houses thus ennobled. Here, too, we find a charming example of one of those elegant old mantel-pieces which were common in all our houses of a certain grade about the beginning of this century, but which are now as rare as the houses themselves. The elements of their beauty are exceedingly simple, but the eye never wearies of it; for it results merely from the harmonious disposition of straight lines and curves, without any



OLD MANTEL IN BEDROOM, HOUSE CORNER OF BRIDGE AND STATE STREETS.



DOOR-WAY OF A HOUSE IN OLIVER STREET.

pretension or implied significance. The design in all of them varied little, as will be seen by a comparison of one in the Bridge street house with two other examples, here illustrated: slender, fanciful pillars, surmounted with vase-form posts, which support a delicately molded shelf, and across the front only a decoration of geometrical figures with concentric lines; but the effect is that of a very winning union of elegance and homelikeness. A building which has long been too familiar to New York eyes to need illustration, and so well known even to those who have not seen it, as only to need mention, was the Washington Hotel, on the Bowling Green; the first house in Broadway; which within the last year has yielded place to the foundations of one of those hideous and perilous structures of many monotonous stories, which, within the last ten years, have risen to affront the heavens with their ugliness. In this house, which was a private dwelling of colonial date, and which had a historical interest as the residence of Washington, there remained to its last days a beautiful recessed, arched window, in the top of which the framing was of wrought metal work, of rich and pretty design.

In houses like this and its neighbors at which we have glanced in Bridge street and in Pearl street, and in the Walton House in Pearl street near Franklin Square, and in the old Glover House, also in Pearl street, near Burling Slip (the garden of which was destroyed when Platt street was cut through), the social entertainments of colonial and immediately post-colonial days had fair opportunity for the display of that courtliness of which the parting light and the fading aroma linger in the literature and the private correspondence of that period. No crushes, no rushes, no mere mob in good clothes with money in pocket; but a comparatively limited social circle who knew all about each other; culture, character; much courtesy, if some stiffness; and a sense of decency even in those whom excess sometimes led to violate decorum. The petty passions and the pettier ambitions which stimulate the strife for that bubble, social success, were doubtless forces in action in the society of those times, as they are now. But at this distance, at least, they appear, even as they were described by the actors in them, to have had an outside decoration of dignity and courtesy which concealed the worst of their deformity. One chair in many a house in Fifth Avenue costs as much as the worth of all the furniture of a room in one of those old houses; but the cost of the chair does not give grace to the sitter; nor will gilding, bright colors, and French polish compensate the eye of taste for the absence of well-ordered space and harmonious outlines.

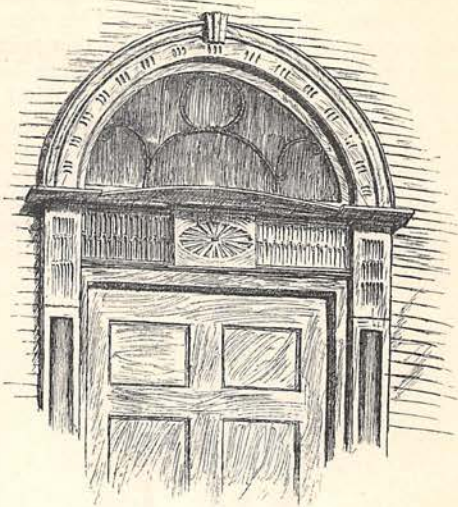
Nor were the interiors of these old houses lacking in the charm of beautiful decorative detail, as the young draughtsman saw who sketched the entablature of a door in the house of the third mayor of New York. Among the city's most distinguished architects, there is not one who might not gladly own this chaste and elegant design.

The neighborhood of the Battery and the Bowling Green could not, even in the earlier days of New York, continue to afford house room to all its inhabitants who were able and desirous to live handsomely; and before the beginning of this century* "fashion" had

* I need hardly say that I am writing very generally. I have neither the intention nor the wish to be particular. As to dates, within a few years, I do not profess to be exact.

gone "up-town," even so far as Park Place, a short street (still bearing that name) which ran from Broadway, opposite the middle of the old City Hall Park, to the Columbia College Green. This very pleasant little street (the oldest of New York "Places"), with the obscure little street on the west side of the College Green called College Place, continued to be the residence of people of wealth and social importance as late as the year 1845. On the east side of Broadway, people of condition, after living even in the upper part of Broad street,* in Wall street, in Pine and Cedar, in Maiden Lane, Gold, Cliff, and Fulton, seized upon Beekman street and filled it, from old St. George's to the City Hall Park, with houses in the best domestic style of London at that period. These houses were the homes of the most eminent merchants and professional men of the city. The street was quiet; it was not a thoroughfare for trade or any other purpose, on account of its nearness to Fulton street (the avenue to the Brooklyn Ferry) and the closure of the western end by the Park. Beekman street, like Park Place, retained its favor long. It was not until after 1845 that door-plates bearing some of the most honored names in New York's commerce and society disappeared from it: and no wonder; it was the embodiment of respectability and pleasant seclusion. I know this; for sleepy old St. George's, where my mother was married and I was baptized, was the first church in which my ears were fed with the music that I loved (it had a grand English organ and a famous English organist); and through Beekman street I went, some ten years later than the time of which I am writing, twice a day, as a school-boy, to and from Columbia College Grammar School. I observed those houses until I believe I knew every brick in the street. Their style and construction were distinctly different from those which prevailed around the Battery and the Bowling Green. Not less expressive of respectability and domesticity, they were less impressive and not so spacious. Already the crowding and flat-squeezing consequent upon uniform building plots of 25 feet by 100 had begun. But in some of the streets in this neighborhood such an arrangement was impossible.

Not far northward from Beekman street, and about a like distance eastward from the City Hall, is a little street, Rose street, the very name of which is probably not known to more than one in a thousand New Yorkers of to-day. Filled now with beer-houses and

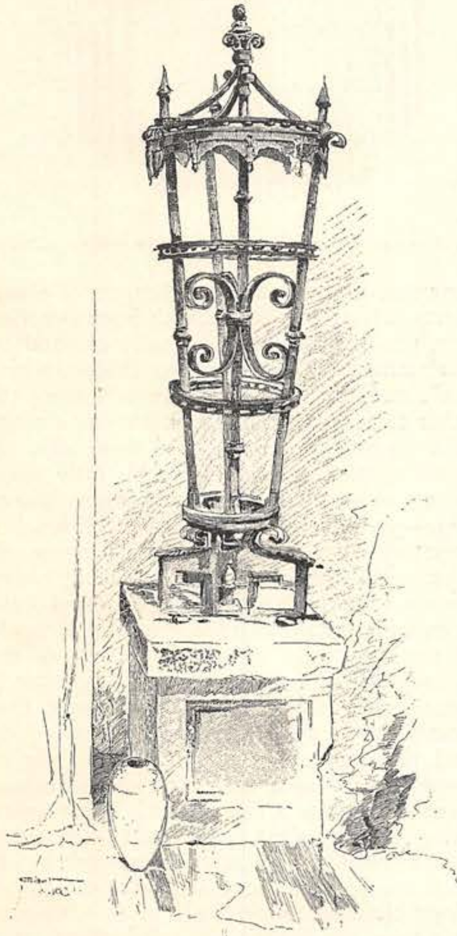


DOOR IN HOUSE CORNER OF BEDFORD AND MORTON STREETS.

tenement-houses, and the cheapest of cheap German boarding-houses, with huge factories, vast printing-offices, and finally crushed by the viaduct of the Brooklyn Bridge, which has shouldered its huge bulk in among the other coarse usurpers, so that it seems strange that the little place can hold them all,—reduced to this condition now, this little street (also a quiet no-thoroughfare) was, so late as 1830–35, filled with residences handsome for their day. Nor need I thus qualify my record. There still stands in Rose street a house, with a full-bowed front, which cannot have been built later than 1820, and which would at this day hold its own with any of the "place" houses of like size on cross streets between Eighth street and Union Square. One peculiarity of this street was that its course and the consequent shape of the plots of ground were such that most of the houses were not built in a line with it. Their fronts, being built at right angles with their sides, left a right-angled triangle vacant before each one of them; and the line of the houses along the street was like that of a rip-saw. In a town which soon was ruled off into rectangular uniformity, this variation of line was not without its charm. In one of these Rose street houses, one of our artists, on his quest for such examples of the style of interior building as might remain, found another of those beautiful old mantel-pieces which I have already mentioned; this one in a paneled room. It was this that first allured me when I saw this collection of sketches; and it touched me close; for it was the first mantel-piece I ever saw; it being in the house my father occupied in Rose street in my early

* Delmonico (the original) was early in business (if he did not begin) in a spacious and elegant old house, formerly a private dwelling, in Broad street, near Exchange Place.

boyhood. The artist supposes it to be a piece of colonial work, and has decorated his sketch with a chair of the period. Upon this point, however, I must venture to differ from him very decidedly—at my risk, I know; but I feel quite sure that those mantel-pieces did not come into vogue in America until about the beginning of this century, and that most of the very few existing examples of them date from 1790 to 1810. Another of them, and certainly not the least pleasing, was



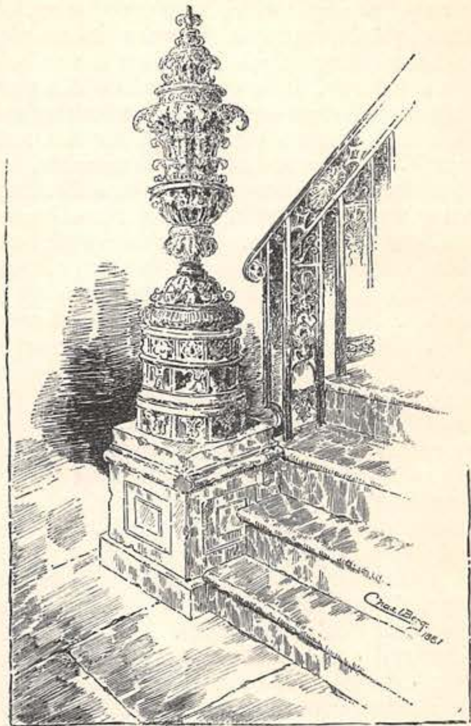
NEWEL NOW IN THE STUDIO OF WILLIAM M. CHASE

found in the back room of an old pawn-shop down-town. But in Rose street there was and is a colonial building, and one of some magnitude. It is the old prison-like stone structure (once, I believe, used as a prison) on the corner of Duane street, occupied by William Rhinelander & Sons, sugar-bakers. According to New York custom, this grim old structure ought long ago to have been pulled down; but the current of domestic life only eddied around it for a few years, and then flowed onward up-town; and thus the old sugar-house was left standing. It is now put to other uses, and is hardly visible from the street in which it was once a gloomy and unsightly, and I believe unsavory, object. A much more attractive one in this street, although equally plain and much less imposing, was the Friends' Meeting-house, which stood deeply recessed from the street in a large green plot on the western side, about half-way between the Rhinelander sugar-house and Pearl street. It remained there many years after Rose street ceased to be regarded as a desirable place of residence by those who could afford to live elsewhere; and it had in its plain and well-preserved exterior and its neatly kept inclosure the very same expression of simplicity, comfort, and respectable stability that now appear in the new meeting-house and school on the western side of Stuyvesant Square, opposite St. George's Church. It is somewhat and not unpleasantly remarkable that these old neighbors, in moving more than two miles up-town, have kept so close together.

In the neighborhood of the Rose street meeting-house lived not a few of the most respectable and wealthy of the Society of Friends, at that time proportionately a very much larger and more influential body than they are now. The position of this place of worship doubtless had some influence in determining a movement which began among the wealthier of them soon after 1825; for the Rose street Meeting was the Grace Church, and the Brick Church, and the North Dutch of Quakerdom. This movement led to the establishment of a neighborhood of Friends in the streets leading from Chatham Square; but not quite so early as the date just mentioned; for this quarter was first filled by the overflow from the region around Park Place and Beekman street. It had then not been decided that the course of the development of New York "society" would be by movement on a narrow, straight line northward. Nor, indeed, was that determined until many years afterward. There were various doubtful feelers put out in several directions, and some half a dozen very strong attempts were made by land-owners to influence the direction of this movement. But every attempt to stop, to allure, or to divert it was in vain, and resulted only in the erection of fine houses that remained standing in a waste of squalor, lonely monuments of loss and folly. At the time that I speak of, all the Grinnells, Henry, Joseph, and Moses H., lived in Market street, which runs from Division street to the East River, in now one of the most obscure quar-

ters of the town. Here, however, I saw, only a few weeks ago, a house which expressed in a simple way the very perfection of comfort and respectability, and which was even not without the tokens of wealth. It was well kept up, too, everything about it being neat and orderly, even to the brick wall of its old-fashioned garden and its handsome brick stable. And yet that stable was built when there were fewer private carriages in New York than there now are locomotive engines. In this quarter, in Oliver street, which runs eastward from the unmentionable purlieus of Chatham Square, one of my artists found a very fine example of a beautiful entrance-door which came in about this time. It curved inward, the door itself being sometimes curved, and it was crowned with an elliptical arch, under which was an arched fan-light. The lintel and the posts were delicately decorated. I know of late years only this one specimen of this beautiful entrance-door, and am not sure, as I write, that this one still exists. A plainer one, somewhat in the same style, but without the alluring curve and the graceful decoration, attracted another pencil at the corner of Bedford and Morton streets. This is on the west side in old Greenwich, a village which New York has swallowed up, name and all; a place to which people fled *from* New York to escape the yellow fever in 1822 (and as to which I find some testimony of protection, quarantinewise, by means of a *board-fence* at that time), and which yet in 1830 began to be the residence of well-to-do merchants whose counting-houses were in Water street and in Front street.

Some readers of THE CENTURY who are interested in the subject of this article will, I am sure, have observed the railings and the open posts, or newels, of the beautiful entrance-door of Oliver street. These were of wrought iron, all worked out with the hammer; and as I looked through these sketches, I saw that luckily my architectural friends had preserved traces of the various stages of development and of degradation through which this feature of semi-architectural decoration passed. One, of a considerably later date than that of Oliver street, has such beauty and such character that an artist has removed it to his studio. Its date is probably about 1840, not later, and it is at once a relic of excellence and a token of coming deterioration. The latter appears, literally full-blown, in the much befoliated newel from the house in Bleecker street,—a bastard thing, both in design and in construction. From this the fashion seems to have passed to the shapeless cast-iron caricature which supports the cast-iron hand-rail of a house in East Fourth street,

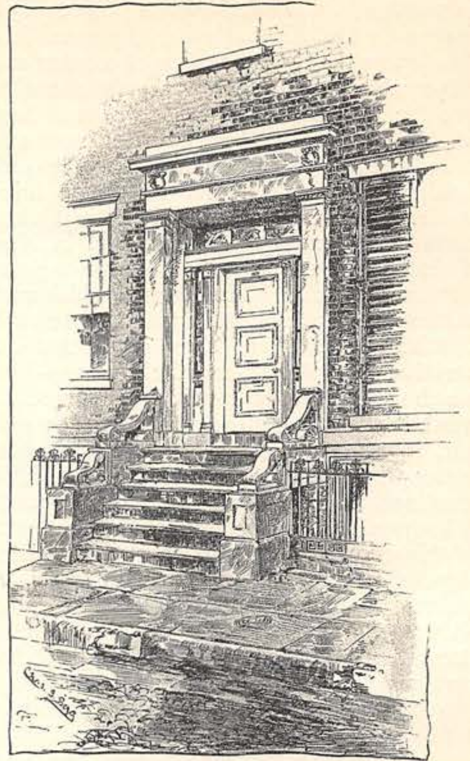


NEWEL IN BLEECKER STREET.

near Washington Square, and which looks like a pine-apple smitten stark with death as it was trying to rise into a column. It suits its place, and it is one of the not rare tokens of the architectural blights that fell upon New York some forty or fifty years ago, of which that neighborhood at the present day preserves vestiges in all degrees.

The course of the up-town movement at first included Broadway; in which great central thoroughfare fine houses and the finest shops in the city were alternated in groups, sometimes in blocks, sometimes singly, making it both a pleasant and a brilliant promenade. No street now exists which takes the place of old Broadway in this respect. In the afternoons of spring and autumn, and on fair days in winter, it was thronged with elegantly dressed people, including those of acknowledged fashion and social position, who now use no place as a promenade, and when they do appear in the street on foot dressed in the soberest and most unobtrusive style. Very few houses in old Broadway had any beauty or made any architectural pretension. Only two or three had striking architectural character, and that was very bad — either oppressively ponderous and dull, or else extravagant. Of the latter sort there is one remaining, directly opposite

Washington Place—a white marble house twenty-five feet wide, with two monolith Ionic pillars standing between its no-roof and something which is neither a vestibule nor a balcony. It is one of two which were built together, presenting to the admiring eye four Ionic pillars big enough for a Greek temple. A more absurdly uncomfortable, unhomelike, incongruous structure for a dwelling-house was never built. One of these houses has been taken down. When they were built there stood nearly opposite to them a large, old-fashioned, wooden country-house in a garden. Such contrasts were then, and even afterward, not uncommon, owing to the rapid growth of the city. Only a few years ago, a large old house stood on the west side of the town, much below Fourth street, surrounded by narrow brick buildings, its ragged old garden and grass-plots occupying half the ground between four streets. Some of the pleasantest houses of later days were in Walker street and White street, west of Broadway. Most of them were what is called "basement houses," with drawing-rooms on the upper floor, and double staircases. They were spacious and comfortable, and, notwithstanding their extreme plainness, were unmistakably the residences of elegant people. Here lived some of the most gay and fashionable as well as respectable families of the city.



DOOR-WAY IN WASHINGTON SQUARE, EAST FOURTH STREET.

The first formation of a large fashionable quarter, after Park Place and the neighborhood of Columbia College became insufficient for the growing demands of the city in this respect, was around St. John's Park. This, like Gramercy Park, was a private pleasure-ground; keys to its gates being perquisites of houses which fronted upon it or were in its immediate neighborhood. St. John's Church and the Park, which was filled with fine trees, made this a delightful place of residence; but none of the houses had any beauty or character. Their only architectural merit was that they were unpretending, seemed comfortable, and were not built in monotonous rows.

The next center of fashionable residence was Bleecker street, on both sides of Broadway, and Bond street, which latter was filled with costly houses, most of which are still standing. Their contrast of red brick with white marble basements, steps, and door-ways, made them glare horribly under our blazing sun. They were entirely devoid of character. Some attempt in this direction had been made in Leroy Place, a section of Bleecker street between Mercer and Greene streets. The stone-work was in gray granite; two houses in the middle of the row had high steps, and those on either side were "basement houses," entered on a level with the street. Symmetry was thus obtained, and the place had an eminently respectable air; but on the whole the effect was rather depressing.

A great architectural effort was made about this time in Lafayette Place, which (as it was next to Broadway, and yet, by closure at both ends, secure against being a thoroughfare,) was thought to be eminently suitable for a place of elegant residence. Wherefore Colonnade Row, with its formidable array of Corinthian pillars, was built. A gloomier, more forbidding, more ridiculous structure for domestic purposes could hardly be found. But one house in this neighborhood deserves honorable mention, that on the western corner of Great Jones street and Lafayette Place, which was recently occupied by the Columbia College law school. It is slightly tinged with the Philistinism of its period; but it is spacious, handsome, and not without character. It looks like the residence of a man of wealth and culture. It is to be deplored that houses like this must be abandoned to public or to inferior uses. Generations ought to succeed each other in such homes. In London they have done so in plainer, if larger, houses on St. James's Park, where families have had their city residence for more than two cent-

uries. Stability and long association are essential elements of a true home, whether it be large or small, plain or costly.

A notable effort in this direction was made in the building of Depau Row: in Bleecker street, two streets west of Leroy Place: a row of large, massive houses, all alike, intended to be stately, each having a *porte cochère*, or carriage entrance, through which, only, admission could be had. The intention was that these houses should be occupied only by people of a certain and identical social standing, and that they should be hereditary family residences. Most of their first occupants were connected more or less nearly by marriage; and it was seriously debated whether one of the first surgeons in the world—a man of wealth and character as well as talent, and of notably fine manners—was in a sufficiently elevated position to be received in one as a tenant. He was indeed accepted; and although then a middle-aged man, he lived to see the famous Row deserted by his critical neighbors as well as by himself, and given up to basest uses. Probably no neighborhood in New York was ever occupied by a more abandoned and disreputable horde of tenants than Depau Row within twenty years of its building. The attempt failed partly because of the uncontrollable movement of the various currents of population; partly because its social design was incongruous with the spirit of the country. Architecturally, it was far from admirable. It was indeed gloomy and peculiar, but not grand,—as undomestic a looking pile of brick and mortar as was ever put together.

The row of houses on the north side of Washington Square was built just fifty years ago. These houses have no external beauty or character, but their situation is incomparably fine (unless we could go back to the Battery), and within they are models of comfort. Even at this day the two most desirable houses in the city are those on the corners of Washington Square and the Fifth Avenue.

Nothing which could be brought within the limits of this article remains to be said about the older dwelling-houses of New York. From Washington Square upward began the endless succession of "places," and of houses in long, monotonous rows, and of that series of architectural horrors known as "brown-stone fronts." Thrift, and the desire to meet the multitudinous demands of vulgar taste for show, were the guiding motives of the builders who covered the upper part of New York with houses the memory of many of which is like a brick and stone nightmare. Pretension is united with vulgarity; and the product in many cases seems to have been the result of a notion that architectural beauty is to be attained by an indefinite repetition of ugliness.

But, within the last ten years, a new spirit has manifested itself in the domestic architecture of New York. Among the houses built within that time are some which, according to their size and quality, are worthy of any country and any period. The fantastic monstrosity in external form which prevailed throughout the previous thirty or forty years is giving place to a sober but attractive and thoroughly congruous elegance; while internal decoration unites comfort and domesticity with a beauty of form and a richness of color to which even our old colonial houses and those of the earlier years of this century did not attain. The rapid accumulation of wealth is at last accompanied by the appearance of a few gifted architects, who promise within the next ten years to relieve modern New York from the reproach of being at once one of the largest and richest and one of the ugliest cities in the world; unfortunately, they cannot help its being the noisiest and one of the most unclean.

*Richard Grant White.*

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## A PRAYER.

THE heart beats glad, though earth has many a grave.
Ah, happy breath! in spite of care and strife!
Though lacking much, this only thing I crave:—
Make me love death, O Lord, as I love life!

*Charlotte Fiske Bates.*