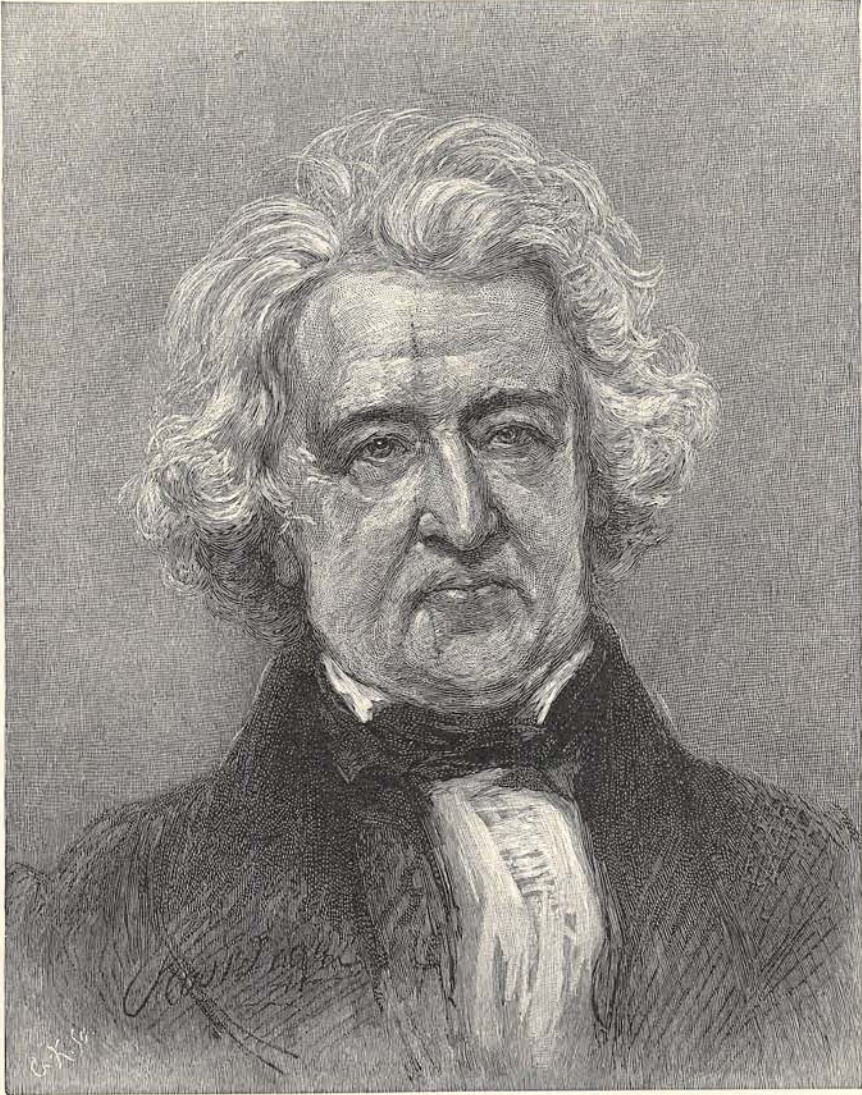


THE CENTURY CLUB.



GULIAN C. VERPLANCK, FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION.

IF a club can be regarded as having any parentage, and can thus be treated as subject to the law of heredity, then the Century Club may boast a remote and reputable ancestry, and display its pedigree in proof of transmitted virtues. It is linked by descent with the earliest recognition in this city of the claims of art, and in ad-
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vancing the cause of literature it continues a task begun by its progenitors.

It is not to its age that the Century owes its name, for though fairly claiming an earlier origin than that of any other of the existing city clubs, it must still wait six years to celebrate the semi-centennial of its formal organization. The elements that combined to assume its present character and name had long been ac-



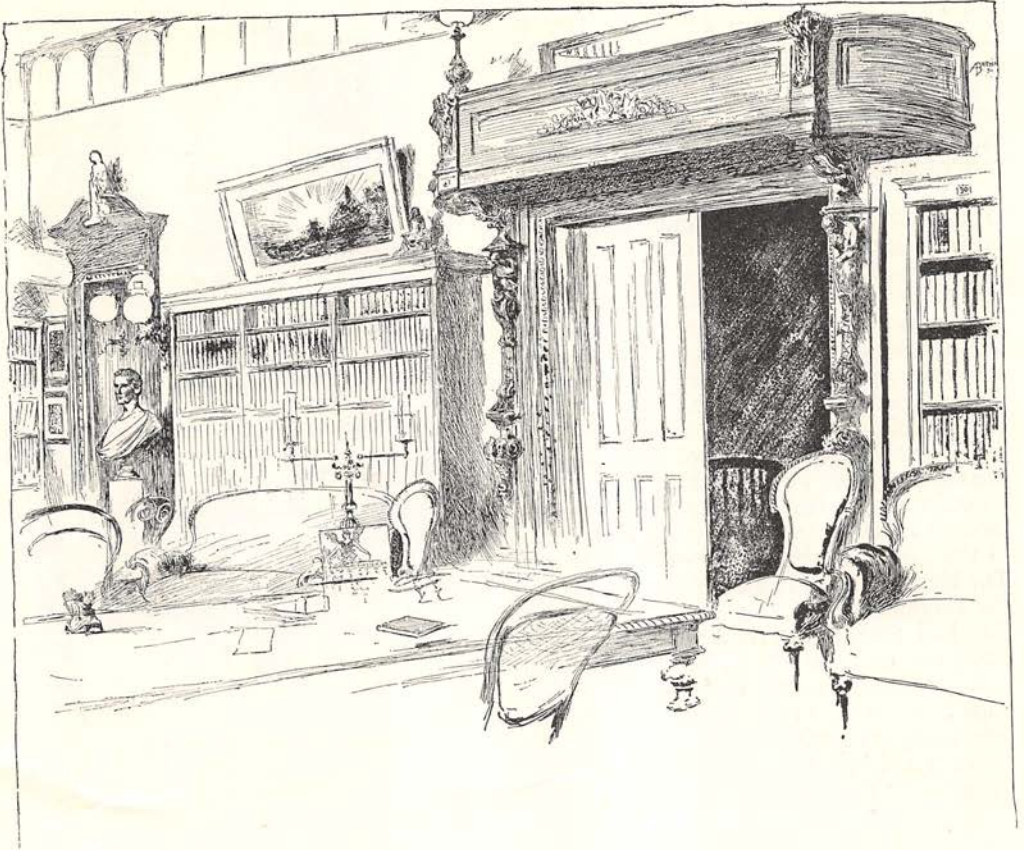
VIEW IN THE ASSEMBLY ROOM OF THE OLD BUILDING,

tive societies. Each of them contributed to the new body its special qualities, and as they had much in common, it is more remarkable that the Sketch Club and the Column, fed from neighboring sources, should so long have flowed apart than that at last they should have mingled their streams to form the Century.

The old question whether Art can flourish in a state through its own vigor, without the fostering aid of government, presented itself for solution in this country very soon after its political independence was gained. Probably the men in New York who founded the American Academy of Art in 1802 did not delude themselves with the theory inspiring some of the politicians of that day, that a new nation meant new human nature. Such practical men of affairs among its promoters as Robert Fulton, the two Livingstons, and DeWitt Clinton understood that they were trying an experiment under new and doubtful conditions. They asked for public support where state aid was not to be hoped for, and no public of patrons existed. Formed on the model of the Royal Academy, with established schools and provision for lectures and periodical exhibitions,

to be kept up without income from endowment, the new institution failed to win public favor. For twenty-three years it struggled on, until in spite of the efforts and sacrifices of its accomplished president, John Trumbull, it died of neglect and want of adaptation to its surroundings. The secession of a number of students, who disliked its autocratic rule and threw off its irksome restrictions in 1825, produced a war of pamphlets, and led to the establishment, on a broader basis and under more elastic forms, of the National Academy of Design, which still flourishes in better fortunes through a clearer perception of the conditions influencing art in this country.

It was at that time a fashion in England to publish a yearly collection of the lighter — usually the lightest — productions of pen and pencil under such titles, familiar to our grandmothers, as annuals, keepsakes, or tokens. The contributors were often men of some note in their respective arts, though their labors were probably less fruitful in improvement of public taste than in profit to the booksellers. The fashion, crossing the sea, passed by Boston, then the country's literary focus, and perhaps too



109 EAST FIFTEENTH STREET, NEW YORK CITY.

serious for such trifling, and made its way to New York. Several of the scholars and wits of the town,—there were, even then, such phenomena outside of New England,—among them Verplanck and Bryant, in combination with some of the younger members of the Academy, gave to the public an annual of the English pattern for three successive years, under the title of “The Talisman.” The distinction which the volumes certainly showed, considering the resources of either art at the time, is not so noticeable as the fact that their creation suggested common objects of interest and pursuit to the artists and literary men of that day. The occasion for a closer communion, with a definite object, was not neglected; and out of this intercourse grew the project for a social club, which in 1829 took shape and name as the Sketch Club.

Mutual improvement in art was the professed object of the Sketch Club, its meetings being devoted to drawings from subjects proposed by the member at whose house, each taking his turn, its Friday evening meetings were held. The plan of a club publication, as an annual, was also projected, but not carried

out. Some fear of encouraging a sensual element seems to have inspired a sumptuary law limiting its suppers to sandwiches, coffee, and wine. A breach of this rule once put the club's life in peril, and the incident may be either heeded as a warning, or accepted as an inevitable step in the progress of all clubs that are to grow and prosper. The anomaly of a rich man appeared among its members, who, with less tact than liberality, spread before his associates an elaborate supper when his turn came to entertain them. They sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to avenge their offended honor. The club dissolved, and after an interval of some months was formed anew, “on a more suitable plan”—omitting Cæsus.

The last record of meeting of the Sketch Club, in 1869, indicates that its name and distinctive membership still existed then, though only as a survival. Its body had been transformed, and its vitality transfused into the Century, more than twenty years earlier.

The society called the Column had led a quiet existence in a more restricted field for some years before the Sketch Club became known. It was established in 1825 by gradu-

ates of Columbia College, in the hope of maintaining scholarly culture among the active pursuits of life, and with the purpose of training its members, through the discussion of literary and political subjects having a living interest, for the best performance by educated men of their duties to the State. Beginning with sixteen members, it has included forty-eight, and counts ten now living. Many of its members rose to leadership in the professions, and among the survivors are men holding the first rank in the nation as statesmen or publicists. Its existence is still maintained by an annual meeting of commemoration, at which a lessening group gathers around the miniature silver Corinthian pillar which is the emblem of the club.

We touch the true source of the vitality of the Century when we recall these elements of its unforced growth, and trace its evolution through existing causes, according to the need of the time and the quality of the persons. The blending of its two components was only the continuance of the movement by which they had themselves arisen almost spontaneously out of urgent conditions, with natural fitness. They were not created—they originated. No mandate of authority called them into being as institutions, nor did their life thrive nourished by any endowment. For them, as for the Century, their product, *nascitur, non fit*, is as fair a distinction as it is for the poet.



A CORNER OF THE SMOKING ROOM IN THE OLD BUILDING.

nascitur, non fit, is as fair a distinction as it is for the poet.

The Century was founded on the evening of the 13th of January, 1847. At the Rotunda in the Park, then used as a gallery of art, now destroyed and almost forgotten, a committee before appointed reported the proposal "to form an association of gentlemen of the city of New York and its vicinity, engaged or interested in literature and the fine arts, with a view to their advancement, as well as the promotion of social intercourse," and presented the scheme of its constitution. Of the forty-two persons who then accepted the plan and rules proposed, twenty-five were members of the Sketch Club, and six members of the Column. Of these primary members ten were artists, ten merchants, four authors, and three men of leisure; there were three physicians, and three bankers; two were clergymen, two lawyers, one was an editor, and one a diplomatist. The name of the Century was given to the new institution, partly signifying its intended limit as to members, and partly in expression of its hope of presenting in little "the very form and pressure of the time" among men of culture.

In its plan, as in its rise, the association was original. It copied neither such literary coteries, famous in English history, as the Kit-Cat, the



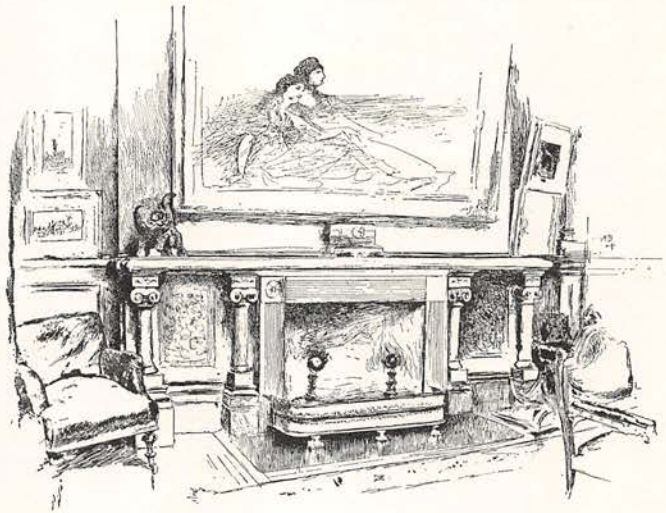
A FIREPLACE IN THE SMOKING ROOM.

Beefsteak, and the Garrick clubs, nor those large and aristocratic clubs which in London gather the cream of particular classes, or professions, or parties. It aimed only to bring together men of every variety of taste, provided always that they had cultivated tastes, under the most simple and independent conditions of intercourse. It promised to give them "plain living," and asked that each should contribute his share of "high thinking."

These, then, were the main piers of the Century's edifice—Literature and Art. But these were not the only ones. Its founders forecasted wisely. It was not their plan to narrow the club into an esthetic academy. The advancement of art and literature with the active aid of those who were interested in those pursuits, together with those engaged in them, meant much more than the mutual improvement of members in a limited society. The population of six hundred thousand then filling the island of New York and its vicinity offered them a missionary field. It seemed to them a worthy purpose to turn the thoughts of those busy multitudes to higher objects than material gain, opening their minds to perceive beauty and excellence in art and letters, and inviting them to improve the neglected half of their natures.

Their plan contemplated, as the only possible means for effecting this purpose, first, concentration for study, discussion, and production among the qualified few, and then the widest dissemination of approved results among the many. It implied an element of practical action, holding a middle place between creators or adepts in art and the general public—an instrumentality for the transformation of esthetic ideas into definite and permanent methods of public influence. Probably not all who encouraged the movement calculated its scope. Very likely even those who took the broadest views of the club's future did not foresee all the subtle and indirect operations of the forces they set at work. Building with materials whose combination on such a scale had never before been tried among us, they builded better than they knew. At all events, to the reproach of complete absorption in material interests, and exclusive worship of wealth, the Century Club was at its beginning, and has ever since been, a steadfast answer of denial.

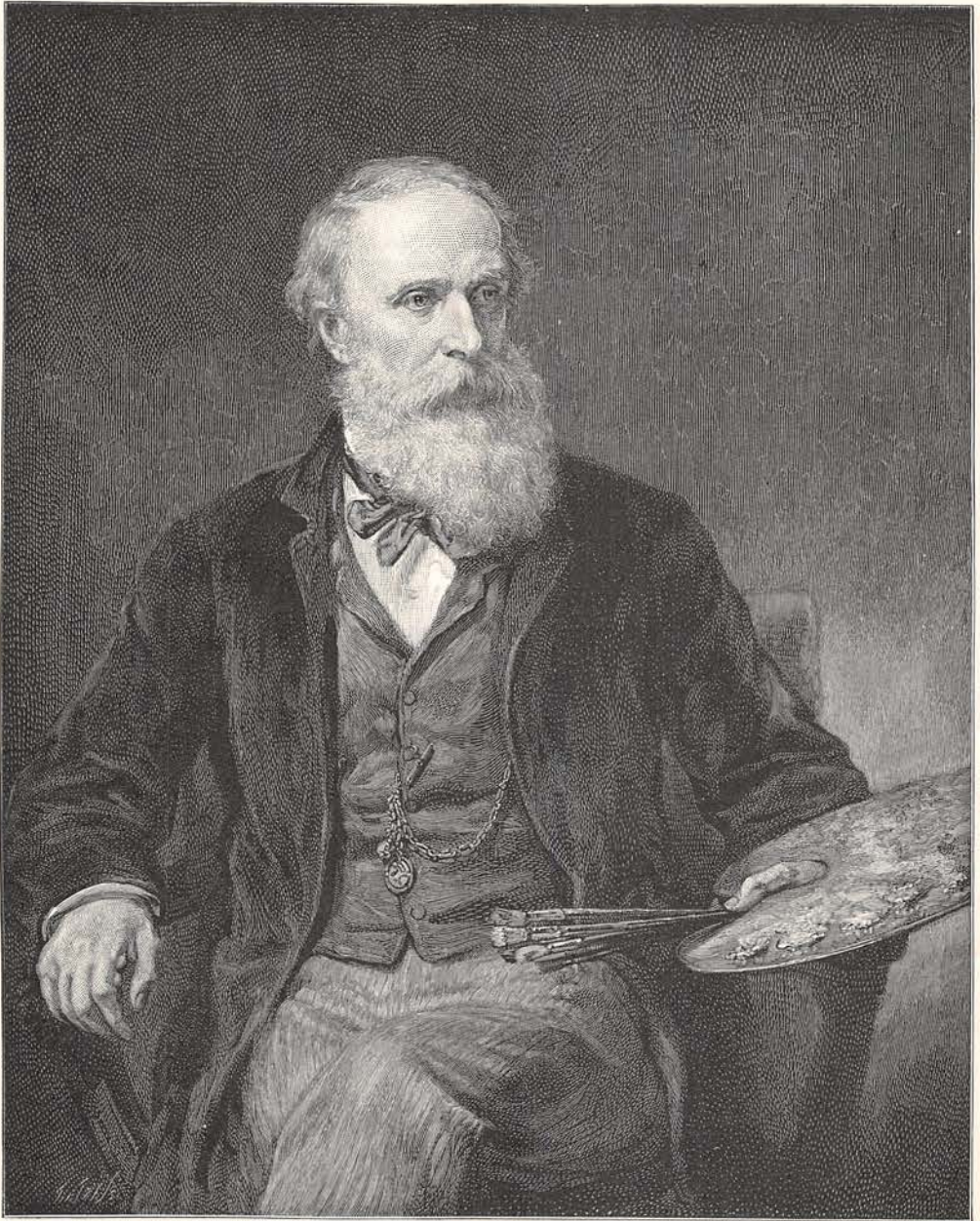
The impact of two bodies thus fusing into one evolved new force and fire, and it was for the due direction of this that under the designation of those interested in literature and the arts practical men of action were introduced as members of the club. Out of the best of the life around them the founders brought into it as an essential working power, to give it breadth and impulse, the chosen men of affairs of the time. Leaders in each profession, jurists, merchants, physicians, journalists, teachers, men of brains who had coined their brains into hard work and fairly won distinction by doing the state or the community some service, came in to aid, strengthen, and diversify the Century. Points of mental contact and interaction of character multiplied, ideas and knowledge mingled from different spheres, criticism of both art and life grew broad and practical, and



FIREPLACE IN THE ART GALLERY IN THE OLD BUILDING.

innumerable outlets for influence upon the community were opened.

Assured that the spirit of the club was a serious and a living one, its members cared little at first for the few and simple rules controlling its action. Its government has matured to its present solidity through a series of changes. Equality was and is the atmosphere of this little republic of letters. At first a pure democracy, it controlled its expenditures and its accessions of members by direct vote of the body, only delegating to a managing committee the task of suggestions, and to keepers of the keys and the pen the details of its records and finances. After thriving eight years under this informal practice, its enlargement required the creation of a committee on admissions, to reconcile conflicting preferences for candidates, and of a committee on supplies, the original of the present house committee, to provide for



DANIEL HUNTINGTON, PRESIDENT OF THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION.
(FROM A PAINTING BY HIMSELF IN POSSESSION OF THE ASSOCIATION.)

its material comfort. Still expanding, it marked its tenth year by the added dignity of a charter, the change to a representative government guided by a president and board of managers, and the adoption of a formal constitution. In the year 1870 the powers reserved to the association in general and those delegated to its managers were more precisely defined, and the functions of its several committees more distinctly marked out, by the adoption, after long

discussions, of the constitution which fixes the club's present form of government.

The Century is often called a conservative body. But its members would not be Americans if they were not apt to raise nice questions touching this instrument, and to bring its provisions under the light of interpretation. Such debates were usually highly entertaining, from the complete lack of parliamentary practice attending them—a curious irregularity in an

assembly containing so many lawyers. They commonly ended, as the only escape from a tangle of points of order, by some one moving, with enthusiastic assent, to lay the whole subject on the table. Such watchfulness may be trusted to prevent "power stealing from the many to the few." The conservatism of the older checking fresh enthusiasm among the newer members may preserve a healthy balance and guide its action securely along the tried paths. Still it has been feared on more than one critical occasion that the general powers reserved to the association were guarded more jealously than wisely. The weakness of its central authority has been sometimes felt—the balance has at times inclined dangerously under the sway of temporary impulse. The lack of strong disciplinary powers in individual cases has been especially an evil, and the great enlargement of the club, and the growing diversity among its members, must in time imperatively call for a remedy.

The first president of the society was Gulian C. Verplanck, a man of singular mental versatility, threefold eminent as a theologian, a jurist, and a critic, whose performances in those diverse fields of learning are still admired and consulted. It was he who wrote of Irving and his *History of New York* that his mind "wasted the riches of its fancy on an ungrateful theme, and its exuberant humor in a coarse caricature." His gentleness forbade him to reproach in the classic phrase he might have used the insult to his race. And it was he of whom Irving wrote in answer, "He said nothing of my work that I have not long thought of it myself." It became him to resent this dishonor done to the Dutch strain that mingles in our city's best life, because he was the most finished example of that race the country has known, expressing its highest qualities in "his benignant dignity of form and character."

With Verplanck began that line of the Century's chiefs each one of whom has ranked as chief in all the land in his chosen pursuit. He became a present and pervading power for the club, in touch at all points with its members, ripe in critical faculty, rich in reminiscence, ready to share and suggest in talk. Under his rule the society doubled in numbers, widened its range of selection, grew compact and homogeneous, and rose to the place of a recognized force in the social life of the city. His love for the club led him to dedicate to it the most characteristic of his minor works. *Twelfth Night*, having been, as it continues to be, its peculiar festival, it was honored with unusual ceremony on the removal to a new house, its present abode, in 1857. To grace the time Verplanck wrote a charming monograph on the history and romance of Three

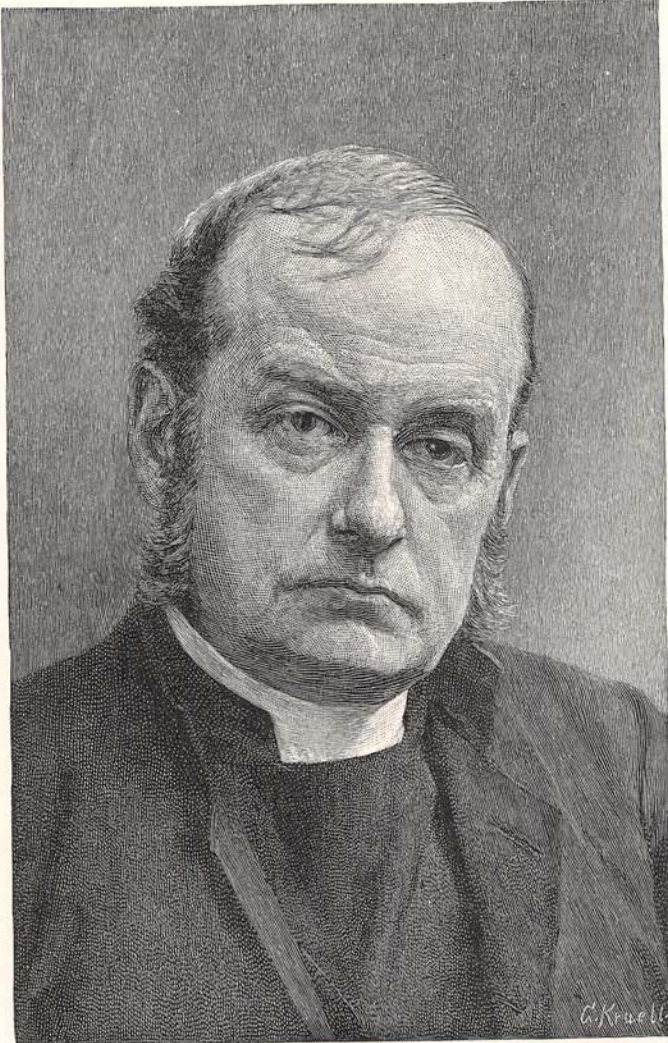
Kings' Day, adorning sixty pages with curious learning and delicate sentiment.

After its manner, in common with all institutions, the Century underwent the influence of the civil war, agitating but not endangering its stability. Perhaps within its walls the passion of the hour was less vehement, discussion less acrid, than without. Yet division crept in, growing to friction, heat, and explosion. Verplanck invited its stroke. He gave free expression to his old-fashioned ideas of federal power, hardened, as was the case with many great lawyers of the day, by rigid judicial training, and he questioned the authority of the Government to issue a forced currency, and the probability of its redemption. If his contention could not be answered, it might be punished. Therefore at the election held by the club in 1864 a very large adverse vote defeated him, virtually deposing him from the presidency, and substituting Bancroft as his successor. Bryant, however, voted for him. Verplanck was too magnanimous to feel from the incident any chill in his attachment to the club, or to withdraw from its circle. Had he lived, he might have read his complete vindication by Bancroft himself, twenty-two years later, in the powerful published argument "A Plea for the Constitution," by which the latter demolishes the claim made by the Government of a constitutional right to emit legal tenders.

In the same year an incident growing out of the war gave occasion for more harmonious action. Among the bright spirits whose wit kindled in that highly charged atmosphere like a light in oxygen, Peter A. Porter was the most accomplished. He edited the "Century Journal," made up of contributed sketches, read occasionally at meetings, and discontinued only when its supporters preferred serving the public as professed authors. It did not contain some of his keen sayings, epigrammatic enough to recall. At that time a Count —, a malignant and insolent Russian, of uncertain origin, singularly ill-favored and ill-mannered, was tolerated in diplomatic circles at the capital and in New York society for unexplained reasons. Some one asking what his means of support were, Porter answered that, so far as he had remarked, the count lived mainly on cold shoulder. Going from the muddy street into an avenue club-house one rainy Easter when the wearers of spring dresses were picking their way across, he reproved a friend for not keeping the church festival. "I see," he said, "you prefer to observe the passover." Porter became a soldier, as his father had been, sacrificing all to patriotism, and fell, struck by six balls, at the head of a charge on the enemy's works at Cold Harbor, the 3d of June, 1864. His body lay for two days within a few rods of the

trenches, and was recovered on a rainy night by five soldiers of his regiment risking their lives by crawling on hands and knees through the darkness to bring it off. The Century honored the gallant act of devotion by caus-

It is by a strange coincidence that after twenty-six years of silence, and while this page is in the press, the missing one of those five comrades in arms reappears and claims the medal inscribed with his name.



RT. REV. HENRY C. POTTER, D.D., BISHOP OF NEW YORK, 1ST VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION. (FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY ROCKWOOD.)

ing to be struck, and presenting to each of the men who could be traced, a gold medal. The disk of this medal is an inch and three-quarters across, engraved on the obverse with the figures of four soldiers carrying a body, the reverse bearing the legend, "A tribute by the Century to . . . for a rare act of heroic devotion in rescuing the body of Colonel Peter A. Porter, 8th N. Y. Artillery, from under the guns of the enemy, Cold Harbor, Va., June 3, 1864," and the rim being inscribed, "Valor and affection triumphant in life and death."

Bancroft ruled the Century for the term between 1864 and 1868, while the passionate interest of the country in questions of reconstruction found reflection in informal and spirited discussions at the club gatherings. Lieber and Bellows were leaders in conversation. No good object ever wanted sincere and sympathetic support from Bellows. Here the great fair of the Sanitary Commission was devised and shaped by his aid, and the plan of the Metropolitan Museum ripened here through his suggestion. His theories were rounded into

beauty and his sentences were fervent with conviction. But as he had emerged into public life from the Temple through the Beautiful Gate of charity, he bore his *idola spectis* with him, and saw them attacked and sometimes shattered in the unsparing debates he stimulated. It would be ungracious and ungrateful to refrain from saying that no one believed more firmly in the Century's meaning than Bellows did, or helped its purposes more freely and wisely, or lent to its repute more of personal character. Lieber, rich with European experience, skilled in dialectics, aggressive and suggestive, provoked many an argument. His mind, combining in an unusual degree subtlety with solidity, carried historical speculation to the verge of paradox. It was his favorite contention, proceeding on refined distinctions, that at the Revolution this country was already, if unconsciously, a national unity, and not a mere group of colonies, forming a potential nation. Eighty years earlier he would have been more monarchic than Hamilton. In his public teachings he fully grasped and clearly expounded the true doctrine, that the Union created a federated and not a consolidated nation, with a government limited to a delegated sovereignty, and supreme only in its permitted sphere. In conversation he maintained the theory that the United States would and should emerge from the civil war transformed to a far more compact State, closely resembling European nations. His arguments on this theme with jurists of the Century filled many an evening with eager and instructive debate, of which the conclusions, seldom those he labored for, often found their way to the public through the press.

Though punctual in his official duties, Bancroft never became a familiar figure at the club. So serious was his sense of its character and purposes that he always spoke of it with intention as the Century Association, never as the Century Club. One of his tributes to it is his address welcoming Bryant at the festival offered by the Century in honor of the poet's seventieth birthday, which is preserved in the sumptuous volume published as a memorial of the meeting of November 5, 1864, when Emerson, Holmes, Lowell, Whittier, Boker, sent greetings from the East and from the South. During his four years of rule the club increased to half a thousand and gained some of its most conspicuous additions. A glance at the lists will show how strictly at that time the club regarded its professed objects in applying the rule of selection. The note of quality in admitted candidates has never been higher. More than forty names may be marked, including those of painters, poets, authors, lawyers, professors, of men at-

tracted to its membership during Bancroft's presidency, who have inspired it with fresh vigor and variety, and contributed with zeal to sustain and spread its reputation. No richer infusion of new blood has vitalized the body, even during its years Consule Verplancko.

Bancroft passed from the chair, or, as it is said that his humor put it, stepped down into the public service as Minister to Berlin in 1868. To mark its respect for its translated chief the club created for him the rank, unknown to its laws, of honorary member, and consented to live under an interregnum, leaving his place vacant for several months.

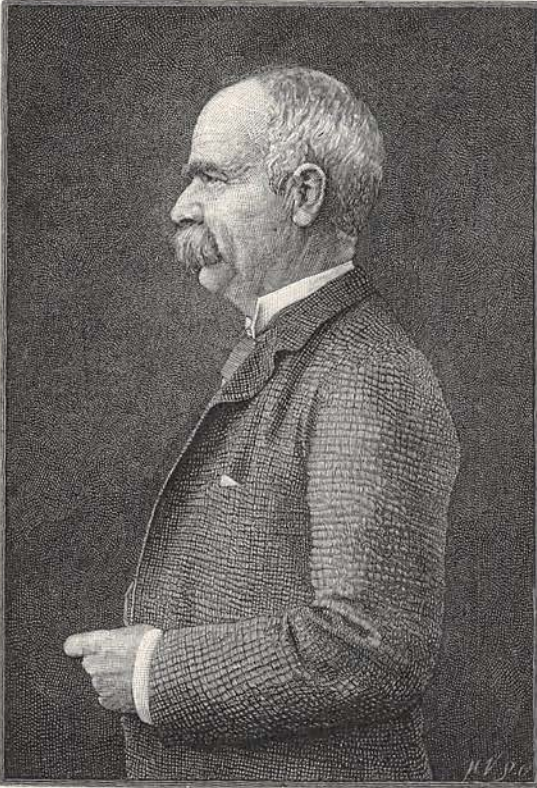
The hope expressed in the salutation *Redeunt Saturnia regna*, welcoming Bryant, fulfilled itself in the eleven years of his presidency. The outward signs of the club's prosperity through that period were an enlargement in numbers, the orderly management promoted by an improved constitution, and its increase in possessions. An inward grace, a secret harmonious growth of strength, and a sincere public respect rising and gathering about it, were in great part the fruit of his personality. It became a mark of distinction to be a Centurion, under the leadership of the first literary man of the country. Those among the hundreds eagerly pressing at its doors who gained entrance brought with them new vigor, the changing ideas of the time, and certain consequent slowly working but sure modifications of its character.

Averse to crowds, even to select ones, Bryant was not often seen at the club except in official meetings. The careless vivacity and mental undress fashion of the place hardly suited his serious and somewhat punctilious habits of thought and phrase. On rare evenings he would join a group around the classic mantel-piece in the smoking-room, and decide an appeal on a point of criticism, or answer the challenge of some paradox. One such occasion came in a discussion on the claim of Watts to the name of poet. He listened quietly to the differing opinions. A few agreed with Jean Ingelow that Watts wrote, as in his "Cradle Hymn," "a good many sweet and musical lines," and that "this was poetry." Others maintained, as the scientific authority of Huxley has since pronounced, that "as poetry, good Dr. Watts's pious doggerel is undoubtedly naught." There was a touch of kindly sympathy, one could not remark even a trace of condescension in Bryant's tone, as he admitted Watts's right to a place among poets, dwelling on his pure feeling, his simple directness, and his command of melodious cadences, and citing, as an instance:

Cold mountains and the midnight air
Witnessed the fervor of thy prayer.

We yielded to the master's authority, but irreverently asked whether he might not be influenced by some special attraction for the cold mountains.

At the date of Bryant's death, in 1878, the Century had been in existence for thirty-one years, about the term of a generation of men. Of that generation in this city it had brought together most of the choicest spirits in freest in-



HENRY E. HOWLAND, SECRETARY OF THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION.
(FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY COX.)

tercourse. Without formality or design, it had become an institute of mutual enlightenment among men knowing the worth of one another's work, likened by Bellows, more than half seriously, to the French Academy. A sure result of this communion was absolute equality among those who shared it. No true Centurion ever assumed anything, each standing in his real place. The atmosphere killed pretension and stifled shams. The pedant or the conceited person silently drifted away. How could it be otherwise, while a famous painter was describing some scene, or a noted philosopher illustrating some theory, or an acute statesman drawing some historical parallel, than that the egotist should drop himself, and the prosier forget to prose?

The strain of driving the business and social

machinery of this great city unbent at evening here, finding rest in interchange of fresh thoughts. Out of this friction of minds flashed incessant currents, conveying force and light. Art, seeking the ideal in life, and practice, working with its realities, instructed and invigorated each other. Conversation ranged animated over boundless fields—from Hindu codes to the latest case in court; from Michael Angelo to "Punch"; from the Decalogue to the newest guesses of science; from Gladstone's politics to the morning's editorials; from Calvinism to Darwinism; from ancient legends to yesterday's gossip; from cosmogonies to the freshest nonsense in puns. Hardly a question of those the human mind can solve that, if proposed here, would not have met from some one a fit answer or a keen surmise. Is some apt quotation or curious literary fact wanted? Bayard Taylor, or Porter, or Bristed, can give it. Some fair sentence on a new play, or nice judgment on an old author? Verplanck and Slosson are arbiters. If you need light on some fresh scientific theory, in yonder corner Renwick and Craven and Youmans are probably discussing it. Cross the room, and you may consult Durand and Kensett and Gifford about canons of art, or their experience of patronage. John Van Buren and Samuel J. Tilden can entertain you with old state secrets, or Clarkson Potter and Chester A. Arthur with new ones. Inquiring into the history of old New York, you find in Mount and Ruggles a mine of information. That spirited talk going on round the fireplace on the moral effect of some political measure is between Bryant and Lieber and Bellows. Bowman will discourse to you of music; Sands and Agnew of medicine; Gillmore or Mac-

farland will give you narratives of war.

Here were sifted by inquiry the philosophy of politics, the realities of religion, the principles of social reforms. No subject was too high or too small to be attacked in talk. Thus no one at the supper-table felt any surprise when one evening Roelker, of Teutonic build and heroic digestion, both corporeal and mental, after explaining some veiled passages in Goethe's "Italiemische Reise" by extracts from his correspondence, looked up with a twinkle in his eye from his beefsteak and pint of Chambertin, and discharged this bombshell of a proposition: "The entropy of the universe tends to zero." At once there was commotion, and after ten minutes spent in settling definitions the combat began, raging between divines, astronomers, and poets, till the house



J. HAMPDEN ROBB, TREASURER.

doors closed on it, still undecided, at three o'clock in the morning.

Some striking instances remain in memory of the way in which at those meetings not only the best informed imparted knowledge, but the most experienced contributed also a kind of prescience upon subjects within their cognizance. Years before the electoral commission awarded Hayes the presidency, a statesman who afterwards became counsel in that contest, in the course of a discussion at the club on the limits of State and Federal powers, instanced the possible state of facts which actually arose in 1876, and maintained the very theory on which that decision proceeded. The success of the German invasion of France was confidently foretold, and even the probable lines of advance and points of attack correctly indicated by military experts among us when the telegraph delayed to send so much as reports. While Wagner was half a myth at home, and derided as a charlatan at Paris, one of our members explained his theories to those who cared to listen, predicting their triumph and promising the vogue of German opera presenting his works among us at no distant day. Before foreign savants had offered any explanation of those crimson mists that suffused the sky after the eruption of Krakatoa, we accepted at the club from scientific observers, not hazarded as a guess, but affirmed as a solution, the drift of its volcanic dust in the air as their probable cause.

Nothing is more intangible than the genius of conversation, and no reputation more evanescent than one which rises from felicity in it. Yet the men who have just been named—all of whom ceased long ago to animate the Century with their living presence—did succeed in infusing something of their own spirit

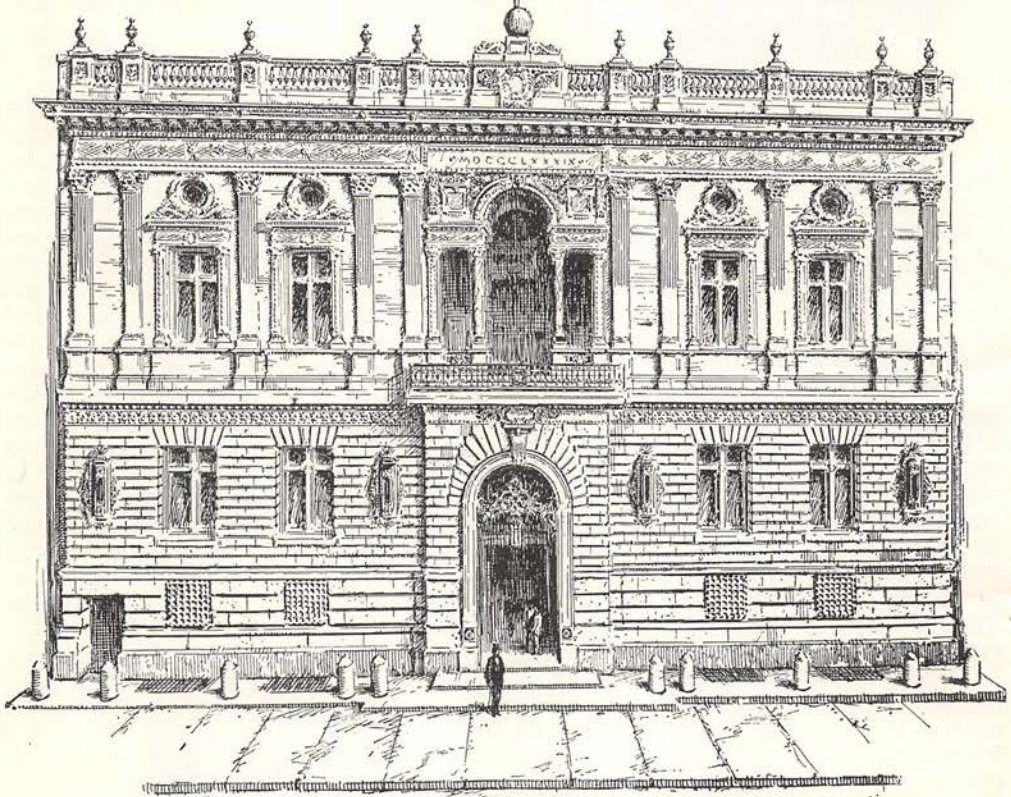
into its corporate life, and in preserving for it continuity in that reputation which they did so much to create. Departing one by one, and one by one replaced, they occasioned no sudden break in its growth, and gave over its care to like successors of their own choice. As no generation has a monopoly of talent, no art ever dies, and no accomplishment misses new cultivators, men never have been wanting to accept and improve this intellectual inheritance. Forty years hence the Century will cite these men of to-day among the lights of the time, as they themselves now designate the Centurions of the earlier date. Some test of their claims and some proof of their powers remain for us in such a concrete form as may be preserved in the books they wrote and the pictures they painted.

The foundation of a gallery or a library formed no part of the original plan of the Century. It enjoyed no endowment and appealed to no patrons for these purposes. Its active members were creators, not collectors, and they judged rightly that their efforts to promote the love of art and letters, and to inspire correct taste among the community, would find their reward in the accumulation of books and pictures through private liberality. Besides, the Academy already occupied one field, and authors and publishers might be trusted to cultivate the other. What the club could do, and what it faithfully did in its limited sphere, was to provide for regular exhibitions in its own rooms and by its own artists of their best productions. For more than thirty years these monthly exhibitions have been repeated, and the experiment fairly tried of a competition without prizes before a sifted jury of critics

THE LATE WALTER HOWE,
FORMERLY CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE.

from the chosen men of all professions—a miniature Salon open only to a little public of competent and impartial spectators. It could not be that this mingling of ripe experience and eager aspiration among artist-spirits, their frank regard, their sure judgment and varied mutual comparison under the comment of keen unprofessional observers, should have failed to correct, to inspire, to elevate those who took part in it, or should have missed its developing power upon the culture of art in the country. During its earlier years

branch of American art. There are examples of most of the conspicuous painters who have at any time been members, all of them interesting for their individual note, many of them valued as memorials of those holders of the brush whose last strokes they preserve. For the rest it displays a rather hap-hazard collection, brought together on no regular system, made up of pictures some of which were bequeathed *en bloc* as the treasure of an early amateur, some acquired through subscription, and others accepted in lieu of initiation fees, as the first-fruits of young artists' ambitions.



THE NEW BUILDING, 7, 9, 11, AND 13 WEST FORTY-THIRD STREET. MCKIM, MEAD, & WHITE, ARCHITECTS.

the occasional reading at meetings of a "Century Journal" gave an opportunity for young authors to test their powers and to invite criticism on their rehearsals from masters whose approval carried the prediction of that distinction and public favor since won by many of those aspirants.

For the reasons given, among the canvases composing the club's gallery, not grouped in one room, but lining all its walls as a decoration, no famous or costly works can be expected to have found a place. There are eight or ten portraits of exceptional merit, painted by the earlier and the later leaders in that

Many of these last are characteristic and clever. As to most of them, their authors, recognizing the promise of their earlier theories and experiments, and comparing that with their recent clearer views and fuller performance, probably look on them with a feeling the reverse of that affecting most of the members as they now regard their own photographs inserted in the club album at the date of their admission, hardly repressing a sigh that the features and figures there presented are not those of to-day.

It was an easier undertaking for the club to evolve at least the framework of a library

from its own resources. An author can offer a set of his works when a painter cannot afford a replica. Beginning with presentation copies and other gifts, and nourished by a liberal yearly allowance, this collection of 7600 bound volumes now forms a very respectable nucleus for an all-round club library. Well furnished with encyclopedias, dictionaries of the several arts, and books of reference, supplied with English standard authors, varied by a moderate representation of classics in other languages, it offers besides some features of interest to the student or the seeker after curiosities. It contains sets of the works of most of the members who are authors, the best editions of Hogarth and Gillray, several valuable illustrated treatises on special arts, collections of engravings from foreign galleries of sculpture, and some specimens of the early literature of this country. The department of periodical literature is fortunate in the support it gains from a small permanent fund, bequeathed to the club for that object by one of its earlier members.

The club has never jealously confined its advantages to the initiated. Noted for its open welcome to all forms of thought,—which invited in its early days the malicious epigram styling it a club of artists, atheists, and infidels,—it has been as freely hospitable to all persons who came bringing the fruits of thought. Its doors are open, under reasonable restrictions, to resident friends of members. Its large welcome has brought into our meetings many whose only claim was that they were curious to see men who are talked of. Few foreigners of note who come to study New York neglect a visit to the Century as a contribution to its due understanding. The discretion intrusted to the managers of receiving strangers distinguished in art or literature, most liberally construed, has given us personal knowledge of such men as Thackeray, Huxley, Arnold, Herkomer, Froude, Freeman, Munkacsy, and a score of other masters. Thackeray cherished a particular liking for the Century, describing it as the most agreeable club he knew, and frequenting it as a member completely at home whenever he was in the city. A special chafing-dish, devoted to celebrating his warm preference for the American oyster, with his initials scratched on the bowl, was long preserved in memory of his cookery and the wit that seasoned it.

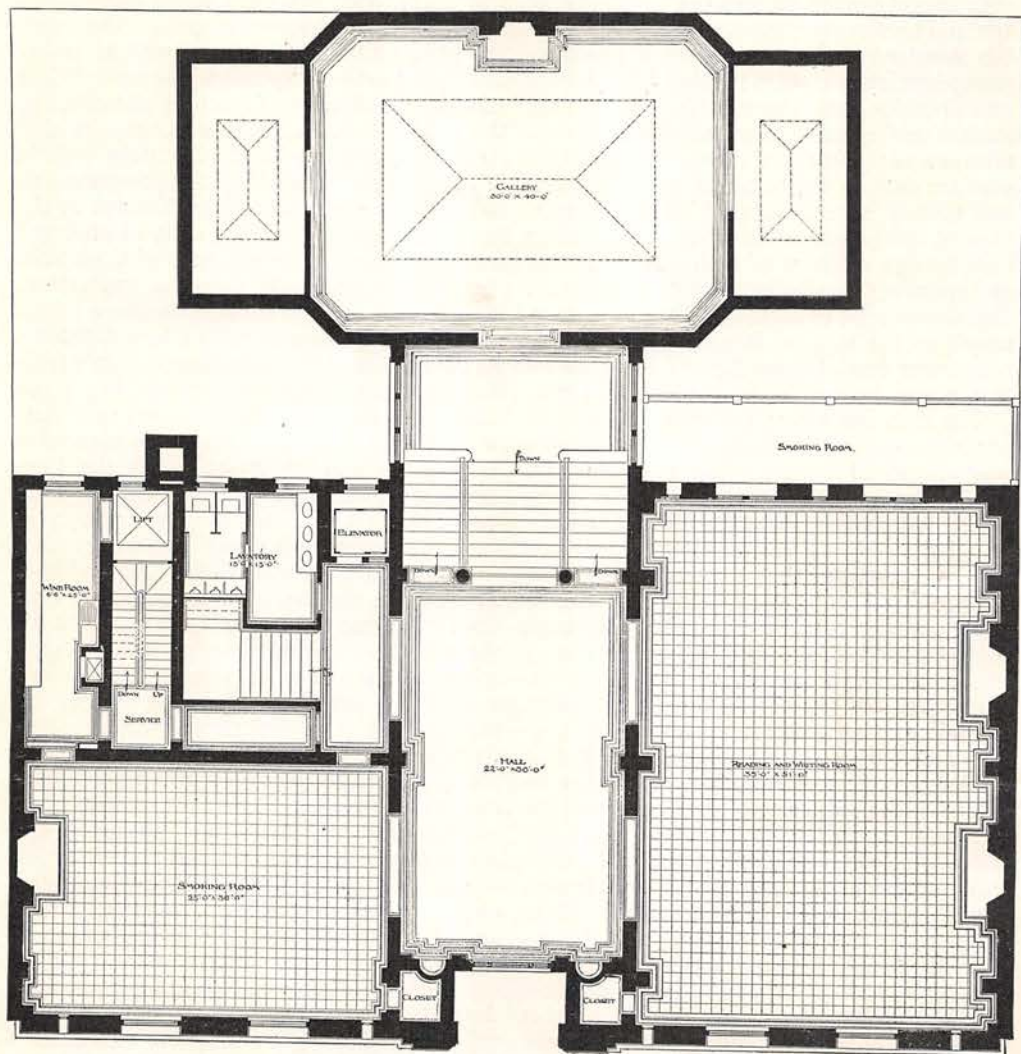
Looking back forty-five years, it is easily perceived that the Century and its ways at the beginning seem old fashioned, just as the men of that date now appear to us, and that it could not have continued to this time precisely the same as it then was. As to fashion in the restricted sense, it has never had anything to do with that. There have always been, as there now are, men of

fashion among its members, but it was not by that quality that they became members. The club has never been a fashionable one by either its locality, or the tone of its frequenters, or the standards it set up. The essential character of those things about which its interest centers, and for the sake of which it arose and still exists, does not yield to the fluctuations of fashion in its narrower meaning. Their canons have nothing in common with its codes. But their modes of expression, the tone of their utterance, their ways of reaching and affecting the public, must admit the control of that larger all-pervading influence, "the fashion of the times," continually passing over from an old order to a new. And the Century, by the law of its being, as a composite of club and academy, blending intellectual with material pleasures, is peculiarly open to impressions from such change. Professing to offer a reflection of the times, it must reflect them faithfully. As the fashion of the times imperceptibly fades into something else, "never continuing in one stay" long enough to be attached to a date or attributed to a personality, it is impossible to note the exact point at which the Century began to be more of a club and less of an association. There was always tendency in that course; there was always resistance to that progress through fear of its direction and end. There have continually been heard, at least since it became a chartered body and took the place of a tax-paying property owner, counsels from the elders of clinging to the old ways, and forebodings of danger in steps untried, as well as warnings from younger enthusiasts against suffering a dry rot to set in. Stubborn debates over each increase of members have followed these lines, and as their solution the inevitable has always come. Amusement, except such as conversation might afford, was excluded by the early statutes, yet chess soon gained tolerance, though looked at askance as a withdrawal from sociality. Not for thirteen years was the click of the billiard ball allowed to break the repose of the club, which only condescended then to the enjoyment of the game by select subscribers. The list remains among the archives as a curious record of the innovators of the year 1860. The latest advance in this persistent drift took the form of a proposed amendment to the constitution, permitting card-playing, which was summarily rejected. Yet it was discussed: ten years ago it would not have been even seconded. And as the most material change of all in its habits, steadily pressed through contests for twenty years between conservatives and innovators, after failure of many experiments, the plain living of the club's infancy has become legally sublimated into the steam

of rich distilled perfumes which to-day salutes the Centurion as he passes the dining-room of its established restaurant. There is still hope that it will be merely as a convenience, and not as a symbol, that the crown and apex of its new building is to be held by the kitchen.

All these positive marks of modification in

expedient and proper for that purpose," implies, rather obscurely and indefinitely, the permission to cultivate social intercourse as a means to that end. It has been shown that the establishment of a gallery and library on any large scale was out of the question. The spirit of the Century could not fit into its legal



ARCHITECT'S PLAN OF THE SECOND FLOOR (NEW BUILDING).

its outward habit of life do not touch the question whether the spirit of the Century has undergone any change during its growth. It came into being in 1847 with the professed purpose of "the advancement of art and literature, as well as the promotion of social intercourse." Its charter of 1857 prescribes that the former object should be pursued "by establishing and maintaining a library, reading-room, and gallery of art," while its added clause, "and by such other means as shall be

body — the charter was a sounding program, not a living law. The promotion of social intercourse became at once, and has ever since continued to be, its primary motive force, through the indirect operation of which the advancement of art and letters was to be brought about. Now, in its slow and necessitated transformation from an association to a club, has that advancement been lost sight of, or is there danger that it may become superseded and extinguished by the ascendancy of



GRILL ROOM IN THE NEW BUILDING.

that social intercourse? It is a question which hangs yet upon decision.

The living force of the Century is its flexibility in adaptation to the needs of the time. It grew naturally out of such fitness and has prospered through such adjustments. Probably the strongest influence that ever pressed upon it from without is that impulse thrust on social life by the consequences of the civil war. Sudden wealth abounded, and the seed took root of that luxury which to-day in our city flowers into splendid materialism, imitating under very similar conditions the social life of a Genoa or a Venice in its prime. How could the Century escape that ferment in the community of which it is a component part?

Its history in this period may yield some hints for the solution of the question whether it is to lead a transformed life in its more splendid home. The great increase in applications for membership—for the Century itself had become one of the luxuries—induced an expanded interpretation of its rules, which allowed them to include as amateurs of arts and letters a wide range of those professedly, rather than practically, so interested. A like extension of its invitation to men of affairs permitted such a construction of the terms of admission as to call in many whose ability in any pursuit whatever of business life had proved itself by accumulation of wealth. It is plain that the club was aware what it was doing in accepting this widening of its base, since an adverse vote of one-third the ballots cast in any individual case would at once have checked the tendency. It feared no danger to its prestige,

certainly none to its prosperity, in opening a channel for the glittering if sometimes turbid floods of Pactolus to mingle with the clear waters of Helicon.

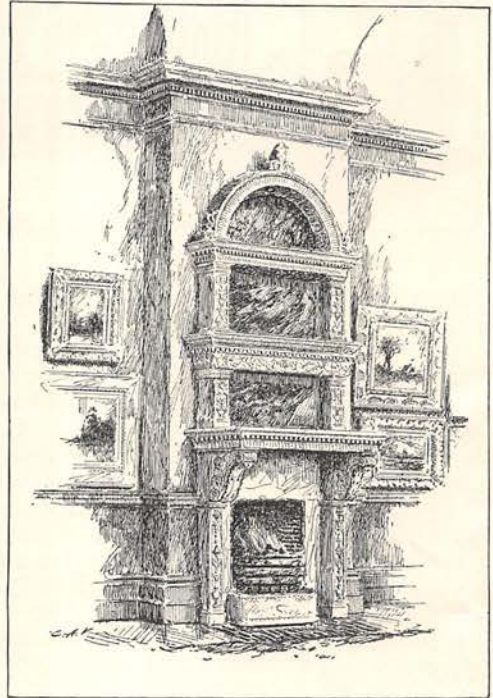
One effect of this tendency appeared, in spite of the carefully balanced composition of the Committee on Admissions, in a disturbance of the equipoise long maintained as a tradition in the relative numbers of the several classes of members. In the young Century artists and business men shared the control, being of equal force, and composing together half the body. Twenty-five years later the proportions had sensibly changed. The legal profession then supplied one-fourth of the membership, the mercantile about one-fifth, and artists one-eighth. At the present time the artists, still, as always, the flower and crown of the Century, represent one-seventh of the club, while merchants and financiers engross one-fourth its voting power, leaving to lawyers the second place, in the proportion of one-fifth. Men of other professions, who are really the salt of the club, sprinkled through it in relatively small numbers, but dominant in character and influence, are so grouped that of its 700 members about one in 25 is a clergyman, a journalist, or a publisher, one in 36 a physician, a man of science, or a professor, and one in 40 an author. That it has lost none of its attractions for cultivated men who do not pursue any profession appears from the fact that the proportion of men of leisure remains nearly the same that it has been for twenty years—that of one-eleventh.

Recognizing this preponderance, the busi-

ness men of the club have not been slow to apply it in the management of its material interests. Nor have their associates hesitated to trust their experience in affairs, and to accept their leadership, being aware of the imperative reasons for still further modifications in its ways if the Century would remain true to its profession of representing the times. In reflecting them fairly it must confess to having outgrown many things—its simplicity in living, corresponding ill with the luxury of society about it; its modest accommodations, contrasted with those of other clubs; even its habitation, left stranded and solitary by the currents of town life sweeping past and away from it. It determined therefore to dismiss one of the most permanent and interesting of its subjects for debate, the removal of its site, closing that long controversy before the difficulty of choice might make the decision too late, and trusting the prudence and ability of the leaders in that accepted movement to carry it out to an approved end. For the change implies much not appearing on the surface. It involves an enlarged scale of expenditure, a greatly increased membership, and almost certainly the exclusion as candidates for the future of many men of promise who could afford to accept from the old Century a welcome that the new Century cannot afford to offer. In a word, it implies the last change in that transformation, so slowly and surely evolving, of the association into a club. It implies, since it was inevitable, that the Century Association has really fulfilled its function. The conditions of its origin and course, imposed by time, place, and persons, could not be maintained here, and cannot be reproduced elsewhere.

Another element, and a congenital one, has worked yet more continuously to modify the character of the Century. It might have been foreseen that the diversity of seeds sown in its strong soil while it was virgin must in due time come to grow up and flower independently. Enlarging its borders and building up its repute, the club drew within it not only the leaders in each art or profession, but a throng of acolytes besides, those who aspired following those who had attained. These expanding groups, conscious of their special needs and sufficient in numbers and confidence, outgrew the state of representatives of their respective arts in a congress of intellect, and became instead each the nucleus of a new organization, recruited by their associates of equal value, whom the Century would gladly have received had its limits permitted. Thus were fostered within the Century and formed as direct offshoots from it, the Authors Club, the University, the Architects', the Engineers', and not a few artists' clubs. Becoming engrossed in ac-

tive pursuits that left them little leisure, the makers of these new circles naturally preferred to spend it among the followers of their own art, and without quitting the Century or losing their love for it, they lost the habit of frequent visits, leaving their place and work in it to later comers slow to assimilate its spirit. Add to this that the steady increase in numbers gradually relaxed that close sympathy knitting together the members of a compact body, and forbade the diffusion among seven hundred of a common force of sentiment or purpose that had easily permeated one-third that number, and it



FIREPLACE IN THE PICTURE GALLERY (NEW BUILDING).

will readily be seen how a twofold element of segregation has profoundly invaded the original unity of the Century.

This rule of disassociation was inherent though not foreseen at its origin. To combine, in order afterward to separate, was part of its necessary if undesigned law. This is truly the function of evolution which the Century has unconsciously discharged. Forty years ago the intellectual forces of New York, dissipated among pursuits that had no common interest, needed a focus. This the Century created. It concentrated mental light and heat from all sources. It brought the elements of culture and aspiration into working contact. Then when it had fostered them by sympathy and fused them by interaction into a homogeneous whole, with a character and a purpose of its

own, it obeyed the universal law of evolution, and proceeded to differentiate them.

Beyond question the Century has been a power for good, the more so because it assumed no authority, and wrought unconscious of itself. It has transcended its chartered function of promoting the advancement of art and literature. Not only have the teachings of older artists and the questionings of younger ones here combined to stimulate the tone and diffuse the culture of the arts; not only have wits and authors, now famous, gained suggestion and encouragement here. No one ever left the Century after one of its spirited gatherings of the older time without carrying away some new fact, or impression, or conviction to spread in ever-widening circles among his associates in the outer community. As the chiefs of all professions met here, so were the standards of conduct in each tested by comparison, illustrated by instances from diverse experience of other lives. The artist learned the artistic needs of the lay public; the author absorbed the passing spirit of the time; the politician rose to broader views; the scientist found his limitations; the divine came in touch with liberal inquiry; the editor caught the tone of living convictions. Sincere and free seeking for truth by discussion gave every man who took a worthy part in it, if only a listener's, better hope and light for the better conduct of life. And this is the virtue which has steadily gone forth from the Century, not without influence on the community: a spirit subtle, elusive, hard to define, but none the less real — the spirit and the habit of search for the best in all things.

The new house of the Century is built a mile and a half farther up town than its old one, occupying a space one hundred feet square on the north side of Forty-third street, a little distance from its junction with Fifth Avenue, at the point where the process of degrading that royal road into a shopping street seems for the moment to have paused. Its style is that Italian Renaissance brought into such vogue of late years for both public and private buildings. The material is a pale brick, in color a little warmer than gray, rather colder than yellow, somewhat raw as yet, but promising mellowness with time, and relieved over much of its surface with terra-cotta ornamentation of a harmonizing tint. It rises to the height of three stories, the lowest one finished in dressed gray stone crossed by narrow horizontal bands of terra-cotta, forming such an elevation as to serve for a massive base to the whole structure, and each of the upper ones gaining in height upon the one below it. The entrance is through a graceful and stately arch of gray stone, piercing the two lower stories, and supporting at the base of the third a

broad entablature crowned with an exquisite recessed loggia, which, after the Florentine manner, is open to the air, and with which the dining-room connects. Low pilasters, parting the window-bays, two on each side, relieve the flatness of the front and inclose spaces enriched but not crowded with wreaths and other decorative forms in terra-cotta. The effect yielded by the simple contour, pure lines, and large treatment of surface of the building, aided by its color, is that of blended dignity and delicacy.

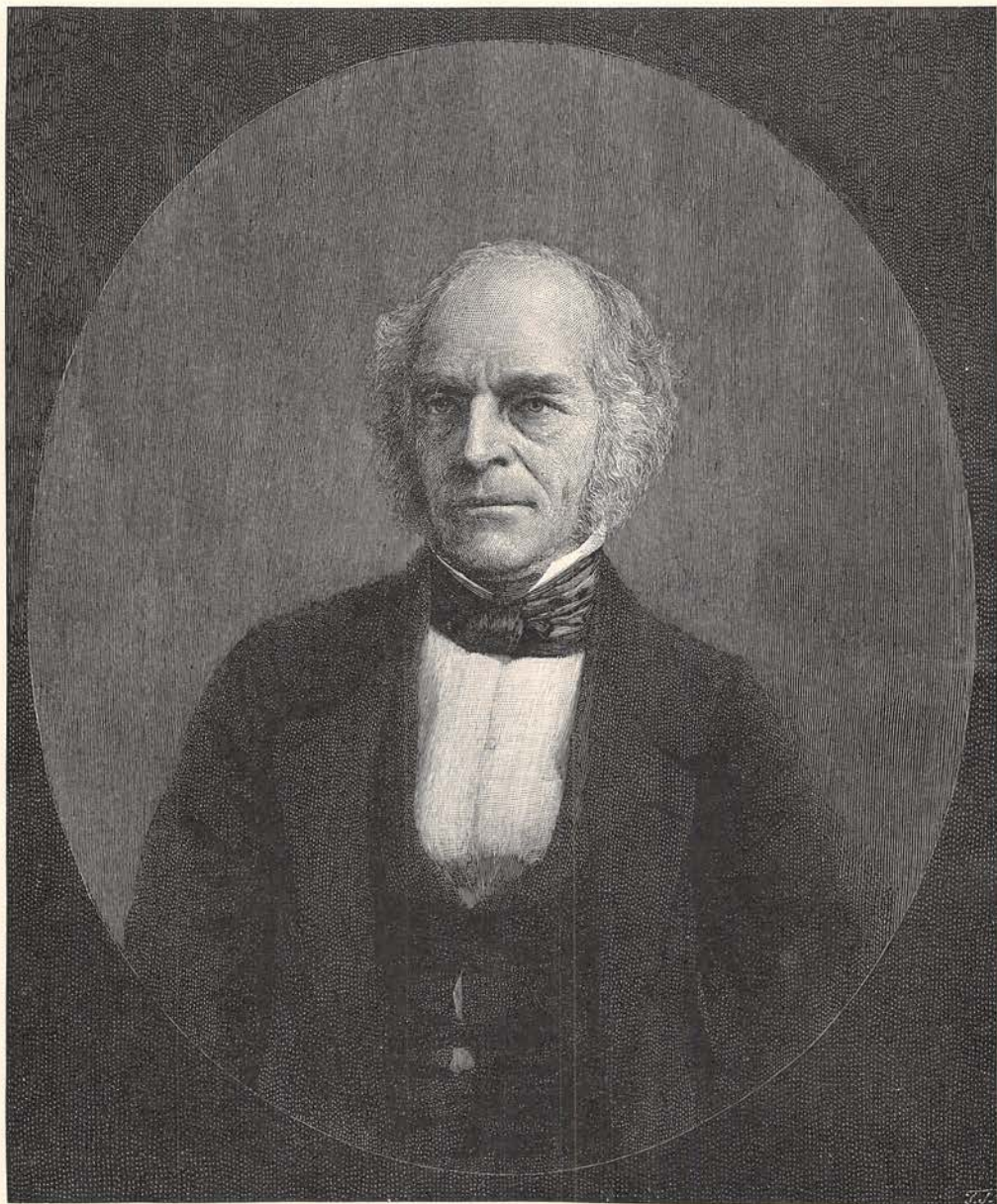
The interior arrangement preserves throughout that scheme of large communicating spaces which made so agreeable a feature in the old building. At the rear of the ground floor, given to offices and strangers' rooms, a broad stairway mounts on each side to a platform, midway of the height of this story, giving access to the gallery, detached from the main structure, built nearly across the width of the ground, and lighted from above and on three sides. The billiard room is below the gallery. Turning again towards the front, the double stairway rises to the second floor, divided into spacious halls for meetings and conversation, and gaining the third floor leads to the library and the dining and smoking rooms. Following the plan of all modern clubs, which civilization is strangely slow in adapting to private houses, the processes and odors of cooking are confined to the region just below the roof. It is curious that the ridgepole and the hearth, both of which were once synonyms for the home, should at length have met in one place.

An air of severe simplicity reigns in these marble-lined halls and oak-wainscoted apartments, relieved by color of onyx panels, by graceful curves of classic chimneypieces, by columns of dark wood and veined marble, and by the gilding of capital and balustrade. So free are the spaces that from almost any point there opens a striking perspective of arch and pillar and stairway. The many members who have surveyed the world of clubdom from Calcutta to San Francisco pronounce the Century's new home to be, among buildings so occupied, unique and complete.

In January last the Century began in the new house the forty-fifth year of its existence and the first of a new era. It relinquished the old abode to a club of brewers, together with the furniture and whatever of old associations may be supposed to dwell in and about these material relics of their owners for a generation. The new possessors, as experts, will enjoy with peculiar zest the fruits of the promise —

Quo semel est imbuta recens, servabit odorem
Testa diu.

A. R. Macdonough.



ENGRAVED BY T. JOHNSON.

AFTER A DAGUERRETYPE IN POSSESSION OF THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION.

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.