

The Proposed Library Building in Washington.

ALTHOUGH the question of securing better accommodation for the Library of Congress has long been a burning one in Washington, it has not received as much attention from the outside press or from the people at large as is warranted by its great national importance. Few who have not personally inspected the present library can imagine the deplorable condition of the collection; few who have not read the reports of the librarian can conceive how rapid has been its recent growth or how inevitably this will increase in the near future; and still fewer, probably, know what steps have thus far been taken toward the erection of a new structure.

At the end of the year 1874 the library contained 274,157 volumes and some 50,000 pamphlets; while at the close of 1882 the aggregate was no less than 480,076 volumes and 160,000 pamphlets. All this immense and so rapidly growing mass of literature is now housed in a way which prevents its proper use and endangers its very existence. Long years ago the shelves were filled; supplementary ones—necessarily of wood—have been introduced wherever possible; and books are piled in great heaps all over the floor, allowing scarce space for the library attendants to move from point to point. The Toner collection of 27,000 volumes, a donation of the past year, is lodged in the crypts under the Rotunda. Every other unoccupied chamber in the Capitol has been pressed into service, and the very valuable files of domestic and foreign newspapers are stored in a garret partly of wooden construction. It is needless to say that the accommodation left for readers is ridiculously meager, and that there is not a place where a Member of Congress can work in even comparative quiet and privacy. A few more years and the librarians will be buried alive, and it will be physically impossible to introduce another volume. To this prospect must be added the unavoidable and ever-growing risk from a fire, which would be surely fatal if once started in these crowded rooms.

It has actually been asked more than once why, under these circumstances, are additions made to the collection? Such a question hardly merits a serious answer; but a sufficient one is furnished by the mere fact that here—alone in all the world—the functions of a copyright bureau are combined with those of the library proper. From this one source came, in 1882, 22,000 additional numbers into the collection. Of course there can be no pretense of affording proper accommodation for the copyright clerks, or proper storage for the specimen volumes furnished under the law. The fire which may occur in spite of the great watchfulness of the attendants would not only be a public calamity, but a great private injury to multitudes of authors and publishers. Every man who pays for the copyrighting of a book or print has therefore a special right to demand that Congress shall provide a place in which the records of the transaction may be preserved in a suitable manner.

Of course none of these facts are new to our legislators. It is many years since the necessity of further accommodation for the library was demonstrated, and no fewer than nine years since active agitation has been under way for its attainment. The first proposal was to enlarge the Capitol itself by means of a projecting

wing. This was seen, however, by every architect who was consulted and by every person who realized the rate of growth of the collection, to be a plan that would not only ruin the appearance of the Capitol, but afford only a temporary, makeshift shelter for the books. "But," many a Member of Congress has been selfish enough to say, "it is the Library of Congress, and as such must not be removed from under our roof. Better have it improperly housed here than properly in any other place." Such a theory is to the last degree mistaken. To say that Congress needs for constant reference all these half-million volumes of miscellaneous literature is palpably absurd. If the bulk of them were removed to another spot, the present rooms would give ample fire-proof accommodation to a library of some 50,000 or 60,000 volumes, which would be more than sufficient for the needs of our legislators, and more than are to-day included in the library of the English Parliament—which, nevertheless, does not seem to pine to have the British Museum collection brought in under its roof. It is time, indeed, that this sort of opposition at least should give way to the absolute and crying needs of a library which is national in fact, if Congressional in name.

Nearly ten years ago a public competition was opened to obtain designs for a new library. Many architects responded, though few whose names would now be cited as among those of our better artists. The prize—there was no immediate prospect of actual work—was awarded to a local practitioner. The "Joint Committee on Additional Accommodation for the Library of Congress" long afterward authorized three architects—among them the former prize-winner—to prepare competitive designs once more, and this gentleman again won the suffrages of the judges,—not in an unqualified way, however; for he has since been requested or allowed to alter and correct his essays and to draw new ones in several different styles, until no fewer than nine or ten now hang on the walls of the committee room. Two years ago a bill to secure an appropriation to buy ground east of the Capitol, and to begin work according to the premiated design, passed the Senate, but was postponed in the House. Last session—February, 1883—a similar bill was defeated in the House by a majority of eleven votes. Shortly after, an amended bill providing for the construction of a library building, in sections and limited to cost two million dollars, upon some "government reservation" to be selected by a commission composed of the Secretary of the Interior, the Architect of the Capitol, and the Librarian of Congress, received a majority of fifty-eight votes in the House, but failed to pass because of the necessity for a two-thirds vote.

The failure of the first bill was undoubtedly owing to the site named therein. This site, which lies east of the Capitol, just beyond its own grounds, is not a government reservation, but would need to be acquired by purchase. Immediately there arose the dreaded cry of jobbery, and Congress shrank before it. Yet it seems as though this were the best possible site, since it is near the Capitol, and yet far enough away—remembering that there are rapidly growing groups of large trees between—to obviate the necessity of adopting a style of architecture absolutely identical with that of the Capitol itself. The only other available site is on Government ground south of the Treasury

building and between it and the Washington Monument. This, however, offers a less fortunate opportunity for architectural treatment, since it is partly surrounded by buildings which are mean and yet are likely to be permanent, and since it lies lower than the level of the approaching streets. A site formerly recommended for the purpose — on Judiciary Square — has now been appropriated for the new Pension offices, and few indorse the suggestion that more of the too-contracted public ground lying between the Capitol and the Potomac should be built over for any purpose. Surely the people would not grudge the necessary expenditure to secure the best possible site for their national library, and any Member of Congress who will say this in the present session should receive the thanks of the public and the support of his colleagues.

Thus the matter rested at the close of the last session. The committee in charge lapsed with the dissolution of Congress, and a new committee has now been appointed, which may either indorse the old plans and measures, or advocate new ones, and must then in either case appeal again to House and Senate.

Much as one regrets on general principles the failure of former efforts, it is yet impossible not to hope that the new committee will not feel itself bound in any way by the action of its predecessor, but will start quite afresh from the beginning. It is true that some little time will be lost by this method of procedure, and that time is of vital importance, since the present condition of the library is a national disgrace, and may result in a national misfortune. But it would be a misfortune and a disgrace were we to be given a building inferior to the best that might be obtained, — were one more to be added to the long list of architectural monstrosities, put up under governmental control, which deform our cities and corrupt the public taste. Ten years ago it would have been possible to secure a respectable, dignified, and scholarly building. To-day it would easily be possible to secure much more than this. We have now not one architect, but several, able to erect a structure upon which we could look with contentment and with pride. But it is well within the bounds of truth and charity to state that none of the designs of the architect who has thus far been most successful in competition come within this category. Pressing as is our need of a new library, we might better wait for a long time yet than afflict posterity by the execution of either of his essays. It is not a mere matter of "taste" which is involved in this decision. It is many matters of *fact* which are not readily perceptible, apparently, to untrained eyes (since they were not perceived by the various committees), but which could be thoroughly demonstrated to any mind whatever, were the drawings at hand for illustration. The first proposed elevation shows a so-called Gothic structure, impossible to describe according to any recognized type or formula. Not that one would deny freedom to the modern builder, whatever the style he chooses, or the liberty to recombine his elements and innovate upon the grammar of his predecessors. Architecture is, if anything, a living art, and may grow as does a living language, often welding together elements from various tongues. But it is not growth, it is not liberty or originality, to plan an immense front without any expression of the building's purpose or internal structure, without proper distri-

bution of masses or consideration of proportions, and then to cover it from top to bottom with a wilderness of applied details drawn from many times and quarters, without relation to the building they cover, the places they hold, or the functions they might reasonably be expected to fulfill, and utterly inharmonious with one another. Many of the details of this drawing could hardly be executed in their given places unless made of wood; none of them serve to strengthen or adorn the building, but all of them to deform, if not to drag it down.

Another design shows the same general outline with "Renaissance detail." One instance may serve to show the author's capabilities in this direction. The upper range of windows is of a type commonly found in early Italian Renaissance dwellings, round-arched, and divided into two round lights, with a circle in the space above these — the design being, of course, a reminiscence of Gothic tracery. Such a window is quite complete in itself; but here the designer, in his mad desire for "ornament," has placed above each a straight cornice with a triangular pediment, having no connection with the forms below; and to show that it has no use, even as a protection from the weather, it may be added that immediately over it projects the heavy cornice of the building.

The design which received the latest indorsement of the committee is a simpler Renaissance essay, less objectionable by reason of being less ambitious, but not really more excellent. Any visitor to Washington may examine these designs for himself, or may look at the new part of the Georgetown college for an example of what their author can produce. It would be, we repeat, nothing less than a public misfortune should the erection of the great new library be a sister work.

But since better architecture is surely to be had, how should the committee go about the task of securing it? The first and most essential thing is that they should abandon the idea of sitting as expert judges in an artistic matter. In no other province does the average layman hold himself capable of testing and directing professional work; but in the art of building it is the unfortunate custom for such capability to be claimed. If it is desirable that the library building should be a good work of art, then no lay committee appointed on purely political grounds should attempt to guide its erection. If it is *not* desirable and necessary, then let all pretense in this direction be frankly given up. Let us have a plain brick warehouse, in which our books can be safely stored until such time as we realize more clearly our needs, and the way in which they should be satisfied.

The first thing to be secured, of course, is a good plan. For this, the advice of competent librarians is absolutely necessary. A committee of such might be chosen, and some design agreed upon as to general features and requirements only; for if the architect is in the least competent, he will be able so to modify it — in consultation, if desired, with them — that their ends will be better served than by their own inventions. For the selection of this competent architect, there is more than one way open. The plan most usually adopted at the present day, in England as well as here, is to invite certain artists to join in a competition, each, whether successful or not, to be remunerated by a sum which will pay him for his time and

trouble. A simpler, more economical, and at the same time more sensible and dignified plan would be to choose an architect out and out. Surely a man's ability may be as easily judged from structures he has already erected as from architectural drawings, especially as these may be among the most hieroglyphic, untrustworthy, and misleading of earthly things. Whichever course is decided upon — whether that of competitive or of immediate choice — the Congressional committee should not trust in its own wisdom. Its proper work would be to designate a disinterested and well qualified judge or judges whose decision should be final and untrammelled. It would not be difficult to find men amply competent for this task, — men (like Professor Ware of Columbia College, for example) who are educated architects and accomplished critics, able to understand both the artistic and the material requirements of the problem, but who, not being concerned with the actual practice of their profession, would be above all suspicion of prejudice or self-seeking. Indeed, Congress has such a man close beside it in the person of the Capitol architect. He has his hands so full of his own work, is so averse to personally directing this project, and is, moreover, so thoroughly acquainted with the necessities of the case and the course of former agitation, that no better acting representative of the Congressional committee could be chosen. By thus putting the artistic part of the matter out of its own hands, the committee would not accuse itself of ignorance. It would clearly show, on the contrary, that it had a wise appreciation of the dignity and difficulty of the problem, a wise judgment as to how it should be met, and a wise wish to shift from its own shoulders upon those better fitted to bear them the burdens of public criticism and possible professional jealousy.

It may be added that, with regard to the selection of a site, no commission could be better qualified than the one we have above named as already once selected for this purpose.

On the Reading of Dante.

WE doubt if there is any name in literature at the same time so familiar and so unknown to those who speak English as that of Dante. It is an evidence, indeed, of Dante's unique power, that his character, in its sterner aspects at least, has impressed itself so strongly upon the imaginations of men that his name, even where his writings remain unread, stands as a type of deep and awful insight. Even those who have not read a sonnet of the "Vita Nuova" or a single canto of the so-called Divine Comedy, know that this is the mortal who, in a certain real sense, has seen Hell. As a mere word, even as a typical and expressive word, Dante is constantly before our eyes; and yet there are comparatively few who have read, even in translation, anything but extracts from the world-famed trilogy. As a rule the "general reader," if curiosity leads him that far, seldom gets beyond the "Inferno." This is true in America at least, notwithstanding that American scholarship has long been especially occupied in translating, or otherwise elucidating, the life and works of the great Florentine, — as is attested especially by the writings of Parsons, Norton, Lowell, and Longfellow. And now, another de-

voted student of Dante, Miss Sarah Freeman Clarke, is about to make public (in the pages of *THE CENTURY*) the results of many pilgrimages undertaken with a view to identifying the places and objects visited by the poet in his wanderings. By way of preface to these chapters, a study of Dante by Miss Rossetti and a paper by Miss Clarke on the portraits of the poet are printed in this number.

It is greatly to be regretted that an exaggerated idea of the obscurity of the poem should lead so many who are well fitted for its enjoyment to neglect the leading work with which Dante's name is associated. It is true, however, that as culture extends a knowledge of Dante grows among us in a rapidly increasing ratio, owing partly to the interest reawakened by the Rossettis, and also to the labors of American scholars already alluded to. A good work is being done, moreover, by the Dante Society. Readers are learning not to stop with the first book of the Comedy, but to continue through the "Purgatorio" and the "Paradiso" to the proper ending. In no other way, of course, can the full beauty and compass of this extraordinary conception be comprehended. Certain of the former writers on Dante are partly to be blamed for the slight thrown upon the second and third books of the trilogy — a slight strangely undeserved. For the "Inferno" (though not without a certain completeness in itself) is, of course, but a prelude part of the spiritual journey described in the trilogy. The climax of the wonderful story is not reached in this portion of the poem — or rather, neither of the two climaxes, for there are two. In the "Inferno" and in the "Purgatorio" Beatrice hovers unseen over the aspiring soul of her still earthly lover. As we read the "Purgatorio," we ask ourselves, can even Dante fulfill the expectations he himself has raised, when it comes to the actual meeting with Beatrice? But this he does in this second division of the poem, while to the third is reserved the still more difficult task of preserving the dramatic interest and bringing it to a second and higher culmination in the concluding vision. In describing Beatrice and glorifying her, how he marshals all history, all philosophy, and all theology! But the story rises ever upward, as it should, from Hell, through Purgatory, to Heaven, growing more and more ethereal, exalted, mysterious, till the final apocalyptic page is reached, and the poet comes at last to the central "abyss of radiance":

"O Light Eterne, sole in thyself that dwellest,
Sole knowest thyself, and, known unto thyself
And knowing, lovest and smilest on thyself!"

We cannot conclude this "advertisement for readers" of Dante better than by quoting the following from Dean Church: "The 'Divina Commedia' is one of the landmarks of history. More than a magnificent poem, more than the beginning of a language and the opening of a national literature, more than the inspirer of art and the glory of a great people, it is one of those rare and solemn monuments of the mind's power which measure and test what it can reach to, which rise up ineffaceably and forever as time goes on. * * * It is the first Christian poem; and it opens European literature, as the 'Iliad' did that of Greece and Rome. And, like the 'Iliad,' it has never become out of date; it accompanies with undiminished freshness the literature which it began."

Guinevere. There is a picturesque simplicity throughout Mr. Young's drama that touches and holds the imagination. The play has good diction, and deserves attention. Mr. Boker's drama is more theatrical and showy, and less poetically written; yet "*Francesca da Rimini*" is conceived in the right tragic spirit.

George Edgar Montgomery.

Dante's Portrait in the Bargello.

IN her paper on the portraits of Dante, in the number of *THE CENTURY* for the current month, Miss Clarke has done me the honor to cite a description of the portrait of Dante in the Bargello at Florence, from a tract of mine printed in 1865. At that time, relying upon the authority of Vasari, as others had done, I ascribed the portrait to Giotto. But there was a difficulty, which seemed to be insoluble, in assigning a date to the picture in accordance with the known facts of the lives of the poet and of the painter. In any case, the picture could not have been painted before 1301, when Dante was thirty-six years old. He is represented, however, much younger than this, and in a sentence, not cited by Miss Clarke, I said: "The date when this picture was painted is uncertain, but Giotto represented his friend in it as a youth, such as he may have been . . . at the season of the beginning of their memorable friendship." Miss Clarke says: "The picture is supposed to have been painted when Dante was about twenty years old." She has inadvertently fallen into error, in stating that this had been supposed; for, if so, the picture must have been painted, if we accept the common chronology, which there seems no sufficient reason to doubt, when Giotto was but nine years old.

At the time when I was preparing my little work as a contribution to the celebration of the six hundredth anniversary of Dante's birth, a commission appointed by the Minister of Public Instruction in Florence was engaged in examining the question as to what was the oldest and most trustworthy portrait of Dante. The members of this commission were the late Count Luigi Passerini, one of the most learned and thorough students of Florentine antiquities, and Signor Gaetano Milanesi, the well-known editor of the best edition of "*Vasari's Lives*," and versed beyond other men in the story of Tuscan art and artists. The report of this committee was published in 1864, in the seventeenth number of the journal entitled *Il Centenario di Dante*, and was followed by a supplementary report later in the year. The first report was reprinted in 1875, by Count Passerini, in his *Curiosità Storico-Artistiche Fiorentine, Seconda Serie*; and the substance of both reports is embodied by Milanesi in an appendix to the "*Life of Giotto*," in the first volume of his new edition of the works of Vasari, Florence, 1878.

The conclusion reached by the commission concerning the picture in the Bargello is that it is not the work of Giotto, but of one of his scholars, and that it was probably painted in 1337. A conclusion so far at variance with the statements of Vasari and other early writers, as well as with popular tradition, has naturally been warmly disputed. It is not established by positive documentary evidence. But the force of the cumulative argument by which it is supported is in-

creased by the difficulties, both chronological and historical, that attend the ascription of the picture to Giotto. The details of the controversy are hardly of interest, except to special students.

That the portrait of Dante, whether painted by Giotto or by one of his pupils, was derived from a sketch by the great master, seems altogether probable. It is the most interesting portrait that has come to us from the middle ages. In the dignity, refinement, sweetness, and strength of its traits it is a worthy likeness of the poet of the New Life, and as such it is a work worthy of the most poetically imaginative of Florentine painters.

C. E. Norton.

CAMBRIDGE, January 23, 1884.

The Proposed Congressional Library—A Reply.

WE notice in the February number of *THE CENTURY* some remarks with regard to the proposed Congressional Library building, in Washington, which seem to us calculated to mislead the public. It is important, of course, that all should be correctly informed of a matter of such great public interest, but we submit that the proper method of doing this is not by allowing an anonymous writer to shoot at random the arrows of crude and uninformed criticism.

The plan which has been offered for the Library is the matured result of upward of twelve years' study of this special branch of architecture, including a personal and exhaustive examination of the arrangements of all the principal libraries in this country and in Europe. No labor has been spared to master thoroughly this very difficult problem of architectural science. The plan does not come from a clique or from favor shown to a "local practitioner," as your correspondent sneeringly insinuates, but is the result of a victory won after the keenest public competition in which twenty-eight competitors participated, and a running competition extending over eight and a half years, one of the competitors being Mr. Clark, who is officially known as the Architect of the Capitol, and whom your correspondent suggests as eminently qualified to select an architect, and another being Mr. T. U. Walter, who designed the Capitol and the building generally known as the Patent Office, more properly the Interior Department. In what sense the victors in the competition can be called "local practitioners" is not understood, unless to reside at the seat of government be considered a sin against architectural canons, as their work appears in nearly every State from Virginia westward to Colorado.

That plans made under such circumstances, and fully approved by the Librarian of Congress, who has also specially studied the subject, deserve more consideration than to be relegated to the waste-basket at the behest of an anonymous writer, seems obvious enough; and we may add that in the only forum where the subject can be properly judged, that is to say, in the professional periodicals devoted to architecture, the excellence of the designs is not questioned.

Various modifications of architectural detail have been shown in the elevations submitted from time to time, at the desire or for the information of the Congressional committee, and further changes will prob-

ably be found necessary before the final execution of the plans. The architects are willing to receive suggestions from any competent source, but it is not likely that any large amount of benefit can be derived from a writer who is not aware that a round-arched window, surmounted by a triangular pediment for "ornament," is a feature frequently found in the best Renaissance architecture.

Nothing is easier than to criticise a work of art which those addressed have not seen; it is like defaming the absent, and is especially unworthy when the attempt is made before a non-professional audience, unaware of the facts and difficulties of the case.

Very respectfully,

J. L. Smithmeyer, } Architects,
Paul J. Pels. }

authors of the design for the proposed Congressional Library Building at Washington, D. C.

[We gladly give place to the above communication in reply to a statement of the situation in "Topics of the Time" for February. The well-considered opinion expressed in our editorial department is not, however, correctly described in the language used by the architects whose work we felt compelled to criticise, in the interests of the public.—ED.]

Sidney Lanier on the English Novel.

IT is greatly to be regretted that the late Sidney Lanier did not live long enough at least to have revised the course of public lectures on the "English Novel" delivered by him at Johns Hopkins University in 1881. The lectures now published lack not a little in symmetry and finish. There are rough breaks and repetitions, and an unfortunate survival of marks of the original oral delivery. But all unpolished as the book is, it is a work to be thankful for. Like all Lanier's writing, it is rich in thought—in that combination always rare and remarkable of the new and the true. In the "English Novel and the Principle of its Development," as in the earlier "Science of English Verse," the author is deeply philosophic; he seeks to go to the root of the matter. Highly interesting, indeed, the present volume must be even to the most cursory of general readers, for it abounds in apt quotation, searching comment and vigorous expression of personal opinion; and, as we turn its pages, we find ourselves face to face with one of the freshest and most acute of the writers who have discussed literary problems from a scientific point of view.

At first glance the scheme of this study seems ill-balanced. Of the twelve lectures, as originally delivered, seven are occupied with philosophic disquisition not at once seen to be pertinent; and the remaining five are chiefly a discussion of the novels of George Eliot. Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne are dismissed hastily and together. "I protest that I can read none of these books," said Lanier, "without feeling as if my soul had been in the rain,—dragged, muddy, miserable." Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield" is called "a snow-drop springing from the muck of the classics"; but no space is spared for Goldsmith, nor for Scott's novels, "which we have all known from our childhood as among the most hale and strengthening waters in which the young soul

ever bathed." A few words of commendation are given to Bulwer, and a few more and warmer to Dickens. Thackeray fares worse. "Under this yearning of Thackeray's after the supposed freedom of Fielding's time lie at once a shortcoming of love, a limitation of view, and an actual fallacy of logic, which always kept Thackeray's work below the highest, and which formed the chief reason why I have been unable to place him here, along with Dickens and George Eliot" (p. 204). Of minor English novelists Lanier says little, and of any American novelists he says nothing.

Now, there is no use in discussing these opinions here, or in offering any defense of Fielding or of Thackeray: if Lanier could not get high pleasure out of their manly pictures of life—so much the worse for him. What gives value to Lanier's book is not these heretical views; it is his philosophic idea of the parallel development of prose fiction and the idea of personality. This it is which gives unity and value to this book far beyond that of more symmetrical volumes of literary criticism, only too often as bare and sterile as this is full and fertile. Lanier declares that "the modern novel is itself the expression of this intensified personality, and an expression which could only be made by greatly extending the form of the Greek drama" (p. 75). In other words, he holds that it is the expression of man's individuality, and of his personal responsibility, as opposed to the idea of Fate. The old theological antithesis between foreordination and free-will represents fairly enough the beginning and the end of the artistic curve. Mr. Lanier shows us successive stages of the evolution by concrete examples. In the "Prometheus Bound" of Æschylus we see the individual full of the desire for improvement, but helpless in the hands of Fate; even the mighty Jove himself, with all his illimitable force, is powerless against the decree; and on this point the Greek audience was at one with the Greek poet. But when in the course of two thousand years Shelley takes up the same myth, the poet cannot but feel that the attitude of his audience has completely changed; and so there comes a tang of insincerity into his work, and a sense of self-conscious effort in his attempt to handle Jove's thunderbolts. "We—we moderns—cannot for our lives help seeing the man in his shirt-sleeves who is turning the crank of the thunder-mill behind the scenes; nay, we are inclined to ask, with a certain proud indignation: How is it that you wish us to tremble at this mere resinous lightning, when we have seen a man (not a Titan, nor a god), one of ourselves, go forth into a thunder-storm and send his kite up into the very bosom thereof, and fairly entice the lightning by his wit to come and perch upon his finger, and be the tame bird of him and his fellows thereafter and forever?" (p. 96). And it is no far cry from Shelley, with this conscious handling of an old myth, to George Eliot, whose work is the most modern yet vouchsafed us, in that it deals almost altogether with the development and the action of the moral responsibility of the individual. When we have thus seized the sequence of Lanier's argument, most of the apparent want of proportion disappears, and the treatise is seen to possess essential unity. That the idea which gives this coherence is more philosophic and nearer the truth than we can find in the work of any one who has hitherto