

Editors' Table.

THE ORIGIN OF HARVARD.

THAT the oldest of our universities probably owed its beginning to the suggestion of a woman has not till lately been suspected. Mrs. Lucy Downing, a sister of Governor John Winthrop, shared in the high intellectual and moral endowments which marked her distinguished family. She and her husband had been urged to join her brother and his friends in New England. Her husband was willing, but she hesitated, for fear that her son George, who showed a great aptitude for learning, should lose the means of completing his education. She wrote from England to her brother, the Governor, on the subject an earnest letter, which is still extant. She urges her objection that the colony had yet "no societies nor means in that kind for the education of youths in learning," and she adds, in the quaint style of the age, some touching and persuasive sentences:—

"It would, I think, as we say, grieve me in my grave to know that his mind should be withdrawn from his books by other sports and employments, for that were but the way to make him good at nothing. I am bold to present this solicitous suit of mine with all earnestness, to you and my nephew Winthrop, that you will not condescend to his going over till he hath either attained to perfection in the arts here, or that there be sufficient means for to perfect him therein with you, which I should be most glad to hear of. It would make me go far nimbler to New England, if God should call me to it, than otherwise I should; and I believe a college would put no small life into the plantation."

This letter was written in 1636; and in October of that year the Massachusetts General Court voted £400 for the establishment of a college. It was commenced in the following year at Cambridge; and in 1638 Mrs. Downing came to the colony with her family. Her son George entered the college immediately, and his name is included in the first class which graduated.

It is fair to suppose that the success and usefulness of Harvard were among the inducements which led to the establishment of other colleges, sooner at least than they might otherwise have come into existence. Yale, William and Mary, Princeton, Dartmouth, Columbia, and others of our ancient institutions of learning, to which many of the great men of the first age of our republic owed their education, were probably indebted, in no small degree, for their existence to the example of Harvard, which showed that in a young and feeble colony a college might not only flourish, but largely aid, as Mrs. Downing suggested, to "put life into the plantation."

One cannot help thinking how much greater the usefulness of this college and its example would have been, if this excellent lady and her friends had been far enough in advance of their age to have urged and obtained that young women should receive in the new institution the same advantages of education as were to be given to young men. For nearly two centuries the instruction received by the mothers of our people—those to whom the early training of our future citizens was to be committed—remained far inferior to what was needed to prepare them for their duties; and all this time there were in existence many institutions with able instructors, good libraries, and other aids to learning, that might have been rendered doubly useful in this way, if our forefathers could only have been led to think that the young men

and maidens who worshipped together in church, and mingled freely in society, might be allowed to pursue their studies together in the same brotherly and sisterly companionship.

One result would certainly have been that a very different moral atmosphere would have pervaded the colleges. We should not, for example, hear that the authorities in Harvard are still vainly striving to put a stop to the unpleasant usage, by which the members of the older classes have thought themselves warranted in inflicting various annoyances and indignities upon the newly-entered "freshmen." Some years ago the custom had led to such disgraceful scenes that Edward Everett thought it necessary to denounce them in vigorous terms, in an eloquent address delivered by him at a commencement dinner at Cambridge. Speaking of the older students, he said: "They act, from year to year, on the idea that what would be mean, cowardly, and cruel everywhere else, may be practised without discredit by persons calling themselves young gentlemen, at places of education; that acts of oppression and insult, and personal indignity, on the part of the strong towards the weak, of numerous bands towards isolated individuals, of those at home toward the timid new-comer—acts worthy only of a mean-spirited bully and blackguard, and so regarded by the rest of the civilized world—may be practised without disgrace or remorse, nay, with brutal glee, by a sophomore at college."

If young ladies were admitted to Harvard as students, we may feel assured that this and all other customs of a low and rude cast would disappear at once. It is of like character and origin with the fagging system and the other brutalities which have long been practised in the great public schools of England, to which boys alone are admitted. The two sexes are not intended to live separately. Whenever this violation of nature's design occurs, whether in colleges, in monasteries, in standing armies, or elsewhere, the results are seen in the evil dispositions and habits which speedily manifest themselves.

Now that it is shown that Harvard University in all probability owed its existence to the suggestion of a noble-minded and far-sighted woman, we may hope that the time is not far distant when the distinction which that world-famous institution has attained will be enhanced, and its usefulness immensely increased, by the abolition of the antiquated rule excluding one-half of the community from those privileges and endowments which it should hold for the benefit of all.

THE WOMAN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION.

THE two annual reports which have been issued by the Woman's Christian Association of Philadelphia show a surprising amount of good already accomplished during its brief existence. The society was organized in December, 1870. The object of its founders, as set forth in the act of incorporation, was to promote "the temporal, moral, and religious welfare of women, especially young women, who are dependent on their own exertions for support." Their first effort was to establish a boarding-house, where young women who were without parents or protectors in the city, could find a comfortable home at rates barely sufficient to pay the expenses of the house. The so-