



WILLIAM D. HOWELLS.

LITERARY AND SOCIAL BOSTON.

SO long ago as 1719, Daniel Neal, an ob-
servant traveller, who ought to be
held in high esteem by Massachusetts peo-
ple, wrote of the New England metropo-
lis: "There are five Printing-Presses in
Boston, which are generally full of Work,
by which it appears that Humanity and
the Knowledge of Letters flourish more
here than in all the other English Plan-
tations put together, for in the City of
New York there is but one Bookseller's
Shop, and in the Plantations of Virginia,
Maryland, Carolina, Barbadoes, and the
Islands, none at all."

Happily humanity and the knowledge
of letters are no longer confined to one
corner of the country; but notwithstand-
ing the growth of an opinion that Boston
and New York are to occupy relatively
the positions of Edinburgh and London,
the capital of Massachusetts still has a
peculiar prestige as the oldest centre of
literary culture in the country, causing
the eyes of the rest of the Union to turn
toward it with a particular interest, a
glance compounded of respect and remi-
niscence with something of insatiable ex-
pectancy. The privileged Bostonian, it is
true; laughs at Boston in his quiet way.
"It is a capital place to live in," said an

eminent publisher who has his dwelling
there, "because then you can go to New
York. But if you live in New York,
where *can* you go?" The *mot* epitomizes
the sentiment of many among his town-
men; but if they sometimes join in the
alien laugh against their "little city,"
and recognize a degree of smallness and
constraint in its general attitude, they
also keenly appreciate the other side. So
do some of our friends the New-Yorkers.
One of the younger New York poets, on
visiting Cambridge for the first time, said
to me: "We hear a great deal about the
failure of Boston to quite appreciate the
mental breadth and energy of New York.
But with all the admiration I felt for this
region before I came here, I find *I* didn't
wholly appreciate *it*: there is such a thing
as New York Bostonism."

The city of the Puritans has reached
the quarter-millennary anniversary of its
settlement, yet is still in its youth. How
young we comprehend, when we reflect
that the men who have given it a world-
wide fame in literature within the pres-
ent century are still nearly all living. A
hundred years later than the time of Neal,
clerical influence, which had governed in
laws, manners, and literature since the

foundings of the colony, still prevailed there; but the Liberal Christian or Unitarian movement, which the year 1800 had seen organizing its forces, tended to

an active social force, was pervasive in his influence for culture. The upper classes were involved in the passion for a broader intellectual development. La-



THE TICKNOR MANSION, ON PARK STREET.

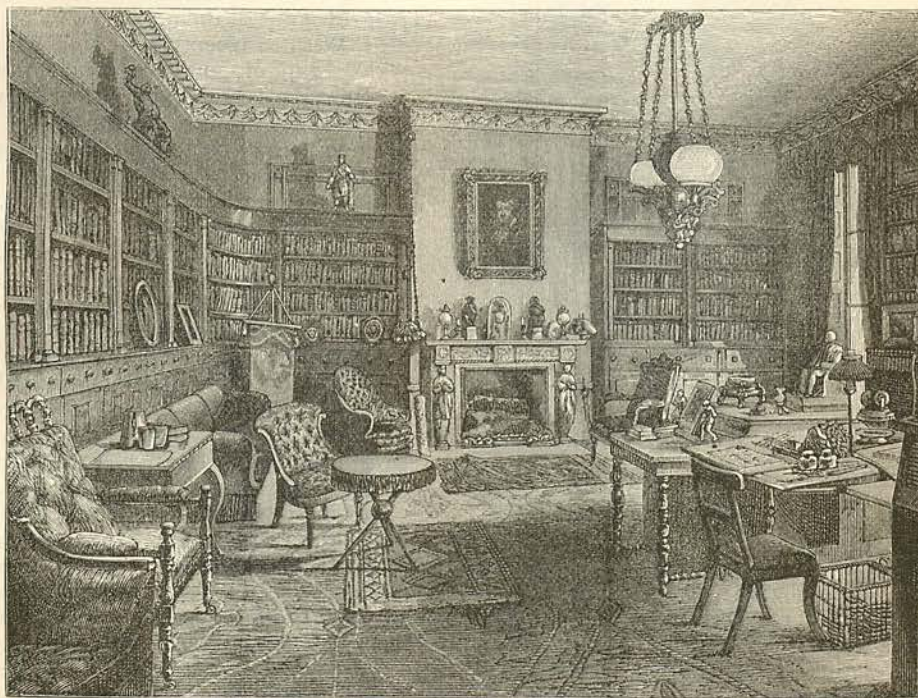
free minds from the theological traces, and cause them to pass over to new objects of thought. This was what freed imagination, and gave us our poets. In those days Boston village was stirring with new thoughts. Buckminster, the eloquent preacher, gathering by his social grace and conversational power a group of gentlemen who met in his parlors for discussion, was doing for his contemporaries what Emerson as a lecturer did twenty or thirty years later; and the Anthology Club, composed of young liberal ministers, lawyers, and physicians, was so important an affair that ladies did not issue social invitations for the evening when it met, because it eliminated so many bright and desirable men. To this Ralph Waldo Emerson's father, indeed, belonged, with Ware, Thacher, and Kirkland (afterward president of Harvard). Then came Channing, who, though not

dies held fashionable morning drawing classes at their houses; there were also mixed evening parties of young men and women at the house of Miss Nancy Lowell (an aunt of the poet), which were to some extent an innovation. The part that women have played in the advancement of all good interests in Boston, and especially those of the arts, has been an active one. How much has not their pure and humane quality influenced our literature! For us, at this time, it is hard to comprehend how much less was their social sway in the "twenties" than it is now. Even in the forties dinner parties of from fifteen to a score of gentlemen, with only the lady of the house present, were the rule. Quantities of Madeira were drunk. The importance of social contact between men and women was not enough understood, and the gentlemen who met in associations like agricultural

or humane societies, and in the venerable Wednesday Evening Century (which still exists), are rumored to have practiced the far from elegant custom of spreading mats about the floors of their drawing-rooms for smokers to spit upon.

In the quickening of thought and the refinement of manners that set in, the smallness and compactness of Boston were advantages. It was a little city; a city of gardens and solid brick houses and stores; cheerful, quiet, unsophisticated; with a fringe of wharves along the bay that supplied the picturesque additions of

whence the occupants, by taking a few steps, could issue forth upon their native or adopted heath of the Common, under the shade of the Great Elm. There still lingers on Beacon Street the fine old house of Harrison Gray Otis, smooth-faced and mellow, deep-roomed, and suffused with a sober ripeness of respectability, which, with that of George Ticknor at the head of Park Street, recalls well the staid aspect of this old Boston. In such a place impressions spread rapidly; theories were infectious; phrenology, Unitarianism, vegetarianism, emancipation, Transcend-



INTERIOR OF TICKNOR'S LIBRARY.

a successful sea-port, and surrounded by villages smaller than itself, of which Cambridge was an important but rather remote one. Two theatres were the most that it could sustain in the line of public amusement, while fashionable life centred upon a dancing hall, imitatively called Almack's, where strictly limited assemblies were held. Within a stone's-throw of each other were the houses of Daniel Webster, Edward Everett, Robert C. Winthrop, George Bancroft, and Rufus Choate, on ground now loaded with merchandise,

entalism, worked their way from street to street like an epidemic. A new course of study or a new thought was as exciting as news of a European war could have been. A lady remembers meeting another on Tremont Street during the full glow of the Emerson lecture epoch, and exclaiming, "Oh, there's a new idea! Have you heard it?"

"Don't talk to me of ideas," retorted her friend; "I'm so full of them now that I can't make room for a single new one."

Perhaps the tendency of the people to

live a great deal by themselves heightened this keen mental appetite. "Everything essential to the most agreeable society exists among them," said an English resident in Boston thirty years since, "with one exception, and that one is the spirit of sociability." The remark is almost as true to-day. "Boston society," one of the most brilliant men in it lately

into town over the West Boston Bridge discussing the higher mathematics. Subsequently Margaret had the ladies of Boston sitting at her feet.

Doubtless there is something touching in the eagerness with which the late descendants of the Pilgrims, having once entered on the field of liberal cultivation, seized upon every fresh atom of æsthetic nutriment. Small beginnings like these appear contemptible or excessively amusing to superficial observers who look back upon them; but there is quite another and a more logical way of measuring them—in the light of what has grown out of them.

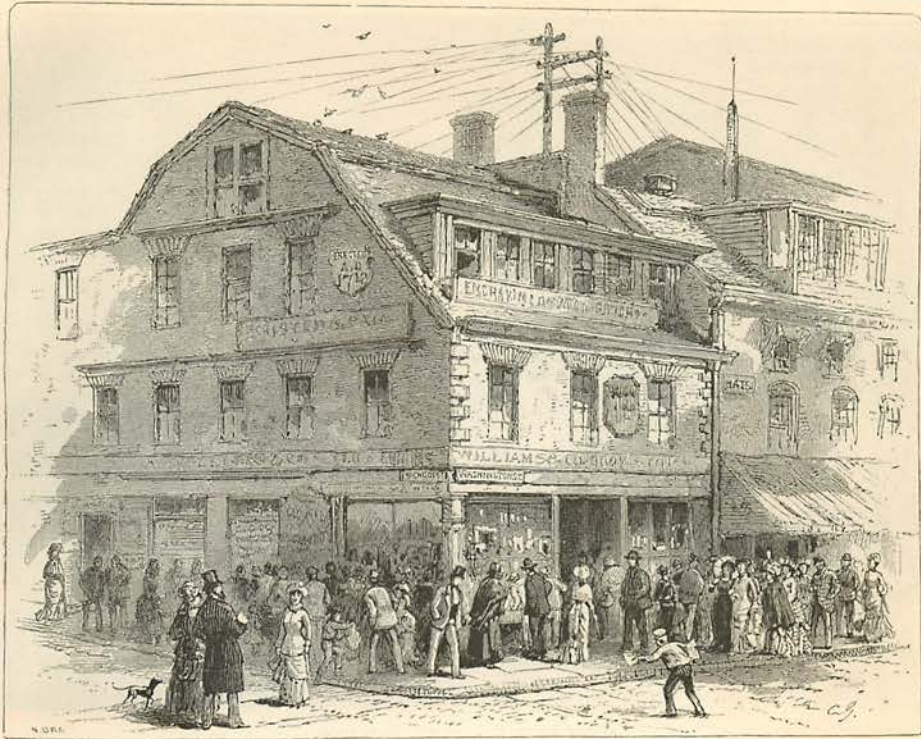
With so receptive an audience, a group of young men like the Mercantile Library Association could set going a system of lectures, which brought before the public men to whom they were to look as leaders. Edwin P. Whipple and James T. Fields were active members of this body, which at its anniversary meetings first introduced to fame orators like Edward Everett and Wendell Phillips, and had Daniel Webster, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and George Hillard among its speakers and poets. This was an important factor, for which there is no counterpart in these later days, to the misfortune, be it said, both of the young men and of Boston.



EDWIN P. WHIPPLE.

said to the present writer, "is a good deal like the Irishman's flea: when you put your finger on it, it isn't there." The substance exists, but one sees it chiefly in mirage. As just hinted, however, the want of gayety or lively intercourse fostered studious habits. Margaret Fuller, for instance, belonged to a family which had expended a good deal of effort on that painful task known as "getting into" the inner circles. The streets of Boston were made narrow and crooked to increase the difficulty of entering good society. This may not be generally known, but it will answer as a good working theory. At all events, the Fullers were to a great extent baffled, and Margaret's father, contenting himself with the most distant social mirage, devoted himself to educating his daughter in the most thorough manner. It was a current saying that the two (who lived in Cambridge) used to walk

It was likewise important and fortunate that as time went on a nervous centre of the growing literary system was situated in the "Old Corner Bookstore," a quaint little red brick building with a sloping roof, very unlike the big publishing establishments since hatched from it, where Mr. Fields played Destiny to the aspirations of authors, and launched the second volume of the *Atlantic*, the first that bore his imprint. Mr. Fields had recommended himself to the rising men of genius as a sympathetic publisher, and when he became a partner at the Old Corner, the authors of the day—Longfellow, Holmes, Lowell, Hawthorne, and George Hillard—made it a literary lounge. Hillard, although like Ticknor he produced little, must be ranked with him as a literary man of note by reason of the aid he gave to the cause of what is called taste. Keenly appreciative of literary form, he



OLD CORNER BOOKSTORE, 1880.

was once the most graceful speaker in the city: no public occasion was complete that was not silvered by his oratory, and his book reviews were of great value in forming the popular judgment. But his prominence did not last. He lived to exchange his early beauty for the aspect of a disappointed and cynical elderly man, no longer figuring in public, but continuing to enjoy his fine library, until stricken with paralysis while editing the life of Ticknor. George Ticknor's activity as a Harvard professor and a counsellor of younger writers, generous with his time and books, has given him a more permanent place in recollection. A foreign recognition of social America, which had not before been bestowed, was the result of his extensive European tour. But at home he accomplished a more important service, and was for a time almost the axis on which the higher culture of Boston turned.

Were he living now, as a young man, he would probably be thought to be posing too much with reference to effect at magnificent distances. You hear him referred to by some as a literary autocrat.

Cold he doubtless was, and conservative in the grain. One day when a young man was telling him of some new philosophical inquiries, he declared, with impatience, "John Locke settled all that for me, sir, years ago." Thackeray, however, made short work of his dignity when, as it is related, on the novelist's dining with him, the historian of Spanish literature fell to musing of love. Ticknor resembled his guest in appearance, even to the latter's oddly shaped nose. "Yes, yes," assented Thackeray, listening to his rather sentimental monologue; "but, after all, what have two broken-nosed old fellows like you and me got to do with love?" Another time, when a young Westerner, who was lecturing in Boston, was asked by Theodore Parker if he had seen Ticknor,

"No," was the reply.

"Well," Parker answered him, "you might as well go to hell without seeing the devil."

This anecdote is calculated to send a shiver through the bones of many dwellers on the trimountain peninsula. It is the sort of thing which may be mention-



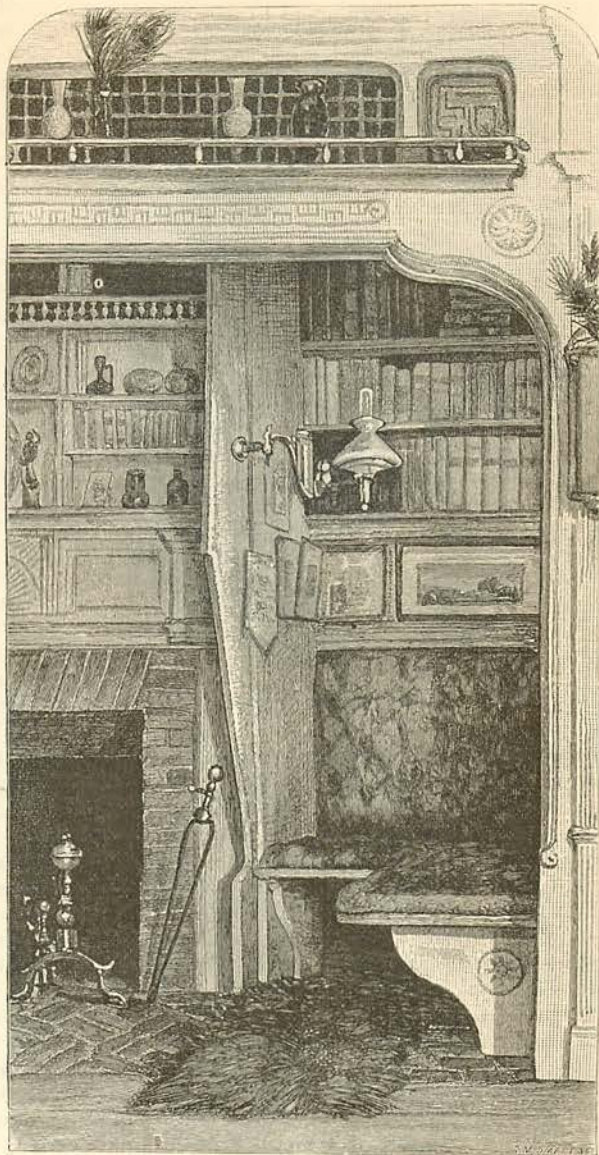
STUDY OF T. B. ALDRICH, PONKAPOG.

ed in corners by the privileged, but, when bruited about, it has a damaging effect on that air of historic repose and classic dignity which, by a singular tacit *consensus*, it has been agreed is the proper one for Boston to assume before the rest of the world. This outward appearance must be kept up, even at an occasional expense to truth. The contrast between Parker's intrepid tone and the careful self-adornment and guarded speech of a George Ticknor or an Edward Everett indicates precisely the difference between the Boston atmosphere and that of London or New York. There is a tendency here to make dignity an incumbrance, instead of a natural outgrowth of character strong enough to support a little freedom. Most people, in all places, are sensitive to social opinion; they are to some extent afraid of others. But the Bostonian goes farther than that: he is afraid of himself.

It is only about ten years since Ticknor ceased to walk the streets—a tall, stately figure, instinct with this Boston dignity. The mention of his name should remind us to discriminate somewhat the groups and tendencies of the earlier date to which we have just been reverting. Although,

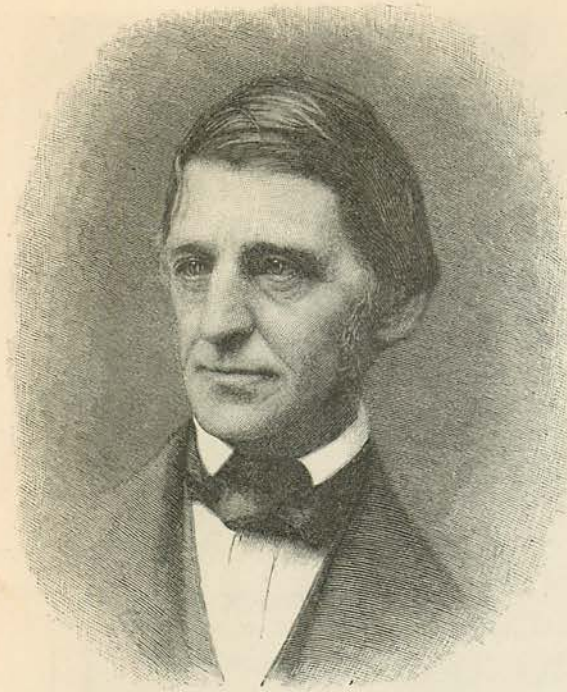
as has been said, Boston was small and its intellectual enthusiasms spread rapidly, it must not be inferred that it was a unit. The party of thinkers and agitators humorously dubbed "The Jacobins' Club," which about 1840 used to assemble at the Tremont House and George Ripley's house, and once met in the parlors of Miss E. P. Peabody, the enthusiastic educator, the sister-in-law of Hawthorne, and friend of Channing, embraced the most extreme and radical reformers, "come-outers," revolutionists, some of them strong men and afterward useful citizens, but others mere on-lookers attracted by the music of progress, and trying to keep step with the procession, or even to run ahead of it. Between the generality of these theorists and Emerson there was a wide gap; although he, like Hawthorne, if less practically, sympathized with Ripley's Brook Farm experiment. If among the more progressive minds themselves there was division, still greater was the distance at which Ticknor stood, representing in letters the spirit of the wealthy merchant and professional class, who have long made great pretensions to inherited aristocracy. George Bancroft, for his part,

was under a ban, stood somewhat apart, because he was a Democratic office-holder; suffering from the same narrow rigor of Massachusetts judgment (a legacy from the seventeenth century) which twice ostracized Sumner, from the most opposite causes, and perhaps escaped doing it again only because he did not live. But Bancroft, from his point of view, sympathized with the intense realistic idealism of Ripley. The lyrists, excepting Whittier, had their eyes cleared by Unitarianism and its successor Transcendentalism; and all of them were abolitionists. They occupied, however, individual grounds. One of the most noticeable things about the whole period, in fact, is the isolation in which the half-dozen men who have shone like a constellation over Boston grew up to power. Because of his shy temperament and his poverty Hawthorne was obscure, and during his Boston custom-house days unknown, his chief distinction to the popular eye, so far as I can learn, having been that he was extremely fond of martial music, and could generally be found—a tall, shapely figure, rendered military by the thick mustache—following any procession headed by a band. Longfellow made his appearance at about this time in Cambridge as the young professor just home from Germany, imbued with the romance of that land, and saying, as we know, a good word to the public for his friend Hawthorne; also settling down to the teaching of under-graduates. Among these last was James Russell Lowell, soon after a youthful lawyer without a practice, somewhat exquisite in matters of dress, and given to penning odes instead of briefs. He also published a novel called *My First Client*—a subject that probably gave free play for the imagina-



COZY CORNER IN MR. HOWELLS'S HOUSE, ELMWOOD.

tion—which has since disappeared from mortal ken. Emerson turned his back on Boston with as much bitterness, perhaps, as we can conceive of in him, for what he considered the city's shams. Holmes was busy with pen and scalpel; man of wit, man of science, keen scholar, writing a good many songs, but not yet known as a brilliant prose author. Meetings and greetings and correspondence took place, of course; but no coterie was formed; the



RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

men were not bound together by a common definition of purpose and mutual criticism, stimulating mutually. These things were reserved for the era of the Saturday Club, which drew together the wise and dazzling circle when they had begun to be famous. It is a pity that this club has had no historian. Among its members, besides those just named, were Felton (professor and president at Harvard, and the friend whose cordiality and humor Dickens so appreciated); Judge Hoar, one of the keenest minds and most pungent after-dinner speakers in the country; E. P. Whipple, the critic; Professor Benjamin Peirce, Rev. James Freeman Clarke; Chief Justice Gray; Agassiz. In the rich reminiscence of his threnody on Agassiz, Lowell has briefly pictured Holmes's "rockets" curving "their long ellipse" at this board so thickly begirt with wonderful men, and has recalled the "face, half rustic, half divine," of Emerson, as he listened,

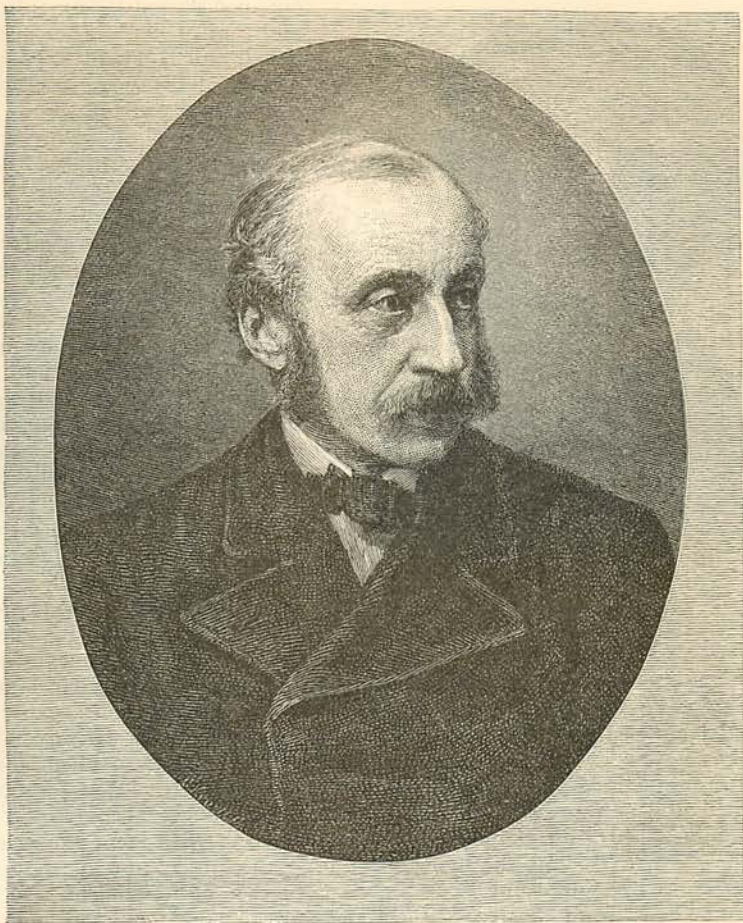
"Pricked with the cider of the judge's wit."

Agassiz, with his large, generous, and sensitive countenance, suggesting that of an intellectualized god Pan, was the life of the feast. Stored up within him was

that irrepressible merriment which the native New-Englander lacks in himself, but heartily enjoys in others; his voice was the mellow signal of good-fellowship; and he was wont to hail with glee the entrance of the lights which were handed around in a half-mystic ceremony, to furnish the "gloria" for coffee, at the end of dinner. Mr. Fields also tells me that the great naturalist always insisted on having a huge joint of roast mutton served entire, from which he cut his own slice, requiring the meat to be cooked more and more rare as he got on in years. The Saturday met, and continues to meet, every month, at two of the clock on the day its name would indicate, in the mirror-room at Parker's. Its gatherings, rife with wit and sense and high spirits, must have been, until the death of Agassiz, a fine source of cheer and mental stimulus to the members; for they

knew how to use conviviality with wisdom, getting the good out of it, and none of the harm.

Possibly their earlier isolation may have assisted in guarding their individuality, just as the smallness and simplicity of the town encouraged that fresh eagerness and sincerity which make the soul of originality. Too much stress can not be laid on this latter influence. Now that the capital has expanded into a large city, and its suburban villages into smaller cities and towns, we see the great difference in the action of the new surroundings on new minds. They are more sophisticated. When the university was called a college, or "the colleges," and that institution was a sort of higher academy, set in a quaint, sleepy village separated from town by the terrors of the "hourly," or omnibus, and bounded on three sides by breezy groves, open country, and huckleberry pastures, the whole atmosphere was—one can imagine what: not Greek, nursing poets terrible as the son of Agamemnon, but yet healthier than it is now. Still, even in these later times, glimpses of old Cambridge when it kept its primitive traits are not wholly wanting. On the northeastern verge of



CHARLES ELIOT NORTON.

the city, in an ample stretch of natural woods, stands Shady Hill, the home of Charles Eliot Norton, where, under the suave hospitality of the scholarly host, amid the treasures of the library, and with original Tintoretto's and Titian's looking down from the walls, one seems transported to a corner of the fifteenth-century Italy. Within that congenial demesne, in an avenue of tall, rusty-coated pines, a party of four young people (of whom the writer was one) were strolling and sitting one day, a few years since, when Mr. Lowell came down the path, and halted to speak to them. He had in his hand Carlyon's *Early Years and Late Reflections*, which was oddly appropriate to his mood; for he dwelt on the fact of thus encountering a group of the younger generation, saying that it was like coming

upon his own vanished youth there in the wood. From this he went on to chat for an hour, telling about the Adirondac expedition recorded in verse by Emerson, and shared in by himself, Judge Hoar, and Mr. W. J. Stillman, who was a genuine Deerslayer with the rifle. He also spoke of poetry; of Browning, Donne, Tennyson, and Morris; quoting from "Pippa Passes" Ottima's lines in the scene with Sebald, where she tells how

"ever and anon some bright white shaft
Burnt thro' the pine-tree roof—here burnt and
there,
As if God's messenger through the close wood
screen
Plunged and replunged his weapon at a venture,
Feeling for guilty thee and me."

"When I read that for the first time," said Mr. Lowell, "I cried out to myself,



T. B. ALDRICH.

'Here is a new poet!' Yet, somewhat contradictorily, he next branched out into a theory that modern life offered no such intensity of passion for the poet's uses as the world of the Elizabethan age still retained. It would be impossible to reproduce the eloquent glow of his monologue at this distance of time; but the incident is mentioned here to suggest how casually on the Cambridge thoroughfares, or in a little patch of unhistoric woodland like the one referred to, any day or hour may bring the pleasure of unexpected converse with some rare mind—of poet, philosopher, critic, or worker in science. Mr. Lowell's pockets that day were full of proofs. "I'm printing," he explained; and he was, in fact, just preparing his essay on Wordsworth for the *North American Review*. So, in the spacious university town, the routine of life goes on: the students study and the professors profess, the street cars trundle, the hucksters patiently trade, the birds build and sing in the fruit trees, and literature grows up and blossoms under your very eyes. Seeing this, the mind naturally turns back to the time when Longfellow's village smithy really stood under its spreading chestnut in what is now the city of Cambridge (with its improved appliances of a City Hall "Ring"); when the diurnal and nocturnal sights and sounds of their neigh-

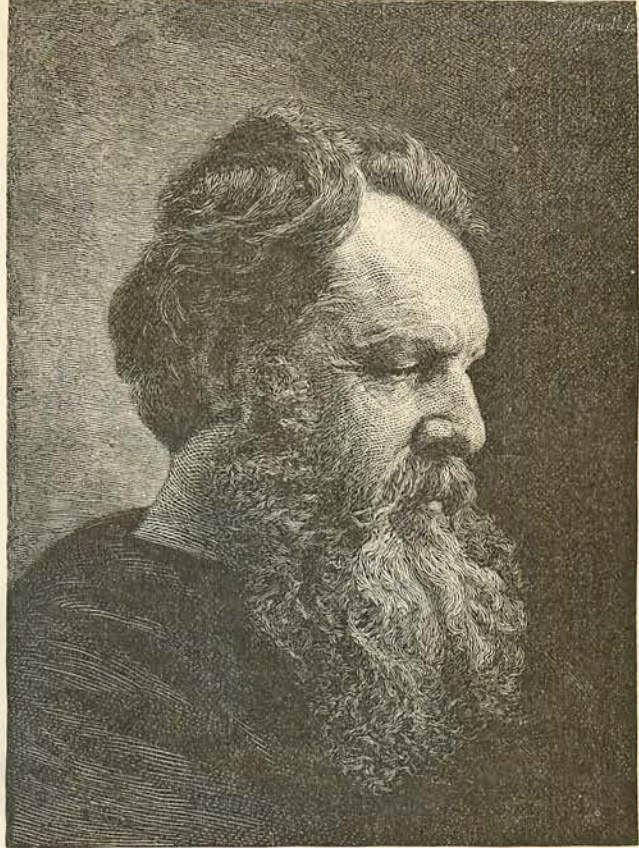
borhood passed living into his verse and that of his brother poet at Elmwood, and Harvard fixed upon Parnassus a less myopic and philological eye than at present.

Mr. Longfellow's stately dwelling, Craigie House, occupied, as every one knows, by Washington at the siege of Boston—"This," said the poet, laughingly, to some visitors, "is the head-quarters, and the houses which he occupied during his retreat were the *hind*-quarters")—has yielded more to the prevailing suburban-villa style of its neighbors than Elmwood or Shady Hill. It is fitting enough that it should, since by reason of its distinguished owner's accessibility, his constant and varied hospitality, and his social position, it forms perhaps the strongest connecting link between society and literature in or about Boston. The days follow in something like a continuous levee at this old colonial mansion, whose heavy brass door-knocker is plied (or

more often gazed at by a deteriorating generation, in ignorance as to the mode of handling it) by a long stream of pilgrims of high and low degree, drawn by reverence, or curiosity, or the wish for literary advice. But across the street a piece of pasture-land, with some cows munching among the clover and buttercups, and a vista of the sliding Charles and Brighton meadows beyond—upon which the poet can look from behind his magnificent lilacs and lofty elms—still keep the rural aroma in the air he breathes. It may be noticed here that Mr. T. B. Aldrich, who for a time occupied Elmwood, during its owner's absence, and had previously lived in Boston, has gone to Ponkapog, a spot more absolutely removed from human aggregations than the outskirts of Cambridge, or even of Concord. There, in a library as perfect as anything in a French novel, looking out on a landscape that might be a Jacques, he works with loving leisure at his poetry and prose, sallying forth just enough to remind people of what they lose by not oftener enjoying the dry and sparkling wit and drollery of his talk. Mr. Howells, whose ready humor and cordial laugh and singularly modest presence were for a dozen years familiar to Cambridge, has betaken himself to the heights of Belmont, a few miles to the westward. There, in the

midst of fields, orchards, and scattered groves, with a cluster of country-seats just below his perch, and a brother of his craft, J. T. Trowbridge, barely half a mile distant, he overlooks the populous plain and hilly amphitheatre, inclosing with wide sweep the city in whose midst the State-House dome—the original “Hub”—shines, gilded into self-respecting, sun-reflecting splendor. Sheltered by a picturesque sloping red roof, the author of *Venetian Life* works with unremitting zeal at his editorial and creative tasks in a white study ceiled with panelled wood, and with a huge fire-place surmounted by hand-carved shelves opposite him. One of several inscriptions in quaint text along the frieze of the room is the Shakspearean line,

“From Venice as far as Belmont.”



JAMES T. FIELDS.

It may remind us of the long flight his talent and his pen have made since first they became known to us, and of the gain in strength that has resulted from his taking root in American soil, nourished by the same life and scenery which have inspired other writers here. While we are considering the influence of seclusion, we must remember that Whittier has passed most of his life at Amesbury, the village on the Merrimac, and at his present home, Oak Knoll, in Danvers, beyond reach of the madding crowd. Emerson's oftenest-used study has been in Walden woods; and Hawthorne, when his sojournings in the Old Manse and at Lenox and Monte Outo were over, ascended the little thinly wooded hill at his later home, the Wayside—that little hill which came to be known in his household as “the Mount of Vision,” where by constant meditative pacings to and fro he wore a narrow trail through the long grass and sweet-fern, which remains to attest his quiet communings with nature.

Concord is now to Cambridge what that place was to Boston thirty years ago—a village which unites the unaffected and friendly manners of the country with a vigorous cultivation of those things that give life its finer value; an ally of literary Boston, too self-centred to be called a dependency. Its small community is exceedingly democratic, no man's occupation being inevitably a bar to the best companionship if he is fit for that; although certain natural and necessary distinctions are made on the base of fitness or taste, and strictly observed. That strained pitch of intellectual intensity assigned to it in stereotyped caricature—whereof the tale about a small boy digging for the infinite in the front yard is a good example—is unknown to the inhabitants. They are busy folk, but exceedingly fond of recreation, and also fond of study, good reading, and conversation which has some object or point, with oppor-

tunities for witty diversion by the way. In a word, they are healthy. Having the good sense to make much of their local patriotic associations, they are the better for doing so. Even Lord Houghton, strange as it may appear, failed to make a convert of Mr. Emerson when, during his visit to this country in 1874, he stood on the field of Concord fight with the author of the famous hymn, and seriously

ed by ladies in issuing social invitations, just as that of the Anthology Club was in Boston seventy years ago. In this Social Circle Ralph Waldo Emerson has been included for many years; and at its meetings the poet, the incisive essayist whom the world knows, encounters his townsmen to talk of affairs probably of no moment to this same inquisitive world, but doubtless of as much worth to him, in

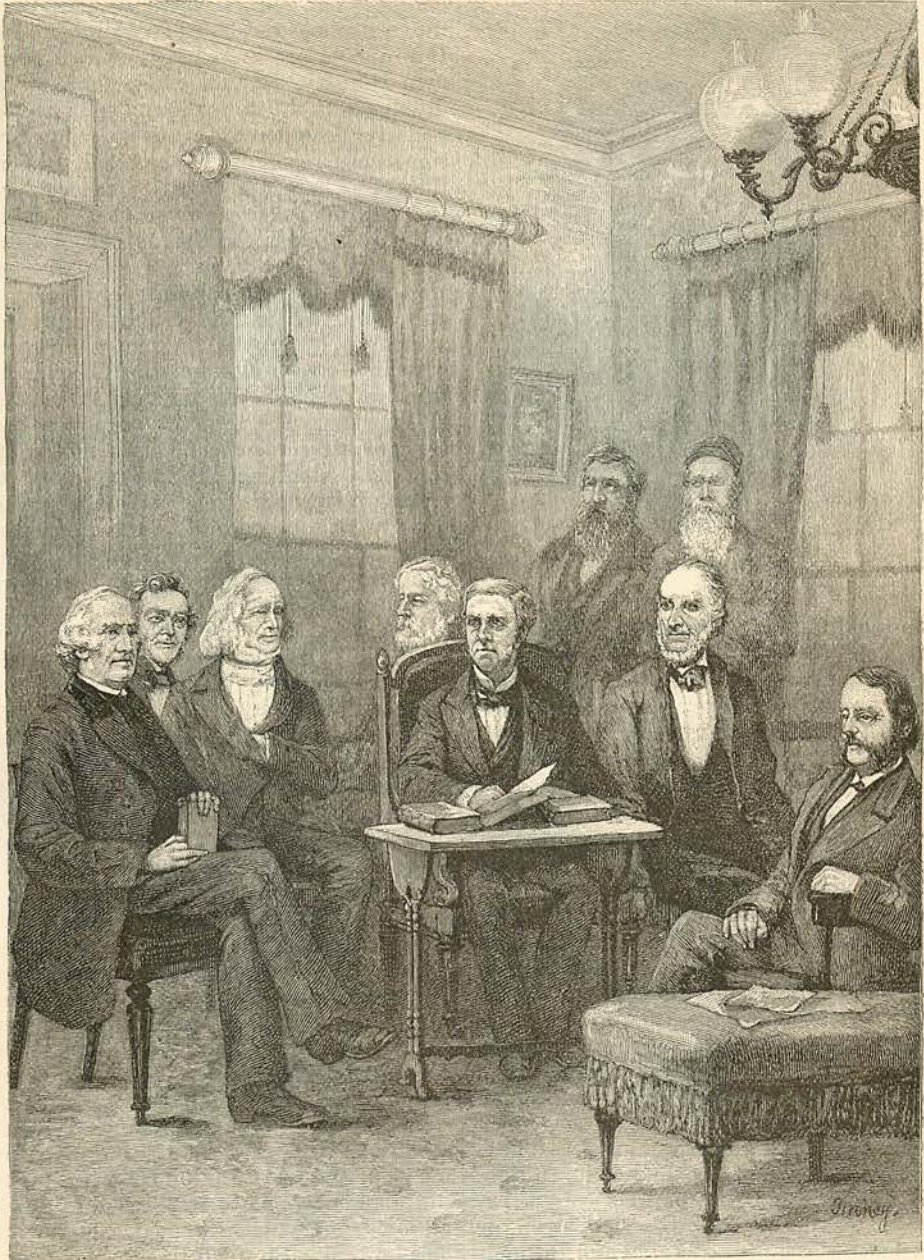


W. D. HOWELLS'S HOUSE AT BELMONT.

tried to persuade him that the revolt of the colonies had been a fatal error, as cutting off all Americans from the glories of the mother-land. And unless one understands what Concord is, and how closely Emerson has been connected with its life, he misses a significant trait of the Massachusetts literary development. There is in particular a club known as the Social Circle, which has kept up its local reunions for more than a hundred years—having grown originally out of the local Committee of Safety in 1775—which brings together in manly and cordial relation citizens of various callings. Farmer, lawyer, judge, merchant, physician, small trader, town-clerk, all meet on an equality at one another's houses through its agency; and the club night is respect-

their place, as the thoughts whose course he has traced for thousands of reverent readers. Formerly, too, there was a pleasant habit, now almost given over, of holding popular receptions at his unpretentious dwelling. The towns-folk in general were heartily welcomed there at a sort of afternoon conversation party; some plain refection was set forth; and it was an excellent custom. Only last summer I saw troops of children from the public schools approaching Mr. Emerson's, one day, and learned that they were going there to be received and entertained by the aged poet and his family.

Such pleasant glimpses as these, and hints of an ideally fraternal commerce between fellow-beings, will be looked for vainly in Boston. There are many de-



Phillips. Sargent. Bartol.

Cranch. Holmes.

Weiss. James, Senior.
Whittier.

Higginson.

RADICAL CLUB MEETING AT MRS. SARGENT'S.

lightful people there, but in general its society exhibits the organs of social nutrition in a state of arrested development. Manners are constrained, hospitality is too reluctant; and the women, with a hundred times more information than

their Southern sisters, can not rival these in conversation. Among the people best worth knowing there is a temperate elegance of life which is admirable; and the presence of many persons genuinely refined and almost free from the local affec-



EDWARD EVERETT HALE.

tations diffuses an atmosphere of general good taste. But there is no spontaneity, and not much warmth. Bostonians know how to dine exquisitely, but they do it with a half-clandestine air. The purely typical inhabitant, you are convinced, is furnished with an icicle in place of a spine, and he is in terror if he thinks a new person is really going to know him. I have known the invitation, "You must dine with me some day," coming from persons otherwise apparently of good-breeding, to remain in that form for years, without ever ripening into definiteness. An accomplished gentleman, now dead, who had accepted the attentions of some friends in another part of the world, dining, breakfasting, going to parties at their house, which was opened to him as his own—on meeting the lady of that house years afterward in Boston, expressed himself delighted that she had come thither. He might well be, for she was every way his equal, and they had been on terms of the most agreeable and intimate friendship; but, by way of showing his boundless and hospitable cordiality, he invited her to call at his house on a Sunday evening *after* tea, when his wife and himself would go with her to church and give her a place in their pew! This is hardly an extravagant instance. A morbid reserve, a contented selfishness, and distinctions set up with an arbitrariness that is ludicrous, hamper intercourse at all

points. The social world divides itself into a number of air-tight compartments. If prophets are without honor in their own country, all but a few hundred individuals in Boston should seem to be, socially considered, prophets. Merit is sometimes recognized more quickly here than elsewhere, and sometimes more slowly. Birth as a form of merit is overestimated. Wealth, so far as my observation goes, though it can not open all doors any more than it can in New York, is quite as important, as much worshipped, as in that metropolis, the mercenary tone of which the capital on the Charles affects to despise. In the matter of hospitality it is true that the corporate dignity, already mentioned as a motive to conduct, sometimes leads Bostonians to entertain strangers (especially foreign visitors) with solid cordiality and a consummate grace. But as a rule they show no generous interest in those of their own kith and kin who have done something noteworthy, something which in New York, or Washington, or London, would lead to their being moderately sought for in agreeable circles.

Such interest, at least, arises only after very marked reputation has given these persons a definite conventional value. It follows that between what calls itself by distinction society, and the literary world, there is no intimate relation. "If we only knew how to get at you literary people," said one of the leaders of the fashionable genealogical coterie, to an author whose fame and habits made it far from a laborious task to find him, "we should be running after you all the time." But the persons who cherish this ardent longing continue to defer its gratification. They are proud of the city's fame in literature, and some of them even cherish amateurish ambitions in the line of writing or painting; but the truth is, that they look upon the artistic world a trifle askance, as a region from which intruders should not be admitted with much freedom. A gentleman of undoubtedly meritorious descent and ample fortune, finding it needful on one occasion to call upon a well-known author, announced afterward, with pleased surprise, "Oh, he's a gentleman; a perfect gentleman!" Another member of the class usually recognized as aristocratic, sitting for his portrait to a young artist of great talent, who was not conscious of being a pariah, said to him with a benevo-

lence that failed to draw out a responsive gratitude: "You're getting on now to a point where you ought to marry. I should think you'd look around for some young woman *in your own walk of life*, and settle down with her."

But whatever its drawbacks may be, the literary part of Boston has had two

any dearth of essayists who are ready to overhaul art, science, philosophy, and theology with improved microscopes, and yet leave something to be discovered. In the conversations that ensue, such men as Dr. Holmes, Edward Everett Hale, and John Fiske sometimes take a share. Dialectics, however, do not prevent lighter



JAMES T. FIELDS'S STUDY.

rallying-points which have formed the centres of many profitable gatherings—the house of Mr. Fields, and that of Mr. John T. Sargent, where the Chestnut Street Club, at one time more widely known as the Radical Club, assembles. Skeptics insist that the instinct of persecution survives in Boston, manifesting itself in the prevalent fondness for making people "read a paper"—or listen to one. But cards to Mrs. Sargent's Mondays are greatly prized, nevertheless, and there is never

diversion on occasions, and the 1st of May has often been celebrated in these drawing-rooms with recitation of original verses by ladies and gentlemen, recalling, one might say, the flights of Crescimbini's Arcadians, or Lorenzo de' Medici's May-songs. Illustrious company is seen there, for the hostess is untiring in her effort to assemble the best. One memorable occasion I recall, when Whittier, seldom seen in town, had been lured from his shy retirement to aid in honoring the



SOMERSET CLUB HOUSE.

memory of Charles Sumner. Carl Schurz, Longfellow, the late John Weiss, Freeman Clarke, and other famous personages were present. Many eloquent and incisive things were said; but when Dr. Bartol asked the abolitionist poet to add something to the reminiscences of the dead leader, Mr. Whittier replied with a quaintness that made one think of Lincoln. He said that he had no skill in speaking, and that the idea of his saying anything reminded him of the dying petition made by the captain of the Dumfries rifles, "Don't let the awkward squad fire a salute over my grave."

Mr. Fields's house, overlooking the widening of the Charles River known as the Back Bay, is crowded from entrance to attic with artistic objects or literary and historic mementos. On the second floor the library, amazingly rich in autograph copies and full of curious old books, clambers over the walls like a vine, with its ten thousand volumes; and here and there pictures of peculiar interest look down from above the shelves. Among these are portraits of Lady Sunderland, by Sir Peter Lely; of Dickens, painted by

Alexander in 1842; of Pope, the work of Richardson, Sir Joshua's master. Up stairs there is a little bedroom, provided with old furniture, antique engravings, and bric-à-brac, and adjoined by a *cabinet de travail* crammed with more books. In this chamber have reposed at different times, as guests, Dickens, Thackeray, Hawthorne, Trollope, Kingsley, Miss Cushman, Bayard Taylor, and other celebrities; for the graceful hospitality of the owner has been always warmly pressed upon the wandering bards and wise men and women who have passed near the door. The interior of this house is redolent of the positive and work-a-day associations of literature and literary genius as perhaps few other Boston interiors may claim to be; and in its congenial atmosphere a circle of ladies meets from time to time, who read the latest thing they have written; Mrs. Fields, perhaps, contributing a poem, Miss Phelps some chapters from a new story, Mrs. Celia Thaxter one of her sea-pieces, or Miss Preston a critical essay.

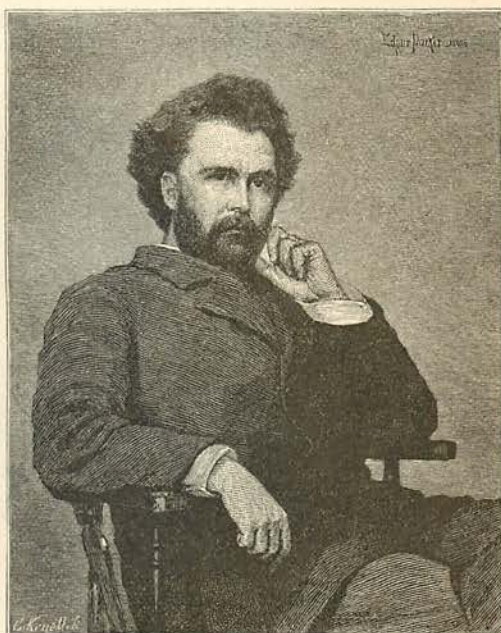
There have been, of course, other centres; and when Mrs. Howe was a settled

resident of Boston she drew around her, by the force of that magical thing, an instinct for social leadership, the most brilliant people. Her entertainments were informal, but always triumphant in the fine tone of wit, grace, and intellect that pervaded them. Count Gurowski, it is reported, said that Mrs. Howe was the one woman complete both on the side of literature and on that of easy and charming social ability whom he had met in America. For fifteen years, too, the Ladies' Social Club, better known abroad by its satirical title of "Brain Club," flourished as the most remarkable instance, in Boston, at least, of a successful club for mental stimulation and refreshment. It was begun by Mrs. Josiah Quincy, and numbered thirty or forty persons, though the companies assembled were often twice that; and among its active members or readers were Emerson, Professor Rogers, Agassiz, and Whipple. The meetings were at private houses, but membership was gained by many wealthy people, who so increased the variety of entertainment by paid performers and what not, and so overstepped the modest programme of the club as to suppers, that it died naturally two or three years since.

It should be said here that Cambridge, on the other hand, presents a mingling and a balance of elements which form one of the most enjoyable societies in the world. The conventional requirements are simple; the members whose employment is in art, with the university professors, and their families, themselves constitute the upper and fashionable circle, so far as it is fashionable at all; and the receptions, dinners, suppers for gentlemen, and little music parties, with which they entertain each other, are close upon perfection in their tone and in the opportunities given for pleasant intercourse. The only fault is the unevenness of the seasons: some are very dull and others too brilliant.

What Boston, pure and simple, lacks socially, it makes up in clubs. Long ago a public-spirited gentleman, one Captain Keayne, who died in 1656, left money to the town to support "a room for divines, scholars, merchants, shipmen, strangers, and townsmen" to meet in. What has become of the legacy I do not know; but

the spirit of the captain may be excused if, in looking down and beholding the transcendent realization of his kindly forethought by other means, it indulges a thrill of vanity. There are the two chief clubs, the Union and the Somerset; the former frequented by lawyers, judges, merchants, and sometimes by the historian Francis Parkman, by Dr. Holmes, Thomas Gold Appleton (celebrated as a wit and a man of fine æsthetic insight), Fields, and his successor Osgood. The



JOHN BOYLE O'REILLY.

Somerset, being the fashionable club of Boston, embraces some of the Union membership, but is especially a favorite with the old young men and young old men. There are the Temple, the Suffolk, the Central, the Athenian, all carrying houses on their backs; and the Art Club and St. Botolph, in a similar predicament. The Art Club, in fact, is about to put up a new building which will cost fifty thousand dollars. Then there are swarms of small dining clubs, weekly, fortnightly, monthly, for which male Bostonians have a passion. They are limited to some half a dozen or twenty persons each. So powerful is their attraction that members will come miles from the suburbs, through inclement weather, or when no other form of relaxation would draw them, to eat togeth-

er in a hotel or restaurant. The Papyrus Club is in structure merely one of these dining companies, gradually enlarged so as to take in about a hundred gentlemen. Journalists, authors, and painters originated it, and are conceded a controlling force in its government. A small admission fee is paid, and each member may purchase a ticket on the first Saturday of each month, which entitles him to partake of a dinner, and bring friends with him, for whom he likewise pays. At these dinners speeches are made and poems read after dessert; and some of the most distinguished authors in New England, as well as

tastes in the journalistic direction—an evening paper founded on the community's desire for literary, artistic, and social gossip, and edited for eight years by a lady, the wife of a Boston banker. The Athenian Club is the chief resort of journalists and theatrical people. But the younger intellectual elements are even less united than were the older ones in their prime. Recently the St. Botolph Club has been formed, with the hope of bringing together in closer relations artists of all kinds and those who should be the friends and supporters of the arts. But the atmosphere of tradition in Boston is so gelid that a



JULIA WARD HOWE.

from without, have been the club's guests. The Papyrus, too, holds annually a Ladies' Night, and it distinguished this occasion not long since by inviting to it some of the notable literary women from different parts of the country. Among its own members Edwin P. Whipple and the two Irish-American poets Dr. Joyce and John Boyle O'Reilly are numbered. The one last mentioned, by his gifts of imagination and the captivating grace of his social presence, has won a place in local regard, and is certainly the most romantic figure in literary Boston. Mr. William A. Hovey, another member of the Papyrus, has become widely known under the name of "Causeur," and is the editor of the *Transcript*, that unique result of Boston

thin crust of ice forms upon the wine of sympathy as soon as it is poured, and it is to be feared that a benumbing frost will creep into even the St. Botolph's house.

The multiplying of clubs, however, is the sign of an uneasiness which may result in good. They are fissiparous. No sooner is one formed than it begins to make another, by subdivision. Men fly from the clubs they have to others that they know not of, hoping always to find one which will yield that generous, productive fellowship essential to a healthier and more joyous life. Perhaps by the time that Boston's suburbs have extended so far as to include a White Mountain school of authors, society itself may have learned to supply the need.