Famous Literary Clubs; Their Leading Spirits Past and Present

Atmospheres Sedate, Bohemian and Romantic Mark Gathering Places That Are Filled With Anecdotal Interest of Great Writers

Fellowship Flourishing in London and Paris Finds Counterpart in Organizations of New York, Boston and Other American Centres

By ARTHUR B. MAURICE.

THE color and anecdotal interest of club life always has been associated more with the men who have earned or tried to earn their livings by the pen than with those of any other profession. The archæologist may trace the club idea back to the roots of history and find quotations from Cicero on the subject of his clubs, but the direct progenitor of the club as we understand it to-day was the eighteenth century gathering in a tavern of London's Fleet street with Dr. Samuel Johnson dogmatically storming, Boswell patiently listening and taking copious notes of the great man's talk, and Oliver Goldsmith supping on borrowed money. There were plenty of other clubs in the London of that day, for example, the Mohocks, who organized for the purpose of carrying out with greater efficiency their pleasure of beating up the watch and inflicting sundry outrages on the persons of law abiding citizens, and the Blasphemers, who went even further than the Mohocks in that their attacks were directed against the Deity; but what held the club idea together and insured the perpetuation of the club spirit was the kind of fellowship found at the meetings in the Cheshire Cheese, where the talk was of the latest play or book or paper in the *Spectator*, or the high cost of living in Grub street, or the comparative rapacity of the publishers in Paternoster Row.

Famous French Literary Circle.

The first of all French literary clubs, to characterize it as its detractors have always characterized it, is the Academie Française. The academy had been a club in the sense that to become an Immortal, or as one cynic phrased it, to be "one of the forty geese that guard the Capitol," not only high talent has been necessary, but also strict social respectability, not only of deportment, but also of work. When the Academy persistently refused Zola, it was in much the same spirit that the Century of New York probably would have blackballed Edgar Allan Poe had the name of the author of "The Raven" come up for election some time in the eighteen forties. In neither case was the genius to be denied, but Zola would have been out of place wearing the green coat with the palm leaves and Poe never would have fitted in the company of the Centurions. No more typical and romantic French literary circle ever existed than the one that, in the early half of the last century was in the habit of meeting in rooms in the Impasse du Doyenné, a bit of Middle Age Paris that was later swept away, but which once flourished between the Rue de Rivoli and the Seine, on ground that is now occupied by the Place du Carrousel.

Gautier the Leading Spirit.

The leading spirit of that circle was Theophile Gautier, who is as famous to posterity for the flaming crimson waistcoats he wore when Victor Hugo's "Hernani" caused Paris to be divided into two camps, as for the writing of "Madamoiselle de Maupin" and "Capitaine Fracasse." Gautier's lieutenants were Camille Rogier and Gerard de Nerval, who translated Goethe's "Faust" into French and who met a tragic and mysterious death, being found one morning hanging to a lamppost in the Street of the Old Lantern. In time the circle was increased by the acquisition of some of the greatest writing men and artists. The elder Alexandre Dumas was in the habit of rushing in and out again, for in the rooms of the circle he was very likely to find Maquet, with whom he was collaborating on "The Count of Monte Cristo." Gavarni was there planning portrayals of new Parisian types, and Delacroix, seeking relaxation after long hours of composition on a battle canvas. Arsene Houssaye belonged to the circle and left a poem called "La Boheme de Doyenne." There was a period when Houssaye, Gautier, Gerard de Nerval and Regier were to be found in the quarters from dawn to dawn. Even after the hardest night they rose very early in the morning and began work. Gautier always painted or drew before he began to write, but his serious task was the composition of "Madamoiselle de Maupin," the masterpiece, which incidentally was eventually sold for $300. Regier was illustrating the "Tales of Hoffmann," and Houssaye writing "La Pecheresse." Finally the circle staged a ball that was successful and so noisy that a hard hearted landlord with little sympathy for the literary calling gave his picturesque tenants notice and one of the most famous if informal of literary clubs came to an end.

The Athenæum of London.

In striking contrast to the Bohemian flavor of the circle of the Impasse du Doyenné has been the Athenæum of London, long the most celebrated of England's literary clubs. The Athenæum dates from 1824, and the present club house has been little changed since it was erected in 1830. The founder of the club was John Wilson Croker, Secretary of the Admiralty, editor of Boswell's "Johnson," and generally accepted as the unsavory Mr. Wenham of Thackeray's "Vanity Fair." Other men than Thackeray evidently disliked Croker, for when the Athenæum was in process of formation and the house, on what was then the courtyard of the famous Carlton House, being planned, Croker, against all opposition, forced on the organization the sculptured frieze under the balcony that was done by John Henning and celebrated by Ruskin, who was a member of the club. The opposing members wanted an icehouse instead, and there was a quatrain running:

I'm John Wilson Croker,
I do as I please,
They ask for an icehouse,
I'll give 'em a Frieze.

Among the original literary members of the Athenæum at the time of its foundation in 1824 were Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Moore. Then came the days of the great Victorians. Thackeray was one of the most active members despite the widely circulated story to the effect that at the time of his first candidacy he was blackballed on the ground that he might portray members of the club in subsequent novels, and was finally admitted by the rule calling for the annual selection of nine men of "distinguished eminence." To all practical purposes a bachelor during the last twenty-five years of his life, Thackeray when in London flitted from one of his clubs to another, and some of his most brilliant pages were penned in the writing room of the Athenæum. At a table in this writing room Dickens, another member, wrote his last letter to one of his sons who did not receive it until after his father's death. Robert Browning, Tennyson, Darwin, Anthony Trollope, Matthew Arnold, Macaulay and Carlyle were some of the great literary names associated with the mid-Victorian Athenæum; and among the successors of the present day who are carrying on the writing tradition in the club are such men as Rudyard Kipling, Sir James Barrie, Maurice Hewlett, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Anthony Hope Hawkins and Sir Gilbert Parker; while among the Americans who have been elected to membership have been W. W. Story, Henry James, Edwin A. Abbey, Henry White, John S. Sargent and Brander Matthews.

It has never been quite settled just how Thackeray became a member of the Athenæum. There is no shadow of doubt about an episode in the history of the Garrick Club in which he was the most conspicuous figure. The row involving Thackeray, Edmund Yates and Dickens is the most famous of all literary club rows. Thackeray's heart was more with the Garrick than with the sedate and statelier Athenæum. In time he came to regard the former club with a kind of proprietory affection. Yates was a new member and a young man. It was in the Garrick that he formed Thackeray's acquaintance. To a London paper he contributed a personal sketch of the great novelist that was not entirely flattering. Thackeray, forgetting how in his own younger days he had lampooned Bulwer-Lytton and others, called for Yates's expulsion from the club. Dickens came forward warmly in support of the offending journalist, an action that Thackeray bitterly resented. "I am not hitting at that young man," he said, "I am hitting at the man behind him."

The estrangement between the two novelists lasted almost to the day of Thackeray's death.

The Garrick Club was formed in 1831, seven years after the Athenæum. Its original home had been the house of William Lewis, the comedian, and later Probatt's Family Hotel. The present clubhouse, now between fifty and sixty years old, is near Covent Garden. Like the Players of New York, the Garrick was founded with the object of bringing together men of the dramatic profession and men of the allied arts of literature, painting, sculpture and music. Besides Thackeray, who found in the club models for such of his characters as F. Bayham of "The Newcomes," who was, supposed to be John Forster author of "The Life of Dickens," and Foker, of "Pendennis," who was indisputably Andrew Archdekne, an eccentric comedian, who invariably addressed his portrayer as "Thack, me boy," inviting him to take a pint of George Augusta Sala, the greatest writer of hack special articles in the history of English journalism; Planche and Andrew Halliday. From the White Hart the Savages migrated to other taverns until finally the present clubhouse was acquired, to answer to the name of the "wigwam."

R. L. S.'s London Home.

A certain similarity of names suggests after the Savage the Saville; the Saville was Robert Louis Stevenson's club. To it he was proposed by Sir Sidney Colvin, elected in June, 1874, and thereafter the club became his home in London. To him the Saville Club was more important than the city. The organization, which takes its name from the original clubhouse in Saville street, is now at 107 Piccadilly, a house overlooking the Green Park. Among literary members later than Stevenson's time may be mentioned Thomas Hardy, Edmund Gosse, Maurice Howlett, Rudyard Kipling, Rider Haggard, Ian Maclaren and Egerton Castle.

Carrying on with rare success the old vagabond tradition of meeting in public taverns is the Whitefriars, which dates from the '60s. It began in Radley's Hotel, Blackfriars, migrated to the Mitre Tavern in Fleet street, and for more than thirty years has been holding most of its weekly gatherings in Anderton's Hotel in Fleet street, where the present writer has more than once been fortunate enough to share in the talk and the material good cheer. There too the present writer learned the danger that lurks in trying to tell an American story to an English audience. For the purpose of comparing English and American literary clubs in the matter of expense in membership, the writer a few years ago compiled the following list of the London clubs:

	Entrance fee.	Annual dues.
Athenæum	20 guineas	8 guineas
Garrick	20 guineas	10 guineas
Saville	10 guineas	6 guineas
Savage	5 guineas	3 guineas
Whitefriars	1 guinea	Members pay for dinners individually
New Vagabonds	1 guinea	Members pay for dinners individually
Vitrek	2 guineas	2 guineas
Street Room	6 guineas	3 guineas
Author	4 guineas	5, 3 and 2
Lyceum	1 guinea	3 and 2

The dues of clubs like the Boz, Omar Khayyam, &c., are merely nominal. The Lyceum, a feminine organization with a great house in the heart of Piccadilly and a London membership of several thousand, is almost international in scope and is often spoken of as the "greatest woman's club in the world."

The dignity of the Hub, the inheritance of Emerson, Longfellow and Holmes, names that Mark Twain once found to his consternation and mortification were not to be bandied about lightly, and the splendor of the sacred cod, are maintained delightfully in the club house of the Somerset, looking down upon the Common from Beacon street. There grave and courteous gentlemen discuss the interdependence of Harvard and Boston, and in awed whispers talk of the *mesalliance* made by the girl descended from progenitors of Harvard affiliations who has elected to change her name for the name of one who is in all ways to be admired except that he happens to be a "Yale man" or a "Princeton man." But more strictly a literary club than the Somerset is the St. Botolph, which was established in 1880 "for the promotion of social intercourse among authors, artists and other gentlemen connected with or interested in literature and art" and which had for its first president Francis Parkman, the historian. The name of the club is derived from the fact that the name of the city in Lincolnshire, which is name parent to the city in Massachusetts, is a contraction of "Botolph town." For that reason the club song of the St. Botolph, which is always sung at the Twelfth Night revels, runs as follows:

Saint Botolph flourished in the olden time,
In the days when the saints were in their prime.
Oh, his feet were bare and bruised and cold,
But his heart was warm and as pure as gold.
And the kind old saint with his gown and hood
Was loved by the sinners and loved by the good,
For he made the sinners as pure as snow,
And the good men needed him to keep them so.

Chorus.

Then drink, brave gentlemen, drink with me
To the Lincolnshire saint by the old North Sea.
A glass and a toast and a song and a rhyme
To the barefooted saint of the olden time

It was in the rooms of the Authors Club of New York, then as now in the Carnegie Building at Seventh avenue and Fifty-sixth street, that took place many years ago the following tilt between Rudyard Kipling and the late Frank R. Stockton. After some preliminary conversation Mr. Stockton said:

"By the way, Kipling, I'm thinking of going over to India some day myself."

"So, so, my dear fellow," said Mr. Kipling with a suspicious warmth of cordiality. "Come as soon as ever you can. And by the way, do you know what we will do with you when we get you out there away from your friends and family? Well, the first thing will be to lure you out into the jungle and have you seized and bound by our trusty wallahs. Then we'll lay you on your back and have one of the very biggest elephants stand over you and poise his ample forefoot directly over your head. Then I'll say in my most insinuating tones, 'Come, now, Stockton, which was it—the Lady or the Tiger?' What would you do then?"

"Oh, very well. That's easy enough. I should tell you a lie."

"Thanks awfully. That's just as good as the truth, now that you've told me it is to be a lie. If you say 'the Tiger' I'll know that it was the Lady; and if you say 'the Lady' I'll know it was the Tiger. Good!"

Club Dates From 1882.

The Authors Club dates from the autumn of 1882. It was founded in the library of a quaint house that is still to be seen through a garden from the sidewalk of Fifteenth street, just to the east of Union Square. Its organizers were Richard Watson Gilder, civic reformer and *Century* editor; Noah Brooks, Edward Eggleston, Brander Matthews, Edmund Clarence Stedman, Laurence Hutton and Charles de Kay. In addition to these men the first membership roll included Henry M. Alden, H. H. Boyeson, George William Curtis, George Cary Eggleston, Lawrence Godkin, Parke Godwin, Bronson Howard, Charlton T. Lewis, J. M. Libbey, Hamilton W. Mabie and Richard Grant White. The first meeting place was a restaurant in Lafayette place.

The cherished night to the members of the Authors is Watch Night, when they gather in the club rooms to see the old year out. At the stroke of midnight the lights are turned down and all join in singing "Auld Lang Syne." Then up go the lights and the tune changes to "For he's a jolly good fellow." Since the organization of the club there has been in addition to the regular membership, which numbers more than two hundred, some thirty writers, including a woman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, on whom honorary membership has been conferred. The present roll of honorary members includes such distinguished foreign authors as Lord Bryce, John Morley, Thomas Hardy, Jean Jules Jusserand, Austin Dobson and Maurice Maeterlinck. It was in the spring of 1895 that the name of J. M. M. van der Poorten Schwartz—that having been the real name of the distinguished Dutch novelist widely known as "Maarten Maartens"—came up for election. There were gasps of amazement. The late "Bill" Nye offered the suggestion that the membership committee act on the first half of the name at once, but hold over the last half until the autumn, when the weather would be cool.

Bygone Clubs and Others.

Back almost to the age of Diedrich Knickerbocker goes the record of the literary clubs of Manhattan. There was one such organization which met in a room known as the Literary Den back of a little publishing house far down town. Among its members were William Cullen Bryant, James K. Paulding, Col. William L. Stone, Chancellor Kent, Fitz-Greene Halleck, G. C. Verplanck and Mordecai N. Noah. About the same time Fenimore Cooper organized the Bread and Cheese Club, which met in the Washington Hotel at the corner of Broadway and Chambers street and took its name from the fact that candidates were balloted for by means of bread and cheese. In 1825 an organization known as the Column was launched by graduates of Columbia College. Four years later the Sketch Club was established, growing out of an annual called the *Talisman*, which had been published by G. C. Verplanck, William Cullen Bryant, Robert C. Sands and later Washington Irving and J. K. Paulding in combination with some of the younger members of the American Academy of Art. The Column and the Sketch Club were the direct parents of the Century Association, which for longer than any other society has upheld the American literary tradition in club form.

The Century.

It was Thackeray who spoke of the Century of New York as "the best and most comfortable club in the world." That was when its quarters were in Clinton place, the old name for Eighth street. Founded in the winter of 1847, with a membership of forty-two, of whom twenty-five came from the Sketch Club, six from the Column and eleven from neither, the Century first made its home in rooms on Broadway, between Broome and Spring streets. To Clinton place it went in 1852, thence to Fifteenth street, and finally to its present quarters in Forty-third street, just west of Fifth avenue. Gulian C. Verplanck was the first president, and was followed in turn by Bancroft and Bryant. The author of "Thanatopsis" held the office from 1868 till his death in 1878. He was the last strictly literary president. About the time that Bryant died a proud Centurian summed up his club as follows:

"Without formality or design, it has 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 is absolute equality among those who share it. No true Centurian ever assumes anything, each standing in his real place. The atmosphere kills pretension and stifles shams. The pedant or the conceited person drifts away. How can it be otherwise when in 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 proser forget to prose?"

Many years later Paul Leicester Ford echoed that general opinion in his "Story of an Untold Love." He introduced the Century under the name of the Philomathean. According to the hero, the Philomathean was the one club where charlatanry and dishonesty must fall however it succeeded with the world, and where the poorest man stood on a par with the wealthiest. Among present day authors whose names are to be found in the book of the Century are Rudyard Kipling and Sir Gilbert Parker, William Dean Howells, James Lane Allen, Henry Van Dyke, Brander Matthews and Thomas Nelson Page among the American seniors, while among the representatives of the younger men are Winston Churchill, Jesse Lynch Williams, George McCutcheon, Irving Schiller, Edwin Lefevre, Arthur Train and Robert W. Chambers.

The Players.

As the Century is often compared with the Athenæum of London, so the Players is frequently referred to as the Garrick of New York, and in each case it is the younger organization which is rather the richer in active writing men. For example, of the men just mentioned as belonging to the Century, Dr. Van Dyke, Brander Matthews, Dr. Williams, Mr. Bacheller, Mr. Churchill and Mr. McCutcheon also are members of the Players. In addition the membership of the club facing Gramercy Park and preserving so beautifully the memory of its founder, Edwin Booth, includes Booth Tarkington, Owen Johnson, Rex Beach, Gelett Burgess, Ellis Parker Butler, Thomas Dixon, Oliver Herford, Will and Wallace Irwin, Samuel Merwin, Cleveland Moffett, Will Payne, Ernest Poole, Julian Street, Stephen Whitman, Stewart Edward White, Irving Bacheller, Ray Stannard Baker, the "David Grayson" of the Adventures; Harris Dickson, Hamlin Garland, Emerson Hough, Rupert Hughes, Compton Mackenzie, Percy Mackaye, Meredith Nicholson, Brand Whitlock and a score more.

Although the idea of the Players had long been in Mr. Booth's mind it was 1887 before it took concrete form. In the summer of that year Mr. Booth, in company with Lawrence Barrett, Laurence Hutton, William Bispham and Thomas Bailey Aldrich, was a guest of E. C. Benedict on board the latter's yacht Oneida. Then the new club was discussed and the name of "The Players" suggested by Mr. Aldrich. In the following year the club took definite form, and at the moment the ringing of bells and the tooting of whistles began sounding the arrival of the year 1889, Mr. Booth made over the clubhouse by deed of gift.

The Grolier.

The Grolier is the New York club of the bibliophiles. Named in honor of Jean Groller de Servier, Treasurer General of France and one of the most brilliant figures in the history of book making, the club had its inception at an informal meeting at the house of Robert Hoe, Jr., on the evening of January 23, 1884. At the meeting were present Messrs. William Loring Andrews, Theodore L. De Vinne, A. W. Drake, Albert Gallup, Robert Hoe, Jr., Brayton Ives, Samuel W. Martin, Edward S. Mead and Arthur B. Turnure, all keen lovers of books, makers of books by profession, or makers of books by taste. Within three months the club was installed in its first home at Madison avenue.

Brander Matthews, writing about the Grolier when the organization was young, held that it was unique, saying that he could find neither in France nor England an organization exactly equivalent to the New York club. In London the Burlington Fine Arts Club, and in Paris the Societe des Amis des Livres were representative of similar interests, but neither of these societies aimed at the double function of uniting book lovers and book makers, and of gratifying the needs and wishes of both classes of its members by collecting and exhibiting the best works of the great artists of the past and by producing new books serving as types of the best of modern skill and taste.

But neither Boston nor New York has a monopoly in the matter of clubs of literary flavor and atmosphere. Challenging in spirit the best of the older world and the two American cities already discussed are such societies as the Franklin Inn of Philadelphia, the Bohemian of San Francisco, the University of Indianapolis, the Cosmos of Washington, the Little Roomers and the Cliff Dwellers of Chicago. The Franklin Inn Club of Philadelphia was born of a meeting of ten men in February, 1902. These men were Francis Howard Williams, J. Bertram Lippincott, Frederic W. Unger, John Luther Long, Cyrus Townsend Brady, S. Decatur Smith, Churchill Williams, Harrison S. Morris, William J. Nicolls and C. Lippincott. During the latter years of his life the late Dr. Weir Mitchell was a familiar presiding figure at the Franklin Inn.

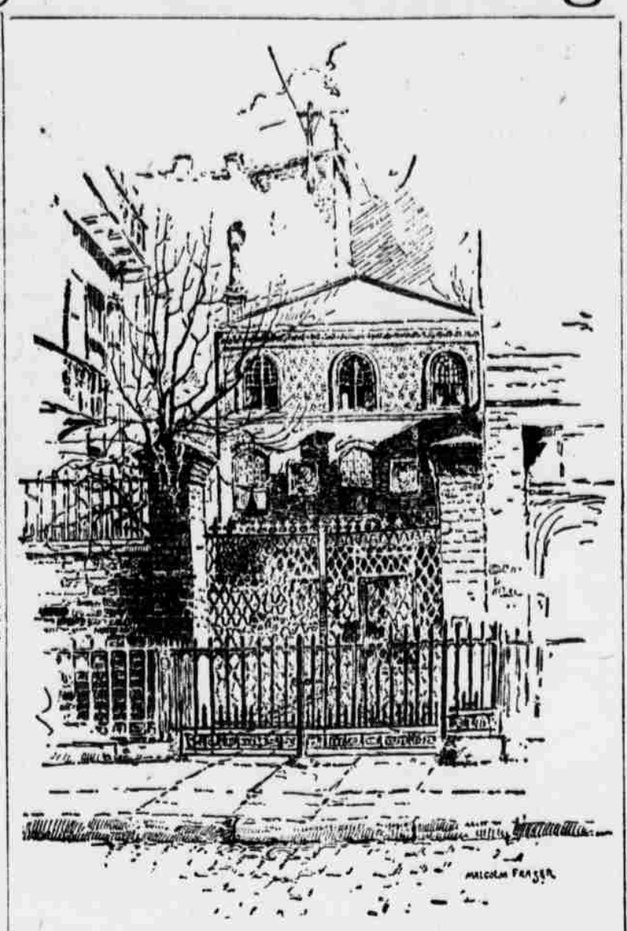
A few years ago it would have been worth a long journey to Indianapolis simply to have seen the figure of James Whitcomb Riley at ease in the University Club there. Although not by taste a clubman, Riley always had a deep affection for the University. Other writing men whose association with the club goes back many years are Booth Tarkington and Meredith Nicholson. In the old days Thanksgiving eve at the University was known as Tarkington night, the author of "The Gentleman From Indiana" usually conducting elaborate ceremonies in which he was ably abetted by George Ade and George Barr McCutcheon. No distinguished stranger following the professions of letters or the drama or painting or sculpture is likely to leave Indianapolis without taking with him a vivid impression of the warmth of the University Club's hospitality.

Justly famed throughout the land and in countries beyond the seas is the Bohemian Club of San Francisco. It was there that Rudyard Kipling in his blatant youth discovered America, but although he spent two weeks there as the guest of the club the Bohemians did not discover Kipling until the publication of "American Notes" made up of the letters he sent to the Allahabad *Pioneer*. When he went away he wrote some pleasant farewell verses in celebration of his visit to Bohemia, which verses remained for some time in the club album.

Associated with the earlier history of the Bohemian are such names as Samuel Clemens, Bret Harte, Charles Warren Stoddard and Henry George, the last named then merely experiencing progress and poverty, not writing about them.

The Oliver Wendell Holmes Jinks given many years ago by the Bohemian Club were responsible for what are perhaps the only verses of occasion ever sent by telegraph. The sire of the "Jinks" early in the evening telegraphed to Dr. Holmes the club's affectionate greetings, forgetting that early in the evening in San Francisco is midnight in Boston. But the oversight proved a happy one because before the Jinks were at an end the wire brought the reply:

Message from San Francisco! Whisper low!
Asleep in bed an hour and more ago
While on his peaceful pillow he reclines,
Say to the friends who sent these loving lines:
"Silent, unanswering, still to friendship true,
He smiles in slumber, for he dreams of you!"
Boston, February 28, 1874. Midnight.

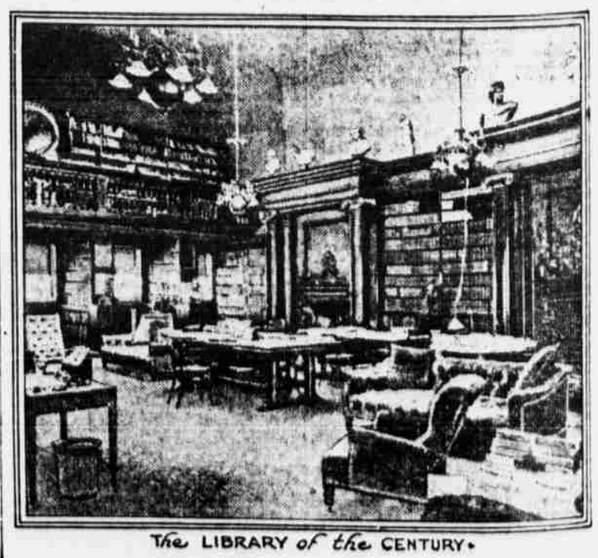


HOUSE IN WHICH THE AUTHORS CLUB WAS ORGANIZED
NO. 103 EAST 15TH STREET

SAVAGE CLUB MENUS

THE READING ROOM OF THE GROLIER

A CORNER in the PLAYERS' LIBRARY.



The LIBRARY of the CENTURY.