

IV. BIOGRAPHY.

James T. Fields: Biographical Notes and Personal Sketches. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

This is the first time that an American publisher has had his biography written. Ordinarily the publisher has his name on the title pages of his books in this world and is without literary immortality. This is not the case with Mr. Fields. He was author, in a small way, as well as publisher, but more than his authorship, which chiefly grew out of his relations with the authors whose volumes he published, was his guardianship of American letters and of what was best in them at the culmination

of what we may best call the transcendental period. His name will always be delightfully associated with the names of Holmes, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Whittier, and Emerson, and with Fulton, King, Whipple, Hillard, and Thoreau,—names only less than these,—as one of the best friends our literature ever had. His biography, which is somewhat scrappy in its character, necessarily scrappy while his correspondence is so closely related to living persons that it cannot be published, is a loving and tender tribute from a wife to her husband's memory. There is very much in it that relates to men and women of letters and Mr. Fields appears to advantage in it, but the full mass is not brought out, nor is his chief service to letters duly enunciated. It is yet too early to give a correct estimate of Mr. Fields,—he held a place so peculiar in the world of letters that his work entitles him to an amount of attention which his purely literary abilities never could have obtained for him. Yet this does not imply that Mrs. Fields has not written an interesting and readable book; this she has done, and her success is greater than could have been expected. She has not only given us close glimpses of the man himself, but has made one of the best volumes of American literary biography that has as yet been written. What we mean to say is that the part of Mr. Fields' life, his services in bringing authors forward to public recognition and in introducing Tennyson, Browning, De Quincy, and other English authors to an American public, which has interest for the world of letters, is not brought out by Mrs. Fields, as it might have been, even to-day. Her book can stand on its own merits, but she does not do much to reproduce a side of her husband's life in which the public is most interested.