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ACERVO DE LITERATURA

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TO THE READERS OF THE AUTOCRAT OF
THE BREAKFAST-TABLE.

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TWENTY-FIVE years more have passed since the silence of the preceding twenty-five years was broken by the first words of the self-recording personage who lends his title to these pages, in the "Atlantic Monthly" for November, 1857. The children of those who first read these papers as they appeared are still reading them as kindly as their fathers and mothers read them a quarter of a century ago. And now, for the first time for many years I have read them myself, thinking that they might be improved by various corrections and changes.

But it is dangerous to tamper in cold blood and in after life with what was written in the glow of an earlier period. Its very defects are a part of its organic individuality. It would spoil any character these records may have to attempt to adjust them to the present age of the world or of the author. We have all of us, writer and readers, drifted away from many of our former habits, tastes, and perhaps beliefs. The world could spare every human being who was living when the first sentence of these papers was written; its destinies would be safe in the hands of the men and women of twenty-five years and under.

This book was written for a generation which knew nothing or next to nothing of war, and hardly dreamed of it; which felt as if invention must have exhausted itself in the miracles it had already wrought. To-day, in a small sea-side village of a few hundred inhabitants, I see the graveyard fluttering with little flags that mark the soldiers' graves; we read, by the light the rocks of Pennsylvania have furnished for us, all that is most important in the morning papers of the civilized world; the lightning, so swift to run our errands, stands shining over us, white and steady as the moonbeams, burning, but unconsumed; we talk with people in the neighboring cities as if they were at our elbow, and as our equipages flash along the highway, the silent bicycle glides by us and disappears in the distance. All these since 1857, and how much more than these changes in our every-day conditions! I can say without offence to-day that which called out the most angry feelings and the hardest language twenty-five years ago. I may doubt everything to-day if I will only do it civilly.

I cannot make over again the book and those which followed it, and I will not try to mend old garments with new cloth. Let the sensible reader take it for granted that the author would agree with him in changing whatever he would alter, in leaving out whatever he would omit, if it seemed worth while to tamper with what was finished long ago. The notes which have been added will not interrupt the current of the conversational narrative.

I can never be too grateful for the tokens of regard which these papers and those which followed them have brought me. The kindness of my far-off friends has sometimes over-taxed my power of replying to

them, but they may be assured that their pleasant words were always welcome, however insufficiently acknowledged.

I have experienced the friendship of my readers so long that I cannot help anticipating some measure of its continuance. If I should feel the burden of correspondence too heavily in the coming years, I desire to record in advance my gratitude to those whom I may not be able to thank so fully and so cordially as I could desire.

BEVERLY FARMS, MASS., August 29, 1882.