

ing. One need not quarrel with Milton's definition of a good book as "the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life," to believe that for most literary men living is more important than writing. Occasionally some one who has been educated under the influence of Greek rather than German ideas comes out with a definite profession of faith on this subject. Symonds, writing volume after volume in his imprisonment at Davos, felt that even the short life he could expect was of more consequence than anything he was likely to write. "Life seems so much graver, more important, more permanently interesting than books. Literature is what Aristotle called *διδασκαλία* an honest, healthful, harmless pastime." Perhaps a time will come when biography will be esteemed more highly than it is now; when it will be held that the record of a life led in conformity with high ideas is of more value than any literary expression of the ideas themselves. Holmes is certainly a writer "whose own example strengthens all his laws." He is not one of those who are more edifying in their books than in their lives. What devotee of the "Vicar of Wakefield" does not feel that the author's human qualities are less than his literary qualities? It is not alone that Goldsmith "talked like poor Poll;" he had weaknesses of disposition which make us regret that we have so much biographical detail about him. How different it is with Holmes! His masterpiece is not the "Autocrat," but his eighty-five years of buoyant, inspiring vitality.

Holmes was born in 1809, the year of Wagram; the year, also, in which Darwin, Tennyson, and Gladstone were born. As a Harvard student the intellectual influences by which he was affected were very different from those which had held universal sway in New England during the preceding century. The moral basis of Massachusetts society was as strong in the days of Holmes' youth as it had been in the days of Solomon Stoddard and Cotton Mather. But the intellectual horizon was expanding rapidly. It was not alone that Calvinism in large measure relaxed its hold on popular credence. A genuine social awakening accompanied the process of religious transition. The combination of ethical purity with freedom of thought, and wide human sympathy, is what gives the Boston literary school 1840-1880 its claim to lasting regard. Those who have read the "Professor," or the essays on Jonathan Edwards, and the Pulpit and the Pew, will hardly need to be reminded of the spirit pervading Holmes' utterances on matters of speculative religion. For the rest, every page he wrote is aglow with his interest in whatever men do. No writer of classical or modern times could say more truly of himself: *Homo sum; nil humani a me alienum puto.*

The Harvard of Holmes' youth was a very different institution from the Harvard of the present day. No doubt it was a better place to study than had been the embryonic high-school over which Dunster presided in the early years of the colony of Massachusetts Bay: when the dormitory windows had no glass, and when students paid their fees in eggs and pumpkins. But Harvard in the early part of this century had not outgrown the stage at which one professor teaches three or four subjects; occupies—to borrow a phrase from Holmes himself—not a chair, but a whole settee. And, moreover, Harvard in those days was not progressive. Holmes said not long before his death: "During all my early years our old Harvard Alma Mater sat still and lifeless as the colossi in the Egyptian desert." But if stationary, Harvard even then was not without charm. The library was housed in Harvard Hall. The books were stored in arched alcoves, "which secluded without isolating the reader." In this place where a little later Lowell browsed delightedly upon Dodsley's "Old Plays," Cotton's "Montaigne," and Hakluyt's "Voyages," Holmes must have found much to arouse his literary enthusiasm. The class of 1829 to which he belonged, numbered among its members several men who rose to eminence in the generation of the Civil War. James Freeman Clarke; Benjamin Pierce, the mathematician; S. F. Smith, author of the national anthem "My Country, 'tis of thee;" B. R. Curtis, of the Supreme Court of the United States; G. T. Bigelow, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts; F. B. Crowninshield, Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives; were classmates with whom Holmes remained through life upon terms of special intimacy. He was while in college a member of the famous Phi Beta Kappa Society, and a considerable number of his occasional poems were prompted by gatherings of his class, by banquets of the Phi Beta Kappa, and by functions of the University. The piece entitled "The Boys," written for the class banquet of 1859, will be remembered as one of his happiest performances in this sort.

In the introduction to "A Mortal Antipathy," Holmes has given an account of the state of American literature when he opened his first portfolio. Cooper, Irving, Bryant, Dana had all done their best work before Holmes became known to the American public. The reigning favorite was N. P. Willis, who emerging from a line of "old-fashioned, coleopterous" Calvinists led for a while a butterfly existence as dilettante and dictator of fashion. The popularity of Willis in one way, as the Brook Farm movement in another, points to a general unsettling of society in eastern Massachusetts, which was particularly noticeable in the years 1830-45. When the