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To Harry de Forest Smith - September 13, 1891

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Sept. 13, 1891.

My Dear Smith, -

As there will be no "bower"^{1a} to-day I will take out my machine and endeavor to thump a few sentences for your benefit. It seems strange to think that you are not in town,² and that I would not find you if I went over the hill; but I suppose it is all so, and I will stay where I am and try to be sensible. I am glad for you, but it is devilish lonesome for m.e.^b

I shall have a change soon, however, as my application to Harvard has been accepted and I shall probably leave Gardiner about the 27th. I expect it will seem rather odd at first, but I trust I shall get used to the new life in a few weeks. As I am not subject to "swelled head" and have no idea of overturning the faculty, I see no reason why I should not be an "eddy of the mighty stream"³ and pass with the multitude. His erudition, M. Frederic Cesar de Sumichrast will be my adviser,^c and I shall be obliged to hold a parly with him before I enter upon my course. Entering as a special student is far from satisfactory, but it is better than nothing. It will give me a taste of the college atmosphere and cause me to mingle with people of all sorts and conditions - a thing which I sadly need. The truth is, I have lived in Gardiner for nearly twenty-two years and, metaphorically speaking, hardly been out of the yard. Now this is

^a Quotation marks written in black ink.

^b The first period is typed. The second period is in black ink.

^c The comma is written in black ink.

not right: the process tends to widen one's thoughts, or rather sympathie,s,^d to an unwholesome extent. This may be a new theory, but I firmly believe

2. . .^e
it to be the truth. Solitude (in the broad sense of the word) tends to magnify one's ideas of individuality; it sharpens his sympathy for failure where fate has been abused and self demoralized; it renders a man suspicious of the whole natural plan, and leads him to wonder whether the invisible powers are a fortuitous^f issue of unguided cosmos, or the cosmos itself - "The master of the show" as Omar Khayyam says.⁴ In short , this living alone is bad business; and I have had more than my share of it.

But here the old question comes up again, Why have I neot^g {=not} done%
~~diffe~~^h differently? I cannot conscientiously say that it has been necessary that I should stay at home as I have; and the more I think it over, the more am I convinced that the fault lies with myself. But how about the unseen powers? The old buffers (no offence to them) will smoke their pipes and cut their coupons and tell us all about how the world is what we make it, and how every man is the architect of his own fortune, etc. It is good to hear them, but I sometimes have a clambering idea that perhaps there is another architect behind ourselves. This is probably moral coward{-}

^d The first "comma" appears to have originally been typed as a period and then corrected with black ink. The second comma is written in black ink. WA omits the first one.

^e The page numbers of this letter are taken from the holograph. WA omits them.

^f The "i" is crossed out in red ink in the holograph. WA simply has "fortuitous", omitting the mistake.

^g The "o" is typed directly over the "e" in the holograph. WA omits the mistake.

^h I am not able to properly reproduce the holographic markings here: EAR has "diffe". The "e" has an "r" typed directly over it. In the space preceding the "d", he has a percentage sign, as shown above, and then four more percentage signs—one typed over each letter through the second "f". WA omits all this. The aborted word comprises the end of the line in the holograph.

ice, and the chances are , ten to one, that the element is but an out-growth of objective inactivity.

You are now in a position where you will have a glorious chance to study into this matter; so when you write next Sunday.ⁱ let us have a word or two on the subject of free agency. Now I will smoke a pipe and wonder whether I have made a fool of myself in writing what I have.

Vale,
E^jA^j Robinson^k

HCL US, 23-24.
Typewritten.

NOTES

1. A grove of pines which Smith and EAR used to frequent.
2. Smith had taken a teaching position in Rockland, Maine.
3. An allusion to the closing lines of "The Crowded Street" by William Cullen Bryant. (SL)
4. In the *Rubaiyat* (tr. Fitzgerald). The full stanza reads, in the 5th edition of 1889:

We are no other than a moving row
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go
Round with the Sun-illumined Lantern held
In Midnight by the Master of the Show
(LXVIII) (SL)

ⁱ Read the period as a comma. WA has a comma.

^j WA has "E. A."

^k Signature is in red ink. WA omits the underline.