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To Arthur R. Gledhill - March 11, 1891

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO ARTHUR R. GLEDHILL

Gardiner, March 11 – 1891

Dear Friend Art,--

Coincidences are very common things in fiction but in real life they are comparative rarities. And yet a rather curious one seems to have taken place. In your letter you tell m that you had the offer of a High School for a few weeks at Bennington, Vt. About two weeks [ago] I had the same offer. Yes, Art, your humble friend down east was offered the position as principal of the China (Me) High School for a week or two during the illness of the present incumbent's wife; but considering my limited knowledge of the mathematics I felt forced to decline: I could not perform an example in quadratics or cube root if it were to save the commonwealth. I might possibly have staggered through the rest of the studies (no Greek or modern languages taught) but it would have been a dry scald for me: I declined, and smoked a pipe. I did not curse myself for my ignorance but rather felt thankful that I know no less than I do. I am a philosopher withal and shall doubtless some day be rich—in something or other.

In looking over the rank list you send [=sent] I can only say that you ought to be more than satisfied. As I read the figures, dead phantoms of 6.00's & 7.00's stand before me in grim array and [I] recall the days that I spent (and wasted, I suppose) at the storied

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G.H.S. How it would have made Preceptor Giles chuckle to hear of my teaching algebra & geometry & "Sis-se-ro!" I do not know whether they teach Cicero there or not but presumably they do. If I remember rightly my experience as interpreter of that old gentleman was
read (?)

a somewhat doleful one: I only ^ three orations and part of another, while I believe you and the rest of the class read three or four more.

Blackmore says, "The less we have in hand to count, the more remains to hope for;"¹ so let us be cheerful. By the way I made a triolet yesterday; here it is:

Silent they stand against the wall,
The mouldering boots of other days.
No more they answer Duty's call--
Silent they stand against the wall,--
Over their tops the cold bugs crawl,
Like distant herds o'er darkened ways.
Silent they stand against the wall,
The mouldering boots of other days.²

Observe the bucolic pathos and fine feeling. The form of verse is of French extraction and if you ever study old French literature you will probably come across hosts of them. They give a man a chance to pour out his whole soul (as I have done) in eight lines.

I shall expect you to preach in Maine next summer and I trust you may make a success of it. Write and let me know what you are doing.

Yours,

EA Robinson

HCL

NOTES

1. See letter to Smith, January 25, 1891, where EAR reversed "less" and "more."
2. During the latter part of the nineteenth century old French poetic forms were much in vogue. Dante G. Rossetti, Algernon Swinburne, Andrew Lang, Austin Dobson, Edmund Gosse, and others were writing ballades, rondeaus, triolets, and villanelles. It was undoubtedly Dr. A.T. Schumann who introduced EAR to the technical intricacies of these forms. One of EAR's most treasured books was Gleeson White's anthology, *Ballades and Rondeaus, Chants Royal, Sestinas, Villanelles, Etc.* (London, 1887). EAR's copy is dated February 1891.