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To Arthur R. Gledhill - March 31, 1891

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO ARTHUR R. GLEDHILL

Gardiner, Me., March 31 1891.

Dear Friend Art:-

I have just received your rather brief letter. and as there is no time like the present, I will seize the opportunity and answer it. When you ask me to tell you the news a feeling comes over me akin to sadness:¹ If you were here in Gardiner you could probably better appreciate the force of my remark, for as distance lends enchantment , so it lends an ideal possibility for the performance of things difficult and uninteresting. (That "possibility" was intended for facility).

To better illustrate what I mean, it seems to me that you might make your correspondence a trifle more voluminous; and yet, when I give the matter a little reasonable consideration, I cannot blame you for getting through with it as soon as possible. It is a bare and undeniable fact that the greater portion of the satisfaction derived from friendly correspondence lies in the unresponsive consideration of the unopened envelopes^a. I receive a letter postmarked Canton, Hopedale, Brunswick (Smith) or wherever: There is a certain undefinable satisfaction in taking it from the office, it is pleasant to know that our friends have been thinking of us, but I think you will confess that, unless something particular has happened or some especially interesting subject is treated, the subject matter (when there is any) amounts to but little,^b provided there are so many hundred words strung together in tolerable English. Perhaps I am taking a cold-blooded view of the matter, and will be sorry that I have written what I have after the thing is sent and it is too late to make alterations; but I feel sure of one thing, and that is that you will not dream of taking offence at what I say, nor suppose that I am indifferent to the receiving of your letters. I have not intended to convey any such a meaning.

I have read two or three walloping good novels (to use a jocund phrase) of late, and I will mention Thomas Hardy's "Return of the Native" in particular. It is a queer thing, lugubrious enough at times, but having after all what the women call "a good ending". There are two heroes and two heroines, and they are all damned fools but one. He is the "natiwào"^c {native} who returns to marry the girl the other fellow ought to have married but didn't. The book is a good thing for one to read who contemplates a hasty marriage: it will probably cause him to consider the matter carefully before he makes the final jump. The "native" is troubled with weak eyes and a famished pocket-book, the which renders his high-spirited and sentimental wife abnormally dissatisfied. They are not

^a WA omits this crossed-out "s."

^b WA omits this entire line.

^c WA has "native".

fitted for each other and they know it; but it is too late. Eventually she (Eustacia) is drowned, together with her former, or for that matter, present, lover. The native goes his way single, and the drowned man's wife (who is in reality the heroine) marries a reddleman who sparked her years ago. One of the most striking scenes in the book is that where the half-brained Christian Cantle gambles away the hundred gold sovereigns placed in his charge by the native's mother. He and the fellow drowned with the native's wife shake dice upon Egdon Heath at midnight by the

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light of a tallow-dip; then the reddleman comes around and wins it all away from him and delivers it, as he supposes, to the proper owner. You had better read the book if you can get hold of it.

Well, the sun is getting rather low, and I think I shall be obliged to draw my effusion to a close. Whatever I write I have to manufacture myself, so pray be lenient in your criticism and write yourself.

Very truly yours,

E. A. Robinson.

HCL Typewritten.

NOTES

1. An echo of Longfellow's lines from "The Day is Done":

And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me
That my soul cannot resist.

A feeling of sadness and longing
That is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only
As the mist resembles the rain.