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To Harry de Forest Smith - June 21, 1891

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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Recommended Citation

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, June 21, 1891.

My Dear Smith:

I am in receipt o[f] your last letter and you may be sure that I will seize the opportunity of writing you once more as you have requested. I have been in a rather uncomfortable frame of mind for the past week but am gradually getting out of it I think; it is all on account of idleness I suppose, though I cannot feel that I have altogether wasted the past three years. Getting a job is not always the salvation of a man, and knowing as I do that I should never have been satisfied had I taken up with some work with the sole incentive of "doing something" and given up the idea of a further literary knowledge, my hopes for the future are not as dark as they might be. If I am ever fortunate enough to secure

2. . .^a
employment in some publishing house or in the office of some one of the higher grade of newspapers I shall be perfectly satisfied. Sometimes I look with envy upon the editor of a popular local paper - E. W. Morrell¹ for example. Of course to fill such a position one must go through the dirty work and learn the ropes, and then the chances are small for the realization of a great income; but the editor is eminently his own boss and lives as it were in a little world of his own. All this you will of course understand as nothing more than a kind of contemplation, but it

^a The page numbers and their format are taken from the holograph.

will give you an idea as to the current of my thoughts and reflections.

I think it is a misfortune to be too ideal in these times; what I mean by ideal is the fixing of one's desires too strongly upon the attainment of some end not generally reached. Successful local papers are far more

3. . .

scarce than we would naturally suppose, and the gaining of a livelihood through literary labors of any kind is, to quote from Thomas Hood, "at best a sorry game."² But I suppose I shall have to try it or else live the rest of my days in a state of general dissatisfaction.

I hardly think you will find any difficulty in getting a school this % fall- and while I thik^b {=think} of it the position of first assistant in the G. H. S. is open for an applicant; but as a lady generally takes the chair it may ^{not^c} ^ be of any interest to you. I think you could give Prof. Wr-ght a few points in teaching Virgil. Don't you think you could turn an occasional dollar by tutoring this summer if you should strike the \$\$\$\$ right place? There are always three or four ad' s in the Boston Journal of private tutors for the Massachusetts collegeasn {=colleges and} it is rumored that they receive

4. . .

celestial prices for their services; but you of course know more of such matters than I, and it will [be] better for me to talk of something of which I am not absolutely ignorant. I could give you a dozen pages on garden truck, but it hardly seems the time for considering such matters.

^b WA has "think".

^c Written in black ink.

As I realize that this is in all probabilities the last letter I shall ever write you as a Bowdoin man my thoughts naturally are led into a rather different channel than heretofore: our correspondence has been the source of much pleasure to me, not so much for the written words in themselves perhaps, as for the sentiment and friendliness of the thing. I have about come to the conclusion that friends are scarce; I can easily count {=count} mine upon the fingers of one of my hands and still have fin-
gers to spare. You will understand that I am speaking of friends in the
5. . .
higher sense of the word. I never thought so much of having a host of acquaintances, and in fact my nature is not one to acquire it if I so desired. Once in a great while I meet with a person in whom I find certain elements that strike a sympathetic chord in my own spiritual anatomy: thus, it gave me a certain kind of satisfaction when I read your remarks upon Mr. Black and his litt le^d piper at Castle Dare. I myself have a weakness for the "skirl" of the bagpipe even if it be played by an Irishman or an unctuous Italian. -----^e I have always considered Macleod of Dare a great novel; consequently I like to read lines in its praise. I do not care so much for the gloomy ending, as I look upon such a book more as a work of art than as a story. The closing is, to say^f the least, magnificent; there is genius in the last sentence.

^d In the holograph, a black ink overarching line connects the "t" and the "l".

^e In the holograph, this is a wavy line written in black ink. It is not interrupted by the period (if that is what it is) underneath.

^f WA omits the pound sign.

6. .

In closing I will ask you to send me a programme of the class-day ~~sp~~/
 speaking^g. I shall not be able {=able} to hear it myself but will be much obliged
 if you will find time [to] ~~to~~ {=do} me the favor. I was very glad to hear of your
 success in obtaining a part though it be "nothing to boast of".³ I think
 however that there would have been a disappointed Smith in Brunswick
 about now had things turned the other way. I should be glad to have you
 write a line or two if you send the programme, and when you come we will
 have a big pipe in the forest.

Sincerely yours,
 Robinson.^h

HCL US, 21-23.
 Typewritten.

NOTES

1. Ernest W. Morrell, proprietor of the *Gardiner Home Journal* from November, 1884 until January, 1893, when it merged with the *Kennebec Reporter* and became the *Reporter-Journal*. Morrell appears to have run this paper until it ended in 1913. (SL)
2. Thomas Hood, "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Clapham Academy," XVIII. (SL)
3. According to the "Catalog of Bowdoin College and the Medical School of Maine: 1891-92," Smith, in addition to winning the Class of 1868 Prize Speaking award for the Class of 1891, was also appointed to give one of the eleven commencement orations for that year. See "Bowdoin College Catalogue (1891-1892)" (1892). Bowdoin College Catalogues. Book 140.
<http://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/course-catalogues/140> (SL)

^g The first two letters of this word are written in black ink, slightly within the margin.

^h The closing is written in black ink.