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To Harry de Forest Smith - January 18, 1892

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

#717 Cambridge St.,
Cambridge, Jan. 18 – 1891.^a [=1892]

My dear Smith,

You must excuse me for not writing to you yesterday, as my time was pretty well taken. I plugged all the forenoon and took lunch at 1 P.M. At three o'clock Whitney, Drew & Barnard came around with a dozen of beer and we had a very pleasant time for the remainder of the day. The smell of the "innumerable pipes" has not yet left my room. I was wishing that you could be here with us; you would probably have enjoyed it. There is a sociability about pipes that I cannot explain. They seem to bring us nearer to each other and I think upon the whole that the world should be thankful for the weed—so called.

Saturday night I went to the Museum¹ with my friend Johnson,² from Kentucky. He is a great blood, and has a wilderness of "lip", but for all that is a very good kind of a fellow—as fellows go. These Saturday nights are about the only real outing I get and I enjoy them. The expense is a little unpleasant at times.^b but I am not a very wild youth. I have discovered one thing, however, and that is that I never shall get through my year here for eight-hundred dollars unless I scrimp like the very devil. Comparatively speaking, I am virtuous &

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prudent (sic) and yet my expenses are uncomfortably large. Twelve hundred dollars, or a thousand at least, is a fair allowance for all the expenses of a year at Harvard. If a fellow has that rare faculty of living on his companions he can get through for less, but he is generally found out before long. As you have said, one cannot be a hypocrite for four years (not often for one) without being discovered. And again, of course one of these prospective self-made men can go through for very little beyond the necessary \$350 or \$400; but I am not of those, and I am damned glad of it.

Here is a little doggerel song that amuses me immensely. Can you tell me what there is about it that is attractive?—

^a WA omits the period.

^b Read the period as a comma. WA has a comma here.

'There wás an old sóldier and he hád a wooden lég,
But he hád no tobácco and tobácco couldn't bég.
There wás an old sáilor who was cúnning as a fóx
And he álwáys had tobácco in his óld tobacco-bóx.'

'Said the sóldier to the sáilor, "Will you gíve me a chéw?"
Said the sáilor to the sóldier "I'll be dámned if I dó! <">^c
Just léave alone your drínking, and sáve up your rócks,
And you'll álwáys have tobácco in your óld tobacco bóx."³

You can get the tune from the words.

Sincerely,-- Robinson.^d

HCL US, 49-50.

EAR misdated this letter 1891.

NOTES

1. Hagedorn noted that EAR "liked to stretch his legs under the black tables of the Museum Exchange, opposite the Boston Museum, the best of the theatres, and listen to the chatter of the actors who drifted in after the performance" (75).
2. Shirley Everton Johnson, Harvard Class of 1895, a member with EAR and others of the Corn Cob Club, a group of congenial students who met informally for talk and drink and general good fellowship. Johnson later became a journalist and wrote a novel entitled *The Cult of the Purple Rose*. Tryon, another member of the Corn Cob Club, characterized Johnson as "A Southerner in spirit, proud of being a Kentuckian, he added warmth to any debate that might be started" (15).
3. A variant form of this ditty is recorded in Carl Sandburg's *The American Songbag*.

^c The quotes here are crossed out. I can't reproduce the cross-out here, so am leaving intact WA's use of angle brackets (which is standard for him) for the mistake.

^d WA places "Robinson" on the next line and omits the dash and period.