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To Harry de Forest Smith - March 6, 1892

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

1691 Cambridge St,^a
Cambridge, March 6 – '92

My dear Smith,

It is now nearly midnight but I will make time to write you a letter of some kind before turning in for my slumbers. If I do not, I may let it hang for a day or two and that is never quite satisfactory to either party. At least, I hope you find enough in my ranting to pay for the reading.

In my last I had much to say concerning a meeting in Saben's room and the consequences. Well, Saben is out. I cannot get over the idea that it was a mean trick.^b but considering the rules of the

-2-

and
college ^ his low marks, perhaps it is no more than he could expect. I am sorry that the thing happened, but of course there is nothing for me to do but keep still. I do not think I shall hear from the faculty concerning the matter now, but I shall not feel altogether easy for some time to come. °I have been putting in considerable time lately in midnight prowling about Boston. I do not think that I ever fully realized before the meaning of the word "prostitution."^d During the past month I have visited something like thirty or forty of these houses and I really think it has done me more good than all the ministers in the world g could do, if they preached till their lungs rattled. Fortunately my experience with the real elephant has

^a WA has "St.,".

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

^c WA starts a new paragraph here.

^d WA places the period outside the quotation mark.

-3-

turned me, I think, forever against it and caused me to realize what a woman is in the true sense of the word. It is hard for me to understand how a man of any feeling or intellect can frequent these holes with ~~the~~ no other motive than that of pleasure. This may make you laugh, but that will make no difference. You know I have always told you that I had more than ordinary reverence for womankind, and disliked to hear them made light of. The fact that perhaps a little over one half of them are more or less blistered does not seem to me to be any defense for the average man's indifference to their condition, beyond those in whom he has some immediate interest. ~~But~~ I think I am not overdrawing things in saying this concerning the average man.

-4-

If you care to know it, I consider that character a cheap affair, comparatively speaking, and even have the sublime egotism to place my own poor self a little above him. This may be all knocked out of me some day, but there will be some satisfaction in reminding myself of the days of my delusion. As to "sorrows crown of sorrow",¹ we will let that pass. There will be time enough to wear it when it comes. I fully realize many of my weak points, but I am glad to say that my experience [with] the above mentioned people has only served to impress me with pity and disgust. If a man has sixteen beers in him at the time of course things are a little different, but not much. I have about decided to let beer alone altogether. I do not think it agrees with me. Guinness'

-5-

Stout does, but as the Jew said, "It's too tam egspensive". Blowing in four or five dollars every Saturday night (with an occasional ten) counts up in the long run, and bye and bye one begins to inquire of himself what he got to show for it. Do not think I am getting penurious—anything but that!--but ask yourself if we are not old enough to have a little common-sense. The "we" is used editorially. Dont^e for God's sake think that I am preaching an indirect sermon to you. If I can mind my own business, I shall be successful beyond the masses on one grand point, at least. I know well enough, in fact, that your ideas are about the same as mine upon this matter.

I shall be happy † when that thesis for English 9 is written. I have concluded to write on Pendennis,² and

-6-

[shall see?] Mr^f Gates (he of the Chaucerian beard) to-morrow and talk the matter over with him. §Your friend "Spide" Giding

most {?}

is in Hubbard's room ^ every day and I meet him occasionally. Was very sorry to hear that you have given up coming this way, but will see you the first week in March, if you are at home then. ^hThe one thing that troubles me now, on purely personal grounds, is an uncertainty whether I shall come here another year or not. I think it would be advantageous for me to do so, but still I cannot but hesitate before deciding. A year is some time, and

^e WA has "Don't".

^f WA has "Mr."

^g WA starts a new paragraph here.

^h WA starts a new paragraph here.

money is, and from present signs always will be, quite an important matter with me. I will try to settle the matter during spring recess, however, and hope to come to some definite conclusion

-7-

before returning to Harvard for the last third. It does not seem possible to me that the year is practically gone, but I suppose the fact is that the change was such a welcome one that time flew faster than I thought.

From one point of view my year's work seems a little unsatisfactory; but from another the whole matter slants in a different light. Upon the whole, I do not think that I can ever regret my coming, and ~~that~~ the fact that I desire to come another year, after considering the matter in the most conscientious manner, leads me to believe that I have not made a mistake. Upon the whole I think a single year in college is such an incomplete affair that no one can be thoroughly ~~satis~~ satisfied with it. As you know, it takes about so much time for a new atmosphere to "soak"; and the first half ~~a~~ is a

-8-

rather shadowy thing anyway. If I come next fall, I shall feel at home from the first. In the present instance it was fully three months before I felt half "settled."ⁱ This is due ~~to a great~~ ~~extent~~ in a great degree to my own temperament, but cannot change the case any.

Well, I guess I have said about enough of this kind. Between the whores and the beer and the general ~~ruminati~~ ~~on~~ rumination you may find something to please

ⁱ WA places the period outside the quotation mark.

you. At least, I hope so.

Good night

Robinson.^j

HCL Omitted from *US*.

NOTES

1. Tennyson's "Locksley Hall":

"Comfort? comfort scorned of devils! this is
truth the poet sings,

That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering
happier things."

2. By William Makepeace Thackeray, first published 1848-50. This novel became one of EAR's favorites.

^j WA omits the period.