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To Harry de Forest Smith - April 17, 1892

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

1691 Cambridge St.

Cambridge Mass, Apr^a 17 - '92

My dear Smith;^b

According to the agreement I will now try to write you something to take the place of a letter, though I am afraid that I am not in a very good mood for it. I have been loaf-ing around my room all day and cannot seem to get over chronic Sunday laziness. I have longed for most everything that I cannot have, including that patch of woods behind your house in Gardiner, and the pipes. I had my own pipe to be sure, but it tasted lonesome. I have an idea that that is figurative language, but I did not intend any poetry. I do not feel like it. I have have {sic} made a little verse to-day however—part of a sonnet beginning:

"I make no measure of the words they say
Who come with snaky tongues to me and tell
Of all the woe awaiting me in Hell
When from this goodly world I go my way, etc."¹

-2-

Eventually I shall go on to say how the appearance of a good wholesome white haired man who never told a lie or drank Maine whisky impresses me, and how I draw a lesson from the unspoken sermon of his own self and begin to realize the real magnificence of better things—the which I have an idea will make the closing line. I shall spring it on the Advocate. They may object to the morality of it, though, and throw it out. If they do I have another for them beginning:

"There is a drear and lonely tract of Hell
From all the common woe removed afar,--
A flat sad land where only shadows are
Whose lorn estate no word of mine can tell, etc."²

I don't know how long this Hell business will last, but I may sigh out two or three

^a WA reads a period after "Mass" and "Apr".

^b WA has a colon here.

more. It is a damned cheerful subject and my muse is merry whenever she gets into it.

-3-

Sometimes I think that Hell may not be such a bad place after all. If there is brimstone it may be a little unpleasant, but otherwise I do not think a man need be afraid of it. Think of the company he will have. Who knows but you and I may sit upon a red-hot boulder and read Daudet and Zola? That would not be so bad after we get used to the caloric.

By the way, how does that picture come on? I have been expecting it for the past day or two, but came to the conclusion that it would probably come with your letter. I have an idea that I cut a classic figure perched on that rock, sucking your pipe. It will make an ornament for my mantel and cause my landlady to think I am growing to be a man when she sees it. I know that she loves me, for she has made a new table-covering for me: red felt with blue and yellow ribbons woven into the ends. Very aesthetic

-4-

and possibly an invitation for me to keep my pipes and ashes on my desk—or somewhere else. But that is an unkind thought and I will banish it immediately. ^cI am writing this upon what is left of my thesis block. I handed the thing in last Friday and felt as if I had dropped an elephant. ^dAs it ~~was~~ is the first thing of the kind I have ever written I have some doubts as to its merits. All I know is that it contains 7000 words and bears more or less upon the subject dealt with. I shall smoke my pipe and hope for a B+. If I get it, so much the better; if I don't I suppose the world will continue to spin just the same. A man is not such an important thing after all. We all

^c WA starts a new paragraph here, though in the manuscript there is rather a large space preceding "I", which I have attempted to reproduce.

^d WA omits the preceding large space.

live in a world of our own and wonder what it is
to others. They wonder what it is to us. And yet, if
we were all to go down to-morrow, she would keep
right on rolling and never feel the difference.

Well I guess I have said enough of this, and
will stop before I make a complete ass of myself.
Hope to get a letter Tuesday.

Yours

Robinson.

HCL US, 59-61.

NOTES

1. EAR's sonnet was apparently not accepted by *The Harvard Advocate*. It was later published in *The Globe* VI (May 1896), 143-144, with drastic changes in the first quatrain sent to Smith:
"I make no measure of the words they say
Whose tongues would so mellifluously tell
With prescient zeal what I shall find in hell
When all my roving whims have had their day,--"
2. "Supremacy," *The Harvard Advocate* LIII, No. 8 (June 16, 1892), 122. In the second line EAR changed "woe" to "gloom."