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To Harry de Forest Smith - October 5, 1893

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, October 5, 1893.

My dear Smith,

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough
A roaring Blaze, an Ear of Corn, and thou
Beside me smoking in the Wilderness,
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!¹

It is a warm and magnificent day after a long cold rain, and I naturally think of the spot where the ashes of our old fires, with a few shrivelled corn-husks, are all there is to tell of the many jolly symposiums we held there only few weeks ago. It beats the devil how time creeps away with those skinny shanks of his. Before we know it,^a spring will be here again, and who knows but we shall spend the same sort of a summer together as the one just past? I know it is past, for the hornets have 2. . .^b left the orchard and the big flies are come to take whartever^c of summer there may be left in the dried pears and apples. "The bee has quit the clover"² long since, and we shall not see any more of him until another year. By the time five or six more of these years have left us.^d we ought to have some idea of what we are good for.

I am afraid that I had too much^e to say about myself in my last letter, and too much about that bogey sonnet of mine. At any rate, you know

^a The comma is written in black ink.

^b This and all page numbers in this letter, with the ellipses, are taken from the holograph.

^c WA omits the deleted "r".

^d This may be a partially faded comma. WA transcribes a comma.

^e The "c" is written in black ink.

that it is not vanity on my part, so I am not so much concerned as I might be under different circumstances. There may be something to the thing, and there may not; I am sure I cannot tell. Schumann has written^f a "Ballade of the Law", iwth^g {=with} the refrain, "He sells his soul for a paltry fee." It is a very good thing, though perhaps a little strong in places. I

will send you a copy of it next week. He has another on doctors, "This

3. . .

marvellous medical man", which I do not think anything like as good as the other, though he professes to prefer it. One cannot tell much by wh^h what the doc says about things, however, so I have many doubts as to his opinions on anything. I know he likes Swinburne and Austin Dobson, and Seⁱ Schuman a little better than either - that is no more than human nature, I suppose. I am not saying anything against the doctor, for with all his faults, I like him, and know he has done me a great deal of good by the negative example his life and opinions have set for me, and by the direct influence of his almost finical precision in the use and pronunciation of words. He "stoops" occasionally, but he never forgets that he is speaking English. The thing has got to be almost a disease with him now, and and {sic} if I by chance say "noozpaper" he goes for me with the figurative

^f The "o" was typed partly over the "e". WA omits it.

^g WA has "with"

^h The "h" appears to have been typed over an "a". The "wh" is struck through in the holograph. WA omits it.

ⁱ WA omits this error.

^j These two words are joined in the holograph. WA inserts a space between them.

4. . .

picked stick. I find it pretty hard to speak correctly in a town where man, woman and child says "aint" and "he don't", and sometimes am more than^k half inclined to let the whole business go and become one of the multitude. Isn't it better after [a]ll to renounce the Muses^l (I mean the whole of them) for Mammon, and try to make a dollar?^{3m} Sometimes I think it is, and have a great mind to do it. But there's the rub. I am perfectly helpless in what the world calls business, and you know just about what I think of the successful business man, as we call him. But I don't keep on droolingⁿ on this same old subject. It injures no one but myself, and that is a rather expensive amusement for a man in my position.

I suppose I shall have to write a "Ballade of Dead Mariners".

The idea, with three or four others, has been chasing me for some time,

5. . .

and I know of but one way to get rid of them - write them out. Even that doesn't always do it, but one feels better after making a trial. Here is

the "envoi" as it came to me of a sudden:

"Days follow days till years and years are fled;
 Years follow years till hopes and cares are dead,
 And life's hard billows boom their message home:
 Love is the strongest where no words are said,
 And women wait forships^o that never come."

^k This is the last word of the previous line. The "n" is written in black ink.

^l WA has "Muse".

^m The first "l" is typed directly over a "c".

ⁿ The "ng" is written in black ink.

^o There is an angular mark written in black ink between the "r" and the "s" that appears to indicate that there should be a space.

This is in the rough, and may be changed more or less. I never tried one in decasyllables before, but think I shall like [it] as well as the popular eight-syllable form. The things may not be^p worth the trouble of the making, but there is a fascination about them that I cannot get over. Trusting I shall get a letter from you to-morrow, I am,

Yours as ever,
E.A.R^q

HCL US, 110-112.
Typewritten.

NOTES

1. See the letter to Smith of October 12, 1890, and note 1 for that letter. (SL)
2. From the first stanza of Kipling's "The Long Trail":

"There's a whisper down the field where the year has shot her yield,
And the ricks stand grey to the sun,
Singing: 'Over then, come over, for the bee has quit the clover,
'And your English summer's done.'"

(SL)

- 3.^r See EAR's poem "Ballade of Broken Flutes," dedicated "To A.T. Schumann."

^p The "b" is written in black ink.

^q WA adds a period and omits the underline.

^r This is WA's note 1.