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To Harry de Forest Smith - December ?, 1893

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

[Gardiner, Maine
December 1893?]

My dear Smith,

Another week has gone somewhere and it is my turn to write you another letter. The house is so stirred up now that I find it difficult to do much writing in anything like an imaginative vein though I peg away simply out of principle, doing perhaps from five hundred to twelve hundred words (first draft) every day. This does not mean much, for I have only written two of my sketches since reading "Marshall"^{1a} They are each a trifle longer than that now, but after the revision (perhaps I had better

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say rewriting) they need I fanc[y] they will average about 4000 words—enough for a short story and too much for more than ha[l]f that are printed in our popular magazines.

I have been reading the Bigelow Papers² this forenoon and find mysel[f] coming to be more and more an admirer of the book. I have had an almost bitter prejudice agains[t] it all my life—on account of the dialect—I suppose, but the thing is so inordinately clever that one is compelled to praise it before he reads many pages. I do not know of any-

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thing more ridiculously satirical than the letters of "Birdofreedom Sawin". What could be more specific^b than this.

^a WA adds a period here.

^b WA has "specif".

c--"Anglo Saxondom's idee's abreakin' 'em to pieces,
pleases
 An^d that idee's thet every man doos jest wut he damn ."

 "How dreffle stick [=slick] he reeled it of
 about the Anglo-Saxon race (and saxons would be handy
 To du the buryin' down here upon the Rio Grandy),
 About our patriotic pas^e an'^df our Star-spangled Banner,
 Our contry's bird a lookinon^g an' singin' out hosanner" &c.^h

 "It ain't disgraceful bein' beat, when a hull nation
 doos it,
 But chance is like an amberhill,--it don't take
 twiceⁱ to lose it."

^jI suppose you will say this is a weak
 dodge to fill up paper, but that is not
 my intention.

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I think I am suffering from "ennui" or something else. To live week after week without a soul to speak to on any congenial topic is hell for a man of my nature. But I won't pull this old string to-day. I am not feeling particularly "elegant", and want to [go] either to Rockland or to Boston—anywhe{re}^k out of Gardiner. But then it would be all the same when I got back so I'd better stay where I am and not growl too much. When the kids³ have left the house I may feel better, but I shall nev{er}^l be good for much until a part of this damned uncertainty is lifted. Work will either do one thing or the other, so work it is. I have taken much pleasure from the "Lyre Francaise"⁴

^c I have added a few line spaces above this couplet for the purpose of fitting it all on the same page.

^d WA has "and".

^e WA has "pa's".

^f WA omits the crossed-out "d".

^g WA has "alookin' on"

^h WA has "etc."

ⁱ WA places "twice" on the preceding line.

^j I have added a line space before this new paragraph.

^k WA transcribes "anywhere".

^l WA transcribes "never".

I borrowed of you some time ago. I am not
just^m ready for it but for all that it is
a welcome guest in my den.

Most sinc{e}r{e}lyⁿ
EA.R.^o

HCL US, 121-121.

NOTES

Undated.

1. A prose sketch by EAR, never published and no longer extant.
2. *The Biglow Papers*, satirical verses by James Russell Lowell, first in opposition to the Mexican War and later in support of the North during the Civil War.
3. Robinson's nieces, Ruth, born in November 1890, and Marie, born in April 1893.
- 4.^p *La Lyre Française* (1867), an anthology of French lyric poetry, collected and edited by Gustave Masson, with notes and a preface in English. (SL)

^m WA has "quite".

ⁿ WA transcribes "sincerely".

^o WA has "E.A.R."

^p WA wrote "'Lyre Française' ??'" in this space but did not complete the note.