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5-6-1894

## To Harry de Forest Smith - May 6, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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### Recommended Citation

Robinson, Edwin Arlington, "To Harry de Forest Smith - May 6, 1894" (1894). *Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions*. 134.

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Maine,  
May 6 - 1894.

My dear Smith,

This is a model day to read "Life's Little Ironies" and Molière's "Le Misanthrope", as I shall probably do when I finish this letter.—Let me say, to begin with, that I have been so stirred up with spring work and other things during the past week that I have had no chance to go out to your house; and I doubt if I go to-day, unless it stops<sup>a</sup> {stops} raining. I must go soon, however, and shall send you Matthew Arnold sometime this week,--probably Monday or Tuesday.

I see nothing ahead of me for the next three or four weeks but hard work--not with my fancy but with my hands; which, I suppose, is vastly better for my general economy. I think I need something of that kind in my present loneliness. When you get back, everything will seem different; but until then I must live it out as best I can. The only thing to do is to keep busy at something, it does not matter much what. Class Day week I shall take a poverty trip to Cambridge, per steamer, and thus shake the dust of "this

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my town of banishment"<sup>1</sup> from my feet for a few days. I cannot afford the trip, but I must do something. A week with Tryon, Ford, and Butler would put new life into me, although the feeling that the last of my friends leave Harvard this spring is not pleasant. That is the way of this life: we meet and get acquainted, and then we are scattered over the country—hundreds of miles apart. As long as you are in Maine and Butler in Boston and the others in Cambridge, I feel that I have someone near me; but when the time comes for you all to change your locations, God only knows how I shall feel. There is no prospect of my getting out of Maine for a long time to come, and I sometimes find myself almost wishing that you will not find any better position than you now occupy, to lead you into new fields. Of course these are not  
and  
genuine feelings, but you will understand me well enough not to lay anything up against me for what I say. I have had a horrible dose of the blues during the past fortnight and

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<sup>a</sup> The "t" is written over the crossed-out "p".

my feelings must be to some extent reflected in my words. So take them for what they are worth, and don't call me a jackass.

Yesterday morning I sent off my three sketches, but have hardly thought of them since. I am getting more and more convinced that

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that {sic} they do not amount to anything, and that they will soon come back with perhaps a little faint praise, leaving me just where I was before I sent them. I am afraid I have made a giant blunder in this literary business. Here I am in my twenty-fifth year, with absolutely no prospects, no money, and not much hope. Still, I lack the courage to upset the whole scheme of my life and face the world with buried ideals. If I must do this someday, I can foresee the result—a hand to mouth existence picked up by odd jobs during the rest of my days. However, when this cleaning up work is over, I shall settle down to hard work once more—harder now than I have ever yet done—and wait for the issue. I am one of those unfortunate devils who must have a little encouragement before they can put their heart into what they do. In my business, this encouragement is necessarily slow to come, and, even then, damnably uncertain.

Yesterday I received a long farewell letter from Saben, who intends to sail for England on the nineteenth of this month. It makes me feel queer to think he is going away, but that is the way of things. Good letters from you, Ford and Butler also made the last week marked with something pleasant, so I have not been so badly off, after all. A letter from a friend is an event in my life (did you say something like this, once on a time?) and without them I

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should be where Saben once told half the first balcony of the Hollis St. Theatre ~~in hell~~. he would be without his books—in hell. S. has a way of yelling in public which is characteristic, and at times embarrassing to the man who asks him questions.

The Dial has not yet taken the trouble to send back my sonnet. It seems to me a little lack of courtesy, but I suppose editors have the right to do as they please. I have my shoes, though Heaven only knows when they will be paid for.

As I look out the window now, it seems to me that all the world needs the washing it is getting. Everything looks dirty,

the sky most of all. I fancy I am dirty myself, and a good bath will make up a part of the day's programme. I can be clean if I cannot be contented<sup>b</sup>

Forgive me for thus wreaking my bile on you, and hope for something in a more che{er}ful<sup>c</sup> vein next week. Just at present, I do not see much to make me laugh—so shall not try to.

Most sincerely.<sup>d</sup>

E.A.R.<sup>e</sup>

HCL US, 148-150.

#### NOTES

##### 1. From "L'Envoi" to Kipling's *Soldiers Three*:

Lo, I have wrought in common clay  
Rude figures of a rough-hewn race,  
For Pearls strew not the market-place  
In this my town of banishment,  
Where with the shifting dust I play,  
And eat the bread of Discontent.  
(SL)

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<sup>b</sup> WA adds a period here.

<sup>c</sup> WA transcribes the "e" and "r".

<sup>d</sup> WA has a comma instead of a period.

<sup>e</sup> WA omits underline.