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To Harry de Forest Smith - May 13, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, May 13, 1894.

My dear Smith,

Were it not for^a a trifle too much wind, and a howling dog across the way, this would be one of God's days, as Tryon used to say in Cambridge. Aa^b {=As} it is, it is marvellously pleasant, and were^c you here^d

-----^eto reap the^f benefit of it with me, life, for a time, would^g be great. But you are not here, and that is the end of it. My loneliness nowadays is complete, and I seem to be slowly getting used to it at the expense, I fancy, of mental prosperity - if you know what that is.

^hIt is a little strange that I have never said anything to you about "Ships that Pass in the Night"ⁱ. Butler sent me the book about a fortnight before he sent "Life's Little Ironies."^j I think the man must be a mind-reader. At any rate the book came at a queer time, and was consequent^kly doubly suggestive to me. If you wish for my opinion of it, I will say that it is, to my mind, well worth reading. At first I tried to think it great, but was compelled to let greatness give way to cleverness. I do not particularly like the word "clever", but it seems, in its best sense, to be the word for this novel. It is {n}ot^l necessary for me to add that it made a great impression on me - an impression which I shall never wholly^m get over. There is a strain of sincerity in it, or apparent sincerity, which appeals to anyone who has ever had any great trouble, especially trouble of a particular sort that comes to us mortalsⁿ now and then. The "jewel"^o of the book to me is a little sentence uttered by the poor neglected devil who called Bernadine "Little Brick:"—"Those who ask for little get nothing" - or something like that.¹ It is not wholly true, but true enough to be a proverb: something like Oscar Wilde's "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."

This is one of the days when my machine does not work to

^a The "r" is written in black ink.

^b WA has "As".

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

^d This is the last work of the previous line.

^e This line is written in black ink. WA omits it.

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

^g The "u" is written in black ink over what appears to be a typed "r".

^h EAR's indentation of his paragraphs is unusually long, and of an inconsistent length, throughout this letter; I have sought to approximate this for this transcription.

ⁱ Both quotation marks are written in black ink.

^j Both quotation marks are written in black ink. WA places the period outside that quotation mark.

^k The hyphen is written in black ink.

^l WA transcribes the "n".

^m The "o" is written in black ink.

ⁿ The "s" is written in black ink.

^o Both quotation marks are written in black ink.

suit me, but I cannot lay everything to that. I do not think I have writ-
month

ten a decent letter for a ~~week~~^p. In fact, I have not done much^q of anything but peg away in my garden, trying^r to fancy that I am enjoying life. My literary scheme looks darker and darker, although my fat uncle tells me that my sketches are^r marked with a "real maturity"^s and some other things^t which an uncle would be likely to say. Like you, he is inclined to think "Marshall"^u a little better than the others. I hoped he would have^v a word to say about The Pines, but he says nothing. Perhaps the subject is not one to particularly interest a man nearly seventy years old. He goes on to say that he will put the things in a way to be examined as soon as possible. I may be surprised, but I do not anticipate any such thing.

Excepting a little Moliere, I have not read anything la^w lately. My farm work takes almost all of my time, and I am gradually getting to be a horny-handed son of toil. My face and neck^x are burned to the color of leather, and I think I feel a little proud of the fact. But what a figure I shall cut on Class Day! I have become so thoroughly fossilized during the past winter and spring that I am half afraid to go; but then, I was always a fossil, and I suppose I always shall be one. It makes no great^y

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difference, as far as I can see. I was born awkward, and I cannot help it. I do not say this for effect: it is the truth, and experience is continual{-}ly reminding me of it. I am fortunate, however, in having a few real friends who do not make much of such trifles, and I feel sure of a cordial welcome when I go to Harvard this coming June. I shall have at least two college rooms to smoke and sprawl in, and ^o {?}^z men to talk^{aa} with whose goddess s^{bb} is not engraved on a silver dollar - men whose literature is not newspa^{-cc}pers. If I could have these men - including you, of c{o}urse^{dd} - with me all

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

^q The "ing" are written in black ink.

^r The "a" is written in black ink.

^s The first half of the first quotation mark is written in black ink.

^t The "h" is typed over a typed "t".

^u The second "l" and both quotation marks are written in black ink.

^v The "e" is written in black ink over a typed "h" or "b".

^w WA omits this typo.

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

^y The "t" is typed directly over the "a".

^z WA omits the typo, which looks like a faded "o" above the line.

^{aa} The "k" is written in black ink.

^{bb} These are the last words of the previous line. WA omits the typo.

^{cc} The "n" is written in black ink.

^{dd} WA transcribes the "o".

the time, I should be infinitely better off. But they are not here.

I shall attend to the books you mention at the earliest opportunity, and am glad for the chance of doing you a favor^{ee}, however slight it may^{ff} be. It is a pleasure to work for others if they don,^{tgg} work you too hard. As Mulvaney² says, "This^{hh} isⁱⁱ an epigram. I made ut."

I suppose, to use a worldly expression, this is one of the lousiest letters I have ever written; and upon the strength of this supposition I must ask you to destroy it. I know I show my weakness in making this request, and I fear I have made it too often in the past, but there are times when it seems to me that my letters are positively disgraceful. And yet,^{jj} this may be a masterpiece. If it is, keep it.^{kk}

^{ll}I read a review of "Ships that Pass etc^{mm}" more than a year ago in the London "Athenaeum".ⁿⁿ
The review struck me as peculiar and something seemed to tell me that I should hear more of^{oo}
the book. The author has written another called "In Varying Moods"—as you have seen in^{pp}
the Dial. What do you think of William Morton Payne's³ wholesale reviewing of poetry^{qq}
and fiction? It seems to me that he does it a little too easily.

Sincerely,
E.A.R.^{rr}

HCL US, 151-153.

Typewritten {except where otherwise indicated}.

NOTES

1. From Chapter IX of Beatrice Harraden's novel, "Those who want little get nothing."
2. An epigrammatic character in Kipling's *Many Inventions*.
3. Payne (1858-1919) was associate editor of the *Dial* from 1892-1915. In 1897 he reviewed TNB, along with a number of other volumes of poetry, and EAR was grateful for it. See his letter

^{ee} The "o" is written in black ink.

^{ff} The "m" is written in black ink.

^{gg} WA corrects the apostrophe.

^{hh} The "T" is written in black ink.

ⁱⁱ The "s" is written in black ink.

^{jj} The "t" and the comma are written in black ink.

^{kk} WA—but not US—omits this sentence.

^{ll} This paragraph is handwritten in black ink.

^{mm} WA adds a period here.

ⁿⁿ These are the last words of the previous line.

^{oo} These are the last words of the previous line.

^{pp} These are the last words of the previous line.

^{qq} This is the last word of the previous line.

^{rr} The valediction and signature are written in black ink. EAR omits the underline.

to Smith, February 11, 1897.