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10-7-1894

## To Harry de Forest Smith - October 7, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Oct<sup>a</sup> 7 – 1894.

My dear Smith,

The past week has been a dull season with me—nothing but ruminating & wheeling wood, and the worst kind of wood at that. Somehow I fancy that you do not know much about it—do you?—Split slab-wood of every shape and length imaginable—full of splinters and conducive to all sorts of swear words. But it is almost all in now, thank the Lord, and I could shout jubilate were it not for the apples. I never could find any poetry in gathering apples.<sup>1</sup> It is the worst work I know except washing dishes and listening to a debate.

I do not think I have read anything that will interest you—in fact I have read nothing but an occasional ~~of~~ snatch of French and two or three magazine stories. The last McClure's is an unusually good number, containing among other things

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short stories by Conan Doyle, Robert Barr and Bret Harte.<sup>1</sup> Doyle's<sup>b</sup> story is well nigh perfect in his way—I should say "its" way, for it is hardly characteristic of its author—& Barr's little satire is surprising and good. The difference between the two is that the second named is clever and temporary while the other is just simple and for all time—if time happens to look at it in that way. "Young Robin Grey" by Bret Harte does not impress me more than most of his recent work—that is, not at all. The scene is laid in Scotland and the atmosphere is supposed to be Caledonian; but there is a failure somewhere. Whethe{r}<sup>c</sup> it is in the story; which is not much, or in the treatment, which is too strongly suggestive of so much per thousand words, I can hardly say. Buy the magazine and read Doyle's<sup>d</sup> little three page piece and tell me if you do not like it better than all the Sherlock Holmes you have ever read.

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

<sup>b</sup> WA has "Doyle's".

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

<sup>d</sup> WA has "Doyle's".

I have never read any myself, but I have my opinions.—There is also a long sketch of Dana the "Sun" man and an article of Niagara turned into a mill-dam—which may be good if one cares to read it.

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To ~~return~~ return to Antigone, I am sorry to say that your quotation from Plumptre stopped just where I wanted it to begin. What puzzles me is to know how the fellow could have any chance to improve his ways by being advised to mend them just before he was hanged. If you will kindly finish out the speech in your next letter—and send me some copy (if possible) I shall be accordingly obliged and grateful. I think I can patch up the other place though I doubt if I can make as good a verse as I had before. There was something in the ring of the words "one with mine, O Creon," that I liked. But I must write Sophocles and not Robinson (as far as euphony permits) I suppose & so shall rehash the passage as best I can.

I am going to write some "Tavern Songs" this winter—down by the furnace with a chew of tobacco "in."<sup>e</sup> This chorus will give your some idea of what they will be like:

"There's a town down the river  
Down the river, down the river,  
Theres<sup>f</sup> a town down the river,  
By the sea."

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I shall endeavor to put a little mysticism in them, and make them worth while as literature; at the same time trying to make them musical enough in themselves to be songs first and poems after. Of course I may not write them at all but I hope to do a few, at least.

The "long awaited,"<sup>g</sup> that is "The Globe" has come—

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<sup>e</sup> WA places the period outside the quotation mark.

<sup>f</sup> WA has "There's".

<sup>g</sup> WA places the comma outside the quotation mark.

two copies—one of which I shall send with this letter. The proof reader evidently has his own ideas of punctuation, but aside from that they (the poems) are printed to my satisfaction. The matter that troubles me most is the question whether they are worth printing or not. Sometimes I rather think they are, then I think they are not. I can only tell by looking at them five years from now. That generally settles such matters. I am beginning to think that Horace's advice to "keep your piece nine years" was not so far out of the way after all, though I think that it is now generally believed that the "Ars" was addressed to a poetaster whose work could be of no value if seasoned for a century. Am I right?

Do not hold me responsible for Thorne's nonsense at the close of the "Wreck of the Mayflower."<sup>2h</sup>

Sincerely,<sup>i</sup>

E.A.R.

HCL US, 169-171.

1. EAR's fellow New Englander Robert Frost would later find such poetry in his famous "After Apple-Picking." The two contemporaries' contrasting attitudes towards this subject offer an illuminating index to their different poetic temperaments. (SL)

2.<sup>j</sup> *McClures*, October 1894: "Sweethearts" (Doyle), "A Deal on 'Change" (Barr), "Young Robin Grey" (Harte).

3. In the July-September of *The Globe*, Thorne wrote an article entitled "Wreck of the Mayflower," in which he severely criticized recent New England literature. The same issue was dominated by the work of Gardiner authors: two essays by Miss Swan, a poem by H.S. Webster, two poems by Dr. Schumann, and two poems by EAR, "The House on the Hill" and "The Miracle." Of EAR's work, Thorne wrote: ". . . Mr. Robinson . . . bids fair to outshine all competitors in his native state." It was the first public recognition of EAR's poetry.

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<sup>h</sup> WA places the period outside the quotation mark.

<sup>i</sup> WA has a comma here instead.

<sup>j</sup> This and the following note are WA's notes one and two, respectively.

