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10-21-1894

To Harry de Forest Smith - October 21, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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Recommended Citation

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Oct^a 21 – 1894.

My dear Smith,

I have just read Marjorie Fleming¹ and feel well paid for my time. I do not know when I have read anything that has struck me more forcibly than that little sketch. I think I like best of all the turkey mother who ~~did~~ was "more than usual calm" & the young buck "whose only lack was in his hair"^b All this is genius, if a child did do it.

At last I have the worst of my "scrubbing" done, and shall soon be able to sit down to work with some feeling of freedom—that is, unless something now² unforeseen turns up to hinder. Things are continually turning up—wrong side up—with me, so I do not dare to look ahead with too much certainty of peace. Still, I think I shall do something in my way this winter and hope to sink some hundreds of dollars some^c time next year in getting something printed. That is, I hope for a chance to run the risk of sinking them in a good place—which is not always so easy to do nowadays.

-2-

I had a letter from Ford the other day in which there are some remarks on Trilby which may interest you. You are in a better way than I am to appreciate them, so I copy out a few lines:

" . . . the writer plainly shows lack of experience and has done some things^d of which a school boy would be ashamed. . . In short the ~~book~~ work is that of an artist" (used in the narrow sense, I suppose) "careless, but intensely individual and original. I have read nothing since the days of Thackeray which pleased me so much, and this in spite of the fact that the author has handled a subject which he had no right to undertake, which very few writers outside of the French circle could handle. The character of Trilby is as impossible as can be, and I suppose it the great heart of the

^a WA adds a period here.

^b WA adds a period here.

^c WA transcribes the "e".

^d WA has "tings".

writer, and the happy careless life which he describes, with the little bits of French song thrown in, which makes the whole attractive."

I do not think you will wholly like this, but then, all men have a right to their own opinions. You know Ford was the man who criticized my chorus for its "Miltonic" slowness. I cannot help ~~feel~~ feeling that he is partly right, but for all that I shall not try to build it over. I am getting more and more convinced every day that blank verse is the form to put it in and shall keep on with it to the end.

-3-

And this makes me think of the chorus you have just sent me. I thank you for it and appreciate your little red-lettered sarcasm on the back. I have been trying for two days to put the first line of the chorus into metre but have not yet succeeded. The nearest I have come to it is this:

"Of all the many marvellous things that are,
There is not one more marvellous than man."

The trouble is, there is too much of the original for one English line & not enough for two—a case of sadly frequent occurrence. I shall get over this snag sometime, though, and then, I hope, go on with a little more ease. There is some satisfaction in knowing that—when I have finished what I now have on hand—the work will be (in the rough) a third part done. The thing ought to be printed in the winter of '95-6 at the latest, and there seems to be no particular reason why it will not, if we both keep out strength and faculties. I don't anticipate very much enthusiastic labor on your part until your tongue is clean again, so kindly "work" Humphrey for all he is possibly worth and try to solace yourself with the fact that Edwin Booth's tongue was as black as the ace of spades nearly all his life. There is something in the company of a dead man—when he is Booth.

-4-

Yesterday I read my big Chap-Book and have come

to the conclusion that "The Passion Flower"³ is above the ordinary. It is refreshingly clean, the italicized interludes helping the author and the reader to an incalculable^e extent. The story is long enough as it is. If I were one of the "rotten rich" as John Walsh calls certain of Gardiners^f eminent people I should ~~by~~ buy Stone & Kimballs^g Poe, & the life of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, together with twenty or thirty more volumes which I particularly want now. But I can't do it^h and I somehow feel that it is all for the best that I cannot.

The last Dial has a rather good article on Alexander Smith⁴ and some pleasing facts from the life of Wainwrightⁱ the poisoner.⁵ Block, the "Globe Review" man has a very commonplace review of Thoreau's letters⁶ and Edith M. Thomas⁷ one of her little poetic icicles which do not please me. Edit[h] is too cold for me.

George is reading Treasure Island aloud to me and I am getting deeply interested in the seafaring man with a wooden leg who has been shipped as cook. There is going to be the devil to pay. Read the book if you have not already. I can vouch for the first eight chapters and at the same time congratulate myself that my love for the romantic is not wholly dead. But I cannot read the Man in Black.⁸

Sincerely,
E.A.R.

HCL US, 171-173

NOTES

1. The story of a child prodigy (1803-1811) by Dr. John Brown, 1863.
2. US reads "new."
3. By Walter Kennedy, *Chap-Book* (October 15, 1894).
4. Scotch poet and essayist (1830-1867).
5. Thomas Griffiths Wainwright (1794-1852), notorious art critic and forger.
6. Frank B. Sanborn's edition of *Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau* had just been published.
7. Edith M. Thomas (1854-1925), noted for her classical severity. Her "daintily finished lyrics,

^e WA has "incaluable".

^f WA has "Gardiner's".

^g WA has "Kimball's".

^h WA has a comma here.

ⁱ WA has "Wainwright".

sweet with the perfumes of woods and fields," appeared regularly in the literary periodicals of the times.

8. By Stanley J. Weyman (1855-1928), writer of historical romances. *The Man in Black* was published in 1894.