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To Harry de Forest Smith - January 20, 1895

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Maine,
Jan 20—1895

My dear Smith,

Here is another week gone by, and I wonder what I have to show for it. A lot of thinking—music for one of Rileys poems—a little reading and 3000 words (two writings) of my reincarnation story which is giving me some trouble that I did not apprehend.^a—that of keeping the idea of destiny ever present without saying much about it. The story is pretty stiff and ends with bullets and smoke—mostly smoke, I fancy, but, for all that, I refuse to call it sensational,^b I hope you will like the better than you did the one I read you during your vacation, but I rather think you will call it strained. It is funny that you and I have such different ideas of human logic. Without intending to defend myself at all, I must say that the two separations in Pembroke give my imagination something of a stretch while the disappearance of my strong man is quite natural. Do not mistake me in this and think that I would compare my stuff with Miss Wilkins's—that is not the idea.

Yesterday I fell again to reckoning up how much stuff I shall put into my book (?). After culling out all my conscience^c I find that there will be any where from 350 to 400 pages, about ~~th~~ {?} 300 words to the page. This seems to me a little too large honestly^d and I shall probably work it down.

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I am now reading The Manxman again and am beginning to feel its prolixity. All those chapters about the wedding are a waste of time and paper, though it is easy enough to see the author's plan. Book IV (Man & Wife) ought (from the point of view of pages) to have been over by this time and pretty much every thing else with it. Caine is a great writer but not great enough to know his own weaknesses, and who is? Hardy surely isn't, but Hardy will be great after Cain{e} is totally forgotten^e His ~~h~~ work has something in it that can{n}ot be found in the Manxman—something that I cannot define If

^a WA omits the period.

^b WA has a period here instead.

^c WA suggests "rejects?" here in square brackets as an alternative reading for "conscience", and this is also suggested by US. However, it is a highly unlikely reading, and I have accordingly removed it from the text.

^d WA reads "however".

^e WA adds a period here.

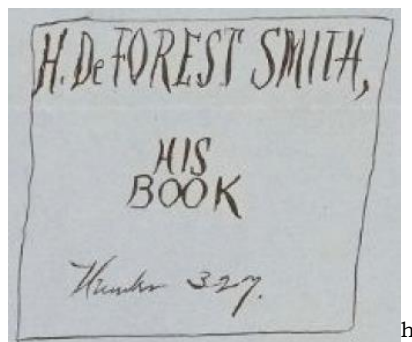
you are not quite will to agree with me, read "Far From the Madding Crowd" of "The Woodlanders"—particularly the first named. There you will find something that you hav{e} never seen before and I am afraid, you will never see again—modernized Shakspearean^f comedy. The bulk of the book, however {?}, is something very different from that—mental tragedy. There it is like The Manxman but the Manxman, unfortunately, is not like that.

It is only when compared with the very few novels of late years that excel it, that this book is sent up in the balance and that fact shows how good a thing it is,^g I am glad for the chance of reading it but I cannot think of it as the much-talked of "book of the year"—even after "The Ebb Tide." It{s} size and elaboration are likely to dazzle one at first but one is conscious of a vast number of forgotten and unnecessary chapters by the time he is half through it. The same can hardly be said of paragraphs in Stevensons work.²

Stevenson makes me think of the Chap Book. At last that disappointing little affair³ has printed someth{in}g worth reading. I refer now to a little sketch øf by Kenneth Grahame, called "The Secret Drawer."⁴ I do not know when I have seen a

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{l}ittle sketch that has interested me so much as that, or satisfied me half so much. It took an artist to even think of writing it. Mr Bradley's book plate is, according to my notion, well drawn, but I do not think I sh{o}u{ld} care to paste [it] in my copy of Jeffrey's essays. People are going to weary some day of this black & white business and demand som{e} thing more {?} tangible. Here is a book-plate which may please you:



I merely suggest this as an antidote for the modern craze. My only intentionⁱ is to make you think a little of the strength that sometimes

^f WA has "Shakspearian".

^g WA has a period here instead.

^h The word at the bottom left is "Number".

lies in simplicity.

On page xxii (advertising) of the *Holiday Critic* you will find an advertisement of books published by the Opus Club Co. If you have not already noticed it you may like to look it over. Have not yet heard from the Chap Book or from Lippincotts^j so there is a pause in ~~my~~ the growth of my collection of blanks. WC Palmer seems to

SS

have forgotten my request for posters and I have spoken to Bizzell. I can{n}ot wake much excitement of over the business or over any thing else

but^k

the on{e} subject I am wrapped up in. When I emerge, I may collect birds eggs.

Very truly yours

EAR.

HCL US, 196-198.

NOTES

1. US reads "weakness."
2. Robert Louis Stevenson had died only a few weeks before, on December 3, 1894. *The Critic* for December 22, 1894. *The Critic* for December 22, 1894 carried a lengthy eulogy.
3. EAR's judgment was shared by *The Critic*. On the page opposite EAR's sonnet in the issue of November 24, 1894, a statement highly critical of *The Chap-Book* was made: "that dainty little fortnightly, *The Chap-Book*, is trying to attract attention by methods adopted by *The Yellow Book*—a system of mutual admiration carried to wasteful and ridiculous excess" (355).
4. *The Chap-Book*, January 15, 1895.
5. ~~To send to Smith,~~ who was collecting posters advertising magazines. {see man. for WA's note}

ⁱ WA reads "interest".

^j WA adds a comma here.

^k This is the last word of the previous line.