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1-30-1895

To George W. Latham - January 30, 1895

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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Recommended Citation

Robinson, Edwin Arlington, "To George W. Latham - January 30, 1895" (1895). *Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions*. 161.

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TO GEORGE W. LATHAM

My dear Latham,

Although you did not see fit to answer my last letter—which was a bit dictatorial, by the way—I am going to try you again and hope for better results. I know well enough how it is—you work all day and hardly see the need of writing to a "jay"^a down in Maine whom you may never see again; but you must remember that you have had an influence over me which you may never have suspected and that influence wa{s} for the good. In spit of the cold glazing you seemed to put over your feelings, there was a depth—a complexity—in your nature that made me--very slowly, I must confess—a stronger man than I would otherwise hav{e} been. A fellow cannot easily forget things of this kind even even though the other "party" drove him wholly out of his thoughts; so, if it is of any consequence to you, you may think once in a while in the future that there is at least one fellow in the world, and I cannot think that I am the only one, who has profited by your friendship and who will always remember it as one of the good things of his life. My life at Harvard was such a mess of what I intended to be innocent duplicity that I cannot but wonder what sort of an impression I made upon the minds of my associates. I had so much to contend with that I could not be myself—except at times; and I rather fancy that I was as near that as ever when I talked you into my room and got you to read something or else did it myself I spent money because I had it. The natural consequence is that I haven't got it now. The little I ~~lent to you~~ loaned to you & Tryon makes a bright spot, & Peters' star bids fair to shine forever. I bear him no ill will, however; he borrowed that money before his

-2-

maturity and for that reason I shall always think that he intended to pay it. As it was he gave me ten dollars long after he pretended to pay any one but "Willie" and I shall always think of him good naturedly for a streak of right feeling somewhere in his nature. So whenever you see him you may give him my regards, though I do not fancy that he will care much for them.

This is one of those still cold sunny days when the mercury stands at zero for twelve hours and not a single frozen thing seems to move from morning to night. My nature seems to have caught a little of the days chilliness and [I] have no inclination to move. I hav{e} written so many hours to-day and I shall write so many hours to-morrow; but what is it all going to amount to? That is the question that staggers

^a WA has "guy". An archaic definition of "jay" is "an impertinent chatterer" (Merriam-Webster).

me. But I have strength (or is it weakness) enough to believe that I shall turn something up someday and after that have a little sunlight to work in.

Ford writes me a letter every fortnight or so & I judge that he is pretty well contented in Exeter. He growls over the atmosphere of the place (nobody to talk books with) but otherwise from that seems to be pleased with his surroundings. There is more college spirit, he says, than in any place he saw. There surely isn't much at Harvard. My great wonder is that there is any at all.

Butler is not so contented as I wish that he might be; he has things to keep him stirred up all the time, and, as you must know, there are many {?} things worse than a lack of funds I drew my own inferences from my two short visits at his home, but suppose I ought not to say so on paper. ^bTryon on the contrary (I hav^e had one letter from him since last June) tells me that he is "optimistic & buoyant." Perhaps you do not know that he is in the Lawrence Divinity School—great chums with the Bishop Prof Lyon & the devil knows who else among the big fellows. I am happy to say that he has wholly given up that rather shadowy journalistic scheme of his and will give his life

-3^c-

to a more direct service to his fellow men. Tryon is one of the few men I could look upon in such work with nothing but admiration. I think he has found his calling, as you will find yours, (like my old friend Smith) in education of another kind.

It may interest you to know that I have stopped *Antigone* at the 900th line and shall leave it for three or four months. I went as far as I could without a long rest. Smith intends to get married in June and to the devil with all the long talks in the pines, I suppose, not to speak of a hundred other things. This "white funeral of the single life" is hard sometimes on the poor devils who are left alone; he^d {=but} still I cannot sympathize with Lamb in his narrow treatment of married men. The place, and the only place, for a married man or woman is at home, and I cheerfully give Smith the privilege of staying there—though with some regrets, of course. An occasional session to recall old days, will be a very good thing but the old ~~dy~~^e days themselves will be gone.

Sometimes it makes me almost shudder to think of the happiness a man might find at Harvard with good health and money enough to keep him going and nothing at home to worry the life out [of] him

^b WA omits this space.

^c This page is written vertically, hence the long lines.

^d WA has "but".

^e WA transcribes the error as "thy".

when away. Whene{ver} I have visions of the college yard on a bright day in October or June, I feel as if something had been stolen from me. And the thought that there are but two fellows left for whom I care any thing in particular gives me a queer feeling of loneliness. Ford & Mead used me splendidly last June—better than I had any

and

right to expect, And now Mead, ~~with~~ Tryon, are the only fellows I should call to see excepting one from Gardiner who is in the Scientific [?] School—a very good fellow but more of a society man ~~that~~ than I can ever be or ever want to be.

Have you read Trilby? I read it in the face of a tremendous prejudice and was well paid. The story doesn't amount to anything but the atmosphere (which is generated in the first three books) is mag{-}nificent. From a literary point of view the book has little merit, but it is human—like Pendennis. You may not get as far as this, but if you do, believe me,

Yours most sincerely,

EA Robinson

Gardiner Maine

Feb 1– 1895. [=January 30]

HCL EAR misdated this letter, postmarked from Gardiner on January 30, 1895.