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To Harry de Forest Smith - February 3, 1895

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Maine
Feb 3 - 1895

My dear Smith,

I had not quite finished the Manxman when I wrote last Sunday, so could not give you my final impressions. If you care for them now, I will say that the author proves his greatness by making the book a success in spite of its fearful length. Scene after scene is spoiled ~~afte~~ by over preparation and half the book is worse than padding. Still it is a great^a work & Caine is a great man.

In turning from the Manxman to the Blithdale^b Romance the contrast is bewildering. How did Hawthorne do it? That is the question that bothers me and I have come to the conclusion that much of it is due to the fact that he was capable of an amount of brain-racking and tinkering of which the modern ink-spiller has no conception. The fact that the writing of The Marble Faun was a five years job is enough to make a man stop and think. I do not think that I ever fully realized the greatness of Hawthorne until I took up the novel I bought of you. (Did I ever pay you for it?) Not that it is the best, but it somehow reveals the master in a way that is not to be noted in the others. There is a sense of reality about it which is utterly wanting in the Scarlet Letter; and there is a kind of glorification of little things which only a great master is likely to find worth while.

When I leave ~~ha~~Hawthorne for my own poor, patient manuscript

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I feel very foolish indeed; but I get over that and go pegging away—sometimes a page at a time without any trouble—sometimes spending an hour over a dozen words. It seems to me that I have flushed a good sized volume of my reincarnation story through the water-closet and there is still more to follow. This past week

been

I have going through the stuff and have gleaned and ground it down to twelve rather large pages—about 6500 words, I should think and now only hav{e} part four to concoct and set down. I think it will take me all ~~next~~ this week and then I am going to take a change of air and write a little thing to be called "Saturday", of which you will be indirectly the Father, as it is fo{u}nded on the ~~amiable~~ amiable portrait of one Mr Hutchings¹ in bed with a

^a WA reads "good".

^b WA reads "Blithedale".

pint of rum and a pile of dime novels.

I hav{e} left off chewing tobacco and feel as if I had lost the greater part of my diabolical system. But I have more time to think and as a consequence have half thought up a rather

it

elaborate tale which, seems to me, ought to be called "The Wool-gatherers" I doubt, however, if it finds a place with the "scattered lives"² which I am hoping may som{e}day come together and find a 12 mo lodgng between cloth covers: it is all to[o] vague for that and seems to ask for rather more space than an ordinary "short story"—Ye gods, how I hate to call them by that name!—and I rather think I shall put it in with another{r} of equal length and let them be a book by themselves. Excuse me for talking about books, but that is almost the only recreation I have now—thinking of the things I am going to do—and [you] must partly understand my feelings.

The thing is wholly out of the question for me, but if I were in your place I should be strongly tempted to subscribe

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for the Edinburgh edition of Stevenson—if only for an investment. It is a matter of some sixty dollars, I believe, but I cannot see any possibility of risk. You might also lay in a supply of [the?] fine edition of Chicago society novels. advertised in the back of the Chap-Book, which seems to be coming up a little in the last number. In looking over The Land of the Straddle-Bug³ I draw an inference that Mr Garland is driving things home. I think you said that you were reading it and that it was worth while. I shall take it up when it all comes and pray that the editor of the C.B may not let another serial story into its pages. It seems to me ridiculously out of place however good it may be.

My posters are piling up, but I have none of any value. Here is the list.

Harper's – Dec. – Feb.	Scribner's – Dec (2) Feb.
Lippincotts Dec – Feb (3)	Century Dec Feb(2)
St Nicholas – Dec.	"Truth" Midwinter [?] No
	Cooking No (2)

Quarterly Illustrator (2)

Outing & Cosmopolitan (Feb) which do not amount to any thing. If you have any extra Jan. numbers I should be glad to get hold of them somehow. I skipped them all. I now have Bissell and Blanchard at work for me and William when he thinks of it.

There is also a hiatus in my collection of declination

blanks. The editor of Lippincott's Magazine made it, but he sent me a check for seven dollar{s} to fill the hole. So there is no loss without some gain: I can shake my shoes and laugh (I havent paid for them yet.) I fixed up the sonnet a little before it [=I] sent it on, so they did not get it just as the Dial people saw if {=it}—if they ev{er} {even?} did that. The third line now reads "Bleak and unblossomed were the ways he knew"

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which seems to have some jingle and a little strength. The receipt of my first "blood-money" is now as much of a thing of the past as is your first week of school teaching. A check tomorrow for a thousand would not give me the same sensation⁴

If you hav{e} Appletons catalogue look up the Gainsborough Series (paper 25c) and consider the purchase of Gier-Wally [?]⁵—Meta Holdenis—Samuel Brohl & Co. They are all first class and the books are quite respectable and fit for any binding—as I remember Gier.-Wally [?]. I was surprised to find Ja{mes}^c Lane Allens "John Gray"⁶ in the list of old Lippincotts, and so within my means. It was a quiet quiet success like Esther Waters and won nothing but praise from the critics. Will send it to you after I read it You will find some good pictures of Frenchmen in the last Munsey and also (horesco referens!)⁷ some of Julia Ward Howe and her daughters.⁸

You have struck the right thing for a book plate, but I am sorry for the dancing faun. I think of having two old men by a little fire, smoking long church wardens and reading tomes of wisdom,—and the shadow of the woods around them.



I think of all this but shall probably never get it. So if the idea strikes you as a good filling for your squar{e} you are

^c WA has "Jas."

quite welcom{e} to it.

Yours most sincerely.

E.A.R.

HCL US, 201-204.

NOTES

1. Twenty-five years later, wonderfully transmuted from sketch to poem, Mr. Hutchings became an enduring figure in "Mr. Flood's Party."
2. US reads "Scattered Lines."
3. Hamlin Garland's "The Land of the Straddle-Bug" was published in *The Chap-Book* between November, 1894 and February, 1895. (SL)
- 4.^d Although EAR's sonnet "For a Copy of Poe's Poems" was accepted and paid for (at fifty cents a line) at this time, it was not printed until eleven years later, *Lippincott's Magazine*, LXXVIII (August 1906), 243.
5. US reads "Cherbuliez."
6. *John Gray: A Kentucky Tale of the Olden Time*, by James Lane Allen, published in 1893. (SL)
7. I shudder to say. (SL)
- 8.^e Including Laura E. Richards of Gardiner, Maine, an author in her own right and to become one of EAR's earliest and most constant supporters.

^d Notes 4 and 5 are WA's notes 3 and 4, respectively.

^e This is WA's note 5.