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3-17-1895

## To Harry de Forest Smith - March 17, 1895

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Maine  
 March 17 - 1895

My dear Smith:

You may have thought it strange that I said nothing at all about your father & mother's sickness, but they told me that you know nothing about it and after that I felt that I had no authority to mention it. Miss Patterson told me yesterday that they are both getting along finely now, in fact they were out of the worst of it last Sunday, when Joe & I went out. We are going again this afternoon.

I find that I have been reading too much of late. My eyes tell me so. Last week I did not read so much—only Lowell's essays on Carlyle & Lessing & Swinburne's Tragedies and half of Stevensons Inland Voyage.<sup>1</sup> Of Atalanta in Calydon Lowell says, "These are not characters, but outlines after the Elgin Marbles in the thinnest manner of Flaxman. There is not so much blood in the whole of them as would warm the little finger of one of Shakspear's living & breathing conceptions."—And I think he is right, though he goes on to praise the choruses more than I possibly can. The first, "When the Hounds of Spring", is great but the rest are nothing, to my mind.—Of Lessing he says, "Wherever he sat was the head of the table? Which is enough praise for any man.

-2-

The essay on Carlyle did not strike me as of much value, literary or critical. Carlyle seems to be a hard man for the critics to handle. I wonder what Minto did with him in his English Prose? Are you acquainted with that book? It is rather ponderous in its treatment but pretty good stuff to be acquainted with, I fancy. Saben had it [in] Cambridge and I used to look into it occasionally.

The other day I received a blank "life-book" from the Secretary of the class of '95, Harvard, for me to fill out, but I do not feel like responding. The circular that came with it says that it is sent to all past and present members of the class and to such special students as have had social connections with the class—whatever that may mean. There is also, and infinitely more to the point a request to contribute as much as possible to

the Class Fund which ought to exceed \$12,000. If I should give them \$5 a year for the next 5 years I should feel quite free to go to all the Commencement Dinners and the Triennials—as far as right is concerned—by [=but] my conscience would be somewhat in the way. It is too much like sham membership, and the whole thing surprises me. I am in doubt as to how to reply. The blanks were evidently sent to me for what money I might return—or I suppose they were—and I do not just like the notion of associating a thing of that kind with Harvard college—which is the object of almost the only patriotism I possess, notwithstanding the fact that I was there but two years, and then as a Special.

-3a-

Here is a rather striking epigram from "An Inland Voyage": "To know what you prefer instead of humbly saying Amen to what the world tells you you ought to prefer, is to have kept your soul alive." This is the spirit of the whole book, which I am sure you would like amazingly. Perhaps you have read it, but I have never heard you speak of it. It is a good thing to begin a reputation with and contains as the author states in his preface "not a single reference to the imbecility of God's universe, nor so much as a single hint that I could have made a better one myself." There is a good deal of high grade humor in it and some rather wise reflections on life,—like unto this: "He who can sit squarest on a three-legged stool, he it is who has the wealth and glory." "The slug off a fellow, who is never ill nor well, has a quiet time of it in life and dies all the easier." These are observations, not complaints.

I have finished up "A Little Fool" and have rewritten the first part of Lévy Condillac, which I like immensely—better than you ever will—or anybody else, I fear I have always sworn to myself that there is the germ of something worth while in that first sketch of mine and I cannot get over the impression. If these things of mine ever get before the public I shall await the criticism of that piece more than any other. I may be laboring under a delusion regarding its significance, but I shall not believe it yet a while.

-4b-

This letter is dull, unoriginal & slow—just as I feel. I enclose a

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<sup>a</sup> Written vertically.

<sup>b</sup> Written vertically.

quotation however which will make up for all that.

The Chap. Book cam{e} this morning and I hav{e} read it. If Mr. Mabie's contribution<sup>3</sup> is a fair sample<sup>c</sup> of his his work he is the master of a drool that is overwhelming. All that he has to say could be told, and much better, in one well-balanced sentence.

"Old World Lyrics"<sup>4</sup> is all safe I will br{in}g it up to you whe{n} you come home . I lik{e} your quotation from Goethe.

Most sincerely,  
E.A.R.

[Enclosure]

"The Master of Balliol's Advice in all Undertakings:

First make your arrangements;  
The trust in Heaven;  
And in no case worry."

Quoted by "Q" in McClures Magazine.

E.A. Robinson

March 17 – 1895.

HCL US, 215-217, 322.

#### NOTES

1. An account of Stevenson's canoe trip through Belgium and France, 1878.
2. *Manual of English Prose Literature, Biographical and Critical*, Edinburgh, 1872, by William Minto (1845-1893), critic and essayist.
3. Hamilton Wright Mabie, "A Comment on Some Recent Books," *The Chap-Book*, II (March 15, 1895), 367-371.
4. Publication of Thomas B. Mosher, 1893. See EAR's Letter to Smith, April 15, 1894.

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<sup>c</sup> WA has "sampling".

