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5-26-1895

## To Harry de Forest Smith - May 26, 1895

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

My dear Smith,

I have a feeling that I ought not to write to you to-day, because I am wholly out of the mood and strangely destitute of ideas; but I hav{e} a feeling of pride on the other hand which tells me that I shall feel better for the writing, even if it be at your expense. Were I a little more courageous I might write with a deliberate intention of destroying the sheet as soon as it was covered, but I'm damned if I do that to-day, even for you. I purpose to keep right on in just this style until I arrive at the bottome of page 4, whe{n} I shall fold the matter up, seal it, and let it go. I shall not take the trouble to read it over (I seldom do that for any body) but shall trust to your own ingenuity in filling blanks and deciphering hieroglyphics, in the making of which I own no master.

I am in a peculiarly reminiscent mood to day, and I think the cause of it lies in the fact the [=that] I shall

-2-

hear no more of Reeces Band, which, as you know, has been with us all the week. At the end of the closing concert last night they all show up and played Auld Lang Syne in a way that sent seven distinct kinds of crinkles up my spine and through my hair. When I stopped and the men began to put up the instruments I felt as if an epoch in my life were over. You dont like t liv{e}s with epochs in them, you [=but] you mus{t} grant me one this time.

Last evening{'s} programme was particularly fine from the Tannhauser<sup>1</sup> overture to the Miserere in Il Trovatore<sup>2</sup> which I played (?) you that evening you ate egg-plant. It wa{s} taken by a trombone and a cornet with a subdued accom{-}paniment by the band, which kept up

the anguish and the tension of the score  
 in a way that was almost beyond belief.  
 I hav{e} hear{d} the opera, but the spirit  
 of the piece was not brough{t} [out] by the hu-  
 ma{n} voice as it was last night by  
 wind instruments.<sup>3</sup> But then, instrumental  
 music was always more to me than vocal,

-3a-

and I hav{e} no doubt that it always will be. This band had the  
 greatest clarinet arrangement I ever saw—seven of them, with bassoon,  
 in a band of 25 pieces is a pretty good showing

Renans Vie de Jesus ha{s} arrived and looks like most  
 attractive reading. My New Testament work is going on well and I must  
 say that I enjoy it That, with five or six French novels, wil{l} con-  
 statute most of my reading for many weeks to come. It would {?} be a good  
 thinkg for me, I think, if I could cultivate your interest in posters, or  
 something of that kind, but it [is] an absolute impossibility for me to do it.  
 There is not place in my brain for collections now, though when I was a  
 kid I used to be collecting every thing from bugs to buttons. The only  
 things that I could possibly collect now with any ardor would be first  
 edition{s} of recent books. But they all cost money. And ~~money~~ money is a  
 substance which I designate with a very small "x". There was a  
 man and he had nought. And robber cam{e} to rob him. I am  
 that man without the robbers. They all know better.

-4b-

In The Story of an African Farm<sup>4</sup> the chickens were wiser than hu-  
 man beings: and I wonder now if my six hens are wiser than I am.  
 They are saying something down there behin{d} the barn that I cannot un-  
 derstand, and for som{e} reason they are making me think of the whole  
 schem{e} of life and of its final outcome. A man is more than a hen,  
 but a hen knows some things of which a man knows nothing. I'll bet  
 they know more abou{t} the weather than all men, and women in the world.  
 Sometimes I think instinct is only another name for divine knowledge  
 and som{e} times I dont think much about it any way. To day my thoughts  
 are all mixed up and the smell of wet lilac-blossoms coming  
 through my window make{s} me a little sick. I wonder if Pierre Loti<sup>5</sup>  
 could stomach them in his study?

Yours most sincerely,  
Robinson

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<sup>a</sup> Written vertically.

<sup>b</sup> Written vertically.

26 May – 1895,

I shall see you at the  
and of the week—saw  
your father & mother this  
afternoon.

HCL US, 227-229.

#### NOTES

1. *Tannhäuser*, an 1845 opera by Richard Wagner. (SL)
2. *Il trovatore*, an opera by Giuseppe Verdi. It premiered in 1853. (SL)
3. EAR's ability here to be so moved by a humble local band's rendition of operatic masterpieces is later reflected, humorously, in *Captain Craig*, where the Captain insists that "The brass-band will be indispensable" at his funeral. Sure enough, when that occasion takes place, his friends honor his eccentric wish, and "all along that road the Tilbury Band/ Blared indiscreetly the Dead March in Saul." (SL)
- 4.<sup>c</sup> By Olive Schreiner, 1883, published under the pen name of Ralph Iron.
5. Pierre Loti (1850-1923), a French novelist. (SL)

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<sup>c</sup> This is WA's note 1.