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To George W. Latham - August 29, 1895

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO GEORGE W. LATHAM

My dear Latham,

Your letter did me more good than all the pipes I have smoked in a fortnight. I knew it would come in time, but of course I had no particular notion when. I understand, however, your slowness in that way and am pretty sure that I should do the same thing if I were not glad for the chance of writing a letter for the mere sake of relieving the damned monotony of the life I am now living. I do not complain, but sometimes I swear, to my self, and wish that things were just ~~wish~~ a little different. What with threatened caries of the temporal bone of the right side of my cranium and "sub-acute inflammation of the middle-ear" on the left, I am having a great rest this summer. I am going to work again right away and see what I can do though for I am getting fussy over that book of mine, which, by the way, if it ever appears, will hav{e} for a title "The Book of Scattered Lives". The title, I fear, will be the best part of it, though I hav{e} som{e} faith in the inside. The devil of it all will be to make that faith contagious.

-2-

This morning I overdid myself and read the last hundred pages of the Mill on the Floss at a single setting. It was not a good thing for my eyes, but the ~~the~~ book carried me along so that I forgot all about them. Of course you hav{e} read it so I will only say that it is one of the great books of the world for the sake of the pleasu{re} it gives me to put it down. The scheme is admirable—as lean as Anna Karenina in the first half—then slowly coming to climax through the last. Middlemarch, I suppose, is greater, but I hav{e} no desir{e} to read it again. George Eliot is too heavy for me, and seems, in my poor judgment, great in spite of herself.

I think I told you what I thought of The^a Ebb Tide in my last letter. Magnificent, to my notion and a perfect masterpiece of character painting, and all the time a story to keep one's blood warm. Attwater¹ will go down the ages I think. Oblivion is not large enough to hold him. And this makes me think of "Will o' the Mill"²—which I read again the other day. If your memories of it are not pleasant please read it again; for I am sure that it is a great thing—as great as "A Lodging for the Night" by the same author.

-3^b-

Ford sent me a long letter from Paris not many days ago in which he tells me that he is getting along splendidly, but is not quite satisfied on account of missing the great man he expected to see. You know he has a standing invitation from Paul Bourget --got acquainted with him in Cambridge through Sumichrast. You may be interested to know that Ford is a poet, en cachette.⁴ He has written, out of his heart, I fancy, but has not yet found the nerve to read or send me any of his numbers. From a translation he made of "La vie est vaine" in Trilby⁵ I am sure that they will be pretty good. By the way, I have written a sonnet for Thorne's next Globe Review⁶—a rebellious half-Catholic quarterly which you may know—and will send you a copy with this letter. I give all my funny poetry to Thorne. He likes it.—Antigone still stops at the 930th line but will go ahead again sometime My interest in it is stronger than ever, and as I look back on the work I did on it a year ago I do not feel ashamed to own it. And that is saying perhaps more than you can realize. My version will be a little too radical to please a scholar who reads after the manner [?] of the times, but it is fairly literal and, I hope, poetical. I have worked on the principle that the players of old Athens went on buskins but not on stilts. If you don't understand me, read Plumptre and tell me if I am right.

-4^c-

^a WA has "the".

^b Written vertically.

^c Written vertically.

How is this from Ford?—"By the way, I came across Gates at the opera a night or two ago. He is a great enthusiast over Wagner and was spending an evening in enjoying Tannhäuser . . . There is too much culture and not enough human about him. I get tired of hearing continually of "artistic significance" and intellectual range. Those things get come in a way to be a religion for me, and the language of Gates or Barrett Wendell or William Vaughn Moody, three pretty much of a kind by the way, beard and all, irritates me as a Methodist minister who is continually talking about our Lord Jesus Christ."—This same Ford characterized B.W's. book on "William Shakespeare as "paradoxical, impertinent and little—like the author." I have got to realize that Ford is a man worth knowing, though I am not yet ready to accept his judgment of Gates. I shall never forget his kindness to me when I first went to Harvard and so like better to read that E.C. Stedman says that his introduction to Jeffrey's essays is the best thing in the book.⁷ I realize, however that I could never possibly get very near to the man and am aware that Ford is partly in the right.—I am very jolly at the prospect of receiving Dr Hills book on Harvard. Nothing could be more acceptable and I thank you very much.

Yours most sincerely,
E.A.R.

Gardiner, Maine.

Aug 29, 1895.

P.S. Won't you tell me a little something about her?—

say the color of her eyes and hair—and whether or not she wears starched fronts. I am very glad to learn, or suspect, that life is beginning to mean something to you.
E.A.R.

HCL

NOTES

1. A character in *The Ebb-Tide*. (SL)
- 2.^d In Stevenson's *The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables*, 1887.
3. In *New Arabian Nights*, 1882.
4. In secret. (SL)
- 5.^e Part Eighth:

^d Notes 2 and 3 are WA's notes 1 and 2, respectively.

"La vie est vaine:
Un peu d'amour,
An peu de haine. . .
Et puis—bonjour!

"La vie est breve:
Un peu d'espoir,
Un peu de reve. . . .
Et puis—bonsoir."

{"Life is vain:/ A little love,/ A little hate. . ./ And then—good day!/"

"Life is short:/ A little hope,/ A little dream. . . ./ And then—good night." (My translation.)}

6. "Kosmos," ["Ah, shuddering men that falter and shrink so"], *The Globe*, Vol. V, Number 20 (October 1895), 407.

7. Gates' *Selections from Jeffrey*, 1894.

^e Notes 5-7 are WA's notes 3-5.