TO GEORGE W. LATHAM

Gardiner Maine
20 Sept. 1895.

My dear Latham,

Two or three days ago I sent you a few words in acknowledgment of the book you were good enough to give me. I have read it as much as my eyes have permitted me and I assure you that I enjoy it. I cannot understand how an Englishman with only a few weeks acquaintance with the place could have written such a book on Harvard. He "goes off" once in a while, it seems to me, but that is to be expected. As far as I have seen he has nothing to say about the fence, which is a great pity. With a fence a man could sit on and no damned Law School in the College Yard to kill half the vital essence of the Harvard atmosphere, your alma mater (I wish I could say mine) would be a vastly different place.

My friend Smith goes to Cambridge this fall for a year's course in the graduate school. He has your favorite subjects (if you have any), Greek and Latin. Smith is a splendid fellow but has had a queer bringing-up, and that shows itself in many ways--sometimes, I am sorry to say, to his disadvantage. But his good points so overbalance his defects that I am sure you would take him home if you ever chanced to fall in with him--as I hope you may sometime. He is married, and so can never be to me--that is, I can never be to him him--(here is a sentence I can't get out of, but you see the meaning).
In my note I told you that I was going to send you a copy of Une Vie. I wonder if you want it, after all? It's a strange book and a sad one, and has in it that same mixture of truth and lie that one finds in The Kreutzer Sonata. In fact, I think Tolstoy took his theme from it and went Maupassant one better in the way of heartlessness. The Sonata is a book that could never, it seems to me, do anything but damage in the world; but I cannot say the same of Une Vie, which is a plain sketch of a plain life, worked out with a relentless sincerity of purpose and a terrible frankness of detail. It is not, from the point of view of honest common sense, a "smutty" book, but it is one that must be kept strictly away from the jeune personae. I don't imagine it would hurt her any, but it might set her thinking, like "Degeneration", of things that were better out of her mind. By "her" I mean anybody who is feminine and not sophisticated. "Esther Waters", on the contrary, I recommend to all the damozels of my acquaintance for the sake of asking them what they think of it. A fairly intelligent girl's opinions of Esther Waters, The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Children of the Zodiac and Chinese Fadden[?] may take one a long way into her inner chambers. I might include the Anglomaniacs and the Princess Aline, but I won't, for reasons of my own. The Ladies Home Journal (my favorite magazine) tells me that a girl should brush her hair ten minutes every night
but it says nothing about how little[?] she shall read
Mrs. Harrison and Harding Davis--very good people in
their way, no doubt, but very frothy. I must except Davis
however, when I recall His Bad Angel, which is really a
fine thing and for that reason not much talked of.--
Have you ever read anything by George Gissing?" I am sorry
to say that I have not, and am afraid that I shall not be
able to for a time to come. The most of his books are
published, I think, in Appleton's "Town and Country Li-
brary. He is getting high praise from a narrow circle
(the kind that counts) and there [are?] many things to
make me think that he is coming forward with the big fel-
lows. I have Zangwill's "The Master" at hand, but I shall
not be able to get through it. I must quit much reading
now for a long time and go back to my own work. When I
finish my first draft of Antigone, and perhaps before that
I am going to Cambridge for a week or two for an intell-
lectual airing and then buckle down to it for the winter.
As far as production goes, my book is no longer a dream;
and that is more than you can possibly understand.

To return to Une Vie, let me say that the book is
an artistic marvel. The first chapter, for instance, is
a masterpiece of simple narrative and filled, like all the
others, with strong touches that show the author's insight. [stray?]
The smallest trifle counts, and whatever is mentioned once
is likely to come back at the proper time--even "the melancholy owl." The story must be read carefully and with a
persistent attention to details. A dozen pages will be enough to reveal to you Maupassant's almost superhuman power of concentration. You shall have the volume in a day or two. Thanking you once more for "Harvard by an Oxonian" I remain,

Yours most sincerely,

E. A. Robinson.