

TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Jan. 25 1890[=1891]

My Dear Smith

I received your letter a few days (or rather about two weeks) ago and will now take up your literary vein and advise you to read "John Halifax" if you have not already done so. It is a novel after the old school but yet there is more of the modern realism in it than you generally find in books written forty or fifty years ago. It will show you the difference between great and small writing in a most impressive manner.

Outside of this I have not done much reading since I saw you; in fact I have read nothing save a book of Bret Harte's short stories and about half of Rudyard Kipling's "The Light that Failed." I think upon the whole the former is the greater writer, although there is a certain "queerness", as you say, about the latter's work that is rather attractive. I think Kipling's poetry is better than his prose. Are Rossiter Johnson's series of Little Classics in the Bowdoin Library? If they are take out the one on Exile and read Harte's "Outcasts of Poker Flat"; in some ways I think it is the best short story in the English language. This may sound a little loud, but read it yourself and write me what you think of it.

I am still dragging along in the same old rut, and occasionally someone says "Well now, Robinson, what do you

intend to do? This makes me mad. I cannot tell what I shall do. I have said that I thought I might go to Harvard in the fall for a year or two but as I am not sure of it I do not say so when these pleasant people question me, so you see all I have to do is to tell them that I do not know, which is about like pulling teeth. I suppose it does look a little queer to see me practically doing nothing at my age,² but at present there is no getting out of it. Someone must be at home to run the place. I am not getting rich but I try to console myself with Blackmore's lines:

"The more we have in hand to count
The less we have to hope for."³

There is a good deal in that if you will stop to moralize a little; but the devil of it is, while we are moralizing someone else gets what we hope for. This is a sad world, Smith, where the underdog gets his neck chewed. Sometimes I think I shall go into the missionary business and teach the chattering Hindoos how to read the Police Gazette & Town Topics. They never would take the trouble to barbecue me, my bones are too large.

Speaking of the books I have read I omitted Charles Dudley Warner's "My Summer in a Garden." It is a good thing, and contains much valuable information. Here is an extract from the "third week":--"The striped bug has come, the saddest of the year. He is a moral double ender, iron clad at that. He is unpleasant in two ways. He

burrows under the ground so that you cannot find him,
and he flies away so that you cannot catch him. . . .
The best way to deal with the striped bug is to sit down
by the hills and patiently watch for him. If you are spry
you can annoy him. This however takes time. It takes
all day and part of the night. For he flieth in darkness
and wasteth at noonday".

I suppose I shall have another garden to make in the
spring and a general spell of "clearing up". I think after
that, a trip to Harvard <be> would be a glorious contrast.

I trust that this letter will be a warning to you
never to use a stub pen. I have used one for three or
four years and this is the effect of changing over. Per-
haps you will be able to read it and perhaps you will not.
It is enough to make a man weep, I think I shall have to
go back to the stub with my hand tipped over upon one side.
Then writing is no great hardship to me; but to write this
way after so many months is hell itself. Keep away from
the stub.

Yours etc. [?]

E. A. Robinson