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1-27-1894

To Harry de Forest Smith - January 27, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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Recommended Citation

Robinson, Edwin Arlington, "To Harry de Forest Smith - January 27, 1894" (1894). *Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions*. 120.

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITHGardiner, Jan^a 27 - '934^b

My dear Smith,

I am glad to find myself deceived regarding my suspicion of "martyrdom" on your part, and shall look forward to the coming summer with renewed pleasure—that is, if your geological frenzy does not crowd out everything else. I regret that I cannot join you in your pilgrimages but I told you how it is in my last letter. My will is good, and I hope you may acquire no end of knowledge of the boulders and brick bats that sprinkle the iron-mine and

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its adjacent territory. I admire and envy your thirst for natural science but alas, my mind is constructed upon a plan that will not admit of such interests.

Yesterday I finished my sketch—the revision—called "Three Merry Gentlemen and their Wives"^c It is not a particularly cheerful thing but I cannot help having some faith in it. To-morrow I shall commence a sketch which I have some fear of never bringing out to anything like satisfaction on my part. It deals with the selfishness of self-denial—a peculiar but by no means rare plan¹ of human nature, but perhaps a little beyond my poor abilities. I shall have the thing done by next Sunday,

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and can tell you more about it then. I am beginning to realize my artistic deficiencies, and can look ahead without many qualms to a hard apprenticeship. As it is, it takes me about a week to get out the first chapter of ~~the~~ a four thousand word sketch—so you see I do some work. Four hours a day is my limit at present,

^a WA adds a period here.

^b The "4" is written directly over the "3".

^c WA adds a period here.

after that my head spins.

Yesterday afternoon I began to read Cop-
pée's "Toute une Jeunesse"²—a personal narrative
modeled after "David Copperfield". It begins mag-
nificently and I look forward to much enjoyment
from its pages—a little over 300. The book is
published in English under the title of "Disillusions"^d
I am already much interested in the the schoolmaster
with the geographical cranium.^e and the

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artist with the Abd-el-Kadir pipe.

I have just smoked a long pipe myself, by the
way, and my hand trembles a little on that
account. Hence this more than usually bad chi-
rography. I shall have my type-writer going pretty
soon and then you may rejoice. I suppose my
letters are pretty hard to decipher, and I
thank you for your patience. Your handwriting
is a miracle to me and quite beyond my
comprehension. There is a firmness in it that
will carry you through a good many tight places,
if fate demands it.

I have a new employment now, which
may interest you a little. Next week I shall
begin to tutor a young lady³ in French pre-
paratory to her entering Well{e}sl{e}y^f College. She

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has everything else, with a little brushing up,
and hopes with what she knows of elementary French
to take the maximum requirements and so get rid
in that language
of the Freshman course ^ . Perhaps I have undertaken
more than I can carry out, but I can make a
giant bluff and trust in Providence. It
will involve a review of Chardenal and the reading
of five or six hundred pages of French prose before
the middle of September, together with the re-
viewing on her part of Latin, Greek, Algebra, Arithmetic,

^d WA adds a period here.

^e WA has a comma. Read as a comma.

^f WA transcribes these "e".

Physical Geography, Ancient and American History and steady work on German and English. If she succeeds I shall be glad and at the same time feel rather small. Of course the programme sounds larger than it really is, but it represents a good deal of work for all

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that. The realization that I am going to be, at least going to try to be of a little use in this world, makes me rejoice^g

The foregoing statement may cause you to smile a little, and possibly feed your fancy a little too much. But you cannot wonder at my admiration of a girl who ha{s}^h to [=the] courage to enter the fFreshmanⁱ class of a college five years after graduating from the high school. (Instinct prompts me to spell "high school" with small letters.)

I am afraid I shall impose upon your good nature if I keep on writing much longer. I do not know that I have anything in particular to say except that I have been re-reading Matthew Arnold's "Culture and Anarchy"^{4j} The

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book is full of good things, but a little too much drawn out. That is Arnolds^k great fault in writing prose. His "mission" stopped his poetry and I have always regretted it.—A day or two ago I looked over Sir Thomas Browne's "Urn-burial", and found that I must read it. It is magnificent. The book is edited by Symonds in the "Camelot" series with the "Religio Medici," and a few other papers.

Yours sincerely,
E.A.R.

P.S.—Had a 20 page letter from Saben last week—nearly as long as "Marshall"^l

^g WA adds a period here.

^h WA transcribes the "s".

ⁱ The capital "F" appears to be written directly over the lower-case "f", although the writing here is difficult to read in any case.

^j WA adds a period here.

^k WA has "Arnold's".

HCL US, 122-124.

NOTES

1. US reads "flaw." There is a significant difference in point of view. Compare EAR's statement above: "my mind is constructed upon a plan, etc."
2. François Coppée (1842-1908), French poet, dramatist, and short story writer. "Toute une Jeunesse" was published {1890}.^m
3. Mable Moore, Ed Moore's sister. There is some evidence that EAR was first attracted to Miss Moore during high school. John Reed Swanton remembered her as "a very good looking and thoroughly respectable girl of about medium height or a bit over and tending toward the blonde but not strikingly so." [Letter to Wallace L. Anderson, August 4, 1955]. The exact nature of their relationship is not certain, but it is clear that during the next three months she came to mean a great deal to EAR. {Donaldson opines that "It seems likely that there had been an understanding between Mabel Moore and him, even an engagement, that was broken" (107)}. See EAR's letter to Smith, May 1, 1894, for the denouement. {See also the May 20, 1894 letter to Smith for hints about EAR's possible engagement.}
4. Arnold's criticism of English society and politics, published in 1869.
5. *Urn Burial or Hydriotaphia* (1658), a reflective, somewhat mystical work written in a highly rhetorical prose.
Religio Medici was published in 1643.

^l WA adds a period here.

^m WA has "???" after "published".