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5-1-1894

## To Harry de Forest Smith - May 1, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, May 1, 1894.

My dear Smith,

I wrote a long letter to Saben yesterday, but it was hard work. I am not in the mood for much letter-writing this week, but I felt that common courtesy demanded that I should not neglect him any longer, so I made the effort, and so, to a small extent, conquered myself; and the man who does that, you know, is greater "than he who taketh a city."<sup>1</sup> I trust that you will pardon me for not writing before this, considering my explanation. When we do not feel like doing anything at all, we often do the thing we least expect to do.

I had a good letter from Butler last week, accompanied by Thomas Hardy's "Lifes<sup>a</sup> Little Ironies". The book is very good, and, as far as I have read, written in a more pleasant vein than "A Group of Noble Dames", which is the model of the second part, entitled "A Few Crusted Characters"<sup>2b</sup> Butler's gift was very opportune, as I have wanted the book ever since I saw it advertised. You will enjoy it next summer, or before that if you wish it. Two of the

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stories, "To Please his Wife" and "The Fiddler of the Reels", are already familiar to me; the others are all new. The opening one, "The Son's Veto" is particularly good.—I am getting to think more and more of Butler every day—not because he sends me books, though of course that is pleasant—but because I am beginning to realize that he is an exceptionally fine fellow. He has been spoiled a little, and that leads him to say unpleasant things; but that is a small matter in the long run. I have often thought that you must have been a little surprised at meeting him in the Parker House when you went to Boston last winter. Well, he is a pretty good man to meet in a strange land, and you doubtless welcomed his broad smile. I think a great deal of that smile, and wish that I had even the ghost of it to lighten my semi-cadaverous countenance. Perhaps I shall learn to grin again some day—when that leaky ship of mine comes in.

I shall go to your house sometime this week and get my beans and Matthew Arnold. When I send you the poems you request, I shall also send a little copy of The Task which you

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<sup>a</sup> WA has "Life's".

<sup>b</sup> WA adds a period here.

may browse over at your leisure. Never read it when you are  
 in a hurry, depend upon finding much that is commonplace,  
 let  
 and do not Book I count for too much in your opinions. You  
 must read with an eye ever open for detached good things,<sup>c</sup>

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rather than for a continuous procession of splendid poetry.  
 I fancy that Books II and V will please you the most of all.<sup>3</sup>  
 And while I think of it, you must be prepared to treat Cowper  
 kindly for his intense Calvinism<sup>d</sup> His religious reflections are  
 not always pleasant to a modern reader, especially if he is in-  
 clined, like you and me, to be liberal in such matters.

This is a gray sticky day that makes me think of every-  
 thing but the sun. I am not wholly in a grouch, but I think  
 it is just as well for you that I am not with you. I fear  
 that my company would not be much better than my handwriting.  
 Perhaps you will understand my feelings a [little] better, and perhaps not,  
 when I tell you that my French lessons are over. You may  
 interpret this as you like, but I fancy you will not get  
 far out of the way in your conclusions. Anticipation and  
 realization are two different things.<sup>4</sup> Take this for the text  
 of this letter, and remember it. It may do you good some-  
 day, and lead you to be more careful in your actions  
 than I have been<sup>e</sup> This business, with two funerals<sup>5</sup> and  
 the receipt of Butler's suggestive book on top of it all, have made  
 the past ten days a little stormy for me. Coincidences are  
 strange sometimes—perhaps a little cruel. Lifes<sup>f</sup> Little Ironies are  
 not wholly fancies. Kindly tear this into seventy pieces after  
 reading it, and when you write next Sunday tell me what you think  
 of "Views and Reviews."<sup>g</sup>

Vale,  
E.A.R.<sup>h</sup>

HCL US, 147-148.

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<sup>c</sup> WA omits the comma, the existence of which—*qua* comma—I am not completely certain of myself.

<sup>d</sup> WA adds a period here.

<sup>e</sup> WA adds a period here.

<sup>f</sup> WA has "Life's".

<sup>g</sup> WA places the period outside the quotation mark.

<sup>h</sup> WA omits the underline.

NOTES

1. Proverbs 16:32.
2. *Life's Little Ironies: A Set of Tales With Some Colloquial Sketches entitled A Few Crusted Characters*, 1894. *A Group of Noble Dames*, 1891.
3. Book II, "The Time-piece"; Book V, "The Winter Morning Walk."
4. For an interpretation of this episode, see Chard Powers Smith's *Where the Light Falls*, p. 134-136.
5. The Robinson homestead was close to the cemetery.