HERMAN MELVILLE

"R. FRANK J. MATHER, JR., for many years an admirer and authority on Herman Melville, purchased years ago, at prices very much below the present levels, all of the first American editions of Melville. He received as gifts from Melville’s daughter Elizabeth the exceedingly rare Timoleon, and John Marr and Other Sailors. Only twenty-five copies of each of these two books were issued in privately printed editions. Dr. Mather very generously decided to let us have the purchased volumes at cost, and presented the two rarities at the same time. The result is..."
that the Library now possesses all of the first American editions of this very important writer. Only one of the Mather volumes duplicated one already here, namely, *Moby Dick*. The definitive bibliography of Melville is in course of preparation and it may turn out that the two copies of *Moby Dick* are variants. There are four other titles where we have two copies of each, but the publishers' bindings are all different. These present interesting points of bibliography to be cleared up. The collection also contains the excessively rare pamphlet entitled, *Herman Melville*, by J. E. A. Smith, which was printed in a small edition at Pittsfield in 1891.

*John Marr and Timoleon*, published in 1888 and 1891 respectively, are among the outstanding rarities in American literature. The copies presented by Dr. Mather have the authors' autograph pasted on the title page of each. A similar copy of *Timoleon* was recently offered by a London dealer for £90. *John Marr* in the same state is worth an equal amount. These two titles are included in the volume entitled *John Marr and Other Poems*, which was published by the Princeton University Press in 1922.

**BOOKS LOANED FROM THE COLLECTION OF**
**MR. R. T. H. HALSEY**

The treasure room of the Princeton University Library has been temporarily enriched by as fascinating and valuable a collection of books dealing with architecture and landscape gardening as it would be possible to desire. Beginning with *The City and Country, Purchaser and Builder*, 1667, some two score volumes printed in the course of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth centuries, represent not only an unusual collection of the handbooks which inspired contemporary work, but also provide a remarkable series of such volumes imported into this country during the later colonial days. To the study of Colonial architecture in America, where far more buildings of merit were erected than it is possible to find architects to whom they may be ascribed, the books that furnished the inspiration and pattern for the builders are an invaluable adjunct. A few titles taken at random will serve to show that the collection is a catholic one with regard to the balance between theory and practice; *The Purchaser and Builder*, cited above, and published in 1667, just after the great fire of London, is a genuine guide through the difficulties of rebuilding and estimating costs. *Palladio Londinensis*, Wm. Salmon, Jr., 1734 stands side by side with Price's *British Carpenter* of 1735. Batty Langley is represented by his *Gardening* (1728), and by *The Builder's Bench-Mate* and *Gothic Architecture*, both of 1747. The last shows the attempt to reconcile the revived study with the Palladian School by reducing the Gothic to a series of orders, as do also many of the designs in the various works of Wm. Halfpenny also contained in the collection. R. Morris, in *Lectures on Architecture*, 1734, remarks "I would have no garden laid out by art but only such as Nature it self [sic] produced" and stresses
thereby the Romantic note which was becoming to be the distinguishing feature of the English garden. Landscape Gardening, by Repton, at the end of the same century, is a book which shows the practice fully developed.

For the bibliophile, interested in old books as books and as examples of the printed page in earlier centuries, the collection has the greatest value; to the student of historical architecture it provides a remarkable compendium of source material. The collector in his painstaking assembly of the library represented by his loan has deserved well of both.

ROBERT FROST

On October 26, Robert Frost delivered a lecture on the Stafford Little Foundation, The Poet’s Next of Kin in a College. During that week Mr. Lawrance Thompson, the new curator of rare books, who has succeeded Mr. George M. Peck, retired, had on exhibition in the Treasure Room a collection of Mr. Frost’s writings. By means of books and original manuscripts which were very graciously loaned to us by Mr. Frost and Mr. H. Bacon Collamore, the Library was able to make an excellent showing. Shortly afterwards Mr. Frederic E. Camp ’28 generously made a contribution for the purchase of books by Robert Frost and we have secured a number of valuable additions to our permanent collection.

Mr. Frost’s Princeton lecture and one delivered at Haverford College October 25, 1937, are printed in this issue of Bibli for the benefit of the Friends of the Princeton Library. These lectures have not been published previously, and as printed here constitute a Frost “first.”

GIFTS DEDUCTIBLE FROM INCOME TAXES

According to a ruling of the United States Treasury Department gifts of rare books are deductible from income taxes. The deductions must be based on fair valuations as of dates of the gifts. Such deductions, together with deductions covering contributions of money, must not exceed fifteen per cent of the income of the taxpayer.

PRINCETONIANA

The Library collection of material by and about Princeton men is one of which we are justly proud. There are, however, a great many items which should be added to it. Of first importance are manuscript writings of alumni, whether in the form of letters or miscellaneous writings. Without doubt there are papers and records written by former graduates which are now reposing in the homes of their descendants. An instance is the group of letters, journals, and other documents relating to the Hon. John Forsyth, Class of 1799, which were presented by Mr. and Mrs. John Forsyth Joline, Jr. Whenever material of this sort is turned over to the Library it is carefully arranged and recorded so as to make it available to users of the Library. Persons in need of seeing such material
naturally turn first to this Library, and it is always a source of great satisfaction when we can meet such demands. The Library will gladly pay the transportation charges whenever anyone offers material of this kind.

SPECIAL NEEDS

Items are constantly coming to the attention of the Library staff which should be in our Library but which cannot be purchased because of lack of funds. The following are a few selected items with the approximate cost, which would be most helpful additions:

Globe of the World

Yorkshire Archaeological Society. Record series. 91 vols.

Denifle. Enstebung der Universitäten des Mittelalters bis 1400


Walpole. Strawberry Hill Accounts

Scudery. Artamenes, 1653-55


In addition to these there is a short list of desiderata from the Department of History consisting of eleven sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century titles which deal with the legal side of European history. These are rare books, and to be secured have to be purchased promptly when located. If two or three hundred dollars were available for this group, definite attempts could be started to trace copies which are for sale.

The various poetical miscellanies which were edited by John Dryden, and published around the beginning of the eighteenth century, are badly needed for work in the Department of English. These too are scarce items and should be bought when copies turn up. If $150 were available for this purpose copies could be purchased when offered in dealers' catalogues. Orders from such catalogues must be placed immediately if there is to be any reasonable expectancy of having them executed.

VICTORIAN POETRY

The continued interest of Francis H. Payne '91 in supplying funds for the purchase of Victorian poetry has brought us many important volumes in the past months. Our collection of the editions of Francis Thompson has been made practically complete by the addition of sixteen items. A member of the Class of 1937 found these of the greatest use in writing his senior thesis on Thompson. Two valuable Landor items have been added to our growing Landor collection: Idyllia Heroica Decem Librum Phaleuciorum Unum partim iam primo partim iterum aq. tertio edit Savagius Landor, Pisa, 1820 (presentation copy to the Rev. Mr. Way); the proof-sheets of the rare pamphlet Letter from W. S. Landor to
R. W. Emerson, Bath [1856]; Letters of an American, mainly on Russia and Revolution, London, 1854. Among the other additions of special note is a copy of the Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1852)—later discovered to be forgeries—for which Browning wrote his famous essay on Shelley.

A gift of $100 has been received from James H. Lockhart ’87 for the purchase of English poetry of the eighteenth century.

HAWAI'I

The Princeton Alumni Association of Hawaii has had the happy idea of establishing in the University Library a collection of books on the history and culture of the Hawaiian Islands. The first shipment of the books the Association is collecting has arrived at the Library and has necessitated the staff’s learning enough of the Hawaiian language to catalogue them properly. Included among them are ten volumes of Statute Laws of the Kingdom of Hawaii for the years between 1845 and 1865, with the Laws of the Provisional Government, 1893, and Treaties and Conventions between the Hawaiian Kingdom and other Powers, since 1825. The files of two of the earliest periodicals published in the Hawaiian language are among the rare items received.

The initial proposal that this collection be made came from the Rev. John P. Erdman ’96 who has thus far been in charge of the project. While Mr. Erdman is on a round-the-world tour the work will be carried on by Edgar C. Schenck ’31, director of the Honolulu Academy of Art.

This valuable service to Princeton by the Alumni Association of Hawaii suggests what might be done by other alumni groups if they would engage themselves to gather for the Library books relating to their particular regions.

MUSIC

Valuable and practical gifts of books and music received in the last year have increased the effectiveness of many details of the work of undergraduate classes. A collection of material bearing on song and singing received from L. Frederic Pease ’95 represents a substantial literature on the subject. From the estate of Dr. LeRoy W. McCay ’78, a large amount of violin and orchestral music filled gaps in the Library’s collections and put at the disposal of students works both serious and entertaining. A very important gift was received from Mrs. Van-Santvoord Merle-Smith, including such rare and valuable items as the first edition of Orpheus Britannicus, with the signature of Purcell, and of the piano-forte arrangement of Weber’s Der Freischütz; also first editions of Brahms, Chopin and Schumann. Friends of the Princeton Library having collections of music, large or small, are invited to consider the Library as a depository and may be assured that such gifts will in so far as possible be put to practical use.
REPORT ON LIST OF DESIDERATA

As the members of the Friends will recall, a letter was sent to the entire membership in August indicating that contributions for the purchase of items on an enclosed list would be much appreciated by the Library. Since it is unlikely that more contributions to this fund will now come in, this seems the proper time to report the results of that letter. They were most gratifying. Twenty-five members responded with checks which reached the total of $670. The items desired were of two sorts, arranged in two lists: twenty-nine drama quartos of the seventeenth century and eighteen miscellaneous works which the Library had been asked to purchase by various departments, but for which no funds were available. As a result of the letter seventeen of the plays were bought, and practically all of the items on the other list will in time be in the Library. The Departments of History, Modern Languages, English, and Psychology and the Reference Librarian are full of the praises of the Friends because of these additions to their materials for study.


LIBRARY GOSSIP AND NEWS

Mr. James T. Gerosd, the Librarian, is on leave of absence because of illness, but it is hoped he will be able to return in a few months fully restored to health. Mr. Lawrence Heyl is Acting Librarian.

The name Paul Revere probably does not suggest poetry to many of us. It is a fact, however, that Mr. M. B. Brainard has presented to the Library a broadside containing the poem Canton Dale, by Paul Revere. A hundred copies were printed by Mr. D. B. Updike, of the Merrymount Press, for the Walpole Society.

American literature is a field where we have a long way to go. Most authors of any standing are represented in the Library, but a careful checking with Merle Johnson's American First Editions has disclosed a great many gaps. We could secure several of the missing titles at moderate prices, but the longer we wait the higher those prices are going to become.

A detailed financial report on the Friends of the Princeton Library fund for the financial year which ended June 30 is in Mr. Dickson Q. Brown's hands. The fund had a balance of $495.66 on July 1, 1936. During the year contributions were received totalling $635.00. Expenditures amounted to $839.36, and the balance on June 30, 1937, was $291.30.
We are indebted to the following contributors: Jacob N. Beam '96, Thomas S. Dignan '26, Franklin D'Olier '98, Albert F. Earnshaw '92, Dr. George H. Lathrop 'oo, Edward K. Mills, Jr., '28, Francis H. Payne '91, Howard F. Taylor '08, and Mrs. Charles Richard Williams.

Our Shakespeare collection has been greatly enriched by a lovely group of writings presented by Henry N. Paul '84. The gift included three sets of collected editions published in 1728, 1740 and 1773; a lovely copy of the Poems [1762?], and also the edition printed for Lintott. Mr. Paul's gift also included a collection of books and pamphlets relating to Monmouth's Rebellion, Titus Oates, and the Popish plot.

We received from the Estate of George A. Armour '77 a bronze plaque of Robert Louis Stevenson, designed by Augustus Saint-Gaudens. The oak frame was designed by Stanford White. The plaque is circular in shape and measures three feet in diameter without the frame. It has been hung in the Reserve Book Reading Room of the Library.

Since the last issue of BIBLIA, in March, 1937, there have been so many gifts that lack of space prevents us from doing more than to give the names of the generous donors. A full report on gifts is made to the Board of Trustees at each meeting, and the annual report of the Library covers the gifts of the year.

Two Lectures by Robert Frost

These two lectures are printed with the permission of Robert Frost. In fairness to him, however, it should be stated plainly that he has not been able to examine the copy since the shorthand notes of his spoken words were converted into written words. Although every care has been taken to achieve accuracy, such mistakes as may occur should not be imputed to the speaker.

POVERTY AND POETRY

A TALK GIVEN BY ROBERT FROST AT HAVERFORD COLLEGE ON OCTOBER 25, 1937

COPYRIGHT, 1938, BY ROBERT FROST

I GAVE out a subject, but it never reached you; so I am free to talk about what I please or not talk at all—or read to you. I shall read chiefly.

There’s a little matter that has been on my mind. I am often more or less tacitly on the defensive about what I might call “my people.” That doesn’t mean Americans—I never defend America from foreigners. But when I speak of my people, I sort of mean a class, the ordinary folks I belong to. I have written about them entirely in one whole book: I called it A Book of People. But I found as I went around, seeing colleges more than anything else, that one and another spoke or implied something about my people that I didn’t care for. I went a long way once to see one or two of my little things acted as if they were plays. They are very short plays, too short to act, but they have something of the dramatic in them. All the actors were cultivated people and they thought the way to represent my three people on the stage was to have them hop a little as if they were going over clods. And one of the actors who acted in the thing—I did not know what to say to him afterwards. I was full of too much to say, and I thought perhaps I would put it this way:

“They are much the same as we are. As a matter of fact,” I said—I didn’t know just how to make him understand—“as a matter of fact, both of them had been to college.”

I don’t think he would ever hop for them again. I was a little angry with him, but that was what I had to say to him, because there are people who don’t go to college and who don’t hop clods.

I spent all that part of my life, over twenty years of it, with just country neighbors around me. Some of them had been educated and some of them hadn’t. They were all much the same. I was brought up in a family who had just come to the industrial city of Lawrence, Massachusetts. My grandfather was an overseer in the Pacific Mills. They had just come to the city from Kingston, New Hampshire, up by Exeter.

The other day I was reading a book called A Proletarian Journey by a boy named Fred Beal. His family ran into more poverty in Lawrence than I ran into.
I ran into some: I don’t know how to measure poverty (I’m not boasting). His people went right down and he went to work at fourteen years of age in two of the same mills that I worked in. He talks of himself as a proletarian; he went radical. It is a very interesting book to me because he names overseers and men at the mill—and all people I knew. He was twenty years after me. We had memories of the farm and the country that I went back to. I walked out of it all one day.

He uses the word proletarian for himself and a great man in Lawrence. The great man was named Wood, of the Wood’s Mills—a great figure against Bill Haywood, his antagonist in the big Lawrence strike of 1910-1911, I think. Now Wood was really a proletarian in my use of the word. As the swear-word is, he was really a son of a sea-cook—I mean it literally—a son of a Portuguese sea-cook. He grew up in New Bedford—and rose to be the head of all the woollen mills; the Woollen Association, or whatever they call it.

Then he had the tragedy, after patronizing the poor and doing everything he could for his employees—even giving them escalators in the mills. He got a great strike on his hands and came out very badly in it. He lost the affection of his people and committed suicide afterwards. He was the genuine proletarian, because he came up from nowhere.

Now Fred Beal, who calls himself the same thing, is a Beal and a Hay of New Hampshire. Right away that’s something a little different; he never knew the peasant life of Europe. He also counts himself a kin of Hannibal Hamlin, who was Vice-President with Lincoln in his first administration—that is another thing. For no matter how educated or poor a man is, a certain level up there in Vermont and New Hampshire stays about the same. We people just sort of fountain up, jet up out of it.

When I meet very wealthy people, I have to face them. I remember facing once a small group, not a thousand miles from Philadelphia. I did it for a charity-working friend of mine. She told me that the girls I must speak to must be gone for: they were worth at least a million apiece, and I could be rough on them. I knew they were all helping her in her charity work, so you can see my state of mind. I felt cross to be there. I took for my text,

“Let not man bring together what God hath set asunder.”

Let the rich keep away from the poor for all of me, as the slang is. Well, that’s just the way I feel.

I suppose I take that position as an artist. “You wrote about the poor,” they said. I never measured that; I wouldn’t have done it if I knew anything was going to be made of it. I didn’t do it to get rid of the poor because I need them in my business.

What is the position of poetry toward the poor? I think, if you look back all through the years, you will find that—maybe falsely, hypocritically—poetry has praised poverty. It may be hypocritical because wealth is sour grapes—
there is a good deal of that. I've sometimes thought that England was a very convenient place to be an artist in, because you have a whole class there who is poorer than any class here, for an artist to retire into in his poor years. Cabbage, bread, cheese, and tea without milk—he can have that. He can lose himself to his relatives and have that. I am not saying that poverty shouldn't be abolished. I do not know anything about it.

But what is the relation of poverty and poetry? I know once in self-defense I did come near to swearing. It says in the Bible, you think—I don't—it says in the Bible that you always have the poor with you. That isn't what it says. It says, "For Christ's sake, forget the poor some of the time." There are many beautiful things in the world beside poverty. I have praised poverty and spoken of its beauty and its use for the arts, but there are other things. I'm not here to dwell with too much emphasis on poverty. I just bring up the little question of the relationship and make a few suggestions, because I run the risk of reading about people—I wouldn't dare say whether they were rich or poor people.

I saw this summer one of the poorest spots in Vermont. I saw an old, old lady who couldn't seem to go on relief because she owned a little house. She hadn't much object in selling the house, because it wouldn't bring much. When she did sell it, she had to give all the money to pay her debts. But even then she couldn't go on relief because they had the record of her having sold a house. They thought she sold it on purpose to go on relief—a very corrupt happening in this impure world. A strange situation: she has a hired man and he is about half her age. And he goes out and earns their living as her hired man. She gives him part of what he earns.

And then I'll just tell you of a charitable act of my own. I don't often do charitable acts; only once in a great while. I went over there just as winter was coming on. The hired man had got hold of an old schoolhouse, long deserted, and had moved it onto an old cellar-hole by an old well. And they were starting to live there. The house was like a hen standing up in the nest; it hadn't settled down on its foundations. It looked kind of cold and windy, and I said:

"You'd better get the wall up under there."

The lady said:

"He is doing it just as fast as he can find the means."

And I said:

"He could raise the means, I guess you know," fidgeting a little, "and I wouldn't take it out in work right away."

He hung his head, and she said:

"James likes to know where he stands."

Of course you know as far as pity is concerned, there's nothing in it. It touches you a little, I suppose, in the middle, like amusement—there's a not unmixed feeling that people have about it. That's the last of a village once quite distinguished. I won't say any more for fear you'll run across it some day. All I say about it is that we're in danger, in our way of thinking that mercy comes
first in the world. It comes in, but it comes in second. The thing you are most interested in is justice; all you ask for is justice in the struggle.

I had a boy come to me with poetry the other day. Who is a poor thing? He comes to me with talk about mercy on earth—everything has now gone merciful; kinder times ahead. I let him talk and have it all his own way. That’s all right. Finally he came out with the poetry he’d brought. I said:

“You’ve come for mercy?”

He looked at me for a second, and said:

“No, sir, I just want fairness.”

You see, they really have more spunk than you think. I said:

“I thought so.”

After I treated him with fairness—and he came out, as it happened, very poorly in my estimation—then I might in mercy carry him home to his mother. It’s there, of course. It’s part of everything. But there’s so much confusion about who is a poor thing, nowadays, that I can’t help saying there’s not much of that sort of thing around my poor people.

Now suppose I read you a few things. Suppose I begin with that very poem about me and the mills in Lawrence. This one is called, “The Lone Striker.” It is all right to be a striker, but not a lone striker. You might think that I might get in right with my radical friends, but the trouble with me is that I was a lone striker; if I called it a “collectivist striker,” that would be another matter. This was the way it was to me, not a very serious thing. It is odd that the first part of Fred Beal’s book is almost the same as this, though I wrote it several years ago:

[He reads, “A Lone Striker.”]

The next poem is one of the little plays: “The Death of the Hired Man.” Some day, in the middle of it all, I shall write another kind of poem like this—and I’m afraid that it will be a little less innocent, a little more argumentative and authoritative. When I wrote the “Book of People,” North of Boston, it was in innocence of heart—no implications. These are sad times, in a way.

[He reads, “The Death of the Hired Man.”]

The thing about that, the danger, is that you shall make the man too hard. That spoils it. That’s the error the people made: they made the man too hard. And all our thinking turns on that.

I was thinking about the hired man’s relations. That’s so common all over the United States, I suppose. We stopped in a town called Vic’t’ry—you say it that way, Vic’t’ry—not Victory. It was hardly inhabited in its best days; it is pretty near empty now. I remember an old man years ago speaking of it as “the jumping-off place.” We stopped there this summer to ask the way, to ask whether the road went through. It looked as if it stopped. A man stepped up to the car with a kind of bright interest—as if he didn’t see much society. He turned out to be a very pleasant man. Intelligent. He said that years before, the place had been the
center of everything; that he had once kept a little store and mill there. He was in hopes that something would make business come back there—the pulp business or something like that. I asked him his name and he told me. I said:

“That’s an old Vermont name.”

“No, sir, it belongs in N’ Yawk State.”

And I said:

“Well, we have a distinguished judge in Washington, of that name.”

He said:

“Oh yes, he’s my first cousin.”

You never know when you’re talking to one of those. He wasn’t so much to look at, but he knew just as much about things as you and I. It’s a perpetual marvel to me. All I want to point out is that you can’t generalize about things, you can not go around saying things carelessly.

You take the poor women’s clubs. All my sophisticated friends make fun of them. I don’t suppose women’s clubs know how poor they are in the estimation of some of my friends. They think just about the same of women’s clubs as they think of Rotary Clubs—I’m betraying them to you. When I get with that kind of people, I feel like telling them about what happened to me in “Terre Hut.” (That’s what the conductor called it. I’m always picking on dialect, though I never use it.) Well, I went to Terre Hut. Once on a time I knew only the poor farmers in New Hampshire; lately I’ve got sort of travelled. Before I read to the club there, I was asked what I’d like to see before sentence was pronounced on me by the women’s club. I said I’d like to see Eugene Debs. (I thought that would blast them. They were all bankers’ wives and such.) They looked at each other rather regretfully:

“Why, you must see him. But you know, he’s very ill.”

I said:

“I wouldn’t want to disturb him. My idea was to disturb you.”

And they said:

“Disturb us?”

I said:

“I supposed he was an enemy of society.”

And they said:

“Why, I suppose so.”

And I said:

“I suppose he ruined your city.”

They said:

“Well, he has done a good deal of harm. But he’s such a nice person. We’ve just been singing carols to him.”

There you are again—just as much blended generosity and largeness as you want to see anywhere—in Terre Hut, in the poor Middle West. One of my friends jokes, “East is East and West is West, but the Middle West is terrible.” There’s no argument to it. You just can’t generalize.
Coming down on the train, a boy just about to get his doctor’s degree at Yale told me:

“Anthologies are the worst thing in the world. You don’t want to read anthologies, do you?”

I said:

“I’ve heard that a good many times. I don’t want to contradict your teachers.”

Poor thing. If anthologies are bad, so is all criticism, for anthologies are just a form of criticism. There’s no better way for you to approach Shakespeare’s sonnets than through reading the selections Palgrave made of them and the selections Quiller-Couch made of them. It’s the example without too many words. Maybe the anthologies are bad; on the other hand, they are good, too. Maybe the poor are unfortunate, but on the other hand, they may be fortunate.

Let me read a poem to you. Here’s my last book and it has got a good deal more of the times in it than anything I ever wrote before. And there’s a little bit in this one called, “A Drumlin Woodchuck.” You see, I had a funny time this year about this book. One well known paper called me a “counter-revolutionary” for writing it. I didn’t know who wrote that. But I was called a “counter-revolutionary” with frills—there were some other words with it. In New York, I stood up and said:

“I wish I could think the man who called me that was in this audience. I would like to call him a ‘bargain-counter revolutionary’.”

I didn’t mean any harm; I just meant a little harm. I had word afterward that he knew what I meant. Some go-between, some semi-radical was in the audience. And I’d better look out, because he had a sense of humor, and got the point about the bargain-counter revolutionary. I’d better look out, I’d get a firecracker. I told his friend I had a sense of humor, too: I knew what a firecracker meant. We forgot about it in the family and along about a holiday a box arrived. I never get things in boxes. I didn’t think much about it, though. I started to open it, when I noticed that my name was printed by hand. Some people write that way, artists do, you know. Then I noticed up in the corner there was no name. It came from nobody, nowhere. I said to my wife:

“Don’t you think we’d better give this back to the postman?”

She said:

“Well, we don’t want the whole town to know about it.”

So I said:

“I guess we’ll take the paper off carefully, so that the jack-in-the-box won’t jump out if he’s in there.”

I took the paper off very carefully. There was a cigar-box. And strangely enough, the seal was broken. There was a very large tack holding it shut. I didn’t like the looks of that tack. I said:

“Well, I’m in for it now and might as well see it through. Let’s go out in the yard with it. The house might be destroyed.”
(We counter-revolutionaries believe in property.) We went out. I tied a large stone securely to it so that it would have some weight. Then I stood off, facing a great big tree of ours, and hurled the thing at the tree—and scattered cigars all over the yard! So whatever's coming to me hasn't come to me yet.

[He reads, "A Drumlin Woodchuck."]

I'm tempted to read a sort of philosophical poem, in closing. It's called, "Two Tramps in Mud Time." Few back roads are left now; mud time is going by. We used to be shut in by mud longer than by snow. All the old pleasures of mud-time are nearly gone. When we first went to another farm, we helped get somebody out of the mud. But this is in memory of those good days.

[He reads, "Two Tramps in Mud Time."]

That last part is what I wanted to read to you. It has nothing to do with the times. It is a very general thing: getting your need and your love together in everything. I don't say we do it. Somebody was nice enough to say,

"Of course, what you mean by that is heaven."

That is saving your soul some way; we all barely scramble into that. It's just that we don't quite do it; we almost do it. That's just the object of everything. To get your love and your need together.
DON'T think for a minute that I think it matters much whether a poet has any kin or friends in a college. I suppose that a poet should lead a dog's life for a long, long time; that he should be late in knowing too well that he is a poet. But when it is all over and his diploma rolls away, he looks back sometimes, I suppose, and wonders who was nearest him and who was kindest to him.

Of course the kindest to him will always be the English department, if we are to speak by departments. It was not always so. The English department grows sentimental with age: it is often overly kind. And poets are often spoiled for facing editors, by this over-kindness. The teachers look on themselves as paid to like young writers: they have to like so many per year. Editors are paid to hate new writers. There is quite a gulf to bridge from teachers who love you to editors who hate you. The editors especially hate poetry, because they don't know where to put it. That is one practical reason. Sometimes I get a letter, a kind letter, from an editor who knows me and wants to do something for poetry. He says, have I a long thing that nobody else will take? That shows what they think about each other.

The English department may be the poet's best and surest friend. But I am talking about kin. Who is nearest the poet in age and occupation? He looks around the English department and sees all kinds of teachers. One you might call the keeper of the texts. That means, of course, very little to a writer. Then there is the person who lectures on literature as representative. That is, he is interested in poetry as it represents its age. If it is a dull age, it should be dull poetry; if it is a rotten age, then it should be rotten poetry; if it is an inscrutable age, it should be inscrutable poetry. That is another concern, I think, that does not matter to the poet at all. He should not be bothered. Then, of course, there is just the general critical approach. That is very dangerous, for the poet—it puts too many words around poetry. For him, the anthology is the best form of criticism to meddle with. It is pure example. I was told, when I was young, let the anthologies alone. You might as well say, let all opinion in poetry alone, for the anthology is the best of all opinionation. It is a good form of criticism, just because it is pure example. But the critical approach is dangerous. It is not the spirit, quite, of the young poet.

Let's leave that department and look at the socio-economic department. That is to blame for the vitiation of much of our poetry today. A poet's main interest is in doing something well. That department's interest is in doing people good, doing the world good. A poet must always prefer to do something well to doing
people good. He is lost if he is interested in doing people good. Leave that to the socio-economic department—while it lasts.

Now let us look briefly at science. That might be nearer than most: pure science, because it is nothing if it is not achievement, if it is not creative. Even with young men, it expects something on the ball, something of originality. But science is antagonistic to the English department and has done it much harm. It has introduced scientific methods of criticism. I said to a literary-scientific-research man, recently:

"I suppose poetry is the least of all things given to quotation."

"On the contrary," he replied, after a moment's thought. "It is one texture of quotations. You write it out of all of the books you have ever read, and it is my place to come after you and trace it to its source!"

I didn't write anything for six months after that. It drove me into what I might call deceptions. That's the intrusion of the scientific into the artistic.

I myself, since forty, have had a great leaning toward the philosophy department—but you know that's just letting all my prejudices out. My admiration for philosophy. I'll tell you why. I think that young people have insight. They have a flash here and a flash there. It is like the stars coming out in the sky in the early evening. They have flashes of light. They have that sort of thing which belongs to youth. It is later in the dark of life that you see forms, constellations. And it is the constellations that are philosophy. It is like forcing a too early mathematics on a child, to bring him to philosophy too young. We have system and we have plan all too soon now. You know too well and have convictions too well by the time you are forty. The flashing is done, the coming out of the stars. It is all constellations—night.

You see, I have said that the growth of a poet is through flashes. Sight and insight makes poetry, and that belongs to the beginning poet—the poet coming out. I suppose that poets die into philosophy as they grow older—if they don't die the other way. They die into wisdom. Maybe it is a good way to die.

I will tell you a story, to bring you to the point. One of my great friends was a college president, now gone. He came to me years ago with a boyish interest in poetry, a naïve interest. And this is the way he had come to it. He had looked on poetry as performance. He was a Welshman. His father had made pottery (and poetry) in America, at Utica, New York. His earliest recollection of poetry was sitting with his father, at the close of a prize contest and hearing the prizes awarded for poetry. The judge was an old Welshman, brought over from Wales, to deliver the prizes. The first prize was awarded for a certain poem and the old judge said, "Will the writer of it stand." My friend's father stood up. That was his first encounter with poetry. Performance. Bravo! Victory!

He went afterward to play baseball on a country ball team one summer, and was picked up by some college boys and taken to their college and educated free. I think I am right in saying that he pitched all four years on his college team and only lost two games in four years. From there he went to the Boston Nationals
and after one year of some pitching blossomed out into the greatest pitcher in
the country. For one year. And then he said to himself: “This ends early—can’t
last many years—and there is always poetry, which is akin. I’m going back to
that.” So he went back to college and got some more degrees—and ended up a
college president. He came to me in that spirit entirely.

Now don’t imagine I don’t know all the problems of athletics. But I never
look around on athletics in college with anything but an affectionate spirit. Take
a boy who is intellectual, who spends his time worrying over the athletes about
him. He will never write poetry. If he tries, he will never write anything but
criticism. He’ll be like a variable approaching its limit: never quite getting
there. Poetry is a young thing, as we all know. Most of the poets have struck
their notes between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. That is just the time
when you are in college and graduate school. It is in those ten years that you
will strike your note or never. And it is very like athletic prowess in that respect.
They are very close together.

When I see young men doing so wonderfully well in athletics, I don’t feel
angry at them. I feel jealous of them. I wish that some of my boys in writing
would do the same thing. I wish they would stop grousing at the athletes—
leave them alone and do something as well in the arts. Remember, you can’t
excuse yourself on the grounds of age. Sight and insight. You must have form—
performance. The thing itself is indescribable, but it is felt like athletic form. To
have form, feel form in sports—and by analogy feel form in verse. One works and
waits for form in both. As I said, the person who spends his time criticizing the
play around him will never write poetry. He will write criticism—for the New
Republic!

When one looks back over his own poetry, his only criticism is whether he had
form or not. Did he worry it out or pour it out? You can’t go back to a tennis
game and play it over—except with alibis. You can go back over a poem and
touch it up—but never unless you are in the same form again. Yet the great
pleasure in writing poetry is in having been carried off. It is as if you stood
astride of the subject that lay on the ground, and they cut the cord, and the
subject gets up under you and you ride it. You adjust yourself to the motion of
the thing itself. That is the poem.

So many ways I have tried to say what I feel. Keeping the thing in motion is
sometimes like walking a rolling barrel. Again, a small poem is like the five or
six balls a pitcher pitches to a given batter. There is a little system—a little set
of pitched balls; a little set of sentences. You make the little set and the coming
off is it—long or short. When Poe said that all poems were short, he meant that
a long poem was just full of little runs—you could take them out; you could tell
where it happened. I’ve boasted I could tell whether it happened in the morning
or midnight—with morning calmness or midnight intoxication! It’s different, of
course, if a poem is just penned to bother. I can understand that kind, even—if
I will be bothered. But all I ask is to be smitten.