

MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

Middlebury

Vermont

American Literature Department
R. L. Cook

Nov 21, 1942

Dear Peter:

Your letter was an exhilarating one. Not all the boys I've talked with have had the success you ^{had} with the Army. It's the old story, the person who has the stuff serves the poor community with his education. It does seem odd for a person who did not appear to be technically-minded to find himself in a very highly technical capacity. Apparently you are well-rounded and all I say is more and more power to you. Anytime the literary man can show how practical he is, he better show it - even to an extreme. It gives the old timers a well-deserved revision. How often we hear about those who can, do, and those who can't, teach! Emerson used to remark, "I like people who can do things". In explanation of his position he told the anecdote (on himself) about how his son Edward and he tried vainly to drag the big calf into the Emerson barn. It refused to budge and it looked like a debut for "the cosmic junkies", when along came the Irish girl who put her finger into the calf's mouth and led it directly into the barn.

I don't know how much of the regimentation you as a member of the Air Corps have to endure. But today an old student dropped in to say that he was getting plenty of it as a radio technician at Fort Monmouth. Before entering the service he was a devotee of democracy; now he is slightly disillusioned. The caste system appeals him; so too does the ignorance of some of his fellow soldiers. At - connection he reasoned logically that the only solution was more and more education. He has been in the service since August, and, in 14 weeks, the Army has transformed him from a student of liberal thought to a technically-minded person. This interests me very much. Just stop and think of the multiple transformations which are

are taking place. You are Transformation, for example. However you bring
a broad perspective to your experience and you bring a favorable point-of-view.
You look forward toward collectivism. Undoubtedly what is happening in the Army
is happening purposefully not simply by chance. Is it not very possible that
all this program has been carefully prepared? Ten to fifteen million "organized"
or technically-trained men will go a long way toward influencing the direction
of our next step in the United States of America. This is what I gather you
meant when you wrote that the war was a prompt deterministic force
acting against individualism. I thought your letter very revealing and intelligent
in its awareness to what is taking place. Do you happen to remember Edwin
Arlington Robinson's Demos and Olympus or Frost's Departmental? In a sense
the two poets are concerned with a similar problem; namely, the relationship
of the individual to society. In the former, Olympus represents the individual
challenges and throws back the arguments of Demos, who represents the people.
Robinson's Olympus is dubious of Demos' exaltation of reason and equality, and
simultaneously Demos is scornful of Olympus' exaltation of art and love. Demos
might be the Mouthpiece or speaking board of the military in the following
passage, which is worth pondering: we have had too much

of the insurgent individual
with his free fancy and for this and that,
And his ingenious right to be himself.
What right has anyone now to be himself,
Since I am here to fix him in his place
And hold him there? And as for your bit word,
I'll have it all alike and of a piece —
Punctual, accurate, tamed and uniform,
And equal. Then romance and love and art
And ecstasy will be remembrances
Of man's young wishes on his way to reason.

Frost's position you will know well enough. Now Robinson sides with
Olympus against Demos; it is implicit in the poem, and Frost is no
man to favor regimentation. The Lone Striker made Frost's position
quite clear. Are, then, these two poets counter-factionists? Is there
no good word to be spoken for a morally self-reliant individualism?

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Middlebury is heading ~~on~~ toward a big decision. It is anticipated that only 130 men will be in residence here ^{next summer}. What shall the college do? Shall it man all the way toward a women's institution? Or shall it let down the barriers and take in military units of 3 or to 500 men? The last sounds logical but I expect those who do the deciding around here are faced with the problem of trying to satisfy the proponents of a liberal education for women. With 3 or 400 American soldiers around the campus, no matter what the discipline may be, it is expected that difficulties will arise. For myself I should favor the military units coming into residence. It is said that they would provide their own instructors, and that the curriculum as it now stands, with the exception of the physical sciences, would be useless to them. The argument is, why should a soldier waste his time studying political science or American literature or philosophy? I can think of good reasons but I would have to blow them through a trumpet in order to make them heard.

In spite of a long football season, the spirit has held up very well. Somehow the work gets done and there is plenty of it. For three weeks I was "out straight" correcting papers - over 300, some of which required an hour for reading, correction and personal reaction. It is for this reason that you have not heard sooner. I am having a breathing space now, yet soon again there will be nearly 300 more. All my spare time is given to Committee work. Sometimes it hardly seems worth the effort. If only one could put all of one's energy and time into the teaching, the results would be far more effective. One's energy is dissipated and often wasted. After a long session in committee I feel too fatigued to tackle

the next week - the Liberator - Aug. This Committee work is the way we make a return for the friendly freedom & an independence. Sometimes everything goes down and I am not always informed & unknown as to the results. Some of the standards & our animosity, there in the Liberator and on the Boston. I am always everything else in got to stop. I only the condition would give in the chance to concentrate our activities.

It has been a splendid autumn - sailing can in the Bells, Bangs will give you large, brilliant mushrooms and mushrooms that are crisp and delicious. Some afternoon the air has been filled with flying white birds and winged seeds. The open plain has been the migrating birds, resting for a day or two for a few hours, to keep the seeds in some ^{cooler} ~~cooler~~ ^{place}. So they come upon them. It is pleasant too to sit in my chair in November to hear the "Red-eyes" scream "to the chimney as it smokes across country, northern chimney smoking and the symposium. Throughout the autumn I have found it, and it lights me a very low moon ^{convulsive} ~~convulsive~~ ^{moon} ~~moon~~ ^{moon}. It is now descending across and will - light but I now on the first day the lanterns make many fires. This too I now see almost periodically against the sky as it was for the lantern. Five days were belated into them before the morning was many days old. Thanksgiving this year will be one of vacation for me, thanks for them.

So we have written you remembered Dr. ~~Henry~~ ~~Robinson~~ ~~Smith~~
 & (Henry) and a truly brilliant man. He died on Wednesday & this week
 and Dr. Bygonet (^{Smith's} ~~Robinson's~~ Physics) died earlier in the autumn. Mr. ~~Quinn~~
 is now in the Norse Cath, I believe. His death is a loss in the Movement
 Association and so on and so on. There have been over 30 changes in the Presidency
 this year.

I shall not forget to send you a copy of Directions. Don wish to bring
Cyril available as soon as not long to long for me. I always like to return
you and will come in during first year.

The very first to you in every way, honest sincerely
 R. H. C. M.