

212 E 48th St, New York City
Saturday, Feb 27th, 1937

Dear Edythe:

Why, of course I remember. My childhood was so scantily furnished with children that the Squier girls stand out in it vividly. I was rather queer and lonely, myself; you know I wasn't sent to school. And I often wondered what happened to you after you moved from Isbury Park.

Incidentally, if I had ever made Edward O'Brien's anthology for a moment I should be so full of self-confidence that nothing could stop me.

But there's no use saying that. The way a rejection slip hurts is simply an emotional fact, no more and no less. And never having found a way to recover fully from them, I'm not very helpful as to yours. Except that I do know a mechanical way to make oneself go on sending out in spite of being slapped in the face by a returned mss. It's simple; list not one but a half dozen markets ahead, and-- most important-- prepare the envelopes, stamps and all, addressed, ready, piled one under the other wherever you keep things. Then, when the thing comes back with its maddening note or still more maddening slip, simply pop it into the envelope next in order, all ready with its own return envelope, and mail it on the spot. This -- for an actually out mss is always hopeful-- keeps the going; and prevents the saddest moment I know, getting ready and thinking out a new market while in low water.

As to your questions; if that life was a block to writing I wouldn't be talking down the radio today, or anything else, I suppose. A little after you left a most thorough going church row disrupted us, incidentally killing my father. My grandfather-- do you remember him? He was retired from the ministry then; he used to come to get me after Miss Young's parties, sometimes-- died, too in three months after, leaving us children and my aunt and mother to live a life which was idiotically that of hermits till finally mother, who always had sense, though Auntie had managed to get hold of what money there was, managed to have us move to Philadelphia-- we wandered, too-- various suburbs-- finally New York because Kenneth was studying law with a cousin. No-- loneliness and change and emotional shock are apparently the foundation-stone of capacity to write, especially when they get you young. Though I have never thought they were worth it-- I mean, I don't think being able to write is worth the things that have happened to aid it.

However, as long as they did happen one might as well write! And also of course the sensitiveness that makes rejections hurt is what one must have received the impressions leading to writing. You simply have to adjust and adjust and find palliations of various sorts; "put tire to tire and

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Widdemer, Margaret, 1890-

To Edythe Squier Draper, Oswego, Kansas.

New York City, February 28, 1937 ~~MS. A. 9.2.37~~

2p. 22x28cm. TLS, with envelope.

Childhood friend of ESD discusses family,

writing.

at it again," as my mother used to say. For returns don't prove much. In your case I should say little but that your material is of good literary grade, but sometimes fails in technique. Which is easy; for work will always improve technique, while organic badness isn't a thing one can help.

Why don't you do what you think of doing? It sounds like a very good book. As for not trusting yourself to carry through, that's nonsense. You don't have to write it all at once. If they ever let me get down to actual talks on actual writing, I'm going into a talk on ways of getting your stuff down which ease that feeling of the interminability of the task. For this next week I am having to clear off answers. The radio works on a sugar-coated scheme which seems to me to be based not on the actual human beings who listen, but that section of them which herds in a big city and is seen by amusement purveyors. Also, I believe if you wrote that church book-- and what can't one write about churches and church people and church workers! various of the pieces would be short stories, to begin with; and when it was done you would find it had been a catharsis which would probably adjust you mentally to a freer capacity to write other things; go on without so much mental pressure. Try it. Do it in the pieces it comes in; it won't be the sort of book anybody could write from beginning to end, emotional books like that are not. Start anywhere; assemble it last of all.

As for the novel about Habel-- I can see her now, running wildly up the stair at Miss Young's and laughing, dark and shy-- take it out, look it over, see whether the time has come to make you feel how to rewrite it. I think you'd be able to. Or if it isn't that time, start the other in its pieces and sell a few pieces, as I said.

It's kind of you to say you recall me as a "darling of the gods". Another of the girls I met later put it "teacher's pet." I had been reared entirely by adults-- the Asbury Park little girls were the first I'd ever played with, even in so limited a way as the church afforded-- and naturally the adults had made me into what adults liked in the way of a child-- docile, hard-studying, and polite. I was always tensely trying to adjust to children, and never very sure it was a success.

Do you remember the others of that little group of Miss Mary's? I have come in contact with them all nearly since. The two Acherman sisters, Lela and Martha, are teaching in California, I think Meremont I saw them ten years back. When I was young and ruthless I made a story of what happened to Sibyl Cole, in a book called "Boardwalk," about Asbury Park. We met again in our twe ties. Winnie Hetrick is in charge of some sort of institution here in the city, but she wrote once and I lost the letter and I suppose we were both shy. The Edmunds sisters-- did you know them? I saw and knew for some years in Philadelphia. They are there still, doing social work.

I married-- very unintelligently, a brilliant borderline case-- divorced him before he had time to finish his intentions of getting the world at large to think me one-- my people though he was trying to get control of me that way, I don't know, you can't tell with those minds--and was too terrified deep down, I think, to do it again, though I've gone up to the edge of it a half dozen times since. No children, I am sorry to say. I took over a little girl to adopt; but they had given me, I don't think on purpose, a subnarcel. Yes, they're all novels without an end-- this side the border. I do think there must be more, don't you? My father used to say "we weave from the wrong side of the tapestry-- we cannot see the pattern."

I think you for writing.