

Colby



Colby College  
Digital Commons @ Colby

---

Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and  
Transcriptions

The Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson: A  
Digital Edition

---

10-12-1890

## To Harry de Forest Smith- October 12, 1890

Edwin Arlington Robinson

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson\\_transcriptions](https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson_transcriptions)



Part of the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Robinson, Edwin Arlington, "To Harry de Forest Smith- October 12, 1890" (1890). *Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions*. 15.

[https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson\\_transcriptions/15](https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson_transcriptions/15)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the The Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Digital Edition at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby.

TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner Oct 12—1890

Dear Friend Smith

I have been intending to purchase Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam's quatrains for some time but have never quite come to it: they are published in a very neat form by Houghton Mifflin & Co for one dollar. I think I shall have to get them before it grows too cold to take them "underneath the bough" and peruse them to a nicotine accompaniment. As to the "jug of wine" and "thou" I am afraid I shall have to do without them. Can you imagine a man of the nineteenth century striking for the woods with a damsel, a book of verses, a loaf of bread and a two-quart jug? Perhaps the jug makes the paradise. "Oh, wilderness, etc."<sup>1</sup> And yet though it be true that a little reality ~~applied~~ applied will completely knock the bottom out of the old verse-makers, we find a sort of satisfaction in reading them that is wanting in the alidade or transit, even though we are paid for lugging them and must read our verses at our own expense.

Did you ever read any of Keats' sonnets? They are great. To my mind they are the greatest in the English language. Take for instance "Kosciusko" "On Reading Chapmans Homer," "Homer," or if you like something peppered take this one:

-2-

"I cry your mercy—pity—love--ay, love!  
 Merciful love that tantalizes not--  
 One thoughted—never-wandering, guileless love--  
 Unmasked, and being seen—without a blot!  
 O! let me have thee all,--all--all--be mine!  
 That shape, that fairness, that sweet minor zest  
 Of love, your kiss—those hands, those eyes divine,  
 That warm, white, lucent millioned-pleasured breast,--  
 Yourself—your soul—in pity give me all--  
 Withhold no atoms atom or I die  
 Or living on, etc."<sup>2</sup>

There are five or six about like this but many of them are on old, solid subjects. In the one "On the Nile" he says--  
 "Tis ignorance that makes a barren waste  
 Of all beyond itself."

If his works<sup>a</sup> are in the library at Brunswick (and of course

---

<sup>a</sup> WA has "words".

they are) get them and see if you do not agree with me.

I have not done a great deal of reading lately except "The Newcomes".<sup>3</sup> I hammered away at that for a month and finished it a short time ago. Big thing, but a little tedious at times like everything else that amounts to much—that

-3-

is speaking of fiction and other extended works. I took up The Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff<sup>4</sup> the other day but failed to be impressed. Of course it is a wonderful book, considering the age of its author but there are too many "O God's" & "I love hims"

I can say today with more or less truth, "Cras ingens iter-abimus aequor."<sup>5</sup> We have been sounding the river for the past week and will probably keep at it through the month; a devilish cold job it is too. At times I don't care a cahoot whether the river is one fathom deep or forty, as long as there is water enough to take us home. I try to put my better self—if I have any—to the front, that he may brush away all idle fancies and gather in the dollars; & I tell you what it is, old man, that he hates to stay there. "When I do count the clock"<sup>6</sup> from eight o'clock till four, and mark down sounding's to the second, an hour seems a week. The only redeeming feature of the job is that Forney (the boss) does not put in very long days.

Well, be good to yourself & the world and read some of K's sonnets. Write nex{t} Sunday & tell me what you think of them. They are calling me to dinner and I am already murmuring again--"Oh, wilderness"--

Yours &

E.A. Robinson

HCL US, pp. 4-6

#### NOTES

1. This and the other quoted words/phrases in the previous lines are taken from the twelfth quatrain of Fitzgerald's translation (probably the 5th edition, 1889):

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—  
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

(SL)

2.<sup>b</sup> "Sonnet to Fanny."

3. By William M. Thackeray, another novel of tangled marriage relationships, first published 1853-55.

4. Russian author (1860-1884) whose fame is based primarily on her *Journal*, first published in 1885 and translated into English in 1889. Begun in the author's thirteenth year, it purports to be a candid record of a woman's life.

5. Tomorrow we set out upon the vast sea again (Horace, Odes 1.7.31). (SL)<sup>c</sup>

6. The opening of Shakespeare's Twelfth Sonnet. (SL)

---

<sup>b</sup> Notes 2 through 5 here are WA's notes 1-4.

<sup>c</sup> WA numbered this note but left it blank.