March 1943

Robinson And The War

H. Bacon Collamore

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq

Recommended Citation
Colby Library Quarterly, series 1, no.2, March 1943, p.30-31

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby. For more information, please contact mfkelly@colby.edu.
In looking through the letters written by Edwin Arlington Robinson to Edith Brower, I find only one that makes any mention of the war. That one, however, records the poet in a mood twenty-five years ago not at all unlike that in which some of us find ourselves today. On June 2, 1918, Robinson wrote "E. B." from Peterborough, N. H., as follows:

I hope to do something this summer, but I shall feel all the time that I ought to be driving a mule in France; and yet, if the world is worth having, I suppose it is best for one who is almost a rickety quinquagenarian (almost) to do what he can do, rather than use himself up in trying to do what he can't do.

There is no danger of my having too joyous a time. I can only hope that I may leave a little something that will add a little something to the lives of a few others. This sounds rather silly, and yet I suppose I mean it.

Anyhow, I am Yours always sincerely E. A. R.

Much more interesting (to me, at least) is his note of December 29, 1914, to Miss Brower, enclosing the poem "Cassandra." This seems to me about the best war statement I have found from the pen of E. A. R.

Because a few complacent years
Have made your peril of your pride,
Think you that you are to go on
Forever pampered and untried?
What lost eclipse of history,
What bivouac of the marching stars,
Has given the sign for you to see
Millenniums and last great wars?

In sending the poem to "E. B." Robinson wrote: "The enclosed will make you a little mad and it may at the same time amuse you. Happy New Year!" Miss Brower remarked: "Evidently he thinks me a pacifist, but Cassandra is here addressing the pocket-book pacifists."

The poem first appeared in the Boston Evening Transcript, December 21, 1914; then in Braithwaite's Anthology in
ROBINSON'S PROSE: A RETRACTION

By Carl J. Weber

In the Colby Mercury for December, 1941 (VII: 69-72), I printed "three short articles, Robinson's authorship of which has been previously unknown." Although in printing them I clearly stated that "in their original sole previous printing, the articles appeared without Robinson's name," I felt that the marks of his authorship were reasonably clear. The article on "the next 'great poet'" with its reference to "a comet or an atmospheric disturbance" sounded (and still sounds) to my ears like the work of the author of the Sonnet

Oh for a poet — for a beacon bright
To... flush Parnassus with a newer light.
. . . Shall there not one arise
To wrench one banner from the western skies...?

And the quotation from Matthew Arnold, in the same prose essay, recalled Dr. James L. Tryon's statement, in his Harvard Days With Edwin Arlington Robinson (Colby Phi Beta Kappa Address, April 16, 1940, p. 11), that "Arnold he liked best of all and from him he most frequently read aloud." The other two prose articles seemed likewise, if not equally, Robinsonian in sound; and all three had appeared in a New York paper in which E. A. R. admitted (in a letter) having had some of his prose printed.

In the December, 1942, issue of the New England Quarterly evidence was presented by Mrs. Alice M. Williams to support a claim that Robinson was the author of an entirely different piece of prose—an editorial on William Jennings Bryan. After reading her article I feel impelled to retract my claim of authorship by Robinson for the three pieces printed in the Colby Mercury. They still sound au-