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To Harry de Forest Smith - May 2, 1893

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Cambridge, May -^a 2 - '93

My dear Smith,

I hope you have not come to the conclusion that I have gone back on you, for that is hardly the case. I have at last shaken off that thesis and the French essay and as soon as I get some French and German composition copied—six or seven hours work—I shall begin to feel like a free man. We have finished "Soll und Haben" and are reading "Wilhelm^b Tell."^{1c} The novel of Freytag's is horribly hashed and practically spoiled in the abridgement, and it is quit^e^d evident that the man, or wo-

-2-

man most likely, in the Critic did not take the trouble to look it over. I like Schiller first rate. Have been reading ~~Sumichrast~~ Victor Hugo's Hernani,² or rather have been hearing Sumichrast read it—and it is a great thing ~~it~~ in the way of romantic drama. These things are about all I have read excepting the books dealing with my thesis and Balzac's Eugenie Grandet. I believe that has the reputation of being the only novel he ever wrote that would not make a horse blush. I believe Zola used that expression once, at any rate it is not original with me.

-3-

Oh, I forgot to mention Thomas Hardy's Group of Noble Dames.³ These stories are decidedly good. If you have never read them I will send you the book. I ask you

^a WA omits this mark, which may or may not be meant for a hyphen.

^b There is a crossed-out vertical line of an uncertain character between the "l" and the "m" in the holograph.

^c WA places the period outside the quotation mark.

^d WA has "quite".

it is
 this, for I know how disappointing ^ to
 find a book in the office and open it to
 be disappointed. If you want it you
 may have it.--There is a book of some
 kind for graduate students to be published
 this summer by Harvard Columbia & Johns
 Hopkins. You may have seen something
 of it. I think it is mentioned in one
 of the Nations I send with this, but
 am not sure of it. Now I think
 of another book I have read—Alexander

-4-

Kielland's Tales of Two Countries—translated
 from the Norwegian by W. Archer for the
 Odd Number Series. They are damned
 suggestive,--not vicious, but rather dark
 in their coloring. A good many plain truths
 are sent home, and it is hard to decide

or worse

whether one is better ^ for reading things like
 Withered Leaves, A good Conscience, Romance
 and Reality &c.^e For they are unquestionably the
 work of a great writer, and told in a
 masterly way.⁴ Excuse the slovenly rhet-
 oric and, for all I know, grammar, in this,
 as I am in a great hurry. Took this time
 to make sure of it—but did not take quite
 enough. Yours came this morning^f

Sincerely,
 EAR.^g

HCL US, 94-95.

NOTES

1. For *Soll und Haben* by Gustav Freytag, see letter to Smith for February 27, 1893, along with note 5 for that letter. *Wilhelm Tell* is a play by Friedrich Schiller, published in 1804. (SL)
2. First performed in 1830. (SL)
- 3.^h 1891.

^e WA has "etc."

^f WA has a period here.

^g WA has "E. A. R."

4. Alexander Kielland (1849-1906), a leading figure in the development of realism in Norway. Called by Bjornson "the most elegant ship in the Norwegian literary fleet," he prided himself on being "an honest believer in utilitarian literature." The Archer translation was published in 1891; the stories were originally published as *Novelletter* in 1878.

^h This and the following note are WA's notes 1 and 2, respectively.