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6-10-1894

To Harry de Forest Smith - June 10, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson a

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Maine, June 10, 1894.

My dear Smith,

The three sketches which^a {which} I sent to Cambridge^b some time ago have been through the Atlantic office with far from discouraging results. Of course they were not accepted^{c—d} I never dreamed of such a thing - but they were damned rather pleasantly by Mr. Scudder, and pitilessly praised by Mr. Whittier, the ancient proof-reader of the magazine. By the way of salve, he tells me that Howell's "Venetian Life"¹ was refused by Mr. Lowell, and goes on to say^e that your humble servant is "a coming^f writer", that his style "reminds him of Deming",² that "Mr. Scudde r^g is not infallible", and other kindred rot, which I take with many allowances for the old friendship between him and my uncle. Mr. Scudder himself writes: "These sketches seem to me not without some claim to notice. They show restraint and an effort at telling something worth while; but, etc." "But"^h is the biggest word in the English language.

ⁱIf there is a corner in Hell for those who waste their time in this life, what may I expect for writing a poem of three-hundred and eighty lines during the past three weeks, - to say nothing of^j the coming revision, which must take place before the thing can be presentable?³ The first writing is all done now, with the exception of eight or^k ten lines, which I hope to do to-day. Then I shall go for ~~Th~~^l {"}Theodore", treating him rather differently from^m any other of my poor creationsⁿ. The story is rather "bizarre", but not half so much as real life. Theodore is not a typical man. The Italian stone-cutter, who whistles the barcarolle from

^a WA simply has "which".

^b The "e" is written in black ink.

^c The first "c" is written in black ink.

^d The hyphen is written in black ink.

^e The "y" is written in black ink.

^f The "n" is written in black ink.

^g The space is in the holograph.

^h Both quotation marks and the underline are written in black ink. WA omits the underline.

ⁱ I have followed the holograph for the indentation of all paragraphs in this letter, in addition to the usual first paragraph, due to their unusual length throughout.

^j In the holograph there does not appear to actually be an "of", but rather an "o" typed over (or under) a "g". WA simply has "of", which is doubtless EAR's intention.

^k The "r" is written in black ink.

^l WA omits this typo.

^m The "m" is written in black ink.

ⁿ The "a" is written in black ink.

"Sicilian Vespers",^{4o} and comes at last to carve Theodore's mon-
ument, must make or spoil the story. I doubt^p if I get fairly
into it until I return from my Boston trip, but we shall
have it in the Pines before long.

In reading Tennyson the other day, I came
across a little poem in blank verse dedicated to the Prin-
cess Beatrice, in which he speaks of her marriage as "that
white funeral of the single life".⁵ A Poet Laureate is worth
while when he says things like^q that. And, speaking of Tenny-
son, how would it do to read him some this summer? His great^r
est charm lies in the fact that one can read him over and
over again without tiring of him. I have read "Maud" aloud
three^s times, and am^t quite ready to do so again - or listen to
you. Perhaps the best way to read a long poem like that is
alternately. The metre, like the poem, is hard (in a certain

2^u

is^v

sense) and strange. And there are always the Idyls. There al-
so another poet I should^w like very much^x to read in our bower:
I speak now of Kingsley, whose "Andromeda"^y I have only read in
short snatches.⁶ I think, if [we] have a mind to do it, we can make^z
considerable of the coming three months, having two sit-
tings a week. "Antigone"^{aa} need not take all our time - if we let^{bb}
it, I am afraid that we should get hopelessly sick of the
thing - and I am sure that I shall not let my own efforts
interfere to any great extent with things of more^{cc} importance.
Antigone makes me think of Latham, who writes that he is
going to take a non-resident course - Syracuse University -

is^{dd}

in the Greek^{ee} drama, and that he intensely^{ff} interested in our

^o The comma is written in black ink.

^p The "b" is written in black ink.

^q WA has "life".

^r The "t" is typed over what appears to be an "n".

^s The "r" is written in black ink over a typed hyphen.

^t Written in black ink.

^u The page numbers for this letter are from the holograph.

^v Written in black ink.

^w The "s" is written in black ink.

^x The "h" is written in black ink.

^y Both quotation marks are written in black ink.

^z WA adds a space between the words.

^{aa} Both quotation marks are written in black ink.

^{bb} The "t" is written in black ink.

^{cc} The "e" is written in black ink.

^{dd} Written in black ink.

translating scheme. It is one of the regrets of my life that you cannot meet that man. It would take you some time to get accustomed to his strangeness, but after that you would soon discover his real worth. He would talk American history and read Matthew Arnold,'s^{gg} poems with you from morning till night if you wanted him to. But such a meeting is probably one of the things that is not to be.

I have been reading Lowell's essays again. There is a mine of good stuff of which we know practically nothing, and I ask you, is it right that it should be so? Essays and poems are the two kinds of literature best adapted for reading^{gh} aloud, and as we have between us an unusually good stock of both, we ought to make the most of them.

Have you bought Barrett Wendell's book yet?⁷ If so, what do youⁱⁱ think of it?

And have you seen a copy of the Chap-Book, which^{kk} seems to be making such a stir just now? The scheme of the magazine interests me and I am anxious to get to Cambridge and find out more about it. My chief^{ll} fear is that it is too good a thing to succeed. I take Bliss Carman⁸ to be the guiding^{mm} spirit of the undertaking.

"Ismene, mine own sister," is dangerously like the rendering I decided upon, but I do not think I have any reason to change it on that account. Of course there must be many little repetitions in the translation of a long work like Antigoneⁿⁿ, but they are not what count. The general effect of the play, as a whole, is the point to be considered; and it is to that end that I shall do my work. And, now I think of it, will you kindly refrain, as far as possible, from introducing poetical lines into your version?- that is, lines of ten properly accented syllables^{oo}, which are so common in the Oxford translation. The more of them you make, the harder my work will be. You would understand this better if you were pulling my end of the string. I shall send you some Chap-Books from Cambridge.

^{ee} The upper-case "G" is written over a typed lower-case "g".

^{ff} The "n" is written in black ink over what appears to be a typed "a".

^{gg} The apostrophe is written in black ink,

^{hh} WA transcribes the "n".

ⁱⁱ WA omits the typo.

^{jj} Written in black ink.

^{kk} The "h" is written in black ink.

^{ll} The "c" is written in black ink. WA simply has "chief".

^{mm} WA omits the second "i".

ⁿⁿ WA transcribes the "o".

^{oo} WA has "syllable".

Yours sincerely
Robinson^{pp}

HCL US, 162-165.
Typewritten.

NOTES

1. William Dean Howells (1837-1920), the great American novelist and man of letters, was editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* from 1871-1881. *Venetian Life* (1866) is a memoir of life in Venice in the 1860s. (SL)
- 2.^{qq} Philander Deming (1829-1915), *Atlantic* contributor and author of *Tomkins and Other Folks*, 1885.
- 3.^{rr} "The Night Before."
4. Verdi's opera *Les vêpres siciliennes*, first performed in 1855. (SL)
- 5.^{ss} "To H.R.H. Princess Beatrice."
6. Charles Kingsley (1819-1975), poet, novelist, critic. *Andromeda and Other Poems*, 1858.
7. Probably *William Shakespeare*, 1894. {See also the letter to Smith of March 13, 1892, and note 1 of that letter.}
8. Canadian-born poet (1861-1929), editor of *The Chap-Book*. Author, with Richard Hovey, of *Songs from Vagabondia*, 1894.

^{pp} The valediction and signature are written in black ink. WA omits the underline.

^{qq} This is WA's note 1.

^{rr} This is WA's note 2.

^{ss} This and the following four notes are WA's notes 3, 4, 5 and 6, respectively.