TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Maine, June 10, 1894.

My dear Smith,

The three sketches which I sent to Cambridge some time ago have been through the Atlantic office with far from discouraging results. Of course they were not accepted—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 Howells's "Venetian Life" was refused by Mr. Lowell, and goes on to say that your humble servant is "a coming writer", that his style "reminds him of Deming", that "Mr. Scudder 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" is the biggest word in the English language.

If 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 the coming revision, which must take place before the thing can be presentable? The first writing is all done now, with the exception of eight or ten lines, which I hope to do to-day. Then I shall go for Theodore", treating him rather differently from any other of my poor creations. The story is rather "bizarre", but
not half so much so as real life. Theodore is not a typical man. The Italian stone-cutter, who whistles the barcarolle from "Sicilian Vespers", and comes at last to carve Theodore's monument, must make or spoil the story. I doubt 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 Princess Beatrice, in which he speaks of her marriage as "that white funeral of the single life". A Poet Laureate is worth while when he says things like that. And, speaking of Tennyson, how would it do to read him some this summer? His greatest charm lies in the fact that one can read him over and over again without tiring of him. I have read "Maud" aloud three times, and am 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 sense) and strange. And there are always the Idyls. There is also another poet I should like very much to read in our bower: I speak now of Kingsley, whose "Andromeda" I have only read in short snatches. I think, if we have a mind to do it, we can make considerable of the coming three months, having two sittings a week. "Antigone" need not take all our time—if we let 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 importance. Antigone makes me think of Latham,
who writes that he is going to take a non-resident course—Syracuse University—in the Greek drama, and that he is intensely interested in our 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 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 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? If so, what do you think of it? And have you seen a copy of the Chap-Book, which 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 fear is that it is too good a thing to succeed. I take Bliss Carman to be the guiding 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 Antigone, 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 syllable, 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.

Yours sincerely

Robinson