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4-28-1895

To Harry de Forest Smith - April 28 [?], 1895

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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Recommended Citation

Robinson, Edwin Arlington, "To Harry de Forest Smith - April 28 [?], 1895" (1895). *Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions*. 173.

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

[Gardiner, Maine
April 28 [?], 1895 [?]]

My dear Smith,

I am glad that you have taken up Pendennis at last and anxious for your opinion of it in your next letter—or whenever the time comes. Have you got to the Chatteris Bridge scene yet, where old Bows tosses his burning cigar stub over into the water and leaves Pen to walk home thinking? Andrew Lang and I are very fond of that passage and I am glad to be able to say that my admiration for it was ~~as~~ as strong before I ever read a line by Andrew as it is to-day. I have read the book four or five times and shall soon be ready to read it again. There is something in the touch of the master ~~that~~ cannot be mistaken or explained, and—at least I find it so—cannot always be seen in a first reading; but I don't suppose there is any use in preaching that to you{r} recent resolution.

I am going to read Sapho when I get a good chance and am glad for you{r} words concerning it. I ~~never~~ [?] ~~h~~ have never been able to believe that the book is "smutty" as the

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word goes, and I think you are quit{e} right in saying that Daudet could not write a novel of that sort. To me he is a mighty moralist but a French moralist with {=which} all the term conveys—or, as some Harvard instructors would say—connotes. There are lessons in Jack that I hav{e} never seen brought out with half the clearness or fire that Daudet gives them and the same is true of all the serious works of his that I have read He is never tired of dwelling upon a person's bringing up, that is. of his general surroundings during the age when the mind is most sensible to impressions. That, I take it, is the first idea of Sapho as it is of Jack & Le Petite Paroisse. Then there is always the compensation, or retribution, which ought to suit

your ideas to perfection. In Fromont Jeune though he makes the doings of the sinners blast the lives of two innocent and (to use^a Henry James's word) adorable people, leaving the sinners themselves to the disposition of the reader. The more I think of *Le Petite Paroisse* the more I am convinced that it will hold a place with the authors best works, but I doubt it will [?] ever become as popular as some of the others. It

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is built upon a wholly different plan from his earlier novels and nearly all of the "story" is brought up after the incidents themselves have taken place. Even the pathos is largely implied, though the reader feels it from the beginning. It is a sad story with a happy ending and the happiness is all kept back until the last page. Ordinarily such a dodge as that would tend to make a novel weak, but Daudet has taken care of that. The only thing to trouble the reader is the question whether a man can be happy with a wife whom he knows has been unfaithful even though the paramour be dead. The reader must settle that according to his own notions.

Lately I have been reading Wordsworth's *Excursion* and now am nearly through it. I never half realized before what a magnificent thing it is. You must read it sometime. Excepting that I haven't read much of any thing but some stories by Catulle Mendes over again. They are wrought with a cleverness that is perfect but they are absolutely un-moral.

There is not one of my letter-writing days, so you must not swear if I am duller than usual. The day is great, and

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all that, but my thoughts are slow and I fear that I am not in the best of spirits. In the last *Critic* I notice an announcement of *Fromont Junior and Risler Senior*, published by the Lippincotts at two dollars. The price is a little stiff but the book is worth it.—Rand, McNally & Co sell *Numa Roumestan*,¹ Illustrated, in English for \$1.00. The *Critic* has taken my Hardy sonnet but I think I said so in my last letter. It would be a good thing for me if I could go through some treatment to make me remember what I say to my correspondents.

Yours sincerely

^a WA and US both read "to me," here. I read their "comma" as being the top of a "t" in the line below.

^b Written vertically.

^c Written vertically.

E.A.R.

HCL EAR did not date this letter. US dates it April 28, 1895 on the basis of the postmark. However, the postmark is torn, and it is impossible to date the letter exactly. The context and the stationery clearly place it within this week.

NOTES

1. By Daudet, 1881.