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To Harry de Forest Smith - May 5, 1895

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

[Gardiner, Maine]
[May 5, 1895]

My dear Smith,

The French book¹ came yesterday and it is very nearly what I expected. Some of the selections (Le Greve de Forgerons² and De Maupassants Le Parapluie, for example) surprised me a little as examples of difficult French, but Zola, Rosny & De Goncourt are where they belong. The book will do a good deal for me if I have a mind to make a study of it this summer, and that is what I intend to do. I am very much obliged to you and will request to [=you] to kindly charge the cost to my account. I enclose postage.

Yesterday afternoon I finished my first complete reading of The Excursion. A man must read that poem before he knows Wordsworth; it is the man himself done over into words, and magnificent words, too. I shall take up the Prelude right away and then the Recluse. These poems are to be read slowly and with no sense of time, That is a man must not be in a hurry, The same will apply to Montaigne. Speaking of him, there is an article in the last Chap-Book by Maurice Thompson which is refreshingly worth reading. It hits the old fellow the best of any thing that I have ever seen, I think, and I sincerely hope that the story of the nuts and the little girl may be true. I care infinitely more for them

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than for the man with the three dogs and the giant fireplace.—In the same number there is a poem by Bliss Carman³ which has an unquestionable touch of greatness in it. And there is a sonnet by Hugh McCulloch⁴ which has nothing of the kind. The thought of it is either an unfortunate accident or a conscious dilution of the passage in Keats's Lamia:

"He answered, bending to her open eyes,
Where he was mirrored small in Paradise."⁵

I have been doing some labor of late—too much,

I think. This (Sunday) morning I was up at five o'clock. As {=At} At six or before, I was at work in that curse raspberry bed of ours and at half pas{t} seven I had breakfast. It is impossible now fo{r} me to sleep much after four o'clock in the morning and almost impossible for me to keep from getting up. I sleep well enough the first part of the night though, and that is when sleep counts—at least so say the medicine men.

At last I am the ~~owner~~ owner Hills Houndations of Rhetoric and I feel much better. If I could now get hold of the person who walked away with my Rhetoric itself, I should feel still better. I hav{e} a great faith in the profes-sor{s} judgment and I hav{e} seen the man and heard him talk. So his books are perhaps

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worth more to me than they are to you.—I hav{e} finally changed the title Christmas Eve which you so detested to that which I mentioned, "The Ruins of Bohemia". The last fills the bill and is rather better I think, though it is not so good as *The Black Path*, or *The House across the Water*.

This is a gray day, with no sign of any change. There are no ideas in my head and I think the sooner I p̄ put an end to this letter the better it will be for you and me alike. Did I ever acknowledge receipt of the second Bookman? I enjoyed it very much, though I dont think I care over much for Prof. Peck's poetry.⁶ The thought was all that made it tolerable.

Yours, with apologies.
E.A.R.

HCL US, 221-223.

EAR did not date this letter. It is postmarked "May 6, 1895, 8:30 A.M."

NOTES

1. "French book": *Difficult Modern French* (Albert Leune, {1894}). See Letter to Ford, May 15, 1895.
2. By François Coppée (1869). (SL)
- 3.^b "Little Lyrics of Joy – V," *The Chap-Book* II (May 1, 1895), 478.
Lord of the vasty tent of heaven,

^a Written vertically.

^b This was originally WA's note one, but it would presumably have been moved to second place, since he wrote what is now note 1 in pencil below the notes and labeled it "1."

Who hast to thy saints and sages given
A thousand nights with their thousand stars,
And the star of faith for a thousand years,

Grant me only a foolish rover,
All thy beautiful wide world over,
A thousand loves in a thousand days,
And one great love for a thousand years.^c

4.^d See "Sonnet," by Hugh McCulloch, Jr, in the same volume, 467:

A new Narcissus, gazing in your eyes
I, shadowed by the flowering of your hair
Behold my own face fondly nestling there
As though within the fold of Paradise.
My soul, it seems, ascended to the skies
Away from flesh, into a purer air;
Joyous to find himself enclosed where
No taint of any earthly evil lies.
And I, bewildered by the aspect new,
And half-enamoured of the changeling elf
Forgot it owes its value all to you.
For having taken it, a shapeless clod,
To the transparent treasures of yourself,
You give it its primeval form of God.
(SL)

5.^e II, 46-47.

6. *The Bookman*, a literary periodical that ran from 1895-1933. Harry Thurston Peck (1856-1914) was its editor from its inception until 1906. (SL)

^c I added the volume number and the poem to WA's note.

^d WA started this as note 2 but did not complete it.

^e This is WA's note 3.