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To Harry de Forest Smith - May 20, 1895

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

My dear Smith,

The more I read of Mr Mabie¹ in the Bookman the more I think of him. It is not a safe thing to damn a man for one short piece like that of his in the Chap-Book, but I am afraid that ~~wear~~ we are both too liable and too willing to do it. I am, at any rate, and hereafter shall try to improve my ways and conquer some of my prejudices. Were circumstances favorable I should immediately take up Mr Mabie's books and then those—or some of them—of Mr Cable² and Mr. Howells³—to man, and great men, as men go nowadays, of whom I know next to nothing. In spite of his weak whiskers, I am beginning to believe that there must be something to the author of "The Grandissimes"⁴ and "Dr Sevier";⁴ and Howells, I doubt not, is really good for something, even if he does write "literary passions"⁵ for the Ladies Home Journal.

I am in the middle of St. Luke now and find him magnificent reading. I am going through the New Testament and then I shall probably go back to the old. It is high time I knew something

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about the Bible, if only for the sake of mental decency and I am positively glad to feel that my conscience, or rather pride, has at last turned against me. There seems to be no place in my brain for reverence but the reading can surely do me no harm.—Yesterday I raised forty cents and sent for Renans Vie de Jesus⁶ (édition populaire in 12). That may not be the most advisable accompaniment for the reading I have laid out for myself but I have always wanted the book and I^a now am going to have it.

You had better keep a good eye out for translations of "L'Armature" by Paul

^a WA omits the "I".

Hervieu <">, "En Route" by Huysmans and "Le Desert" by Lotéi. They are all attracting an unusual amount of attention and there must be something in them.

Joe and I went out to see your father and mother. They had been to the re-dedication of the White Meeting House and your father described the whole occasion as a hell of a time. The most interesting feature of the thing <,> was, according to the description, the attitude of Long John Henderson who stood facing the congregation and waved a large hand of welcome to all who came in.

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Speaking of the Bookman and Mr Mabie, can you tell me why the picture of Mr Lowell "always studying Dante," with a magic ring of books around him, is not a pleasant thing for me to consider? I am afraid I am a little sour on Lowell, in spite of all that I can do. I cannot take him for a great man as I can Bryant, or even Longfellow—who, were it not for his sonnets, would immediately fall in my estimation, to second rank of American poets.

I sent my quatrain⁷ to the Chap-Book the other day but do not anticipate its acceptance. But it seems more natural to have it "out" somewhere and I am one of those happily constructed people whom declinations do not disturb I have had too much practice in that line.

I am now turning our friend "Theodore" inside out, completely rewriting him I do not expect to do any more original work until next winter.—nothing now but copying and tinkering with an uncomfortable feeling that I am not yet ready to publish any thing. But I shall try it all the same, even if I have not much hope.

Sincerely.

Gardiner, Me. E.A.R.

20 May, 1895

HCL US, 225-227.

NOTES

1. See letter to Smith, March 17, 1895. (SL)
2. George Washington Cable, American realist novelist (1844-1925). (SL)
3. William Dean Howells (1837-1920), the American critic and novelist. (SL)
4. Novels by Cable: *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life*, was published in 1880, *Dr. Sevier* in 1882. (SL)
5. *My Literary Passions*, miscellaneous essays on literature by Howells, published serially in 1894 and published as a volume in 1895. (SL)
6. Published in 1863, philologist Ernest Renan's (1823-1892), *Vie de Jésus* (Life of Jesus) was extremely popular, though also highly controversial because it sought to "humanize" Jesus and cast Judaism in a negative light. (SL)
7. See EAR's letter to Smith, December 9, 1894.