

# Colby



Colby College  
Digital Commons @ Colby

---

Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and  
Transcriptions

The Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson: A  
Digital Edition

---

1-24-1894

## To Joseph S. Ford - January 24, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson\\_transcriptions](https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson_transcriptions)



Part of the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Robinson, Edwin Arlington, "To Joseph S. Ford - January 24, 1894" (1894). *Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions*. 186.

[https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson\\_transcriptions/186](https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson_transcriptions/186)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the The Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Digital Edition at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby.

TO JOSEPH S. FORD

Gardiner, Maine,  
Jan 24 - '94.

My dear Ford.

To-day I have learned something about Joubert.<sup>1</sup> I fancy this is why I am writing to you.—What I have learned I have read in Saint-Beuve and Petit de Julleville.<sup>2</sup> The result is that I am just now filled with an aching desire to read his "Pensées et Correspondance" Do you know much about him? Do you know that he said "Atala" was "passion covered with a long white veil?" Well, he did; and a man who could say that much has said

-2-

other things worth knowing. These thinkers who never write much are very interesting men to me. But woe is me! the writers who never think much. The world is full of them—especially America. America seems to be afraid of thought. Our great army of short story writers to whom we must look for what is most characteristic in our literature does not fill me with great admiration. Alphonse Daudet in a little sketch of ten small pages (Le Caravanserail)<sup>3</sup> can say without trying to be great, "Les mots sont toujours plus poétiques que les choses."<sup>4</sup> We do not think of such things here. Here the "choses" are everything, ~~everything~~ especially if they are green and made of a

-3-

peculiar kind of paper difficult to counterfeit. Daudet means things do not come up to our expectations. I have simply expanded it a little.

"The day is cold and dark and dreary."<sup>5</sup> It rains, but the wind does not blow. I wish to heaven it did. Any thing for a noise to drown a baby's yelling That is all the sound I hear nowadays. I am sick for Cambridge—for someone

to talk with; but here I am with no immediate prospect of being anywhere else. I am working in a small way and doing what reading my eyes will permit. I find much pleasure in Daudet's "Contes".<sup>6</sup> He knows the relation between art and life and understands that a born broker will never cook macaroons from choice. There are a few differences in men that we Americans

-4-

must learn to understand before we can be as great as we think we are. We project, Europe perfects. Most of us are satisfied, and sing glory to the American Eagle.

I have no great idea as to what I am talking about. I am in something of a grouch and am lonesome. So excuse me, and write some day if you feel like it. I had a characteristic 20 page letter from Saben this morning and a good one from Latham a little over a week ago. L. is pretty well contented now and is reading French and German with with {sic} one of the french teachers in his establishment. Hav{e} you read any of Paul Verlaine?<sup>7</sup> I can imagine him with his pale, moon-struck face dut[=but] do not think I would care for him. Read Saint-Beuve on "Cowper," and give my best regards to Mead.

Sincerely

E.A Robinson

Box 595.

UVA

Joseph Sherman Ford (1873-1932) prepared for college at the New Church School (Swedenborgian) in Waltham, Mass. He was a close friend of EAR's at Harvard and graduated with the Class of 1894. After graduation he became an instructor in French at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, later becoming Assistant to the Principal and Director of Admissions. His obituary noted his early association with "the Swedenborgian communion, whose delicate and cultivative spirit left its permanent impress on the sensitive boy. Throughout his life he remained incapable of any ungentle or ungenerous or dishonorable act." [*Phillips Exeter Bulletin* (July 1932), 14.] A colleague once described Ford as "Below average height, trim and trig in dress and appearance, careful and considered in speech, affable in manner up to a point, he well typified what he was, a Harvard graduate of the Nineties. At the same time, it was difficult to think of him as ever having been an undergraduate." [Myron R. Williams, *The Story of Phillips Exeter*, 168.]

## NOTES

1. Joseph Joubert (1754-1824), French writer known for his fine aphorisms, first published posthumously as *Recueil des pensées de M. Joubert* (1838). The collection EAR is referring to here, *Pensées, essais, maximes et correspondance de J. Joubert*, was published in 1850. (SL)
2. Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869), French literary critic.  
Petit de Julleville (1841-1900), French literary historian.
3. French novelist (1840-1897) comparable to Dickens in his humor and pathos and his concern for the vagaries of mankind.
4. Words are always more poetic than things. (SL – my translation)
5. Longfellow, "The Rainy Day."
6. *Contes Choisis*.
7. Early French Symbolist poet (1844-1896). EAR's sonnet "Verlaine" was not written until after Verlaine's death. See EAR's letter to Smith, May 22, 1896.
8. Published in *Causeries du Lundi*, vol. XI (1854). (SL)