12-15-1895

To Harry de Forest Smith - December 15, 1895

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

14 Dec – ’95 [=15 Dec.]
My dear Smith;

I was glad to get hold of the Phil-
listine—particularly for the Dipsy Chanty, which
I think one of the best things Kipling has done.
It is not so good as the "Bolivar" or "There’s a Whisper
down the Field" but of course a man can’t al-
tways be at his best—that is, his very best.

I followed your suggestion in regard to the
Chap-Book business and sent them a page of
stuff about the Rosny books I haven’t the
slightest thought of their printing it but I
suppose there is the ghost of a chance. A "V"
would come in handy just now but I am
afraid that I must do without it,—at
any rate from that source.

Ford spend [=spent] last Sunday with me and
his coming was, as you may imagine some-
thing of a change for me I think it did
me good though he was probably a little
surprised to find what a seed I hav[en’t] de-
veloped into My only hope is that someday
I may sprout and make some leaves.
The poetry-book is getting on and will
be pretty well shaken out by the first of
February—sent off, I hope. When that
comes back I shall be stirred up for a

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few days, but not for many. It isn’t worth
while. And on the other hand it isn’t half
so easy to put such things out of one’s mind
as it may seem to you who have never had
the experience—as far as know. You may be
a literatus "on the quiet," but I don’t believe
it. You hav more respect for your brains.

Do you hear any thing from Butler nowadays?
I havent had a line from him since he sent me
his book-plate—five or six weeks ago. And
how about Jamie’s piece in the Advocate? I
fancy it was about the dead men outside the
wall, which was a very good story indeed. I
never saw his writing of it, but I imagine
he did it pretty well.

I hav been rebuilding that sonnet translation
of Horace's ode to Leuconoë. How do you like
these for the opening lines?—

"I pray you not, Leuconoë, to pore
With unpermitted eyes on what may be
Appointed by the gods for you and me,
Nor on Chaldean figures any more."

I may get the thing to partly satisfy me some
day but I rather doubt it. I hav spent
the last three weeks mostly in rewriting that
story of mine The Night Before—you may—
remember it—in blank verse. "Look you Dom-
ine, look you and listen &c" I dont know
what it all amounts to, but there are some

pretty good passages in it and they may lug it through
My songs are corksers—particularly Edward Alphabet:

"Look at Edward Alphabet
Going home to pray!
Drunk as he can ever get,
And on the Sabbath day!—"

and so forth. You may not think it from the first lines but
the poem is an argument against the present attitude of the
females. I also hav a piece of deliberate degeneration1 called
Luke Havergal, which is not at all funny. Then there is
old John Evereldown who had all the women of Tilbury Town
under his wing, or thought he had. The "Tavern" part of my
book is not like any thing I ever wrote before and I doub{t} much
if I evry [=ever] try any thing like it again. The songs hav been for
the most part villainously hard to make.

I think I shall hav to [go] out and see your father &
mother this afternoon—for I hav{e}nt seen them for nearly a month.
Something has turned up every Sunday to stop me.

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Monday morning.
I was out to your place last evening and had a good smoke with your father.
He is going through my set of Marryatt2 and thinks them great—particularly
Japhet and Midshipman Easy. If I had eyes I should read them again
myself, but as it is I cannot. I am going through a school edition of
Loti's Pecheur d'Islande3 which is very good but rather suggestive of short
life. To use Binnell's4 phrase, "it smells of mortality.
Hope to see you now in a few days.
Very truly yours
E.A. Robinson

HCL US, 237-239. Robinson misdated this letter as December 14, 1895.

NOTES

1. Robinson had been reading Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, a virulent attack on the Decadent movement, including Symbolism.
2. Frederick Marryat (1792-1848), British sea captain and popular novelist.
4. Augustine Birrell (1850-1933), British statesman and essayist. His volume *Essays about Men, Women and Books* was published in 1895. US reads "Bennell."

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*a This and the following note are WA's note 2 and 3, respectively.*