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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 Philistine—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 always 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 something 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{e} developed 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 have 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 Domine, look you and listen &c" I dont know what it all amounts to, but there are some

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pretty good passages in it and they may lug it through  
My songs are corkers—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 degeneration<sup>1</sup> 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 *Marryatt*<sup>2</sup> 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'Islande*<sup>3</sup> which is very good but rather suggestive of short life. To use *Binnell's*<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>a</sup> 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.
3. *Pêcheur d'Islande*, Loti's novel about Breton fishermen (1886). (SL)
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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<sup>a</sup> This and the following note are WA's note 2 and 3, respectively.