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To Joseph S. Ford - August 9, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO JOSEPH S. FORD

Gardiner, Maine,
August 9, 1894.

My dear Ford,

It is my turn to make apologies for my delay, and I can say in all sincerity that for the past three weeks I have been so busy that I have not had the heart to write to anyone. Do not think from this that I am making that time-honored and not over-impressive excuse of "not having time;" I mean that I have not taken it. You will appreciate this and think none the less of me for my frankness. When a man's head is so tired that he feels that he cannot do anything like justice to a friend in writing to him, perhaps it is best for him to let it go.

I was interested more than you thought in^a your clipping on Leconte de Lisle. I like to keep posted on the literary condition of the three countries, and the little sketch you sent me did me double service in informing me that there are now only three poets of any consequence in France. By the way, the "Dial" puts Coppée and Verlaine out of the race, giving the palm jointly to de Lisle and Sully Prudhomme.¹ I fancy this is quite fair, although there is something about Coppée's verses "au réalisme" that fascinates me. I am sorry to say that "La Grève des Forgerons" has disappeared. If it ever turns up I shall send it to you.

Since last writing to you, I have read George Sand's "Le Meunier d'Angibault"² and Hawthorne's ~~Scarlet L~~ "Marble Faun".³ For some reason I have never read much of Hawthorne, and I must confess that he^a is not wholly satisfactory. I do not object to his "laboriousness" - in fact, I like him all the better for showing me how hard he has worked; but there is something that is not just as it should be. I find the same thing in Irving, and, I think, to a greater extent. The Marble Faun is a great piece of literature, but it lacks something, in my opinion, that goes to make a really great romance. I do not know whether Hawthorne is a great favorite with you or not; if he is, you will think the less of me for telling you that his greatest work is in his short stories. He came too soon.

After putting down Le^b Meunier, I took up Chardenal. The contrast {sic} was painful if not heroic, but I am getting slowly

^a WA omits this word.

^b WA has "the".

reconciled to the task I have undertaken, and even anticipat(e)
 something like enjoyment from it when I get into Part II. I
 am pretty much a stranger there, and shall feel that I am ac{-}
 accomplishing something. And even where I am now - in the mid-
 dle of Part I - I a^m continually finding something that I
~~have~~—forgotten. - To return to Le Meunier, let me say that it
 had
 perhaps I had better
 keep "have"^c

-2-

is a marvel of comfortable prolixity, to be read sheerly for
 the fun of it. Nothing happens to speak of in the first hun-
 dred pages, and in the following two-hundred or so the ac-
 tion is rather thin. Happily, I do not care over much for ac{-}
 tion, so that is no drawbac^k for me; but to one who reads
 books wholly for the story. there is no need of his going be-
 yond the First Day, which is longer than most days. If you
 have read the book, or if you ever do read it, perhaps you
 will be able to tell me why I was continually thinking of Ba
 Balzac as I read it. I think it must have been old Bricolin.

Here are a few lines from the first Chorus in "Antigone"
 Kindly give me your honest opinion of them, and mention any
 places you do not like - no matter hom {sic} many they^{re} may be.

And there he stopped above our palaces,
 Raging around our seven gates with spears
 That thirsted for our blood; but ere his jaws
 Had found their feast, or ever tarry flames
 Had seized our crown of towers, in his rear
 Sounded a battle-crash of dragon foes
 Against him, unresisting, and he fled.
 For Jove doth inexpressibly detest
 The braggart flaunting of an idle tongue;
 And when he saw them like a ringing stream
 Of gold on rushing in proud armor, swift
 With brandished flame he smote him down who strove
 To win the upper walls and even then
 To shout the battle-strain of victory.

This is just as I made it an hour ago, and so is subject to
 any amount of change. "There al^dready" would be better than

^c The words beneath "have"—"had" – "'have'" inclusive—are written in black ink.

"even then" in the next to the last line, but it would {=would} cripple the metre. "Stopped" in the first line is a temporary word in place of something that is poetry. I now have about 140 lines "Englished" - a little over one tenth of the whole.

I had a long letter from Latham a short time ago, from which I will copy the following lines, which I think are more or less characteristic of the man: - "Since I have been here (Auburn) I have dawdled through a few novels - mostly rot - but one which you have often urged upon me - "L'Arna Doone." I was not fascinated by the story, but in all other respects I was charmed. - I am now reading a book on the Evidences of Christianity, which a pious friend has put into my hands. - I learned through Mead that you had been in Cambridg

is

Did you enjoy yourself there or ~~was~~ the place filled with ghosts? Seeing ghosts, however, is not altogether unpleasant."

I am reading Political Economy.

Sincerely

E.A.R.^e

If you care for Le Meunier in green paper covers I shall be glad to give it to you.

R.^f

UVA Typewritten.

NOTES

1. René François Armand (1839-1907), philosopher and poet, {winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1901}.
2. Sand's novel of 1845. (SL)
3. Published in 1860. (SL)

^d There is a "bridge" here in black ink connecting the "al" to the "r".

^e The valediction and signature are written in black ink.

^f This postscript is written vertically in black ink, to the right of the typed page.