

Colby



Colby College
Digital Commons @ Colby

Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and
Transcriptions

The Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson: A
Digital Edition

10-20-1894

To Joseph S. Ford - October 20, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson_transcriptions



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

Recommended Citation

Robinson, Edwin Arlington, "To Joseph S. Ford - October 20, 1894" (1894). *Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions*. 202.

https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson_transcriptions/202

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, Oct 20 - 1894.

My dear Ford

No, I have not read "Trilby", but I have read "The Ebb-Tide".¹ Have you? If you have not, take my advice & do so at once. It is one of the best things that has fallen in my way for a long time; there is something in it beyond description—incredible perhaps, but quite human & natural. Do not take the time to read "Le Meunier" until next summer, when you have nothing else to do. Since I sent you the book I feel almost ashamed of myself—not for its contents, which are good enough in their way, but for its binding—or rather its lack of it.

I thank you very much for your kind offer to lend me Trilby, but I think that I can get it from a friend here in town. But I should like very much to read "On ne badine pas &".² I hav{e} read two of Musset's "Proverbs" but did not care much for either of them—any more than I did for Croisilles³ & Pierre & Camille.⁴ Why I want to read the play in question is for the reason that I want to know Musset at his best in prose.

-2-

If I am not mistaken, this piece borders on the tragic and so must be better than *On ne saurait penser de tout*⁵ (is that right?) or *Il faut qu'un porte &*⁶ They, to my mind, are a little tiresome and flat, but then, I am not a Frenchman and so may not appreciate all the fine touches in them.

I can appreciate "Tartarin" however, and have had much sport with him. I am now reading the second book of his adventures, "Tartarin sur les Alpes".⁷ It is not so good as *Tartarin de Tarascon*,⁷ but it is ~~m~~ much better than the average "funny book". I have yet to read *Port Tarascon*⁷ and look forward to it with much pleasure. You now I "blew myself" a little on those ~~three~~ three books and hav them in a binding to suit my own tastes, which is no small thing. If there is anything that I mortally detest, it is a good book in cheap binding; if possible, that is worse than a cheap book in a good binding. "Sartor Resartus," and the like, in gaudy nineteenth century bindings on thick cheap paper—all for twenty five cents, breaks my heart. Returning to

Daudet, it is hard for me to believe the author of Tartarin to be the same man that wrote "Jack". I have spoken before about that book and now want to know if you have read it. If you have not, you can do me a favor by giving me permission to send you a copy. It is a great novel, and one that every

-3-

man and woman should read for the human lessons it contains. I know that you are not one to throw it down and condemn it because it is hard and gloomy. I must confess that it doesn't "come out well" as the women say, but it comes out in just the way it should. Some critics have called it an abuse of pathos, but that is very narrow criticism. Henry James⁸ comes nearer to it when he calls it a "brilliant photography of pain"; but I cannot agree with him when he condemns the episode of Dr Rivals & his daughter as the weak spot in the book. I know I have not yet arrived at Mr. James's perfected heartlessness in such matters, and I am not sure that I care to; but I do know, if I know anything, that Cecille (I think that is her name) is a necessity—and that pretty much as Daudet has painted her. Of course the master character of the book is D'Argenton. Then comes Jack's mother. I hope you will consent to read this novel, because it is one of the best things France has given us; only, it must be read with both eyes and the reader's whole soul. Aside from the human qualities it contains, it is a monument of literature. The style is a little suggestive of Hawthorne (though I cannot tell why) in its obstinate perfection.

-4-

I have just read a story by your friend of the glittering whiskers, F.C. de Sumichrast, entitled "The Untold Word." It is a dream of mesmeric possibilities and is a surprisingly good thing. You have probably read it long before this. It is very suggestive of its author and for that reason, if for no other, is unusually bright.

They are making a great noise now about Villier de l'Isle Adam.⁹ Can you tell me where I can find out something about him? All I know is that he

wrote a story called "The Secret of the Scaffold",¹⁰ which I have never read. I am going to get it soon, however, together with Champfleury's "Le Violon de Faïence".¹¹ They, with many other good things, are in the "Auteurs Célèbres" series--20¢^a,--readable little books, but not exactly de luxe. The print is good, and their whole get up suggests respectability--a thing which Jenkin's Contes Choisis never did.—I now have at hand "Le Maître de Forges" and "The Greater Glory". Two good novels but rather long for my poor old eyes.

I have an ambitious winter's work laid out—and have three novels well under way—in my mind. Don't worry too much about my short stories. If nothing happens I am going to write a volume of them this winter and then go for "Roman Bartholow".¹³ Equalize the accent of "Roman" with an (ä) and you have a pretty good name. Suggests aristocracy.

Sincerely,
E.A.R.

UVA

NOTES

1. By Robert Louis Stevenson in collaboration with Lloyd Osbourne, 1894.
2. *On ne badine pas avec L'Amour and Fantasio* by Louis De Musset (1810-1857).
3. Musset's novella of 1839. (SL)
4. *Pierre et Camille*, Musset's novella of 1844. (SL)
5. The correct title of this play by Musset is *On ne saurait penser à tout* (1849). (SL)
6. *Il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée*, a play by Musset of 1845. (SL)
7. The three "Tartarin" novels: *Tartarin de Tarascon* (1872); *Tartarin sur les Alpes* (1885); *Port-Tarascon* (1890). (SL)
8. See the letter to Smith, March 4, 1894. (SL)
9. French Symbolist dramatist, novelist, and short-story writer (1838-1889). (SL)
10. "Le secret de l'échafaud", published in *L'Amour suprême* (1886). (SL)
11. Champfleury's novel of 1862. (SL)
12. *Le Maître de forges* ("The Ironmaster", published in 1882) by Georges Ohnet (1848-1918).^b
- 13.^c *Roman Bartholow*, a long novel in verse, not published until 1923.

^a WA reads "206".

^b WA's note slightly edited for style.

^c This is WA's note 8, edited slightly for style.