

My dear Ford,

I am glad to hear that you have been reading Coppée, but am sorry to be obliged to tell you that Leconte de Lisle is still a stranger to me. As you well know, I intended to buy Poemes Antiques and Mon Franc Parler; but I fell in with Tryon's brother (who, by the way, is a very good fellow) and the natural consequence was that I was compelled to borrow the wherewithal to get back to Maine - where there are - fortunately for me - no "Pop" concerts, nor much of anything else to interfere with the desperately even tenor of my way. However, between my pipe and my beans and my lofty genius, I manage to get along very well. I am now at work upon "Theodore" - a story about three times as long as "Marshall", and which will amount to something or nothing - ~~and~~ and upon my translation of Antigone - a thing, I fear, of more pleasure than profit. Of course there can really be no profit from it except the practice (which is considerable) and the personal satisfaction of having done the thing.

If you are so well pleased with "Longueus & Brèves, I wonder what you will say when you take up "Vingt Contes Nouveaux." which seems to me to be one of the most remarkable volumes of short stories ever printed. In most of his books Coppée has an unpleasant way of stuffing his covers with mediocre sketches for the sake of making a bigger book. This is true alike of "Contes en Prose", "Contes Rapides" and, in my opinion, the book you have just read; but in Vingt Contes there is nothing of the kind. Every story is a little masterpiece, though perhaps none of them are much better than "Le Portrait" and "Vitrioleuse." But they are entirely different: they are wider and go deeper into this confounded muddle we call human nature. The ^{book} is a classic of common things; the style is a kind of idealized realism. From a mechanical point of view, I fancy the finest thing in the book is "La Soeur de Lait." "L'Enfant-Bibelot" is perhaps the most striking. I hope you will read this book, because I want you to tell me if you know of any writer who has made a book of twenty stories and kept them all up to such a standard. When my circumstances change a little I shall read the author you recommended. Poetry as an art always interests me, and, more than that, I have great confidence in your judgment of French writers. I am not always willing to bow to my friends when on English or American ground, but I have not your familiarity with the literary doings of Frenchmen.

Excepting Job and Polyeucte, I have not read much of anything lately. Will it seem wicked if I tell you that I found Job just a little slow? I do not mean by this that I did not like it immensely - that is inevitable, "as the sparks fly upward" but still it seems to me that the poem drags in places. I trust you will also forgive for thinking, during the reading, there that may be certain wise men in Cambridge to-day who utter vain knowledge and fill their bellies with the east wind. You will think it incredible, I suppose, that I have never read Job before, but must make the best of it. I am reading the Bible this summer instead of modern novels and newspapers. I like the change.

As for Polyeucte, I think I like it, next to Andromaque, the best of ~~all~~ the French tragedies I have read - five, I think, in all. I cannot speak from a very wide reading, but I am slow to believe that there are any - unless it be "Phaedra" that would give me the satisfaction I have found in reading the two just mentioned. It is hard for me to conceive of the same Peter Crow ~~re~~ writing Polyeucte and Le Cid. The last named never pleased me: I never could find any humanity in it. The girl is nothing compared with Pauline. Romantic and artificial as Polyeucte may be, the human complexities of the thing are real for all time. Le Cid too strongly anticipates the literary fireworks of Hernani. (I am always tempted to put another "r" at the end of the second syllable of that word.)

I shall not forget your kind offer to hand my stuff to Mr. Brown. I may conclude to let you try him with "Theodore" and "Marshall" some day - he may be able to give me some good advice ~~advice~~, if nothing more. I imagine he will feel most like advising me to stop writing. Do not think that I do not fully appreciate your kindness in offering to do this, but just remember that I am not good at saying things upon such occasions---By the way, have you read Lowell's essay on "Rousseau and the Sentimentalists?" It seems to me brilliant and inadequate, but I do not hold myself competent to judge such work with any wisdom. I should like your opinion of it, however, if you can give it.

Write whenever the spirit moves, and believe me

Yours sincerely,

John Brown, M.A.
July 19-1894

Rob