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Some Robinson Letters In My Collection

Howard George Schmitt
SOME ROBINSON LETTERS IN MY COLLECTION

By HOWARD GEORGE SCHMITT

IT is interesting to me to learn that Colby College has received Edwin Arlington Robinson's copy of Virgil. I wonder whether he wrote anything in it.* This acquisition reminds me of two letters which came into my possession nearly four years ago. They were written by Robinson to his friend, Arthur R. Gledhill. Why these letters did not accompany the fifty or more Robinson-Gledhill letters now in the Widener Library at Harvard I do not know. Writing from the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire, Robinson addressed his boyhood-friend as follows:

* Robinson used a copy of Virgil's Works with notes by Carl Ruaeus (Philadelphia, H. C. Carey, 1825) which his father and his brother had used before him. Since the poet's death the book has remained in the possession of his niece Mrs. William Nivison, by whom it has now been deposited in the Colby library. It contains about a dozen notes in the early handwriting of Robinson—chiefly dates when he completed his readings. For instance, he finished Book II on November 11, 1888; Book VII on January 31, 1889; Book X on March 30, 1889. At the end he wrote: “Finished Aeneid May 12, 1889. E. A. Robinson.”—Editor.
Colby Library Quarterly

Colony Hall, Peterborough, N. H., July 8, 1930

Dear GLEDHILL,

I have often thought of you during the past forty years and have wondered what you were doing. Somehow I felt pretty sure that you were alive, but hadn’t the remotest notion of your whereabouts until your letter came the other day. You write as if you were fairly well contented, which at sixty is about all we can ask, and more than most of us can say. I have been over a more or less rough road, but on the whole haven’t much to growl about. A fellow with my trade mustn’t expect too much attention or interest from a hard-boiled, child-minded world, and the wonder is that I haven’t been exterminated long before now. I wonder if you still have your illustrated Cooper’s Virgil. This is a Virgil Year, and you might take it down and dust it off in honor of his anniversary. I saw Moore in Gardiner in 1925 and found him much the same as ever — though I’m afraid things haven’t been going any too well with him. Spider Longfellow is prosperous in Boston and Atwood is still in a bank in Auburn. I don’t know anything about Sawyer, whether he is living or dead. With his handicap he must have had a fairly hard time. Your news of my being seen in Los Angeles surprises me, as I have never been west of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

With all sorts of good wishes,

Yours always sincerely,

E. A. ROBINSON

I may take a ride out to your place sometime — if you will put me up for the night.

E. A. R.

* * *

Colony Hall, Peterborough, N. H., August 22, 1930

Dear GLEDHILL,

The old Cooper’s Virgil brings back many memories, and I find it hard to believe that those illuminating pictures were made more than forty years ago. In those days forty years looked longer than they do now, but even now
they seem fairly long. I wonder what another forty years will do to us.* I am glad to have the book and will turn it over to my married niece, who will like to have it in the family.

Your invitation to California is rolling itself over in my mind, and I may get out there sometime. I suppose every Yankee should see the other shore of this queer country before he dies, but as I get older, it is harder and harder to get me started. But I am glad to know where you are and that the years haven’t been too rough with you. Let me hear from you whenever you will. Address The Macmillan Company, 60 Fifth Avenue New York.

Yours always sincerely,

* We know one thing.

E. A. ROBINSON

Robinson’s writing from the MacDowell Colony brings to mind another letter in my possession—one that he wrote to Edwin Markham about that very grand old lady, Mrs. Edward MacDowell. I think she won the award that E. A. R. was writing about. Here is his letter:

Peterborough, N. H., July 31, 1924

Dear Mr. Markham

I am taking the liberty of writing to you as one of the judges of The Pictorial Review’s Achievement Award for 1924 in the hope that you are sufficiently acquainted with the general nature and great importance of the Edward MacDowell Association, and the MacDowell Colony here in Peterborough, and at the same time sufficiently interested, to give the name of Mrs. Edward MacDowell, who has brought the whole thing to pass, your most serious consideration. Of course this is not to be interpreted even remotely as a request, but it is written frankly in the hope of concentrating your attention upon Mrs. MacDowell’s importance. When I add that seven of my ten books of poems (whatever their merit may be) have been written
here, you will not mind a little enthusiasm on my part.
With the best of wishes to you and to Mrs. Markham
Yours very sincerely
E. A. ROBINSON

One thing leads to another. Robinson's statement that seven of his ten books (in 1924) had been written at the MacDowell Colony reminds me of his practice of turning his minutely written MS. over to Miss Esther W. Bates for typing, and one of the letters that he wrote to her tells about his being hit by a baseball. Since it shows the humorous side of Robinson so clearly, I will quote the entire letter:

257 West Newton Street [Boston], November 6, 1933
Dear Miss Bates

The copy and MS. of Amaranth came to-day and I hope seriously that the work hasn't been a bore for you. Just now I'm not to look at them, but I know that they are all right, with possibly a few slight errors of no consequence. Probably the copy will soon be peppered with alterations — so you see that a few small slips of yours will count for little.

I was surprised to see the Tate quotation in The Transcript, and don't yet quite see the point of it. I wasn't in any mood or condition for an interview, and may have shown it in spite of myself. I suspect that the inquisitor doesn't know or care much about poetry, though he was pleasant and agreeable enough. For that matter, how many people do know or care much about poetry? I know so few who do that sometimes I wonder what makes me write it. But I don't know that anyhow.

I want to see you for dinner as soon as I'm in better shape. I had my head x-rayed, but they found nothing in it. I was pretty sure that there was nothing there. I was hit in the street two years ago by a base-ball and nearly knock-outé as French newspapers say of prize fighters. But
apparently it left no mark — and my headache is much better. I hope to be presentable before long.

Yours with many thanks

E. A. ROBINSON

SOME RECENT ACQUISITIONS

BY N. ORWIN RUSH

THE past fall was a time of special rejoicing in the Colby Library, for we have received a number of most welcome gifts. In particular, the libraries of the late Dr. Ada Bearse Herlihy and of the late Dr. Francis K. Ball comprise two of the most extensive additions to the college library in recent years.

Dr. Ada Bearse Herlihy was, throughout her life, interested in English history. At an early age she began to collect with a discriminating eye a library of English history and literature, biography and art. By the time of her death she had assembled some three thousand volumes, many of them valuable rareties, which have now come to Waterville.

The Francis K. Ball library is the collection of a scholar interested primarily in the classics, religion, and philosophy. His library consists of about fifteen hundred volumes.

The following recent gifts of books are also worth mentioning: Lewis Galantiere’s edition of the Journals, 1851-1870, of Edmond Louis and Jules Alfred de Goncourt, and Ralph Roeder’s Men of the Renaissance: Four Lawgivers, from Daniel J. Munson, ’92; Bennett’s Standard Chemical and Technical Dictionary, from T. Raymond Pierce, ’98; George G. Booth’s The Cranbrook Press, from John Humpstone’s Man and Message, and D. B. Updike’s Richard Smith, first English settler (autographed by the author), from Edward F. Stevens, ’89; Eleusis, a lyrical drama by Louis V. Ledoux,