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To Harry de Forest Smith - October 11, 1891

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

717 Cambridge St.,
Cambridge, Mass., Oct. 11
1891

My Dear Smith,--

According to agreement, I will now try to inform you what I am doing and how I am feeling. I have been feeling by turns hopeful and blue for the past two weeks; it is the change, more than anything else, I suppose. But the fact is, I am not fixed upon the firmest footing possible; I am where I have no business. This is what I mean:

When I came to Harvard, the idea of a special <requesting> wishing to take courses primarily intended for upper class men and graduates, with nothing to show but a diploma from a second-rate high school, rather dazzled the faculty; and the result was, that at half past ten o'clock Thursday A.M. (registration closed at 1.00) I was no nearer entering Harvard College than I was when we were talking it over in the "bower." But when I succeeded in fully convincing them that I had no idea of entering as a special with the intention of gaining an A.B. in a year or two by jumping to one of the upper classes, they looked more favorably upon my case. I succeeded in registering about 12.45, but I do not feel easy yet. Prof. Lathrop or rather Mr. Lathrop, who has charge of the English A division (Composition and Rhetoric) has an abnormally swelled (swollen?) head; and I am in that division merely on trial. If I were dropped, I do not know how it would be about my keeping on in the other studies.

This is my program:

English A Tu, Sat. 12 (Sander's Theater)
(This class numbers over 500.)

English 3 (Anglo-Saxon) Mon, Wed, Fri. @ 11	} Prof. Child.
English 10 (Shakespeare) " " " 10	

English 9. (Prose writers 19th century) Friday @ 3.30
Mr. Gates.

French A. Mon, Fri. @ 1.30—Dr. Marcou.
" " Tu @ 3.30—Prof. de Sumichrast.

English A (written work) Upper Dane—Th. @ 11
Prof. L. B. R. Briggs.

I was obliged to give up the idea of taking German, as it would make a general split in the time-arrangement. My eyes are troubling me, too. As to Anglo-Saxon, the rudiments are hellish. (I know you will pardon me; I dislike profanity in correspondence as heartily as any man, but this is the only

adequate adjective I can think of). The Shakespeare is of course fine and Prof. Child is the man for the place. You have doubtless heard of him.¹ French seems to come quite easy. At the end of the year I shall be expected to take up an ordinary French novel and read it without any idea of translation. I hope it may prove true.

The "Prose Writers of the 19th century" means work; I am beginning to wish that I had not taken it. Four recitations a day are too many for a man who has done no compulsory studying for over three years. To be candid, I am working about three times as hard as I expected to. It will probably be of no injury to my system, but it is a most decided surprise. When I get fairly at work, however, things may look differently and come easier.

By the way, I submitted the White Ship ballade² to the Advocate³ the other day, and received a card of acceptance yesterday morning. "Sic itur ad astra (!)"⁴ I have the idea of a ballade with a refrain, "When Themes are due on Friday next." If I ever work it out I may spring it on the Lampon.

Upon the whole I am living a tolerably comfortable life and am probably a deal more fortunate than I realize. I shall probably begin to thoroughly enjoy myself about next May—just before I leave. I think some of taking a private class in penmanship to pay for my tobacco.

Trusting that I shall receive a letter from you to-morrow, I am

Yours truly
E. A. Robinson

HCL US, 29-31.

NOTES

1. Francis James Child (1825-1896) was Boylston professor of rhetoric and oratory at Harvard, and most famous for his five-volume anthology of *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, published between 1882 and 1898. (SL)

2.^a "Ballade of the White Ship," written in 1889.

3. *The Harvard Advocate*, one of the two literary journals published at Harvard. Although EAR was immediately successful in placing his poems in the *Advocate*, he never was able to convince the clique that edited *The Harvard Monthly*, the more prestigious publication, that his work was worth printing.

4. "Thus is accomplished the ascent to the stars." Virgil, *Aeneid*, ix, 641.

^a This and the following two notes are 1, 2, and 3 respectively in WA's manuscript.