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To Harry de Forest Smith - February 21, 1893

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Cambridge, Feb^a 21 – '93.

My dear Smith,

Here it is Tuesday evening, and I think it is high time I was writing to you. I have not received any letter from you yet, but I suppose the railroads have been so blocked that everything is delayed. Or possibly you have not written. Such a thing may happen and I can easily excuse you if that is the case. If I remember rightly, I have been guilty of such negligence myself—the present instance seems to be something very like it.

I began college work again yesterday and now it seems quite natural again. I read, or thought I did, a German farce during my sickness, but I find the second reading about as hard as the first. There seems to be a devil in the German language that refuses to be cast out. But I suppose that like everything else that is different, time patience, etc^b, is the only successful treatment. I had hopes of being able to read German tolerably well by June, but I must confess that it looks a little doubtful now; but when I look back, I remember that after four months of French I knew practically nothing about the language. If I make the gain in G. that I did in French during the last half-year I shall be pleasantly surprised.

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I got my thesis back in English 7 yesterday with a clean A. That made me feel a little better, though I do not think a mark here signifies much of anything, as a rule^c. In German I got a C on the midyear^d. Poll asked me if I was satisfied with it and I had three minds to tell him that I was not. I thought better of it though and said that it was all I expected. We are beginning to translate stories into German, which is hell for me. I can go the translation very well, but draw the line at composition.

I would give a hundred dollars (if I had them) to get over my nasty habit of microscopic writing. I cannot seem to cure it, try as hard as I may. Four or five years ago I wrote well enough, but I

^a WA adds a period here.

^b WA adds a period here.

^c WA adds a period here.

^d WA reads "midyears".

seem to have gone steadily down hill in that way (and perhaps in every other) during the later years of my life. There may be an explanation for it; but I cannot find it out.--I found a paper covered edition of Rudyard Kiplings^e poems to day^f and it is the nearest to a complete edition that I have seen. There are some important ones omitted, but it is quite a pleasant volume^g Will send it to you to-morrow.

To morrow^h is Washingtonsⁱ Birthday, and I shall spend my time in reading French, comitting a fable and writing an essay on "Fielding and Thackeray."--I have

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lately finished Tom Jones (1084 big pages) and have no desire to repeat it. It is great, but there is a lack of human interest to me which makes it a little slow. The introductory chapter to the various books is the (are the?) best part of it.

Read Mrs^j Browning yesterday all through one of Prof. Royces^{1k} lectures. This may startle you, but he is not at home in psychology, and I get absolutely nothing from what he says. Prof^l James' book is quite enough. My eyes are a little lame this evening, so think I will stop here. Hope to get a letter from you to-morrow. Sent two Nations yesterday.

Sincerely

E.A.R.^m

Excuse folding. My "eye" was bad. [On verso.]

HCL US, 86-87.

NOTES

1. Josiah Royce (1855-1916), a significant 19th century American philosopher, and a Harvard

^e WA has "Kipling's".

^f WA reads "to-day".

^g WA adds a period here.

^h WA has "to-morrow".

ⁱ WA has "Washington's".

^j WA adds a period here.

^k WA has "Royce's".

^l WA has a period here.

^m WA omits the underline.

professor from 1882 until his death. (SL)

2. William James (1842-1910), brother of Henry James the novelist, was a highly influential American philosopher and psychologist. James was Royce's close associate and good friend, and was professor at Harvard from 1873 to 1907. Today, he is perhaps most famous for his *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). The "book" in question here was almost certainly either his *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), or his *Psychology (Briefer Course)* (1892). (SL)