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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 ballade\(^2\) to the Advocate\(^3\) 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 Lampoon.

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


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.