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To Harry de Forest Smith - October 25, 1891

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

717 Cambridge St.,
Harvard University.

Cambridge, Mass., Oct 25 1891^a

My Dear Smith,--

I have just been having a quiet spell of thinking, the while I have smoked my new bull-dog. This thinking is bad business for a man, but sometimes he falls into it ~~it~~ in spite of all he can do. I fear that I do so altogether too often. If you care to know what I have been thinking about, I will say that I have been wondering what the deuce I am here for. This is an old story and you are doubtless heartily sick of it; but to be honest, I cannot get over the idea that I am wasting time and money. To be sure I shall be able to read a French novel—unless I fail in the course—by next June, but I might have done that without leaving Gardiner. I can-

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not understand how a text-book can be so lucidly written as Chardenal's "First French Course"¹ is. Any person with ordinary ability could take it up of his own accord and read ordinary French with
after
comparative ease ~~in~~ six months of regular application. The pronunciation is of course another matter. I called on Prof. de Sumichrast Thursday evening and found him in his library with his two dogs. "That gentleman", he said, pointing to a York-

^a Everything in red here is part of the printed Harvard stationary. The month, date and "1" for the year were written in black. WA omits "Harvard University."

shire pup asleep in an easy chair, "is apparently satisfied with worldly existence." At the same time he was holding a snow-white terrier of some breed or other in his arms. I had a great time with the Prof. for about an hour, and when I ~~eam~~ left he came to the door lugging the pup in his arms. He advised me to drop Anglo-Saxon, as Prof. Child did, and I shall

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probably have no difficulty in so doing. Then I shall have a little time for breathing. ^bI have got to read one of Scotts novel's for English 9. Think I shall take Guy Mannering, as it is the only one I have with me, and is one of the shortest that Sir W. has written. A very little of Scott will go a great way with me. I shall have to write an essay on some subject dealing with him before next Friday.

I have just written one on "Sydney Smith: His character as displayed in his writings." It is a somewhat marvelous production, I expect, though it may never immortalize the writer. Shakespeare is going on finely, ~~th~~ and there will be the devil of an examination before long on Hamlet and Shakespeare's life and times. I shall have

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to do considerable reading before it comes off, but I do not apprehend much trouble. A fellow can generally do something with a subject that interests him.

I am moving rather slowly through L'Abbé Constantin, as it comes hard when one is absolutely ignorant of French grammar. De Sumichrast is beginning to conduct recitations in French,--but I guess I told you so last Sunday. I have not sent any more contributions to the Advocate yet but think

^b WA reads this space as a paragraph break and hence starts a new paragraph on the next line.

I will sometime next week. The number I sent you is not a fair sample of the periodical; you have probably seen enough of them to know that. And you will also see that the editors spoiled my ballade in the mechanical punctuation they adopted. This letter is rather personal, but I trust you will overlook that and let me know what you and [=are] doing, and how the Columbia scheme is going on.--Shall look for a letter to-morrow noon. Y's--Robinson

HCL US, 33-35.

NOTES

1. C.A. Chardenal, *First French Course, or Rules and Exercises for Beginners*. Probably the "New and Enlarged Edition" published in 1886 (Boston: Allyn and Bacon). (SL)