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To Harry de Forest Smith - March 18, 1892

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Boston, Mar^a 18(?)-'92

My dear Smith,

I have come in from Cambridge this afternoon and am now sitting in Whitney's room, smoking his tobacco and using his paper. He has a note on his table telling anyone who comes in to wait until 5.00 P.M. If he comes on time the gentleman from Maine will appear in about ten minutes.

From your letters I should say that you are turning "society-man" in a way that will leave me all in the shade. I have been to two or three receptions at Mrs. de Sumichrast's but will not attend any more. I was not made for that kind of thing and had better keep out of it. It a [=is] fairly a mystery to me how a fellow can ~~mix~~ mix himself with a roomfull of strangers and enjoy himself. According to my ideas of pleasure the thing is an impossibility, but my ideas are probably wrong. I don't know but they always are. There is one thing, however, that I do know, and that is that passing through one of these "at-homes" here

-2-

in Cambridge—they are very informal too—is like passing through Hell to one who dislikes it. When I watch these "polished young gentlemen" floating around from one girl to another, keeping their tongues wagging all the time and saying things that no man or woman that God ever made could remember five minutes, I begin to realize the difference in humanity. I must confess that I envy them their powers to a certain extent: such accomplishments are convenient in emergencies. No, the truth is that I never enjoy † myself so much as when I am with one or two congenial souls talking on some congenial subject, and smoking the pipe. This is a misfortune, but the truth may as well out.

There is (to change the subject) something very rotten in the department of English Composition here at Harvard. There is a system of "third hour

^a WA has a period here..

exercises" in English A that is a curiosity. Every Thursday at 11 A.M. I go to Upper Dane and there write a theme (!^b) on some topic generally assigned after I enter the room, and have from fifteen to twenty-five minutes to write it in. The next week they come back with decorations in red ink. These decorations are very interesting. Sometimes my paper will have none at all (which [is] a rather unusual thing, by the way) and again they will be so covered that I am hardly able to make out the original. This all comes from their being examined by different instructors, who are something better than boys. If there is any course where the best instruction should be received, it is in the department of Eng. Comp. I pulled a B+ somehow but do not consider it of any more account than a D as far as showing the real value of my work is concerned. In English 9 I expected an A- and got a B-. That barely excuses me from the hour examination to be held the Friday before the Easter recess. If I ever get that thesis on Pen-dennis written, it may raise the mark a little. It may surprise you that I care so much for marks—but then, I think I have explained how they may be of value.

Saben has a room at #16 Hancock St., and is enjoying life to its utmost. He spends his time in reading, smoking cigars, and buying books. I don't think I could take things so easy under his circum-

-3-

stances—I surely hope I could not.

Last ~~Saturd~~ Monday evening I went to see Soth-ern¹ in the "Dancing Girl"² at the Hollis St.³ I think it is one of the strongest plays that I have ever seen. It is rather disagreeable in plot, but one hardly notices it on account of the fine acting and sparkling dialogue which is continually inserted to lighten the gloom. I have half a mind to go again to-night. Rather think I shall be fool enough to pay three dollars to hear Patti⁴ in "La Traviata"⁵ next Thursday evening—that is if I can get a seat. That is the only grand opera excepting "Trovatore"⁶ that

^b WA has a question mark.

ever interested he [=me] much. The music is great, as you doubtless know. Farce comedies have been the ruling amusements here this winter, and I would like to see a law passed rendering the composition of one of them a capital offence. If there is anything pertaining to the drama more disgusting or degrading, I have yet to see it.--Well, Whitney does not seem to appear, and while I am at the bottom of the page I think I may as well stop. Please excuse the ultra or super-colloquial tone of this mess, and write as often as you find time. Yours,

Robinson.

HCL US, 57-59.

NOTES

1. Edward Hugh Sothorn (1859-1933), already well-known at this time for a variety of successful roles, and later to be even more reknowned for his famous Shakespearean collaborations with Julia Marlowe (whom he married in 1911). (SL)
2. By English dramatist Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929), known for his realism. *The Dancing Girl* made its successful Broadway debut in August, 1891, with Sothorn in the lead. It was a controversial play, which the *Illustrated American*, in its October 3, 1891 issue, declared as being "not calculated to please audiences composed of Christian men and women," a play, indeed, which "no young woman should be permitted to see, and which cannot be discussed in the family circle" (VIII, No. 85, 305). (SL)
3. Boston theater that was open between 1885 and 1935. (SL)
4. Adelina Patti (1843-1919) was an Italian-French soprano, a major opera star of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. (SL)
5. By Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) and first performed in 1853. Patti starred as Violetta at the Mechanics Building Auditorium (Mechanics Hall) in Boston on March 26, 1892. (SL)
6. *Il trovatore*, another opera by Verdi, first performed in 1853. (SL)