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5-14-1894

To Joseph S. Ford - May 14, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO JOSEPH S. FORD

Gardiner, Maine,
May 14, 1894.

My dear Ford,,

Owing to my bucolic labors around the house, I do not now find much time to write letters - that is, letters of any length; so you must excuse me if this one is shorter than you anticipate. Perhaps you will thank me.

In your last letter you had considerable to say about Professor de S.¹ Your words surprised me somewhat, but I am far from convinced that you are in the right regarding his feelings toward me - if he has any at all. There are two good reasons why I think that he could not be particularly glad to see me: first, because, excepting as one of his innumerable passing acquaintances, he never knew me; second, y because I gave him every reason to believe that I cared little or nothing for him or for his instruction - which, I am glad to say, was far from the truth. The fact is, I was in such a hopeless muddle on account of my poor health and certain domestic complications, that it was impossible for me to do any work except that which I did mechanically. The fact that I worked from ten to fifteen hours every week on German and received a D- at the end of the year will go to

to

show you about how much soul I put in^ my work. The slight knowledge I gained of French during my first year - when I was feeling much better - was all that saved me from a total fiasco in that language. I read so much outside my prescribed course that I had to absort something. This partly counterweighed the effect of my carelessness in copying excercises, and gave me a C at the finals. C is a nasty mark in anything for a man with a conscience, but it was all that I deserved, I suppose. I must confess that I was somewhat surprised at being put on the black list just before mid-years, but that, like many other things, was the result of my carelessness; I can say without egotism that it was not due to my ignorance. I do not know much French, but I do know enough to keep my head above water in "1a" - provided that Fates are not playing with me all the time. But then, I have nothing whatever against Sumichrast: he is engaged as a professor, not as a mind-reader. If a time ever comes when I can explain a few things to him, I shall be very glad; if such a time never comes, then things must stand as they are. I thank you for your good words and for your friendly interest, but, as I have just said, I cannot conceive of his having any interest

whatever in the matter. Humanity does not demand everything.

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I have just planted an onion-bed - big red Victorias - and am anticipating great smells for next fall and winter. But beans are the things I pride myself upon: a man who does not like beans is only partially constructed. And then there is all the other stuff that goes to make a garden and to gladden a lonely man's heart. If I thought that the Professor raised beans, I half fancy that I should call and see him during my brief trip to Harvard next June; but a man who compels unsuspecting Freshmen {sic} and Sophomores to read About is not a man I should expect to care much for the sturdy vigor of leguminous climbers. I have egg-plants and okra (for the fun of raising them) and five kinds of tomatoes - together with many other profitable herbs too numerous to mention. When I look at them I feel like singing the old French song:

J' ai du bon tabac dans ma tabatière,
J' ai du bon tabac, tu n'en auras pas, etc.²

In short, I am what I call a microscopic farmer. I mix my work with my reading and writing - though I am not doing much of that nowadays - and, were it not for a constant fear that I am overtaxing my eyes, I might enjoy myself fairly well for the present. My future is so cloudy that I am inclined to look too much the other way; but I have great hopes in a clearing up of some kind before long - that is, if I do my share to bring it about.

Have you ever read Coppée's "Contes Rapides"? If you never have, I wish you would, to please me, read three of them some day when you get a chance. I refer to "Fille de Tristesse" L'Orgue de Barbarie, and Le Numéro du Régiment - also A Table— if you do not know it in the "Odd Number" translation.

By the way, will you send me one of your photographs? Tryon sent me his the other day, leaving you the last of my old friends of whom I have no likeness. When I have some taken, I shall make a general distribution of them among my seven friends.^x Vale,

Robinson

^xI should include S.E.J.³ With all his faults he is a good fellow at heart and has enough gall to carry him beyond the need of all friendly sympathy.^a

^a The signature and Robinson's note are written in black ink.

NOTES

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1. Frederic de Sumichrast, EAR's faculty adviser and French teacher.
2. From a humorous song attributed to Abbe L'Attaignant (1697-1779):
I have some good tobacco in my snuffbox,
I have some good tobacco, and you won't have any of it!
(SL)
3. Shirley E. Johnson, member of the Corn Cob Club from Kentucky.