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To Harry de Forest Smith - October 18, 1891

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Harvard University.

Cambridge, Mass., Oct 18 1891^a

My Dear Smith,--

Your letter has made me quite ~~uneasy~~ uneasy; it seems to me that I am most as anxious that the Columbia business should turn out all right as you can be yourself. I have always had an idea that you were intended for something above the common herd, and shall continue to think so for some time to come. Write and let me know how things are looking in that direction.

I have fallen into quite a nest of Bowdoin boys though of course I do not know them. Hubbard ('90) has the next room to mine. He is the only fellow in the University that I am any way acquainted with, thus far. They are a devilish queer lot; I have of course had some conversation with quite a

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a {sic} number but I have not yet seen one that I have [been] at all attracted by. This is my nature, and it will probably play the very devil with me all through my life. But as for cultivating familiarity with Tom Dick & Harry wherever one may be, it is out of the question in my case. I shall probably come across someone after a time, with whom I can smoke a pipe and talk of Matthew Arnold Andrew Lang & Co, but he has not appeared yet. My "ballade" is in the last Advocate,
it
will get one to-morrow and send ^ to you.¹

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

This is your own request, remember.

I do not think the college papers are very well patronized here. It is a rare thing to meet a fellow with one in his hand, and the very fact of my contribution being accepted & printed within two weeks of my coming here would go to prove there is no great deluge of manuscript submitted to
for
the editors. I have subscribed to the Ad-

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vocate and the Monthly, but I doubt if I ever appear in the latter. It seems to be a medium for airing the work of its editors. There is not an article in prose or verse (excepting the alumnus' opening paper on Dumas, fils) that is not contributed by one of the staff. However I think I shall spring something on them pretty soon, to see how it will work.

Here is a pleasant quatrain (barring the rhyme) from the Lampoon:

In Boston town her sons may drown
Their
Her cares in sweet oblivion;
But coppers here swipe kegs of beer
And at the station divvy 'em.

I have come to the conclusion that it will be for my interest to drop Anglo-Saxon, for two reasons: First, because it will take at least ten hours work

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every week that could be spent far more profitably upon French and English.

Second, because my eyes are going back on me and the less glossary hunting and grammar consultation I have to do, the better. And more than that I think I am practically wasting time, considering the fact that I am to have but one year in college. But the question is: can I drop it? I shall know by to-morrow night, I hope.

I have just read three pages of L'Abbé Constantin. I have to guess at half the words and all the tenses, and for that reason do not make very startling headway; but I think in a few weeks I shall surprise myself. At least, that is what Marcou & Sumichrast say—to the class, & not me.

I have got to write an essay on Sydney Smith², English as I have been taught, & on the first two chapters of Hill's Rhetoric³ before next Saturday. It has been so long since I have written anything like a theme that I feel a little anxious about these first

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3.^b

three. Sydney Smith is a gentleman for whom I have no particular regard, and I anticipate a ~~dry~~ rather dry job. As for the other two I had ought to make something from them

We have almost finished the first act of Hamlet and I have a better idea of the characters ,(especially Horatio) than I ever had before. I am anticipating great sport in this course, though ~~the~~{?} there will be a good deal of hard work combined with it. Prof. Child is a curiosity. I cannot conceive of a man's head being so packed with erudition as his. The only trouble is that he is old and hard of hearing. And speaking of ears, I went to see Dr Greene yesterday. He thinks it is looking a little better and gives

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me a little encouragement. There is a possibility that the operation may not be necessary. If it is so, it will mean a good deal to me, I can tell you. The idea of not syringing it out in the morning for a week to come makes me want to dance.

^b This numeral seems to be in EAR's hand, referring to the fact that this is the third sheet of paper for this letter.

Rum was rampant last night. The very buildings and trees were drunk. There will probably be some hot times here before Spring, and if the Parietal Committee⁴ mind their business they will be sadly afflicted with compulsory insomnia.

It may be an insult to write such a scrawl as this, but I will start in to write a sentence with something like care, and forget all about it in ten seconds, relapsing into my customary jerkiness. If you do not read it you will live quite as long as if you had. My ~~m~~Muse is drowsy. Yours very truly
#717 Cambridge St. Robinson.

HCL US, 31-33.

NOTES

1. "Ballade of the White Ship," *The Harvard Advocate* LII, No. 2 (October 16, 1891), 22. EAR reprinted it with a change of title to "Ballade of a Ship" in *TNB* and in *CN*; he did not retain it in *CP*.
2. Sydney Smith (1771-1845) was an English preacher and writer, famous as an advocate of emancipation for Roman Catholics, and for his wit. (SL)
3. A textbook composed by Harvard Boylston Professor of Rhetoric Adams Sherman Hill (1833-1910). (SL)
4. According to the *Laws of Harvard University, Relative to Undergraduates* (Cambridge: Folsom, Wells, and Thurston, 1841), the Parietal Committee was comprised of "[t]he officers resident within the College Walls" who "constitute[d] a permanent standing Committee," and whose responsibility was to "have particular cognizance of all tardinesses at prayers, and sabbath services and of all offences against good order and decorum within the College buildings and yard" (53). (SL)