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To Harry de Forest Smith - November 15, 1891

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

717 Cambridge St.

Harvard University.

Cambridge, Mass., Nov 15 *1891*^a

My Dear Smith,--

I am beginning to feel at home and am in a better frame of mind than when I wrote you that half lugubrious epistle telling you of my woes and uncertainties. Of course there is some uncertainty now, and will be until after the mid-years, but I am not going to trouble myself any more about it. "Sufficient unto the day, etc."¹

Whenever I think of a teacher's life I think of teachers' meetings, or conventions—whatever you call them. They must be purgatory to anyone save to damned fool{s}. Perhaps that is a little too strong, though, as our late preceptor GA Stuart, revels in them. It was he, who once on a time at New Portland affirmed that in the sentence,

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"The trees stand thick on the mountain", the adjective referred to the thickness of the wood and not to the number of the trees. I guess he was right, as "thickly" would be required to express numerical quantity. He must have blinked most jovially at himself and poked that lead-pencil along his right cheek in secret satisfaction of his intellectual prowess over the untaught knaves of northern Maine. They all hooted him but he heeded them now. He felt upon his immortal head the crown of individual supremacy and ~~doubt~~ doubtless went home and talked it over

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

with his wife. By the way, do you know anything of the whereabouts of that youthful prodigy, Freddy?²

I was never able to learn what Giles thought of me, though I have an impression that he considered me a hopeless case. When he caught Gledhill and I in the settee business his heart was well-nigh broken. So was mine, for that matter, and I always feel cheap when

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I think of it. His veracity, or their veracities, Walter Swanton and Billy Gay blew on us, and the consequence was that we lost our good character and four dollars. I think we regretted the latter more than the former, at the time, but now I would willingly give as many dollars as I could conveniently muster if the whole thing could be forgotten by all parties concerned.³

Here is an examination I took yesterday:

--English 9.--

[Spend 40 minutes on I. and twenty on II]^b

I

1. Give your impressions of any two of S. Smiths essays.
2. What are the characteristics of Jeffrey's style?
3. What dates (from 1750 to__) have seemed to you best worth remembering. Give reasons.

II. _____ are".

4. "Caleb^c Williams" as an attack on "things as they
5. What can you say of the origin of the ~~G~~ great Reviews? [either 4 or 5]^d

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I wrote a steady hour on it but cannot yet tell you how I came out. But I am fairly confident that a bad mark can only result from a failure in expressing myself clearly. In English A. (Comp & Rhet.)

^b The square brackets here and their contents are taken from the holograph.

^c WA has "Calbe".

^d The square brackets here, and their contents, are from the holograph.

I managed to get a "B", being one of about eighty in a class of 500. Better than I expected, though it does not amount to anything. The course doesn't, for that matter.

Last evening I went into town to see the Russell Comedy Co in the "City Directory".⁴ I think it is a little the flattest thing I ever witnessed on any stage. I cannot understand how the Athenians can support such stuff. Cheap farce-comedy is undermining the whole dramatic scheme and God only knows what we shall have a few years to come. Richard Mansfield plays "Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde"⁵ next Sat. evening & if nothing happens I shall be on hand to see it.

Last Wednesday, Dr Schuman came to see me and I went in to see him in

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the evening. Beer, oysters, pipes, cigars, & literary conversation were in order. It was the most thoroughly Bohemian evening I ever passed and one of the most satisfactory. The Doctor "uttered nothing base"⁶ during the whole time. I wished you were with us more than once: you would have enjoyed it.

For some reason or other I cannot take any particular interest in Harvard athletics, though I am as much a member of the University as any Senior. And I will say here that there is remarkably little feeling between the students of different grades. I am on comparatively good terms with a Senior, a Soph and two or three Specials. They are all alike, and all seem to be fellows of good common-sense. The "fast set" we hear so much about it not a fictitious body, but they keep themselves

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severely away from the common herd. I can generally tell one when I see him, and he is not much to see either.

The Professors are gentlemen; but when some upper-class man is temporarily promoted to some petty office like superintendent of exams, or assistant registrar, then authority is agonizing. They are harmless, however, and I rather enjoy watching them after I get used to their ways. I might do the same thing myself, unconsciously, should the opportunity present itself. But it will not.

There are eight bowling courts in the gym, and I am quite a fiend for that rather antiquated sport. As to the other appliances I have not touched them. I fear I am not an enthusiast on the subject of physical culture, though I am an excellent subject to [be] experimented with. My stooping shoulders are disfiguring, but I cannot bring myself to ~~to~~ a regular course of training. In fact, I cannot find the time.

Expect a letter to-morrow. Yours.

Robinson

HCL US, 38-40.

1. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (*King James Version*, Matt. 6:34).
- 2.^e Son of Giles Stuart.
3. See letter to Gledhill April 8, 1890.
4. A popular farce of the day. (SL)
5. Richard Mansfield (1857-1907) was an English actor who was famous for his lead roles (as *Jekyll and Hyde*) in this play based on Robert Louis Stevenson's novel of the same name. (SL)
6. ^fTennyson, "To the Queen," March, 1851.

^e This and the following three notes were numbered 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively in WA's manuscript.

^f This is WA's note 5.