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11-21-1892

To Harry de Forest Smith - November 21, 1892

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

1716 Camb.,
Nov^a 21 - '92

My dear Smith,

The dungy Thanksgiving week has come again and the College yard is reeking with the strong but honest odor of New England ordure. There is also another kind of dung that is noticeable here, particularly by those more interested in athletics. I speak of that rubbed in at the Harvard-Yale foot-ball game at Hampden Park on Sat-

-2-

urday. I was sorry that you could not be here, but perhaps it was better for your peace of mind that you were not. If you had seen that game your adoration of Yale's "manliness" would have received an unpleasant shock. I send with this a copy of the Sunday Herald and a copy of the Crimson for this morning. Yale's deliberate plan to physically disable Harvard's strongest end was so obvious that it was disgusting. The whole

-3-

thing was much like the Colosseum of old—twenty thousand people and two men half-killed.¹ A life time is not well lived without seeing this game once. I only got my ticket at the last minute and I am mighty glad that I got it. I don't think you need hesitate to pay ten or twelve dollars for the day if you ever get a chance to take

^a WA adds a period here.

the game in. The mere game is by
no means the whole of it. All
I hope is that you will never see
such brutality and dirtiness dis-

-4-

played upon any field as that
which characterized Yale's play on Satur-
day. Between half murdering two men
and having the umpire cheat us
out of a touch-down, the score does
not reflect any great credit on the Yale
men—though no one thinks that Har-
vard would have beaten.² It would
probably have been a tie. I do not
think you will have any complaint
to make with the Crimson's account of
it. It may surprise you to see
me enthusiastic over foot-ball, but
Saturday would have excited a corpse.

I sent you the books this morn-

-5-

ing^b--They are 45¢ each.

I ran across that Critic with
Pres. Hydes^{3c} book-notice in it & will
send it along. I bought a copy
of Austin Dobson's "At the Sign of the Lyre"
and was disappointed. I prefer
Kipling's "Ballads"^d At first I did
not care much for them but now
they are great.

"The old lost stars wheel back, dear lass,
 ^eThat blaze in the velvet blue.
They're all old friends on the old trail,
 our own trail, the out trail,
They're God's own guides on the Long Trail,⁴
 the ~~trail~~ trail that is always new".⁵ etc^f, etc.

^b WA adds a period here.

^c WA omits this partial underline and adds a possessive apostrophe.

^d WA has a period here.

^e WA does not read an indent here in the holograph. The line is not indented in the original poem.

Sincerely
Robinson

HCL US, 74-75.

NOTES

1. The final game of the season, and Harvard's only loss that year, took place on November 19, with a score of 0-6. (SL)
2. What is interesting about EAR's description of the Harvard-Yale game is that he aims his partisan outrage against Yale's "brutality and dirtiness", while appearing to entirely ignore the fact that it was on the occasion of this very game that a notoriously violent and controversial tactic, soon to be banned, was introduced by Harvard—the infamous "flying wedge": "Just like Napoleon, the Crimson surprised its opponent at the tactical level of physical combat. Ten men, running full tilt in a 'V' formation from a position some yards behind the ball, massed upon one Yale player. Thus, the flying wedge was born, and an already violent game brought forth the most revolutionary football play ever developed. It was a vivid example of the brutality which then ruled the sport" (McQuilkin and Smith 57). (SL)
3. See note 1 from the letter for October 1, 1892. (SL)
4. The original poem has a dash here, not a comma. (SL)
5. From one of EAR's favorite poems, Kipling's "L'Envoi" to *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses* (1892). See EAR's letter to George Latham, October 10, 1894. The poem is also called "The Long Trail" in later editions of Kipling's poetry. In the original poem, the first quoted line reads, "Yes, the old lost stars wheel back, dear lass". (SL)

^f WA adds a period here.