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2-11-1894

To Harry de Forest Smith - February 11, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, February 11, 1894.

My dear Smith,

I received a very fine letter from my friend Hubbell¹ (you may have seen his name in connection with your reading of Harvard athletics) in which he spoke of many things - among them, in a gentle way, of my handwriting. So much has been said to me of late on th^{-is^a} subject that I have become somewhat alarmed, and am beginning to wonder if it would not be better for me to give up writing with a pen altogether. I know what the boy in the book would say, but I assure [you] that the thing is almost an impossibility for me. The^b more I try to improve, the worse success I seem to have; for the criticisms often come after what I consider a praiseworthy effort. I suppose the real fact in the case is that I don't care enough about the matter. Good penmanship is to me, in most cases, a fortunate accident. I may be too apt to consider all the virtues and accomplishments in this- I have always confessed fatalistic tendencies in things both great^d and small.

I think I can appreciate, perhaps to a greater extent than you think, your uncertainty as to keeping on in the dead languages. It would of^{(?)^e} be unpleasant and useless meddling^g on my part to offer any advice, so I

^a Written in black ink.

^b The "T" is written in black ink.

^c Written in black ink.

^d The "e" is written or traced in black ink.

^e Written in black ink.

^f WA omits this typo.

will hold my peace after offering one suggestion that may tire you a little, but, I trust, will not awaken any lasting animosity. ^h - I would say that if you think yourself sufficiently imbued with the greek spirit – the "sophrosyne"² of the Periclean age - to temper yourself in the smash of American life, andⁱ feel that your place is where conquests are being made.,^j

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you cannot be too soon in realizing the absolute necessity on your part of a practical familiarity -I won't say mastery - of the French and German languages. I would not seem egotistic, but I honestly think I have had a little better opportunity than you to know the truth of what I am now saying. The knowledge of these languages is no longer looked on as accomplishment but as a working tool - intellectual and social. In other words, it is taken for granted; and you are probably doomed, sooner or later to work them up- provided you continue to aspire as you have during the past five years. You will find the work pleasant after your conscientious and moderately satisfactory work in Greek; you will feel that you are working nearer to-day,^k and at^l the same time hear the accents of the past sounding in your ears with a comforting familiarity.-- I am right, old man, and I know it; but of course you have the born right to "Anglo-Saxondom's idee."^{3m}

^g The second "d" is written in black ink.

^h WA has only one of these ellipses.

ⁱ The "d" and the preceding comma are written in black ink.

^j WA omits the period.

^k The comma is written in black ink.

^l The "t" is written in black ink.

It does me good to "chin" in this way all by myself, and as long as you feel that it does you no particular harm, I trust you will pardon me my familiarity. I have great faith in you, but I wish you were not quite so damned energetic and exemplary in some directions: you make me feel uncomfortable and a little out of place; It is only when you smoke a pipe and build houses "founded on the rock" that I feel wholly your equal. And yet, I have been doing some pretty good work of late. {T}heⁿ study of of {sic} selfishness | that^o I spoke of in my last two letters is, I am happy to say,^p <-> written and revised. The thing gave me far more trouble than I anticipated and I am much in doubt as to what I have brought to pass. I am convinced that it is either pretty good or pretty bad. In writing, I have a pester-

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ing tendency to repeat small expressions, and my experience with "Mar-
so⁽¹⁾ q
shall showed me that nothing will reveal this fault as well as reading alo^r
aloud. When you come to Gardiner again I hope for your kindness to list-
en to perhaps half a dozen sketches written in aching earnest in the^s
cause of art and strength: these are the things I am after,^t from the me-
chanical point of view.

I have been reading this forenoon a long-short^u story by Cop-

^m WA has the period outside the quotation mark. In the holograph, it is actually directly below it.

ⁿ WA transcribes the "T".

^o The vertical bar, written in black ink, is placed between the two words to separate them, as they have no intervening space in the holograph.

^p The comma is written in black ink.

^q Written in black ink.

^r WA omits these letters. The "o" is typed above the "l".

^s The "h" is written in black ink.

^t The "f" is written in black ink, and the "t" is traced in black ink over the pre-existing "t".

pée. The title is "Une Faute de Jeunesse", and the story an old theme in the hands of a master. "Toute une Jeunesse", which I have lately read is very fine work, but too thoroughly French to be read sympathetically by the general American reader. The tone is wholesome, still I doubt^v if it is much to my credit to say that I thoroughly enjoyed it; but I did, as I do everything written by the author of "Les^w Vices du Capitaine."⁵ one^x of the^y most human things every written.

My machine keeps getting away from me to day^z, and I think I had better stop now and go over what I have done,^{aa} with an eye for corrections. It is easier for me to do my correspondence in this way, but it seems to take half the character from a friendly letter - to kill the sentiment, so to speak. Do you ever think of that?

Yours most sincerely
E.A. Robinson.^{bb}

(1) What is your opinion here?^{cc}

HCL US, 126-128, postscript omitted.
Typewritten.

NOTES

1. Chauncey Giles Hubbell (not Walter as in Hagedorn and Neff), a member of the Corn Cob

^u The "o" is written in black ink above a typed "e".

^v The "b" is written in black ink over a typed "d".

^w The quotation mark is written in black ink.

^x WA has an upper-case "o".

^y The "h" is written in black ink.

^z WA has "to-day".

^{aa} The comma is written in black ink.

^{bb} WA omits the period.

^{cc} This endnote-question is written in black ink.

Club at Harvard, a Swedenborgian.^{dd}

2. Disciplined soundness of mind.

3. From Lowell's "Biglow Papers." See EAR's letter to Smith, December 1893.^{ee}

4.^{ff} "Une Faute de Jeunesse", in the collection *Longues et brèves* (1894). (SL)

5. "Les Vices du Capitaine", collected in *Contes tout simples* (1894). (SL)

^{dd} WA adds "For further details see p." but does not provide a text or book. He was presumably thinking of Hagedorn's biography, though I am unsure which page he had in mind specifically.

^{ee} This is an undated letter, listed in the archive as "December ?, 1893."

^{ff} Note 4 was numbered by WA, with the title of the first story in the allotted space, but no other information. On the next line was written Les Vices Du Capitaine, but no other information was given. I have made this into note 5, and have provided the corresponding in-text superscript numeral for it.