Translations From The Vernacular-I.
"All Set."

So, you're all set? Not a thing to worry about. That's fine. On with the bridge game. Take the afternoon off. Turn on the radio. Enjoy the evening. All set? Well, well. But for what?

Tomorrow's classes? For several wee morsels of assignments? To give a few brief answers to a few brief questions during a brief quiz? Maybe you are. What a pity if you couldn't be! But what a pity that you limit yourself to so little. Minimum essentials. Just enough to get by. The line of least resistance. Niggardly service.

All set. You mean that you feel that you know enough about each of the subjects you study--enough at least for today, enough so that your thirst for learning is temporarily quenched, your hunger for truth satiated, your ambition for intellectual attainment satisfied, your ideal of duty fulfilled? Is that what you mean? That you are content to take in knowledge piecemeal, a teaspoonful at a time, as it were, and always under direction, if not compulsion, studying by the clock on the wall and the distant fear of the little pink slip? Little chocolate soldiers strutting around on the academic drill ground, complacent in the daily recitation strut, the daily strut, and nothing more!

Then, again, it may be that we haven't got your meaning at all. The phrase is elastic, its meaning elusive, hard to pin down to anything quite definite. You might mean simply that you don't want to become a "grind", a dyed-in-the-wool bookworm, such a fanatic on study that you forget how to be sociable, how to talk anything but "shop"--in short, how to be a normal human being. That is surely an extreme to be avoided. Not that there is much danger, fortunately; merely that it is a possibility.

After all, one must be reasonable, even in study. Precisely. Make it unanimous. But what is a reasonable effort? Laudable endeavor? Consistent work? If we can agree on the answer to that question, maybe we can then translate our phrase, 'all set', in such a way as to bring out its full meaning.

That is reasonable which commends itself to reason, you say? But to whose reason? The professor's, the student's, a third party's? But their judgments won't agree. The same answer is not equally acceptable to each and all. That way of settling what is reasonable in study leads nowhere. For the question always remains: Whose reason is right?

Take another tack. Reason doesn't create; it merely discovers. So suppose it suddenly dawns on your reason just why you are in college, rather than, say, jerking sodas, or selling bonds. And suppose you conclude that it is to make a fully-educated man out of yourself, and that that implies a reading an an understanding of the best that other minds have produced, a refinement of your tastes, a training and a sharpening of all your faculties--your senses, imagination, memory, reason, understanding. Next, that it means in addition to the cultivation of all these powers, the formation of a set of habits, through methodical and persistent practise, by which you could translate this acquired knowledge and these mental skills into consistent, honorable, charitable Christian conduct. Don't you think then that, given this unique opportunity to acquire such a great good, no effort is reasonable except such as stops just short of overdoing your powers?

Where the life of the intellect is concerned, you can never truthfully say: "All set," for the powers of the mind are unmeasured, and the extent of truth is as wide as reality itself. The phrase, all set, is not for time. It is only for eternity, when there is surcease of action in the perfection of one's powers.