

saw; and yet once he has undergone this elementary training, off, he goes full-fledged like any typist in the world. The only formula to guide an office clerk is patience plus constant practice. You do the same thing in the same way and with the same good humour for hundred and thousand times over, and then you acquire a sort of habit by such constant practice that your body and soul become, so to speak, immersed with the desk routine, and ultimately your work become part of you and you part of your work. Then, and only then, you are an out-and-out office clerk! One of my colleagues who can boast of twenty years of office experience once told me his trick in doing office work. "Suppose," he said, "my work is to make an entry of account at three books A, B, and C. The first thing I do is to set up an order in making these entries which I shall follow as a rule with an iron will. I'll go first from book A, second to book B and then third to book C; and I know no other way about it. I stick to my rule with such stubbornness that I simply won't talk, won't drink and won't eat until I am through with it in the right order safely and happily. Then after months or years of training, I'll close my eyes and yet work as unmistakably as a machine. A new hand might think it disgraceful to reduce himself to the status of machinery, and might think it not incompatible to allow himself a little indulgence within possible bounds. He'll say: 'I'll follow the order A.B.C. on Monday, and then change it to B.A.C. on Tuesday, and again to C.A.B. on Wednesday and so on. So long I don't slip over any of these books, you may leave me free to play acrobats with the trio in as many forms as I care.' Now, look here, in nine cases out of ten, this man is sure to commit errors either from negligence or sheer forgetfulness." And then he added with an ugly leer: "The truth is this: while a man so often commits mistakes, a machine never does." How deep does this sally cut into my heart! And what a poor picture does this make of me who fail to become a competent clerk just because I refuse to reduce myself to a machine!

Now, I have laid before you the whole case. The points raised here are certainly too commonplace to arouse anybody's interest. The general unfitness of one's learning to one's employment is just such little ironies of life that no one is likely to be much concerned about it in this queer world of ours. A student of economics who can quote at random from Adam Smith, Ricardo and Karl Marx is called upon to keep a ledger and balance the credit and debt. A master of science, who has gone through the most advanced courses of mathematics where the subtle relations of figures are said to be evaporating

into abstract philosophy, is planted to a desk to make endless blunders in simple addition and subtraction. The thing which puzzles me is the diametrically opposed views of life held by people in school and those outside of it. In one place, we are taught with theories, "isms" and all abstract reasonings that savor of profound learning and scholarship; while in the other, we are hurled headlong into the quagmire of everyday trivialities and a thousand and one odds and ends which we look down upon. The greatest as well as the most difficult task confronting a college graduate after leaving his school is how to adapt himself to the new surroundings in order to fulfill the new demands for which he is not well-prepared. I personally have heard many people complain, as though they can not understand why, that a college graduate often proves to be no match to an average clerk of middle school education or even of no school education at all in doing clerical works. I think there is nothing to be wondered at. It is because the college students are never prepared for clerical work, although almost one out of three goes to office after graduation. Then, is the college graduate to blame for that? Of course not. Then, is college education itself to blame? I think not. Then, is society generally to blame? I think not either. Then, after all, who is to blame? I think that would be too complicated a problem for me to solve. Now, to return to my case, I can assure you that I shall soon go on nicely with my job and have even now such ambition as to become someday a third-rate or fourth-rate office clerk. Since I know something about Darwin's theory of the "survival of the fittest", and since my lot is to be condemned to "the drudgery of the desk's dead wood", to borrow a phrase from Lamb if I remember it correctly, I shall pluck up my spirit and stick to my desk body and soul in order to keep at least on level with, if not luckily outrival, those of my colleagues who have the advantage of not having received any college education.

Last but not least, I beg to harbour my sincere regret to my dear readers for laying bare my trouble to you and doing nothing else. You might have the right to demand an answer as to what can be the purpose of my making these complaints to you. To this, I reply as follows. I hope those of you who are already well along in office life will find something here to laugh at, although nothing to learn; and those who are just fresh from school as I am will bear your present plight with better humour on account of my company; and those who are still in school will profit from my experience and know how to get yourselves better prepared.

Thoughts Of An Undergraduate

By ZIA YEE CHEN (謝貽珍)

AS an undergraduate and "at the threshold of life", I have spent a good deal of my time inquiring about this question of my future. It is next to impossible to

note down the diverse feelings which have arisen in me the many times I have looked into the years ahead of me: hopes and doubts, illusions and fears—oh, if only I

could pierce through the time element!

Practical minded people usually dislike the idea of forecasting the to-morrows, just as certain poets would warn us not to trust the future, however pleasant. But it is inevitable that the darker the clouds that overhang China at the present, the more anxious are her youths for the future. The chief anxiety among most of them seems to be in connection with the conquest of bread. For my part, being so much the wiser as a result of frequent contemplation upon my future, I have come to realize that money matters should never be the chief concern in my life.

Being a poor and fatherless youth I cannot be said, as compared with other college students, to enjoy a privileged position in the struggle for daily existence. And as for domestic concerns I am also not better off than others, in the fact that my sick mother badly needs my support. Yet in spite of these facts, I maintain that any educated Chinese able to think correctly should in every possible way endeavor to serve his country and fellowmen instead of devoting his life to the mere satisfaction of personal wants. There is no reason but to consider as lost souls those intellectuals who make comfort and convenience their chief aim in life.

Hard and pressing as the bread problem undoubtedly is, it cannot, I believe, starve the industrious worker of simple habits, or block the prospects of the energetic youth whose material wants are few and whose standard of living is elastic. Such a youth as I indeed aspire to be would above all refrain from going headlong into marriage and assuming the excessive burden of a household. The economic advantage of the single life cannot be exaggerated. A single man can live on twenty-four coppers or even less for daily food, and such a living has been found possible by many people, as told and retold in contemporary literature. But a married couple with one or two children must, to be distinguished from the beggars, at least spend ten dollars per month in order to pay for the minimum amount of rent, food, fuel and clothing.

The much eulogised home is now more than ever before a center of conservatism and a field for tragedy. It ruins the career of the male and kills the female. The young man, if not the heir of a capitalist mandarin, who has married and brought up a number of children will have to struggle all the year long simply to keep his family in a tolerable condition. Noble thoughts of any other kind must appear to him nothing but idle thoughts. I therefore will either remain single or marry a girl who, among other things, can be economically independent. Thus should I have to go through the most outrageous fortune, I shall be able to bear it cheerfully and no one will suffer for my sake.

I firmly believe that this idea will hold good in practice, for even the whole of Chinese society nowadays seems to have fully recognized the evils of a burdensome household economy as witnessed in the widespread movement of simple marriage, of birth control, in the increase

of woman employees and in many other things. For instance, the once despised bachelor who used to be charged with the most horrible crime of unfiliality now passes very well in respectable society and can put forth many well developed arguments in defence of his way of life. Nay, the very fact that there are so many intellectual people remaining unmarried is itself a forceful plea for the bachelor.

There is another fact that forces itself upon my consideration. The world today is manifestly moving towards collectivism. The interests of the individual are to be merged into those of the communal or corporate whole. Being well cognizant of this world tendency, I should be the last to seek for personal distinction. It seems to me very clear that once I forego the conventional notions of money and power, which have been such deciding factors in shaping one's career, my future is safe and secure. All other considerations, fears, or doubts regarding my destiny will be of minor importance. I am spiritually fortified to meet the worst; nothing that lies ahead can vex or embarrass me. Whatever befalls me, will be unimportant so long as I am myself sincere and unselfish.

It is unselfishness alone, I verily believe, that comprises what Hazlitt termed "the immortality of youth." The present conditions of China are really such that she demands that her sons be able to live in the most dreary slums, to fight on the bloodiest front, to bear the loneliness of the great North-west, and to be unmoved by the voluptuousness of Shanghai. They must be a type of clearminded, courageous, hardworking young men, who will think most of the people and least of themselves. Here I recall what Anna Louise Strong in her "China's Millions" recorded of Borodin's remark about a promising Chinese young general when he had actually in his mind the unreliability of the elder generals: "He's young; they are all good when they are young." It does not matter who made this remark, but I want all the young men of China to think over the simple fact that we are no longer young as soon as we become selfish; just as on the other hand we remain young so long as we are unselfish.

Believing that what I have said is true, I am optimistic towards my future and even more so towards that of the Republic. I set out in life with the latter, and her bitter experiences in the last twenty-three years mark a corresponding period of thick gloom in my life. In the years to come she will certainly prove her maturity and character, and with her progress I shall have better days. And if such days will not come within my life, I should not be disappointed. The great truth of today is that there will be no particular favor shown to the individual, although there is every hope for the rising generations as a whole. When the nation is being built, the citizens have to sacrifice themselves. Blessed be all those who recognize this truth and act accordingly.