

*The  
Young Student*



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New Castle, Virginia

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In a certain land I know of there is a very beautiful city. Tourists and sightseers who go to visit it leave exclaiming "I never dreamt that one city could contain such beauty and such wisdom," or "It is a triumph of Man in his search for God," or simply, "Marvellous!" The reason that they make such remarks about God and wisdom is that besides its own beauty the city is renowned for its cathedral and university.

The cathedral stretches its spires up towards the sun as though it would rival the mountains that look down upon it. Up and up the steeples go until they are almost lost

to sight. It really is a wonderful achievement! The townsfolk say that when it was being built, God looked down from Heaven and saw the steeples growing nearer and nearer until at last he decided they had come quite close enough, for he didn't want people climbing up and taking a peep into Heaven before it was time. So he sent an angel to tell the architect in a vision, that God regarded his work with favour, but thought one could easily have enough of a good thing and would he please go no higher. The architect — a God-fearing man—decided not to tempt providence and revised his plans, secure in the knowledge that he had built the tallest and most magnificent cathedral in the world. So both God and his servant were well pleased.

The university, on the other hand, though undoubtedly the more modest of the two monuments, (as is indeed proper, for man has no cause to set himself before his Creator) enjoys perhaps an even greater renown. From the ends of the earth men come to drink at the fountain of its wisdom



and, it is hoped, go away wiser. Among these was a certain young student.

When he was born his parents decided that whatever it might cost them, their son should receive those benefits that had been denied them, for they knew that however clever he might be, without a knowledge of mathematics and economics and philosophy he would be unlikely to obtain preferment in the world. Accordingly they worked even harder than before and saved every penny they could until, when their son was eighteen years old, they had just enough money to see him through the university. So with his mother's blessing and his father's good advice ringing in his ears, the young man set out, intent on realizing his parents' most cherished ambition.

As soon as he reached the city he began to look about for lodgings but, try as he might, he could find nothing suitable. Either the rooms were too expensive for his humble means or the owners would allow him only a weekly tenancy, which was not what he wanted at all. At last, having walked to nearly

all the likely addresses in the city he sat down on the cathedral steps and debated what he should do.

As he sat staring across at the distant mountains and dismissing one idea after another, he heard footsteps behind him and a hand touched him on the shoulder. Turning he saw an old man with kindly eyes who asked whether there was anything he could do to help. The young student told him his difficulty and how he had searched the whole town for lodgings without success. The old man nodded sympathetically and taking a piece of paper from his pocket wrote down an address. Giving it to the young student he said, "Try there, and tell the good lady that I sent you. Good luck!" and waving aside the young man's thanks he disappeared into the hurrying throng of people.

After some difficulty the young student found the street and eventually the house. The woman who came to the door smiled when he told her what the old man had said and asked him to come in.

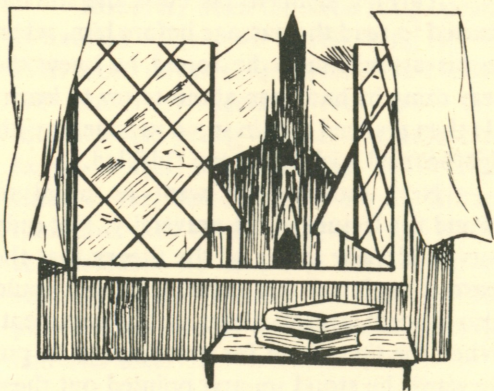
The room she offered him was at the top of the house and not very comfortable, but the young man was so thankful to find a lodging of any kind that he gladly paid the price she asked and, being a dutiful son, sat down to write and tell his parents of his adventures.

He soon settled into his new life and, although he was not particularly brilliant, he worked hard and gave his tutors no reason for displeasure. His fellow students frequently laughed at him for being a 'stick-at-home' and not joining them in their noisy revels, but he reasoned wisely that he was better employed over his books than wasting the little money he possessed in beer and dancing. At night he would open his window and gaze out over the lights of the city to the spires of the great cathedral which rose black against remembering the happy days he had spent climbing in the hills and fishing in the stream that murmured beneath his window. But he could not dream forever and with a sigh he returned his attentions to his books.

Sometimes the evening wind would come whispering round the window and say, "Hey! you young student, why don't you come out and let me blow away those wrinkles from your brow?" and the young student would gaze out of the window and reply sadly, "Gladly would I join you, but I owe it to my parents to study hard, and that I cannot do if I am with you." Then the wind would whistle derisively and say, "Wisdom does not lie in books but in Life, and I can show you Life. Come outside." But the student would only shake his head and bend once more over his pen.

One evening when the sky was spread like black satin over the city and the stars played hide and seek with the moon, the wind came blowing gently in at the window, bearing with it the scent of apple blossom and jasmine from the mountains. It ruffled the young student's hair and whispered, "If you could have anything you liked in the world, what would you choose? Think well." And the young student, smiling at





what he thought was his own imagination, laughingly replied: "I would choose wisdom, for that can only be acquired at the end of life and I am just at the beginning." Then the wind kissed his forehead and murmured: "So, you shall be wise, for that is my gift." Then it died softly away, and the moon shone with an even greater brilliance over the cathedral until the spires appeared to be tiled with silver and the stone buttresses shone as though a thousand torches were illuminating them.



Turning again to his book the student started to read the passage before him, when to his astonishment he found he knew the very thing he had been about to try to learn! He then realized that in some strange way his lighthearted wish had been fulfilled.

Next morning he went as usual to attend the lecture at the university. Not only was he already aware of the theory that the learned professor was expounding but could also discern several flaws in his argument. When the time came for questions to be put forward, he stood up and pointed out these errors in a manner that showed such wisdom and debating ability that the professor was shocked into silence and could find no words in which to reply. Afterwards he sought out the young student and asked him whether he was not a doctor from some other university who had come hither to increase his knowledge. But when the young man only smiled and said that he was in truth no doctor but merely a person who had been granted the gift of wisdom, the professor thought he was being laughed at and walked off in a huff.

However, when the same thing occurred in another subject on the following day with even more devastating results, the heads of the university decided they had better interview this young student, and accordingly he was sought out and taken before them. Each in turn asked him the most difficult questions they could think of, and to their astonishment he answered each with such subtlety that without hesitation they pronounced him to be the wisest man they had ever met.

On the strength of the examination they offered him the immediate title of "Professor of Wisdom" and a chair at the university, both of which he accepted gladly.

His reputation soon spread throughout the country and many people came to hear his lectures and ask him questions, but so profound was his knowledge that he was able to give the correct answer every time, and the people went away marvelling that one so young should be so wise.

It became his custom to wander in the city parks in the evening, for he still loved

the trees and the summer sky, even though he now knew that the beautiful sunsets were merely light shining on minute particles of dust suspended in the atmosphere and that trees were composed of a series of cells and drew the moisture up from the ground by evaporation. As a rule he contrived to ignore such facts and appreciate the beauty of the things he saw without recourse to his great wisdom, but on this particular evening he had no eyes for such things for he was trying to solve a problem set him that morning by an eminent professor from the University of Peking and he was finding it very difficult.

As he wandered in a world of his own, peopled by strange abstractions and complicated equations, he heard someone call his name and, looking round, saw a young lady smiling at him. Feeling a trifle annoyed at having his meditations interrupted just when the solution seemed to be in sight, he asked her briefly what she wanted. She smiled at him again and inquired politely whether he would mind answering a question that had been troubling her for some time

and that she had been unable to solve. Seeing that she was pretty, the young professor (for you must remember he was no longer a student) smiled graciously and said that if she would tell him the problem that was bothering her, he would do his best to answer it. "Certainly," she replied. "My question is 'What is love?'"

Thinking that she was wasting his time the young professor was about to make some curt reply, when the full force of the question struck him. What *was* love? None of the quick answers he had in mind seemed satisfactory and the more he thought the less likely it seemed that he would find the solution.

Seeing his difficulty the young lady suggested they should meet again at the same place in three days time, by which time perhaps he would have reached a decision. Intrigued by his own inability to offer a satisfactory answer on the spot, the young professor agreed, and so they parted.

When he reached the university (for he occupied rooms there since his promotion)



he went straight to the great library to find what other men had written about the subject. He found plenty of references! Everyone seemed to have something to say upon the subject. The trouble was no two authorities seemed to agree. If one said it was "like a heavenly flower blooming richly in the human soul," he was sure to find another who described it as "a roaring tide sweeping all petty considerations aside in a torrent of overwhelming emotion": and try as he would he could not combine the two pictures in his imagination.

All that night he continued to read about love in one book or another and the question was still as far as ever from being solved when he went to give his lecture. Afterwards the eminent Chinese professor came forward to ask whether he had solved his problem, and he was forced to admit that he had not, with the result that the old man returned to China and told the Emperor that he might rest assured that the Chinese were still the wisest people in the world.

So great became the young professor's



desire to find a satisfactory answer that he obtained leave to forsake his post for a few days in the interests of research. Then he set about the question in earnest.

For all the progress he made he might just as well have given up at the start. Sheet after sheet of paper was covered with notes which he eventually assembled into his now famous "Prolegomena to a Thesis upon Love" — but that is another story. To the question 'What is love?' he was forced to admit to himself that he could find no answer.

When at last the time arrived for his second meeting with the young lady he set off with a heavy heart, for like so many of us, the young professor did not like having to admit defeat.

She was waiting for him in the park and advanced to meet him with the same smile dancing in her eyes and playing round her lips. "Well, professor," she said, "I trust you have the answer ready for me after all this time." But he only shook his head glumly and said, "I have searched every famous work that has ever been

written and have noted down the conclusions of all the men who have discoursed upon love and the sum total of my researches is that love is indefinable."

When she heard his words the beautiful young lady threw back her head and laughed, and her laughter put him in mind of the distant tinkle of goat-bells on the mountainside in a summer evening. Then she said, "Look at my face, professor, and tell me what you see."

The young professor did as he was bidden. "I see a pretty face," he said.

"Is that all?" she asked.

The young professor looked again and said guardedly, "I see a very *beautiful* face."

"Are you sure that is all you see?" asked the young lady.

The young professor stared at her again and said slowly: "I see two eyes like murky pools of emerald, arched by brows as dark as the moonless night. I see two lips of cherry-red behind which hide two rows of little pearl-white teeth. I see a face as lovely

as the dawn itself.”

“And what do you feel?” asked she smiling.

“I feel as though the moon had given you its light and let me stand silent to admire. I feel that I will never rest again unless you allow me to take you in my arms and seek the answer to your question in your dark eyes. I feel — ”

“Enough!” cried the beautiful young lady. “Already my ears burn at your conceits. Yet is it not strange that all the wisdom culled from your dusty books could not tell you what you have discovered for yourself? Truly I believe you are falling in love!” And with an aching heart the young professor was forced to agree that it was true.

Later, when they were married, the wind whispered in the bridegroom’s ear, “Now you have wisdom and you have love; you should live happily ever after.” And so far as I know he did.



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