

UNEDITED BIOGRAPHIES

Mr. Wu Mi (吳宓), A Scholar And A Gentleman

MR. Wu Mi is like nothing on earth: once seen, never forgotten. There are some people, one has to be introduced to a hundred times, and on the hundredth and one time one has to be introduced again. Their faces are so ordinary: no mannerisms, no "anything," just plain Jack, Tom and Harry. But Mr. Wu's face is worth a fortune: it is peculiar to the point of caricature. A head shaped like a bomb, and just as suggestively explosive, gaunt, wan in colour, with hair threatening to break out all over the face, but always kept well within bounds by a clean shave every morning, rugged, with very prominent cheek-bones and sunken cheeks, and eyes which stare at one like glowing coals,—all this set on a neck too long by half; and a thin body, as strong and as little elastic as a rod of steel!

Head always erect, and back straight as a die, Mr. Wu looks dignity itself. He is proud of his scholarship, and his friends are just as proud to find in him one of nature's great gentlemen. Never mean, always eager to do a good turn to everybody, invariably misunderstood by both friends and foes, a little too trustful of other people's goodness and ability, and over-sensitive as regards the outside world's opinions of himself, Mr. Wu is never at peace, either with himself or with the world: if he is not distraught, he is furiously working. A great admirer of Goethe, he is as far from attaining the state of "ohne Hast, ohne Rast," as he who said, "*Io fei giubetto a me delle mie case.* (I made a gibbet for myself of my own dwelling)," is from ever attaining the state of grace.

Mr. Wu is one of those men, who never know what it is to be young. Actually on the right side of forty, he looks any where between thirty and a hundred. Always lenient in his judgment of others, he is Draconically severe on himself. A Confucianist himself, he suggests to us exactly what a Confucian scholar ought to be. Grave, taking life at its own face value and a little too seriously, with a deportment as unbending as it is "correct," he is yet the least formidable of men.

the last century, this humbleness on the part of the Chinese was naturally interpreted as an acknowledgement of inferiority. No use to add that it was exploited for all that it was worth. Even to this day, the Chinese are hardly regarded as equals by foreigners. The Chinese, on their part, have inherited the shortcomings of the last generation, both psychological and traditional, and so a great deal of foolishness is still being perpetuated, with no great credit to our race. Not until our people can assert their own personality and discard most of the unnecessary formalities of ceremony is there any prospect of winning the respect of the rest of the world.

Mr. Wu is a professor in the Western Literature Department of Tsing Hua University. Besides this, he used, until this year, to edit *The Critical Review* (學衡) as well as the literary columns of *The Ta Kung Pao* (大公報).

Mr. Wu is everything that a teacher ought to be, except to be inspiring. Punctual as a clock, he works like a galley-slave at his lectures. Where others would read a quotation out of a book, he would memorize it, however long it might be. He is as orderly as a drill-sergeant in the exposition of any subject, with his "firstly this" and "secondly that." Dull, perhaps, but never pointless. He is not one of those teachers, who talk of everything and say nothing. What he says does mean something: it may be wrong, but at least it is not hot air. He never hedges about any point; he always puts his foot plump on it. In other words, he is never afraid of committing himself to an opinion. On matters of fact, especially of those facts which are to be found in encyclopedias and books of reference, Mr. Wu is unimpeachable. One can only fairly quarrel with him on matters of taste or of interpretation. In these, Mr. Wu shows his weakness; but it is not a weakness, due to haziness or any failing in sincerity: it is a weakness, inherent in his point of view, which is that of a humanist,—a Babbittian humanist, at that. It is a pity Mr. Wu has allowed himself to be lured into Babbittian humanism. As it is, all his views are coloured by it. Ethics and art get woefully mixed up. Often, one is puzzled whether he is delivering himself on a question of literature or of morality.

As an editor, Mr. Wu stands for everything that Dr. Hu Shih is against. The avowed aim of *The Critical Review* (學衡), which Mr. Wu started a few years ago, it to fight the Pai-hua movement, and to strive to maintain the old ways of writing. It is a losing battle, but the effort is heroic. It was no less heroic in Mr. Wu, when he was editing the literary columns of *The Ta Kung Pao*, to try to interest the literary world of China in the facts of Western Literature, rather than in its frills and trappings. Well, with very few exceptions, practically all the younger writers of China have decided to take the frills and trappings of Western Literature, and to let the facts take care of themselves. Facts, dates, learning: they are so dull and so difficult. What one wants now-a-days is to swim with the current, and to pick up whatever flotsam and jetsam one comes across,—Dowson, Baudelaire, Valery, Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, and so on, *ad infinitum*. In the contemporary world of Chinese letters, to insinuate clumsily, as Mr. Wu does, that there is some value in studying Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton, is to invite derision.

A tragic and lonely figure! What makes Mr. Wu's case still more tragic is his complete misunderstanding of himself. He professes to be an ardent humanist and classicists; but by temperament, he is a romanticist through and through. So sincere, and so truly himself is Mr. Wu, that he allows everybody to see this, except himself! His admiration of Byron is no secret. He has even written a long Chinese poem after the manner of *Childe Harold*. A contradiction, but one that is perplexing to nobody but himself!

OVERSEA CHINESE

EDITED BY LIN YU

A Message From An Oversea Chinese

WE publish below a message from Dr. Albino Z. SyCip, a well known Chinese in Manila, who has been equally successful as a lawyer, a business man and a banker. Although it might not be inappropriately preached from the pulpit, the sender of the message is not connected in any way with any formal religion whatsoever. And what is more, Dr. SyCip's life oscillating between his private business and service to his own community lends the message a weight which it otherwise cannot have. It gives both food for thought to the thinking men in every walk of life and encouragement to those who believe cooperation, rather than destructive competition and conflict, is the highway to a better society:

"Unrestrained greed and selfishness are largely responsible for the economic ills of the world. Individuals as well as nations have been acting on the delusion that prosperity can be achieved at the expense of others; and the pursuit of such a selfish policy has led to destructive competition among themselves until all have to suffer from the consequences. If the many sufferings through which nations and individuals have gone during the last few years could teach them to realize that we cannot attain nor keep prosperity at the expense of others, and that if we are to be happy and prosperous, we have to see that our neighbors are also happy and prosperous, these hardships would not have been suffered in vain. If from the events of the last few years we could discover means of curbing greed and selfishness and could see the wisdom of substituting useful cooperation for destructive competition among nations and individuals in their future dealings with each other, we shall have achieved, through the hardships of these few years, a big advance in the progress of civilization. With greed and selfishness properly curbed, and with the substitution of useful cooperation for destructive competition, there will be restored confidence among men and nations. Until confidence is thus restored, things throughout this world cannot be expected to move in a normal way."

Whenever I think of Mr. Wu, I always think of his tortured smile, of his neat, clean, bare rooms in Tsing Hua, and of the beautiful, wild scene, just outside his curtained windows. It may be just my fancy, but I often think there would be less perplexity in his life, and less torture in his smile, if he would take down all the curtains from his windows, and see more of what is outside his rooms, or better still, abandon himself to the beautiful, wild scene out-of-doors.

THE LITTLE CRITIC

On Aunts And Other Curses Of Life

I THINK that I am only enunciating a truism when I say that all men desire to be free. In fact, ever since civilization began, man has been waging a perpetual warfare for freedom. But, strange to note, this battle has never really been won. In spite of the fact that man has been engaged in it for the past four thousand years, he is still everywhere in chains much as ever. The reason is not difficult to find. Men are not, and indeed will never be, free, so long as they have relatives.

We can send our kings to the guillotines, and even chop off the heads of our landlords and capitalists, if we want to. Our political or economic freedom is often achieved that way. But with our relatives, we cannot do anything of the kind. The man who strangles his mother-in-law to death is not hailed as a revolutionary hero. Indeed he would be very lucky if on the plea for insanity he could get away with a life sentence.

On the subject of mothers-in-law, however, I can not speak with authority, although I do know that they are only a trifle better than aunts. Now the trouble with aunts is that they are always with us. You can't get rid them, as you can your mother-in-law. When the latter gets on your nerves, the easiest way out is—no, you have guessed wrong; for as I have said before, murder will never do. Well, the easiest way out is to divorce your wife. But aunts will always be aunts, for better or for worse. They are as closely related to you as your parents. But unlike your parents, they generally refuse to let you alone. When you have been wayward and foolhardy, for instance, your understanding parents will always be ready to forgive you with a smile. But not so your aunts. On the contrary, in all likelihood, they would be very stern with you and treat you exactly as if you were a criminal who had just robbed a bank.

That is the way they would behave when they are ill-tempered, but when they are in a happy mood, they are even worse. For one thing, the majority of them generally take up match-making for their pastime. Should you be a bachelor, therefore, you might as well give yourself up to them for lost. They have, as a rule, a list of all the eligible girls in town and insist on your making a choice from it. Or they would be very solicitous about your health and force you to drink your milk at dinner and wear the stomacher, which they have thoughtfully knitted for you, when you go out to play tennis. They are heartless, for they literally smother you with their affections.

We are free to choose our own friends, but we can never have any choice when it comes to aunts. And there is the tragedy of men, for as long as this situation holds, I am afraid that we will be a galley-full of slaves.

T. K. C.