

A Poor Boy Next a Throne.

(Charles E. Burton, in 'Success.')

'I am poor, unknown and friendless,' thought Ti Yin, of Quong Si, 'and it is more than twelve hundred miles to Peking, where the great civil service examination will be held a month hence; but what is a walk of twelve hundred miles to a healthy youth with an ambition for a government office, and in China who ever heard of poverty and lack of influence standing in the way of merit?

'From earliest childhood I have studied diligently, and have improved every opportunity to increase my store of learning. I feel that I am worthily prepared, and why may I not hope to take the first degree, or, possibly, the second degree of Tszin S. S.? I sometimes think that I should not presume too much if I should try to get the third degree of Han Lin, or even, perhaps, that of Chung Yuen, highest of all and honored throughout the Empire. I will go and do my best.'

Ti knew that intellect, not 'influence,' secures promotion in his native land, and that the avenues to station and power are open to all alike.

But he also knew that, while in America young men are graduated from college in three or four years, their education 'finished,' in China there is no limit to a collegiate course except that of a very long life or transcendent mental power. None but a prodigy can hope for graduation in ten years. Even then he has merely taken his first degree, and another course of at least three years is necessary before he can hope for the second. If he passes the examination successfully for the second degree, he can study for a third in a still higher college, but if he fails he must review his work for three years and then try again.

Thus he progresses until he at length surpasses all competitors and becomes a 'Chung Yuen,' that is, the greatest scholar of his generation.

If he takes one degree at each examination he will probably be forty years of age before he becomes a Chung Yuen, but very few of forty have taken the second degree; indeed, many earnest men of fifty are still working hard for their first. But Ti Yin had studied as very few young men ever study, and felt that it was no idle dream for him to hope for at least one or two degrees. So he made the necessary arrangements and started for Peking, on foot and alone.

Long and weary was the journey; but the young student, although poorly clad, gaunt from hunger, and footsore from his month's tramp, was received with as much consideration as the wealthiest competitor.

The aspirants were locked in separate compartments, with nothing but the list of questions, blank paper and ink, and the plainest food and water. They were treated kindly, but with such consideration as is usually shown to prisoners.

Ti Yin remained long enough to hand in a full set of essays; but he had spent his last penny, and was forced to leave before the awards were made, too tired and sick to give more than passing thought to what he had come to consider a waste of time and effort. So despondent had he become that he had almost determined to commit suicide. Yet more from instinct than from settled purpose he started to work his way homeward.

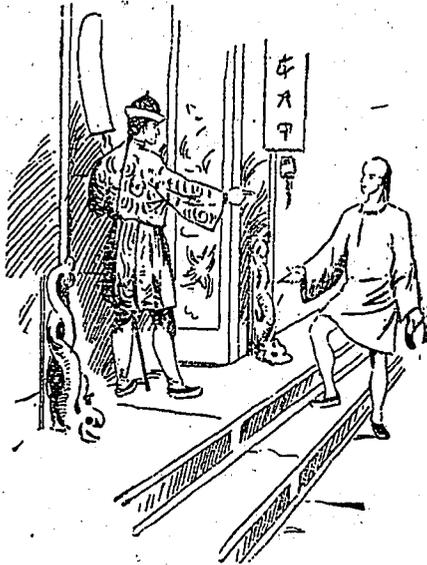
'What is the matter?' asked a kind-hearted waiter at a little inn where Ti stopped for a few minutes' rest; 'your sorrowful looks would add gloom to a funeral.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Ti Yin, with a sigh, 'I have studied for years for the civil service

examination, and have undergone great hardship to attend it, only to find myself forced to withdraw before the decision for lack of money, and probably without having won a degree, so unfitted was I, by my long walk without sufficient food, to do myself even scant justice.'

'Never mind,' said the waiter, 'I will tell the inn-keeper, who is a kind man, and he may find a way to aid you.'

'Yes,' said the landlord, when he had heard



'YOU CANNOT ENTER HERE.'

the story, 'you shall be my assistant clerk until you can earn enough to proceed homeward in tolerable comfort. So cheer up! Things are bad, but not so bad as they might be.' So Ti Yin took heart, donned an apron, and was soon known as one of the most polite and faithful waiters who had ever served at the inn tables. It was a new experience; but he learned quickly.

'It is one of the very oddest things that ever happened,' Ti heard a stranger remark at dinner nearly a month later; 'when the highest degree of Chung Yuen was awarded at the recent examination, no one appeared to claim it, so the Emperor dispatched his special herald to Quong Si, the home of the successful candidate, but he could not be found there, and the Emperor feels very anxious for his safety.'

'But what name, sir?' asked the astonished



'HAVE I NOT BORNE HUMILIATION ENOUGH?'

restaurant clerk, in tones of surprise which attracted the attention of all.

'What concern is that of yours, you young intruder,' asked one of the aristocratic guests; 'you seem to have a brotherly sympathy for the Emperor's anxiety.'

'Ti Yin is the name of our new Imperial

Councillor,' said another guest, a little more civil than his fellows. 'But why do you ask? Do you claim the honor of his acquaintance?'

The young clerk withdrew modestly, without replying, made himself as presentable as possible with limited means, excused his departure to the innkeeper, and hastened to report to the Department of Ceremonies.

'You cannot enter here,' said the guard.

'But I have important business to attend to,' said Ti, 'and must have immediate audience with his Majesty, the Emperor.'

'Begone,' shouted the guard, as he drove the ragged stranger from the gate; 'this is no place for vagrants.'

Ti Yin soon returned and renewed his request for an audience, but was arrested and imprisoned as a dangerous character. He remained in confinement for some time, while outside the whole Empire was in a ferment over the strange disappearance of the new 'Chung Yuen,' who had not been seen during the month or more which had elapsed since the examination.

'General!' exclaimed one of the prison guards, addressing the jailer, 'I beg you to liberate this inoffensive stranger and allow him to go his way in peace; for,' he added, 'my heart goes out to this man, who, I feel sure, is more sinned against than sinning. I will pledge my life that he is not one to do evil.'

'Well,' said the jailer, after enquiring carefully into the matter, 'I am willing to order his release; but first he must needs receive the corporal punishment due on account of his conviction for vagrancy and disturbing the peace.'

'Have I not borne humiliation enough?' cried Ti when he heard of this; 'tell your jailer that I, Ti Yin, am here basely confined, and that I command him to appear before me and in person loose these fetters from my limbs.'

'Oh! my master,' began the kind-hearted guard, as he knelt and clasped the knees of this distinguished charge; but at that moment the doors of the prison were thrown open, and his words were drowned by a laugh from the President of the Board of Ceremonies, who had just returned from a search for Ti Yin, and was overcome by the sight of an officer upon his knees before a prisoner. 'What is the meaning of all this?' he asked in surprise; but when he had heard the story he hurriedly descended from his chair of state.

'Mayest thou, O master, live a thousand years!' he exclaimed, kneeling very reverently at the feet of the celebrated scholar.

'Imagine the picture,' says a writer in 'Harper's Magazine,' 'the still manacled prisoner; the kneeling officers; the crowd of awe-struck on-lookers; the death-like silence in that gloomy prison-room! Could there be imagined a greater tribute to knowledge and education than was there expressed?—the physical power of a great nation doing homage to the intellectual power of an individual! Although trite, still is true the proverb that "knowledge is power."'

'Permit me to remove these disgraceful fetters from the limbs they profane!' exclaimed one of the more thoughtful attendants, when the humiliating sense of having through stupidity done offence to one whom they loved and respected had partially subsided.

'No!' said Ti Yin, proudly but firmly, 'he who put them on, and he alone, has the right to remove them.'

'I beg your forgiveness for bringing disgrace upon so illustrious and noble a man,'