

TO SIR WITH

Love

By Miss Law

To the Unknown Teacher

Henry Van Dyke


I sing the praise of the Unknown Teacher. Great Generals win campaigns, but it is the Unknown Soldier who wins the war. Famous educators plan new systems of pedagogy, but it is the Unknown Teacher who delivers and guides the young. He lives in obscurity and contends with hardship. For him no trumpets blare, no chariots wait, no golden decorations are decreed. He knows the watch along the borders of darkness, and makes the attack on the trenches of ignorance and folly. Patient in his duty, he strives to conquer the evil powers which are the enemies of youth. He awakens sleeping spirits. He quickens the indolent, encourages the eager, and steadies the unstable. He communicates his own joy of learning, and shares with boys and girls the treasures of the mind. He lights many candles, which, in later years, will shine back and cheer him. This is his reward. No one is more worthy to be enrolled in the democratic aristocracy, "King of himself and servant of mankind."

To Sir With Love

Dear Mr. Cheng,

How are you? Yesterday, I happened to read a poem 'To the Unknown Teacher' by Henry Ban Dyke and that's why I am writing to you. The poem reminds me of your life as a teacher. I've known you since I was in Primary 4. It was my first year of studying in an English school and I was a bit under-aged then. English was so unfamiliar to me that I simply felt disorientated and scared during the English lesson. I still don't understand how you could guide me through my learning fears and became a serious learner. Was it because of your enthusiasm or was it because of your strictness? I also noticed that even some classmates who were lazy, naughty or unfocused became conscientious students during your English class. You also gave yourself the trouble of teaching Phonetics to us after school. What touched me most was that your sole aim and purpose was to enrich our English knowledge. Somewhere in my mind are vivid scenes of your Phonetics class: students struggling to pronounce correctly such awkward words as 'fifth' or 'sixth' and the hearty laughing of the class at someone's repeated inability to distinguish 'no' from 'low'. With limited resources but unlimited enthusiasm, you opened the door to English learning for me. Later on, I followed your footsteps to become an English teacher.

Time really flies, and you have retired from teaching in regular schools. But your teaching mission has not ended there. Sometimes, I have the impression and feeling that you are married to education and you take care of your students with fatherly devotion. Some people may think that teaching isn't an attractive profession. Why? They are fed on grass and are expected to produce nourishing milk. But, Mr. Cheng, you can even go without grass. Sometimes, if you do have grass, you may share with others who are in need. You are so kind and generous that you have set up some scholarships with your own income. You have taught us not only English but also a set of noble values.

You're really respectable, admirable and above all, inspiring. Mr. Cheng, please remember one thing — we all cherish you !! 

Love,

Law.