

The Betty Letters



My Dear Grandchild,

As I was walking, this afternoon, I overheard a conversation between two Filipino maids. They were complaining about Hongkong and their respective employers (they, always, complain about employers, anyway). The conversation went on to the subject of Christmas holidays, with one of these ladies of the scullery, claiming that she would be happy to see her home again and to eat the good food of the Philippines. The clear suggestion of this duo of half-a-decks was that the Philippines was a much better place in which to live than Hongkong. The Filipino people, these half-brains were claiming, were better than those of Hongkong; the food was superior in the Philippines to that which may be obtained in Hongkong; and, the countryside has more beauty in the Philippines than has Hongkong. It upset me to hear this nonsense because the Philippines is one of the most corrupt countries in Asia, probably second only to Indonesia. It is not even safe to walk down a street in the Capital City of Manila, these days. As for food, Hongkong tops the list in this category of the attributes of the places of the world in which to eat well. Of course, the Filipino maids of Hongkong are not, exactly, the cream-of-the-crop when it comes to using their little brains so that much of that which they utter, other than grunts and splurts when they are putting food into their mouths, is to be discounted. I mentioned my observations in respect of the Filipino maids to Grandpa. He listened and, then, suggested that some people claim that I, too, do not like Hongkong. This really shocked me because I spend a great deal of time and effort in helping my city. Not being able to write very well, myself, I asked my friend, Cecilia Lee, to write something about Hongkong and how I, really, feel about these four hundred and sixteen square miles. After explaining to Cecilia how I felt about my city, its peoples, its diversity, its dynamism, the incomparable beauty of the harbour, with its ships, plying the waterways, the rolling hills of Kowloon, the willingness of its seven million-plus human population to strive for improvement, she came up with this poem, dedicated to me – naturally! This is what she composed. Tell me what you think of it:

My Home

*Say what you will, of politics and men,
Complain that the sun no longer feels the same
As in days of yore, when a language was spoke,
Refined at a far-distant shore. Then, look at the sea
In the clear morning's light and ask: What is more beautiful
Than nature's gifts: The sparkling harbour;
The sun, kissing wavelets, resembling diamonds,
Rising from the sea.
And, then, I hold your hand in mine and think:
Hongkong, my home, this is where I want to be.*

*This is where I want to be,
Now, and forever more. Of politics and men,
I have little use, as man vies with his fellows
In order to induce support for mandates, near forgot.
But, as boats criss-cross water lanes,
The harbour still pure of man's arrogance and pride,
I mark the beauty of this sight*

*And, captivated by such grandeur, hear my heart say:
Beauty and truth are one; we cannot but be moved by such splendour,
As welcome as is brilliant day, following the calm and softness of the night.*

*The lone junk, which threads its way
Between the lighters and the ships at rest,
Knows it is past years' sail, surely,
Yet, still, it does not fail to knit
The tapestry, which is Hongkong: The old, married to the new;
The miracle that gives delight to the young, the many and the few.
And, when the sun descends behind the hills
And it is time to rest and recollect,
No doubt, shall I contemplate about my fellow man,
A thought which, sadly, no longer thrills.*

*The child, who gently sucks at its mother's breast,
Soft little fingers, caressing warm white flesh;
Life personified in the babe at rest.
Feed the world and be blessed by the need,
Which, from mother to child continues to be
That which is honest, beauteous beheld.
Come nearer to me, child of my life!
Let my arms enfold you, hold you, dress you in yellow silk,
Feed you and, always, be true to you.
Come: Drink of my teat, it is among Asia's sweetest milk!*

Talk to you next week,

Chief Lady

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