



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

Now that the Christmas and New Year holidays are over, I am able to recall to mind all that has happened to the various peoples of different cultures, especially comparing the West with the East. It appears to me that, in various parts of the world, people view holidays in very different ways. In the North American Continent, for instance, Christmas and New Year holidays are a time to lay down tools and plan for the family meal, an orgy of very fattening foods, followed by a nice comfortable chair in front of a television set in order to watch the various sports events. The programming of television channels of North America are dedicated to showing American football matches in various parts of the American Continent, as well as hockey games and basketball. If a Martian were to come to Earth, during the Christmas and New Year holidays, and took note of the activities of Americans, he might jump to the conclusion that this race of humankind is very shallow, intellectually. He would not be too wrong, sadly, because, by and large, Americans – that means Canadians as well as citizens of the United States of America – are terribly shallow in their thinking. This is, probably, because, being the most-successful society that the world has ever known, the studies of these peoples are centred on their own history, geography and sociological characteristics, to the partial or complete exclusion of the history, geography and defining sociological characteristics of societies of the rest of the world. Even the news broadcasts of the North American Continent, during the Christmas and New Year holidays, emphasise the successes of the past year, recapitulating the natural disasters that befell the Continent, during the previous twelve months, and looks for one breaking story – known, in journalism, as ‘an ace in the hole’ – that could be said to be a touch of humanity to which all Americans can relate. What is missing from the programming in North American television is, of course, what is happening in other parts of the world – because life continues, whether or not it is December 25 or January 1. Contrasting the way in which North Americans celebrate the most-important holidays on their calendar and of the way that the East celebrates the same holidays, one notes that Asians, by and large, take the opportunity to pay particular attention to the elderly family members and plan to share the holidays in the company of their parents and grandparents. Television is not a big thing in Asia as is the case in North America: There are few sports events in the East that can rival the following of the sports events of the North American Continent, during Christmas and New Year. In fact, in Asia, per capita, there are very few television sets, relative to the number of television sets in use in the North American Continent. But the point of all this is that it is not in the culture of the average Asian to sit for hours in front of a television set in order to watch athletes, run with an oblong ball from one side of a football pitch to the other, to marvel at the way in which tall Americans throw a round ball into a basket from sixteen feet away or even further, or to note how well-padded men, wearing on ice-skates, hit a puck (a hard rubber disk) past an opponent in order for the puck to fly in between two poles, known as a goal.

Other than my observations of the Christmas and New Year holidays in North America and Asia, there is, also, another side to it. While the East does not, really, endorse the Christian ethic, nevertheless, the spirit of these two holidays has spread to this part of the world and people in China and other parts of Asia take to

opportunity to be cognizant of the concept of good will to all men. But the way in which Asia celebrates these two holidays is to focus on the family, the elderly in the extended family, and to make plans to cater for the elderly, generally. In Hongkong, one notes how the elderly, visiting parks, Disneyland, etc, are treated with a great deal of respect and understanding by perfect strangers. It seems that at no other time of the year are the elderly treated, thusly. It is good. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, a French writer who died in 1944 at the age of forty four years, who is best known for his famous fairy tale, 'The Little Prince', said: 'If you want to build a ship, do not teach men to build a boat, but teach them to yearn for the wide and open sea.' It is a lesson for us, all. At Christmas and New Year, the population of North America appear to yearn to be able to view the talents of their favourite athletes, forsaking the yearning to acquire mundane things, such as a new motor car, a new television set, etc. In Asia, the yearning of the population is to make displays of appreciation and love of parents and grandparents and to be able to sit down at a table and to eat in their company. Conception, you see, is everything. One may not believe in an omnipotent being, but everybody in the world, be he Jew, Muslim, Catholic, Zoroastrian, Hindu, etc, believe in the concept of love and good will to all men at this time of the year. If nothing else, Christianity has given the world hope in the years to come. And I love you, all.

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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