

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I have read, recently, that India is having trouble in locating suitable hangmen to end the lives of those felons, found guilty of the most-heinous crimes. In New Delhi's Tihar Prison, there is Mohammed Afzal, who has been found guilty of taking part in the terrorist attack on the India Parliament in 2001. It has been determined that this man must hang for his crimes. But there is a dire shortage of trained hangmen in the country, it has recently been discovered. Evidently, people are not queuing up to learn the gentle art of killing their fellows, in accordance with the law. It seems odd that, in a country of about one billion people, there should be a shortage of people, schooled in the profession of hangmen. India, you will recall, is the birthplace of the Thugs – from whence the term, 'thug' was derived. Thugs (from Sanskrit sthag, 'conceal' or 'deceive'), formerly a secret organisation of robbers in India, who always strangled their victims, were notorious during the 19th Century at the height of the British Raj. Devotees of the goddess Kali, they regarded their activities as religious rituals. New members were initiated in an elaborate ceremony and they worshipped, as a symbol of the goddess, the pick axe with which they dug the graves of their victims. Included in their ranks were Brahmins and respectable businessmen. Each October, they would meet in bands and set out on the highways, where they would set upon wealthy travellers, strangle them with a piece of cloth, distribute the booty, and then flee. Thugs arose in northern India before the Muslim conquest in the 12th Century A.D. and thrived, with extraordinary immunity from prosecution under Hindu law, until 1829, when Lord William Bentinck, the British Governor-General of India, began to investigate the organisation. The campaign against the Thugs was remarkably successful and, within 7 years, more than 3,000 Thugs had been imprisoned or hanged. The cult was wiped out, completely. So you understand, My Dear Grandchild, Indians, historically, have been in the habit of hanging, or garroting, their victims to death. One may say that it is in their blood. For what reason, therefore, should there be a shortage of hangmen, today?

In China, on the other hand, as you well know, it is considered too gruesome to hang people, especially in this day and age, because it is so much easier (and cleaner) to shoot a person, found guilty of a capital offence, and, then, have the family of the felon, pay for the bullet that did the deed. In my studies of penology, there is evidence that suggests, strongly, that incarceration of a felon does not guarantee that, at the end of his or her term behind bars, the felon may be returned to the bosom of society with any likelihood that the felon will play a constructive role in that society. Recent studies of penology suggest that recidivism is an increasing problem because keeping criminals in prison for an extended period of time is no guarantee of rehabilitation. Far from it, because a criminal, more often than not, enters prison with a 'bachelor's degree' in say burglary, and graduates in prison with a 'master's degree' in armed robbery or murder. China appears to have the right idea: Don't bother with the concept of rehabilitating criminals, just shoot them. Bang! You're dead! That's that! There is something to be said for the deterrent form of sentencing of criminals because it frightens the pants off those people who may be considering committing an offence, punishable by a bullet in the back of the neck. Public executions are frequent in China so that the masses may see for themselves what happens when a criminal has half of his head blown off by a bullet. With hanging, on the other hand, there is so little to see for the citizenry at a public execution because even the face of the unfortunate is covered up during the hanging party. Now, if hanging were to be re-introduced to China and no sacks were placed over an accused's face, one would be able to see him or her, suffering as the hangman's noose tightens, choking the life out of the bastard. Good stuff, don't you think? Such a sight as a public hanging, minus a face sack, would be more sickening at a public execution than a bullet in the back of the head. After a person is nearly dead, I am told that he loses complete control of all of his bodily

functions and he or she urinates uncontrollably as the life drains away. I suppose that if hanging were to be re-introduced to China, adult diapers would be supplied to the person, about to be hanged, because, otherwise, there could be a terrible stench as the unfortunate individual squirms at the end of the rope, his or her neck, being broken and being unable to breathe. People would not want to be too close to the proceedings if urine and faeces were to be spewed out of the body of the unfortunate – and to have the citizenry afraid to get close to the proceedings would be contrary to the idea of a public execution, you must understand. I wonder which form of public execution is more painful: The bullet in the back of the neck; or, the rope around one's neck, choking the life out of one? Something to consider, isn't it?

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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