

## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*I was pondering, just the other day, whether or not Hongkong is a caring society. What do you think? Does the Hongkong Government have a duty, expressed or implied, to demonstrate that it is a caring society? On a per capita basis, I would be willing to bet money that the average man and woman in Hongkong are fairly well off, compared with their counterparts in most other parts of Asia, except, perhaps, Singapore. That means that most of the inhabitants of the territory want for very little. Of course, everybody is greedy, I understand that, but very few people here go hungry in this territory – unless they are on a diet. However, there are some unfortunate people, here, also, I have observed. On the little bridge, linking Fairmont House to Queensway, for the past year (at least), there has been this ragged little Chinese man, actually living on the bridge. He stands on this bridge, smiling to people as they walk by. In the night, he disappears ... to where, I have no idea. In the daytime, however, he is usually there, looking at the people, coming and going, and, usually, smiling at them. He causes little trouble to anybody, but, of course, he smells terribly. He is very dirty and I see him, scratching various parts of his body, the scratching, obviously, being an indication of being infested by some kind of insect(s). But, he seems happy, all the time. When I walk by him, he waves to me. I do not wave back because I do not want to encourage him. I feel somewhat guilty at having to treat him in this manner because he means no harm and only wants to be friendly. One morning, at about 9 am, one of the Hongkong Government's cleaners was sweeping up the bridge and, when she came to the point where this unfortunate, normally, stands or sits, he went absolutely berserk. He jumped up and down and protested that somebody should go 'into his house', as he put it. He tried to enlist the assistance of passersby to stop the lady cleaner. The lady cleaner, of course, continued with her duties and took scant notice of this poor, ragged man. I should tell you, My Dear Grandchild, this ragged little man has been there, during the coldest temperatures of the winter months, and he must have been very uncomfortable, during the cold-weather period, because his clothes are threadbare. I have long thought to myself as to the reason that the Hongkong Government allows this obviously mentally sick man to continue to live on this bridge. Will the Government only take care of this man when he becomes a threat to himself and others who use the bridge? Hongkong is rich and I think it is terrible that, on seeing a man, such as this one, nothing is done to help him. He needs to be hospitalized for his own sake. Whether or not a man in this condition would be conducive to counselling, I do not know, but it seems to me that an attempt should be made to try to help him. Is that not one of the many roles of a caring society?*

*In a way, you know, My Dear Grandchild, I envy this ragged man, whom I assume is about 40 years old. He wants for nothing, it appears, and lives off handouts, given by the shop-owners in the immediate vicinity of the bridge. He is not a beggar and solicits nothing from anybody. More is the pity! He must know right from wrong because, after eating something, wrapped in a paper bag, he carefully folds up the paper bag and puts it in the rubbish bin. He, obviously, has been taught to be neat and tidy even though he is unkempt, dirty, and wears only ragged clothes, today, clothes that are falling off his back and legs. The Hongkong Government spends tens of billions of dollars, annually, in building infrastructure of one kind or another – while some of its charges are in dire need. Can it not spare a little money for humanity? John Donne (1572-1631), English poet, prose writer, and clergyman, wrote this in 1620, about nearly 387 years ago. The contents of his Meditation of 1620 were as true in his day as they are in this day:*

*'No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved with mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell*

*tolls. It tolls for thee.'*

*It appears to me that those people, who choose to live in Hongkong, permanently or temporarily, have an implied contract with the Government of the day, de jure. Conversely, the Government of the day, de jure, has a contract with the 'citizens' of Hongkong. Other than the de jure contract that the Hongkong Government has with its people, there are, also, contracts, de facto, that the Government has with its people. The de facto contracts, inter alia, include moral laws, many of which may not be precisely defined or, alternatively, may be defined differently, from time to time, depending on a number of factors. Moral conduct seems to be a foundation stone of any free, civilised society of today, but the definition of a moral conduct may differ, also, from time to time, depending on the choices that the majority of the people, living within a free, civilised society, may determine. A moral law, therefore, becomes unconditional, absolute and very necessary when the majority of the people of a society accept it as such. At this point, of course, the Government of the day is bound to uphold it. Jurists, too, apply it in courts of law in their determinations. What this all means, as far as I can determine, is that the Government of Hongkong has a duty toward this little ragged man as well as to all of those other, little ragged men of Hongkong, who have need of immediate assistance.*

*One must not forget that, at one time, my little ragged man was somebody's baby. He drank his mother's milk, enjoyed birthday parties, went to school, and, probably, lived a useful life, at some point. But something happened to change the direction of my little ragged man's fortunes. He no longer is acquisitive; he appears to have no drive, sexual or otherwise; he has stopped acting in the manner of his fellows; and, he has become, if anything, antisocial, albeit passively so. Many people decide to escape from the reality of the day. Some of them sail round the world in sailboats, claiming to be adventurers when, in fact, they are, merely, escapists from the societies that they have left behind. Others try to escape by choosing to live in the wilds of forests, living off the land. And, then, there are those who escape reality in their minds. I suggest that that is what has happened with my little ragged man. He is unlikely to be an orphan of the Hongkong society: There must be many others in similar, or even worse, situations. Who will help my little ragged man before he kills himself, by accident or by design?*

*Talk to you, next week.*

*Chief Lady*

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