

## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*I was watching a very old motion picture, recently, called 'The White Cliffs of Dover'. It starred Irene Dunne and a cast of very accomplished actors and actresses, the names of whom, I did not recognise and, because of the age of this wonderful production, no doubt all of the actresses and actors are long gone to a motion-picture Heaven. The story line was that of a young American girl who, in her late teens or early 20s, travelled to England with her father on a visit. One of the first things that she saw of England from the passenger ship on which she was travelling (this was prior to World War II – 1914-1918) was the white cliffs of Dover. Hence the name of the motion picture. As the story unfolds, at a ball, soon after her arrival in London, she meets a young baron. They fall in love. They marry and, then, go to live in Devon, England, in the ancestral house of the baron. Her husband is killed in World War I and she is left with a baby boy. The boy grows up and, as is the tradition of the family, he joins 'his regiment' and goes off to play his part in World War II. He, too, is mortally wounded and, in the hospital where he is sent, he dies while his mother looks out of a window, extolling virtues of courage, honour, and the greatness of man ... lest we forget. The entire motion picture was devoid of speeding motor cars, fighting between the good and the bad, computer enhancements of any description, gangsters, killing each other as well as innocent bystanders, aeroplanes, dropping bombs on cities, or any other kind of accepted genre of the modern-day motion picture. The complete, 2-hour performance demanded, only, the excellent ability of the art of the actors and actresses. When the motion picture ended, I had the feeling of being totally satisfied and completely fulfilled. And, then, I thought: This story, of beauty, of love, of honour, of one's duty to the society in which one lives, of the eternalness of noble man and woman and their respective roles in the universal scheme of things, are, to a great extent, absent (or veiled) from our life of today. When a motion picture is produced, today, in order for it to be a financial success at the box office, it is required to contain all number of imaginary scenes, such as an Arnold Schwarzenegger, fighting, single-handedly, the army of an evil government; a kick-boxer, who is unbeatable even when fighting 10 enemies at a single battle; a professional boxer who, faced with an impossible task, overcomes all obstacles and, at the end of the motion picture, he wins the fight of his life; a policeman, chasing a gang of killers in his motor car, travelling at more than 100 miles per hour, flying over bridges and even through plate-glass windows in order to bring the felons to justice; and, so on and so on. One cannot even start to compare the beauty and purity of yesteryear's motion pictures with those of today, it seems to me.*

*Is there a lesson to be learned from the above comparison of yesteryear and today in respect of motion pictures? I think so. The lesson is that, to some extent, we have forgotten the lessons of our forefathers. We seem to be relying on the fantastical and, only too often, the impossible and unbelievable situations, forsaking the dignity of simplicity. More to the point, I ask you: Has man lost some of his imaginative powers? When I was a young girl, I read books, avariciously. I found beauty and a great deal of satisfaction, discovering answers to problems of pseudo-spherical geometry; in studying and getting to grips with the workings of parts of the internal organs of man; in reading books of the history of Egypt of the 14th Century Before Christ; of the rise and fall of the Roman Empire; of the absolute and undying beauty of the letters, exchanged by Héloïse and Abelard; the inspired works of William Shakespeare, undoubtedly, the greatest of all playwrights and one of the world's greatest poets; of the thoughts and accomplishments of the ancient Greece philosophers, such as Heraclitus, Anaximander, Empedocles, Socrates, Aristotle, and Plotinus; or, experiencing a mental orgasm when listening to the Richard Wagner opera, Tristan und Isolde. But, who, today, reads? There was a time when reading books was one of the best methods of enjoying one's leisure hours, unless one had learned to play a musical instrument with some degree of competency. Talking*

*about music, do you know that, in 17th Century England, in pubs, many people could pick up a piece of sheet music, one never seen before, and, immediately, read the annotations and, then, sing, or at least hum the composition without a second thought? Who can do that today? Those days are, just about, gone forever. It is sad, is it not?*

*Tell me, My Dear Grandchild: Can we bring back yesteryear? Can we return to basics? Or, is today's world what one is supposed to maintain as being progress? Are the lessons of our forefathers swept under the carpet of history? Can we institute a renaissance? It appears to me that, if today is progress, then, what was yesteryear? The progress of today appears to have been, mainly, in the expedient killing of man. The white cliffs of Dover are as white, today, as they were when they were first created, but the human viewers of these magnificent precipices are more jaundiced than ever before. Man, still, cannot live with his fellows in the peaceful magnificence of nature. Technical advances are, theoretically, supposed to make man's life easier and more comfortable, improve manufacturing production so as to make products more affordable to all peoples, and enrich the quality of life in general. For me, I would have preferred to live in the world of that thought-provoking motion picture of so many years ago rather than in today's world.*

*Think about it.*

*Talk to you, next week.*

*Chief Lady*

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