

## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*Hongkong has become a territory where even adults seem to be losing their abilities to understand ideas and to imagine concepts. Instead, one notes that many people are resorting to reading comics or are watching cartoons on television. In some cases, cartoons contain the sequential nature of pictures so that pictures replace words. Clearly, this art genre is a substitute for the inability of many people to imagine, and/or to associate words and sounds for pictographs. One is bombarded, daily, with cartoons of one kind or another on television. Adults have become the biggest purchasers of computer games where fictional characters do battle with each other. I cannot help but wonder where this society of ours is headed. Originally, comics, the earliest form of the modern rebirth of this phenomenon, were meant to convey comedy. Today, most comics convey very little that is comedy and, instead, the pictorial narratives convey suggestions of illogicalities, such as flying teenagers, righting the wrongs of the world when needs be such, or an otherworldly being, posing as a journalist, during an ordinary working day, and, then, changing into a super-human being, who has the ability of saving the world from itself. Rubber man, spiderman, superwoman, ad nauseam! Then, of course, there are the talking animals and birds in cages, with the predator animal, never getting a meal, while the little tweety bird tells the predator: 'You naughty little thing!' The mass market of the world first got its taste of comics in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the newspaper comic strip. The combination of words and pictures became very popular. This set the stage for the world and, today, everybody is assaulted with comics of one kind or another and in one form or another.*

*I suppose that you are wondering as to the reason for me, writing to you about the above. It is because, I think, they pose a threat not just to children, but to everybody. Now, when I was in primary school, one of the first things that I learned was the multiplication tables. You remember, I hope: 2 times 2 is 4; 4 times 4 is 16; 16 times 16 is 256; 256 times 256 is 65,536, and so on. Then came square roots: The square root of 2 is 1.414; the square root of 3 is 1.732; the square root of 4 is 2; the square root of 5 is 2.235, and so on. I could give you many more examples of what a child, just a few short decades ago, had to learn by heart. The idea of these mental exercises is quite obvious because they are, to be trite, the building blocks of learning. One extrapolates and interpolates from these building blocks and, although in one's formative years, one may not note the importance of these building blocks, as time passes, one appreciates them more and more. Some of the greatest thinkers of the world started out as children, learning their lessons by heart. All of the sciences that we take for granted, today, had their roots in philosophy. The very word, philosophy, has its roots in the Greek word, 'φιλοσοφία' (philosophia), which means, literally: 'Love of Wisdom'. The roots of Western philosophy go back to about 585 B.C. with Thales of Miletus. Thales is said to have been the father of Western philosophy and is, today, considered one of the Seven Wise Men of Greece in his day. He is best known for his statement: 'Water is best.' The thinkers of this time were engrossed in trying to understand the fundamental causes and principles of the universe. Everything seems to come from and revert to water, one might have heard Thales commenting in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century before the birth of Christ. From these beginning, we owe our knowledge to a storehouse of disciplines, too long for me to write in this letter, but I can tell you that all modern applications of science have their beginnings in philosophy.*

*Instead of continuing along the path, fashioned by our forefathers of centuries past, the modern world seems to be trying to escape into the world of make-believe. In the movie, The Wizard of Oz, in which the famous Judy Garland made her mark of the world, forever, every one of the principal characters was, in fact, a personification of the foibles of the world. As the heroine of the story goes, Dorothy Gale states that she longs for a place where there isn't any trouble. In a dream, Dorothy is transported to the magical Land of Oz where the Good Witch of the North advises her 'to follow the yellow brick road' to the Emerald City and, there, to meet the Wizard of Oz. During her journey, Dorothy meets a Scarecrow, a Tin Man and a Lion. These characters join Dorothy in the hope that they may obtain that which they lack: A brain for the Scarecrow; and heart for the Tin Man; and courage for the Lion. The Wizard of Oz, as a film, is inundated with lessons for us, all, lest we forget; and, the lessons are taught to the haunting lullabies of such favourites as 'Over The Rainbow', 'If I Only Had A Heart', 'We're Off To See The Wizard'. The film is rated as one of the ten best in history. It goes back to the basic principles that were taught in school in the late 1930s.*

*Then, of course, there is the tremendously popular story, written by the Dean Jonathan Swift in 1735: Gulliver's Travels. It is a tale that is told and told over and over. One never tires of it and of its lessons, embedded in the thinking of Gulliver and in the thinking of the characters that Gulliver encounters. The philosophy in this story is as true in Dean Swift's day as it is today: It is a satire on human nature. It is a sad testament to man.*

*Enough of this for today. It is saddening to think how man has sunk into the modern intellectual depths of degradation where his only escape appears to be in comics, cartoons on television, computer games, and nonsensical beliefs of his ability to achieve superhuman feats.*

*Talk to you, next week.*

*Chief Lady*

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