

## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*While strolling round The Strand, one of the important streets in the heart of London, I came across a shop, specialising in men's and ladies' shirts and blouses. In the window of T.M. Lewin, was a sign, stating: Established in 1898. For a shirt shop to be 113 years old is, almost, an incredible record of achievement and I cannot think of any shop in Hongkong to come even a little close to being 113 years old. So, in I walked with a view to purchasing some shirts for Bo-Bo, my froglike husband. As I looked round the shop, the many shelves, lined with shirts and blouses of many colours, it struck me that the shirts all looked very much alike, except for the colours, of course. Picking up one of the shirts, I looked to see where it was made, but the inside of collar only stated the name of the shop. On careful inspection, I soon realised that there was no tag, stating that the shirt had been made in England. At about this time, a young man, wearing a big smile came over to me and asked if he could help me. 'Where are your shirts made?' I asked. The young man, obviously of African descent, looked round the shop for somebody and, not finding that somebody, said that the shirts were made in China ... 'I think.' I did not ask him the price of the shirts because I reasoned that anything made in China could be bought much cheaper in China than in London, England. And so I left the shop. Instead of a shirt to remind The Frog of my trip to London, I bought him a 2-pound box of British butter cookies, which had been produced in Denmark. Anyway, that was a much better present for The Frog because then I could have a few of the cookies when I was in the mood.*

*Seated back in our home in Hongkong, I told The Frog of my experience in the T.M. Lewin shop. He smiled: 'British shirts! The Brits have just about forgotten how to make any bespoke. The days of bespoke shirts and shoes and suits are long gone. Very few people take up the art of tailoring, any more, in that country.' It was the first time that I had heard the word, 'bespoke', but The Frog explained that it is the opposite of ready-made. The Frog continued: 'British workmanship started to die a slow death with the coming of the Industrial Revolution of the 1700s. By the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, British-born artisans were few and far between. If you were to ask 10,000 people in the United Kingdom as to the meaning of a cooper, it is likely that not more than one person would be able to tell you. And, no, Betty, a cooper is not the name of a motor car. With the passing of the real artisans of England, Scotland and Wales, and with a static population of about 62 million people (the Brits do not like to have too many children, these days, it is something to do with the length of their penises, according to the latest medical findings), the need for clothes had to be met and so, as English people are, generally, a thrifty race, clever purveyors of clothes looked round for a country where clothes could be mass-produced at a price to fit the average Brits' budget. China was among those countries that fitted the requirements, laid down by those purveyors of the British Isles. Luckily for China, it is well known that the Brits, generally, have, just about, forgotten or even recall the meaning of quality so that, to them, one shirt looks just like another. That is the reason that, as you appreciated in the shop of T.M. Lewin, all of the shirts looked as though they were stamped out of a single mould, except for the colours of course.'*

*As I thought about that which The Frog had told me, I realised that he was totally correct. What do the Brits make today? The Rolls-Royce motor car is owned by the German corporation, Volkswagen AG, while the*

*Bentley motor car is owned by Bayerische Motoren Werke AG, known popularly as, simply, BMW. The Land Rover and the Jaguar motor cars are both owned by the Indian conglomerate, Tata Motors Ltd. Eastern European workmen, by and large, act as the handymen in the United Kingdom, replacing the ethnic Indians and the Central America tradesmen, who used to be able to settle in Great Britain due to the fact that, at one time, the area of the world in which they were born had been part of the British Empire when the slave trade was in full swing. When a rich Brit wants to purchase a well-made suit, a good pair of leather shoes, he travels to Italy where such arts as tailoring and working as a cobbler are still, jealously, guarded by families who pass down their talents to the younger generation. In World War II, it was an accepted fact that the British Broadcasting Corporation, known as the BBC, was the most-reliable of all news services in the world. Today, the Al Jazeera news service has upstaged the BBC. So, just about all that the Brits have left is their inimitable British accent. How the mighty have fallen!*

*Talk to you, next week.*

*Chief Lady*

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