

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (UK) has made a terrible faux pas by inviting Mr William Bratton to give advice to the British Government on how best to tackle the recent riots in a number of parts of London and other cities in the UK. The innuendo, by virtue of this invitation, is that Prime Minister David Cameron is of the opinion that the British police force is incapable of handling the situation and so the Prime Minister has determined that he has to bring in the 'American cavalry' in order to save the country, just like those stories of the old West of the 19th Century when along came the cavalry, just in time to save the day as the Red Indians were about to win the skirmish with the White Eyes, who were known to have forked tongues. One can only speculate as to what the average British bobby on the beat thinks of the leader of his Government, but it cannot be complimentary, can it? If anybody should have called for help from the United States, one would have thought that it would have been the Metropolitan Police Commissioner (of London). Is it possible that it was he? Unlikely! For the Commissioner of Police to have had to call in the US Cavalry, it would have been an outright, blatant admission of his own incompetence. Another question is, of course: What does Mr William Bratton, the former Commander of the police forces of Boston, New York and Los Angeles, know about the problems, confronting London and other cities of the UK? Probably zilch. I am not suggesting that Mr William Bratton is incompetent, not at all, but I am suggesting that Prime Minister David Cameron is stupid to have asked for this gentleman's advise – and, then, make the request public, thus undermining the esprit de corps of the entire UK police force. This is likely to lead to some inopportune resignations among the rank of file.

It is historical fact that the UK police force was much slower to come into existence than in other parts of Europe. In the 16th Century, there were only private watchmen, mostly funded by private individuals and certain organisations of the UK. The closest thing to a police force in the UK was The Statute of Winchester (1285) which obliged the authorities of every town to keep watch at the city gates and to arrest any and all suspicious 'night walkers'. Those were the days of the infamous British highwayman, who stalked the carriages on the highways, robbing and killing, willy-nilly. In 1663, night watchmen in London were the first paid law enforcement body of the UK, augmenting the force of unpaid constables. Their main task was to guard the streets. They were nicknamed 'Charlies'. So, you see, My Dear Grandchild, the UK has been slow off the mark, historically, when it comes to employing a police force to maintain law and order. The British 'bobby' has, always, been held in high regard, internationally, but of late, along with the telephone-hacking scandal of the now defunct, The News of The World, he has fallen from grace, somewhat.

I recall, some years ago, that I nearly had a problem when travelling on a motorway where the maximum speed limit was 70 miles per hour. I was travelling at the maximum speed in my Citroen and, there, a little distance in front of me, was a Land Rover with 2 people, seated in it. I pulled over to the right in an attempt to pass the vehicle, but the Land Rover blocked my way by pulling over to the right, also. When the Land Rover returned to the left side of the motorway, I, once again, attempted to pass it, giving my Citroen a burst of speed. But, once again, the Land Rover blocked my way. Now, I was getting upset with the driver of the Land Rover. When the Land Rover, pulled over to the left side of the motorway, again, the passenger in the

front seat, next to the driver, turned round to have a close look at me. Then, I noted that he was wearing the hat of a policeman. He pointed to the side of the road, commanding me to stop. 'Do you speak English?' the policeman asked when he came over to my Citroen. On learning that I spoke perfect English, being a Chinese lady of high birth, he explained that I was not exceeding the speed limit 'because I would not allow that. Did you notice that my Land Rover was only travelling at exactly 70 miles per hour and it was blocking you from passing?' 'Indeed, I did. I did not understand your actions, at all!' I quickly added. 'Well, you see, if you had passed my vehicle, you would have been exceeding the speed limit, wouldn't you? And, then, I would have had to pull you over and endorse your licence for travelling in excess of the speed limit. You wouldn't have liked that, would you?' It, at this point, struck me that I was, potentially, in trouble. I put on my dour look and tried to force out a little tear. 'I am sorry. I fully understand, now. I am, very, very sorry.' The policeman said that, since I had not exceeded the speed limit, I had not perpetrated an act that was contrary to the law, but he was going to broadcast to other policemen on the motorway to watch out for my Citroen just in case I did exceed the speed limit. 'Please be careful and do not speed! You may travel up to 70 miles per hour as long as you wish, but do not exceed that speed. Do you fully understand, Madame?' With that, the tall, handsome policeman let me continue on my journey to Dover. Now, in the US, a patrolman in his Ford would have allowed me to pass, and then fined me for speeding without a second thought. I must tell you, My Dear Grandchild, I never thought of speeding again, remembering the lesson that I had been taught on that British motorway by a tall, charming British bobby. Summing up the difference between the British and the American police modus operandi, the British prefer to deter crime while the Americans seem to relish punishing wrongdoers.

Coming back to the matter of Prime Minister David Cameron and his idea about bringing in an experienced crime fighter from the US, that smacks of an act, being contrary to trying to deter crime, preferring instead, to punish wrongdoers. The core of the problems of the United Kingdom is well known: The class system guarantees that the have-nots will continue to be among the underclasses and will find it difficult to lift themselves out of their underprivileged lifestyles. The British hoi polloi, for generations, have been encouraged to admire the aristocracy, the privileged class, first created by the former kings and queens of the realm, who bestowed honours on certain people whom they liked or who were monied, raising them above what monarch of the day considered the riff-raff of the British Empire. The House of Lords is a classic example of this. Sir W. S. Gilbert (of Gilbert and Sullivan fame) loved to thumb his nose at the antics of the lords and ladies of the British Empire and dared to mock them, whenever possible, in the comic operas of which he was the librettist, the music for which was composed by Sir Arthur Sullivan. Perhaps, Prime Minister David Cameron should aim at trying to solve the real problems of the United Kingdom, talking to philosophers, sociologists and the intelligentsia instead of wasting his time and the country's money, importing an American policeman.

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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