

Two days ago we sent our eldest, Andy, off to Chefoo for the first time. Only three days previous, we had welcomed his youngest brother, Titus, into the world. That was about enough excitement for one week! After the whirlwind of emotions which accompanied Titus' arrival and Andy's departure had subsided, I had time to reflect and picked up a book to read to Tim, our four-year-old. It was a story I had often read to Andy - PINOCCHIO

As a preacher I tend to exegete everything I read - even the comics. As I flipped the pages of that ancient fable, I began to see many similarities between Pinocchio and the events of the last few days.

Like all fathers, Geppetto wanted a son and so formed him from a piece of wood on his workbench. He realized that, in order to be a "real" boy, Pinoke would need to meet other boys and girls, learn social graces, and stuff some knowledge into his little wooden head. Education was the answer.

Finally the fateful day came when Geppetto prepared his son for the first day of school. (He had considered home schooling, but there were no correspondence courses in Italian at the time.) No doubt he shed a tear or two as the puppet clopped down the street towards school. Pinocchio never made it to school, however. A sly fox tricked him into boarding a coach pulled by donkeys headed for Pleasure Island. Everything went great at first. But in a short time the fun and games ended as homesick boys (many sprouting donkey ears) realized they were separated from "mommy and daddy."

Like Old Geppetto, I watched with concern as our six-year-old stood in innocent bliss with his pals (he was the first in line) eager for this new "adventure." His tran-

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sportation wasn't a coach filled with rowdy boys but a Boeing jet laden with twenty-two Chefooites from Thailand. Andy's mind was more on the airplane ride and toy in his backpack than on the realities that lay ahead. Ever since his first visit a year ago, Andy had viewed Chefoo as a kind of Pleasure Island - a place of excitement, new friends, new teachers and, of course, the jungle. Yet "Pleasure Island" will no doubt become "Reality Island" when Andy realizes that mom and dad aren't around and won't be for four long months.

Geppetto took a risk in sending Plocchio off to school. He knew full well that the Foulfellows and Lampwicks of this world would try to detour his son onto the wrong path, but he sent him anyway. We do the same. The modern world makes Pleasure Island seem like a picnic. Our children will face temptations and trials that we never dreamed of. It's comforting to know that the spiritual and academic training at Chefoo is designed to prepare my children for life in the 20th century. Sure, it's risky sending a five or six-year-old away to boarding school. Yet it is a calculated risk based on the faithfulness of God.

Why could Geppetto send his son off to school with such confidence? The answer is surprising - a little cricket named Jiminy. Jiminy acted as Pinoke's conscience and guide and was constantly at his side. Unfortunately, Jiminy failed to keep the naive puppet out of trouble. Unlike Jiminy, I know that my son has an unfailing Guide and Companion who has promised to help him through the rough spots - the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, if you are a nervous Geppetto, like me, who has just sent your oldest to Chefoo - take heart. I've been assured that they will return quite normal - no donkey ears or tails. Be aware, however, that the "Hee Haw" of your donkey may have a distinct English accent. But then again, you realized that could happen when you sent your child to Pleasure Island in the first place!