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Editorializing

The Huddled Masses

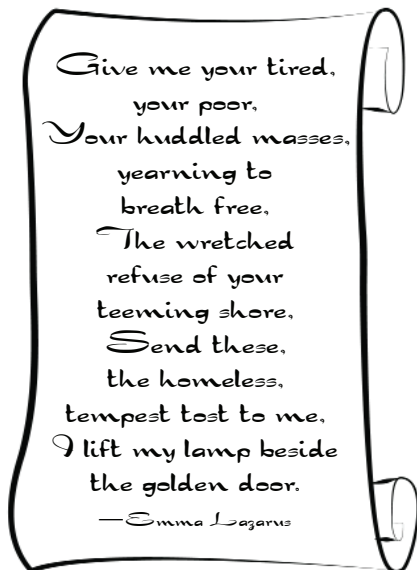
To understand “The Land of Opportunity,” and “The New World,” as referring to what is now the Continental United States, we must take a look at what life was like during the 1700’s and 1800’s in the “old world.”

The United Kingdom gave birth to the United States in what can best be described as a forceps delivery, recorded in history as the Revolutionary War. During a period in which British

colonies were so vast that it was said—accurately—that the “sun never sets on the British Empire.”

In spite of being the dominant world power during the 18th and 19th centuries, living conditions for the majority of the habitants of the United Kingdom were extremely precarious. There existed a virtual caste system that created an almost insurmountable barrier between the few—the aristocracy—and the masses—the peasantry.

The aristocrats, owners of large estates, to borrow a Biblical term, were “clothed in...fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day,” with servants to tend to the fields, the herds, all household chores—indeed, to dress the female members with their



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whalebone bodices and multilayered petticoats, to attend to their every need so their daily social calendar would not be disturbed.

So ingrained was this aristocratic caste system that loveless marriages were often arranged by the parents in which wealth and “good breeding” (social status) were the primary factors. For parents to marry off their daughter—especially one with limited physical or mental attributes—a dowry was paid to the prospective groom, only refundable in case of a divorce. By Crown law, any wealth or property brought to the union by the wife remained the legal possession of the husband in the case of divorce or death.

For the underprivileged, each new day was a challenge to survive—a challenge calculated in terms of “mouths to feed.” In the maritime cities, many were employed in the fishing and whaling industry, either as sailors or in processing plants where catches were prepared for market and whale blubber distilled into oil to be burned in lamps.

To feed the mouths, often with a thin gruel, that never satisfied the stomach, required that both parents, and often children nine or 10 years old, work in dank, insalubrious sweatshops for 12 hours or more daily. Expectant women were fortunate to have a ten-day maternity break.

Shipwrecks, accidents, childbirth, sickness, and epidemics were a constant reminder that a difficult life could get even worse. In a most literal sense, very frequently there was only a step or two between them and death. For a widow to be off work for a week could easily spell death for undernourished children.

Since in most neighborhoods the situation was the same for everyone, handouts were rare. To place food in the mouth of a neighbor child was to deprive their own child of life-sustaining nourishment.

Almost everyone lived in tenant housing and to get behind even a week in the rent could result in eviction—with nowhere to go...

Actually, there was somewhere to go. To the infamous workhouses. These were an absolute last resort and avoided like the plague, although it was exactly in these establishments that the frequent plagues often struck first, decimating the inhabitants. Everyone was expected to work, even five and six year old children. Security was no problem, with anyone free to leave...and go where?

In all fairness it must be pointed out that not only the nation, but the world was in a metamorphosis, a transition from medieval serfdom to a more open economy with greater social maneuverability. However, as so often happens, human greed and desire for a life of luxury and leisure, even at the price of trampling on the advancement and happiness of the unfortunate, greatly retarded this change.

In Ireland the Great Famine, also known as the Irish Potato Famine, in the middle of the nineteenth century, resulted in over a million deaths and a million emigrations, most to America, causing the country’s population to fall by approximately 25 percent.

Thus, when word began to circulate of a new land of opportunity where men and women could, even though apparently not created equal in their homeland, through hard work and persistence, become equal and flourish.

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Many nationalities migrated to N America, but the greatest contribution was surely made by citizens of the United Kingdom.

The abjectly poor could not, of course purchase passage to the Land of Opportunity without outside help. However, those a step higher that rented or owned small plots, sold all they had to land a crowded, unsanitary berth on a sail ship that could be at sea several months before reaching N America. Never did all those embarking reach their destination. Funerals at sea were a constant reminder of the fragility of life.

It was these brave souls who placed liberty above life, who sold all and risked their lives at sea for the chance to become their own masters.

Many reached American shores virtually penniless, with no guaranteed job. Yet they flooded in, taking whatever job, however menial, seeing it as the bottom rung of a ladder they would eventually be able to climb. And climb they did!

It was the immigrants, from many nations, that offered their lives as a dowry for opportunity. It was all these immigrants, especially from Europe and Asia, that laid the foundation for greatness. Many languages were spoken that dominated in both villages, regions and entire sections of cities. But it was the English language that was sown from coast to coast and made all other languages secondary or totally eradicated them.

The list of what immigrants did for America is endless, so we will mention basically two: the building of railroads, the crowning achievement being the Transcontinental, and the westward move that carried settlers even to areas that had not yet acquired statehood.

Among these nineteenth century settlers there were culls, there were swindlers and there were criminals, but they were a minority. As law and order were established, the undesirable elements were brought under control.

Anyone who has grown up in the Bible Belt, as well as in many other conservative areas, may have difficulty appreciating the true value of the cultural influence these brave immigrants had on the life enjoyed today. Anyone who has lived abroad knows that the standard of honesty implanted in N America goes far beyond the flexible measure of truth and integrity ingrained in so many foreign cultures.

The American judicial system has borrowed heavily from anglo-saxon jurisprudence. In a word, the English had a strong and positive influence on the founding of the New World nation.

It was not the English aristocracy that crossed the ocean en masse to populate the new continent. It was, as the inscription reads...

The tired,
The poor,
The huddled masses yearning to breath free,
The wretched refuse,
The homeless,
The tempest tossed (“tost” in the original).

It was those who worked like slaves and knew that even so were destined to remain poor.

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It was the huddled masses dreaming of owning a home from which they would not be evicted after a week in arrears on the rent.

It was those who were expected to know their place in life and address their “superiors” as My Lord and My Lady.

It was those who were often denied even minimal benefits of education and health services, who believed that death was the logical and inevitable sequel to many simple ailments.

It was these huddled masses that endured the rigors of an ocean passage in fetid quarters and disembarked virtually penniless to face life on a new continent.

It was these huddled masses who first found work in factories not unlike those they left in the “old world,” but with a great difference. Through long hours of hard work they were able to accumulate enough to buy a team of oxen, a wagon, rudimentary tools, seed, flour and basic staples to make the trip westward, again facing death and hardships. But at the journey’s end they were able to register a claim on a quarter section of land on which to start a new life.

This, in a few words, is the beautiful story of a nation that lifted its lamp beside a golden door for many peoples yearning for liberty and the privilege of seeing the fruit of their labors.

This is the story of how America grew to be the greatest nation in all history.

It is a nation that stands as a tribute to the valiant people of the United Kingdom.

It would be unfair to leave the impression that the English ruling class was made up only of tyrants and frivolous men and women. Were it not for a lone Englishman, born at the tail end of the nineteenth century, a distinguished warrior in the Boer War in South Africa, America would not today be a land of liberty and opportunity.

Winston Churchill.

In his book, *Things That Matter* (Crown Publishing Group – ISBN 978-0-385-34917-8), Charles Krauthammer dedicates a chapter to Mr. Churchill, entitled “Winston Churchill: The Indispensable Man”.

He begins by reflecting on TIME Magazine’s choice of the Man of the Century, Albert Einstein. Krauthammer agrees that Einstein was doubtlessly the greatest mind of the century in the field of physics, renown especially for his theory of relativity. However, he believes that with the passing of time others would have reached the same conclusion, thus making him replaceable.

Winston Churchill, on the other hand, Krauthammer believes, was irreplaceable—the right man at the right time at the right place. He should have been, Krauthammer asserts, the Man of the Century.

Adolf Hitler, was the most evil despot of all human history in that he was responsible, directly and indirectly for the death of some 60 million men, women and children. He makes conquerors like Caesar, Nero and Napoleon look like schoolboys. Hitler’s goal was not only to dominate Europe, but eventually the entire world. With his blitzkrieg and Luftwaffe he almost effortlessly overran Poland, the Balkans, the Netherlands and many other neighboring nations. Yet he instinctively knew that until England was brought to her knees, his goal of conquering the world would be thwarted.

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It was with a demonic fury he lashed out at England in nighttime air raids of up to three or four hundred bombers raining destruction on London and surrounding cities. Incendiary bombs often set entire blocks on fire.

It was during these terrible nights when air raid sirens repeatedly sounded that everyone had to struggle to air raid shelters and remain there until the all clear was heard. Each new day brought to light the terrible reality of the death and destruction wrought during the night. The words of Thomas Paine, the English journalist living in America during the Revolution, “These are times that try men’s souls,” held a special meaning during the dark night of World War II when death angels sought to destroy not only the firstborn, but all living souls. Had it not been for the words of encouragement of Winston Churchill, England would have fallen, and in a domino effect, so would have the rest of the world.

Let’s notice a few of his jewels:

In his first speech to the House of Commons on 13 May 1940, he declared: *“I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat...”*

“You ask what is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory. Victory at all costs. Victory in spite of all terror. Victory however long and hard the road may be. For without victory there is no survival.”

In a speech to the House of Commons on 4 June 1940, he made his famous promise:

“We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender!”

The House of Commons on 18 June 1940:

*“The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, **‘This was their Finest Hour.’**”*

The House of Commons on 22 January 1941, speaking of the bravery of the Royal Air Force pilots who nightly took to the skies to repel German bombers and fighters:

“Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.”

A speech given in the Canadian Parliament on 30 December 1941:

“When I warned [the French] that Britain would fight on alone, whatever they did, their Generals told their Prime Minister and his divided cabinet: ‘In three weeks, England will have her neck wrung like a chicken. [a pause] Some chicken! Some neck!’”

A speech in Mansion House on 10 November 1942, after a resounding victory against the Germans:

“The Germans have received back again that measure of fire and steel which they have so often meted out to others. Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”

This is supposed to have been the humorous response of Churchill on 27 February 1944 to a priggish civil servant’s memo informing him that it was improper to end a sentence with a preposition:

“This is the kind of tedious [sometimes “pedantic”] nonsense up with which I will not put!”

America is great because of the English and exists as a free country because of Winston Churchill. ☒

My Grandpa and the Official

Now, let’s get this straight. My grandpa was born toward the tail end of the 1800’s and exited this life nearly half a century ago. The official I am talking about was born in the middle of the last century and exited some five years ago. My grandpa was American and the official Brazilian, so they, of course, never knew each other.

The official, I should clarify, was a household word in our city of a hundred thousand plus inhabitants because of being the owner of one of our local “cartórios.” I don’t know if you have an equivalent office in N America. He, together with his wife and staff, were responsible for drawing up land titles, registering contracts, notarizing signatures, among many other things, a highly respected position in social circles.

Some 40 years ago a small parcel of land on the Colony was purchased by an American. Unfortunately, the owner passed away shortly after and I was given power-of-attorney and the responsibility of selling the land.

Two buyers soon showed up wanting to purchase the land in partnership. One was the official I have just spoken of and the other the head of an important federal office. The price was agreed on and among smiles and handshakes the deal was sealed. Now all that needed to be done was draw up the papers and get them signed.

Then a problem arose. The official called me in and said he had decided he wanted to buy the tract of land by himself and that I should sign the title over to him alone, leaving his partner out.

I told him this would be unethical as we had a gentleman’s agreement that I would sign the title over to both of them. He was adamant (a propensity he exercised artfully) and made it plain I *would* sign the title over only to him. He apparently believed that being an official and head of the land office gave him the last word.

I said to him, “We need to sit down and talk.” He agreed and asked where I would like to meet after work. I said, “How about in your home?”

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Hearing my suggestion, it looked like the man was about to have a coronary. He shouted, “After a stressful day at work, the LAST place I want to go is home!”

My grandpa is the most saintly man I have ever known. He had a small farm that he tilled with an old D John Deere. I still see him slowly turning the flywheel on the side of the tractor, releasing the petcock to suck in a bit of gasoline to aid in the initial combustion. Then close the petcock, twirl the flywheel in the opposite direction until a slow pop-pop was heard, saying the motor had powered up. He harvested his grain with a pull-type binder, gathered up the scattered bundles and made shocks, that were again gathered up and taken to the threshing machine.

Needless to say, his background and way of making a living were different from that of the described official.

My grandparents were married back in the oil lamp days. A few of the windows in their house did have a Thomas Kinkade glow to them, but basically the house was in darkness with no outside lights or yard light.

My grandpa told me once that he never came home after dark. No matter what he was working at, he would drop what he was doing so he could be with grandma when night settled in.

Recently I had the opening to an evening service in my congregation. I told them the story of my grandpa and the official.

Then, in a change of course, I asked my listeners if they loved their congregation. I think that if I would have asked for a hand raising, everyone—with maybe a few abstentions—would have held their hands high. After all, it is noble to love one’s own congregation.

Then I asked them if they loved their congregation like my grandpa loved my grandma, or like the official loved his wife?

My grandpa believed that being home before darkness *everyday* was what grandma deserved. So far as I know, he made no exceptions.

The official, on the other hand, wanted to be anyplace but at home at nightfall. If he would have lived in England, I suspect he would have spent several hours in a pub before heading home.

So far so good.

Then I reminded my good listeners of a school meeting we had on a week evening of the previous week.

We are moved when reading how Jonathan said to David, “Tomorrow...thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty.”

Admittedly, very few normal human beings would list school meetings as their favorite way of spending an evening. But most assuredly, in our Mennonite circles the majority would list our private schools as a top priority. Most would raise their hands to this.

So, if Jonathan would have been present in our school meeting, might he have commented, “Yesterday [thou wast missed because thy seat was empty.]”?

Let’s get one thing straight. I hope to hear no pious remarks like, “My, so in Brazil you are allergic to school meetings.” I suspect this is a problem endemic in quite a few

congregations.” So, don’t ask what size shoes we wear in Brazil. Measure your own instep.

It is discouraging to read about utopian aspirations, of situations that can only exist on paper. Yet, as I write a question circles my head like a pesky gnat: Is it utopian to believe that it should—and could—be possible to get a better turnout in school meetings? In Bible study? And in other meetings labeled as “boring”?

Thus the final question: Do you love your congregation like my grandpa loved my grandma? Or like the official loved his wife?

Now, as an afterthought on our school meeting. In spite of everything, it was one of the best school meetings I have ever attended. Our school is in a period of transition and there were some potentially sticky issues to resolve.

I have no doubt that quite a few of those present in the meeting had some preformed opinion as to what would work best. As these ideas were presented I noticed a merging taking place. Each one considered what the other had to say and what resulted was a consensus that took into consideration all that had been said. Or put differently, I believe that many adjusted their thinking to a new thought superior to their own. And yet, in a sense, it now was their own.

What really caught my attention was the fact that all the votes were strong—the kind of vote that requires no counting. And then it hit me, when a subject can be discussed in a meeting in which it isn’t necessary to count votes, that is success; it is what a good meeting is all about. ▲

Life on the Colony

Buriti Shopping. That is the name of the new shopping center that opened in Rio Verde December 20th. Only about half of the 180 stores are occupied at this point, but in another couple of months I suspect most will be in operation. For those of us who moved here nearly half a century ago, to see the Golden Arches pasted on the front of the building represents change. I am not adverse to occasionally stopping at a McDonalds (their restrooms are better than their food—and free), but for what I would have to spend at our local McDonalds to get a half decent meal, I can buy a fabulous meal with grilled meat and all the trimmings at a number of restaurants in town. So, their survival will depend on people with different taste buds and bank accounts than mine.

The highway from Rio Verde to Goiânia. Someone who recently went to Goiânia to pick up relatives at the airport tells me there are only 24 kilometers still under construction until it is 4-lane all the way. Nice doesn’t cover it.

Passing lanes. On the GO174, the highway we use to go to town from the Colony, work is soon to begin on passing lanes. I suspect work will begin at the end of the rainy season, probably in April. Very heavy traffic and heavy feet on the accelerator have turned this into a dangerous road, especially during harvest and planting.

Barometers in Brazil. People with barometers will confirm that they don’t seem

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to work. As it turns out, we don't have the wide barometric pressure fluctuations common in N America. However, since my Davis Weather Station has a very precision barometer, I have made an interesting observation. Our normal reading ranges from 29.95 down to 29.80 inches of mercury. However, when the reading dips below 29.70 we almost invariably have severe storms with high winds and often torrential rains. So, I now pay close attention to what my barometer has to tell me.

Brazil Annual Meeting. On December 31st we had our Brazil Annual Meeting at the Monte Alegre Cong. The afternoon was taken up with reports and issues that need to be settled. The evening session was dedicated to technology. During the year an impromptu group of six brethren began working on bilingual content filters that would work in both English and Portuguese (important as quite a few members, especially our youth, are bilingual). Several are now being tested and with some fine-tuning should be very adequate for our needs. An effort is being made to work closely with the N American Technology Committee. A vote of support was given to the group to continue their work until the next Annual Meeting.

Cupid. Between January 5th of last year and January 18th of this year, there will have been 11 weddings in the church in Brazil—a record, coming close to a wedding a month on the average. One wedding was in the Rio Verde (Town) Congregation, two in the Rio Verdinho Cong. and eight at the MonTree Alegre Cong. Four of these weddings were girls marrying N American boys. One is a N American boy who will be living in Brazil.