

Canterbury Tales Redux

The Traveler's Tale

*A tale to tell that you might hear
The truth of all of that we fear
That and which we hope to be
That and which we'll never see
A tale so old that it might be
Greece or Rome or Brittany
A tale of power you would know
Except you still deny it so
For once again we've gone astray
And once again we'll rue the day
By standing not for what is true
By standing not for what we knew
But let us now this tale be told
A tale new yet a tale old*

*The traveler spoke to us that day
Of a kingdom far away
He said the kingdom although young
Was watched by all in Christendom
For it was hoped that it would be
A beacon for the world to see
A light of justice a torch for peace
Opportunity within reach
How might this be a voice did ask
When such has never come to past
That ever since man ruled man
The rule has been by iron hand
The traveler said it was to be
Ruled in ways quite differently
There was to be no king or queen
Nor any manner where it would seem
That one was better than the rest
It was to be a noble quest*

*It was to be a kingdom fair
Where all would be an equal there
Where every one would have a voice
Where everyone would have a choice
Those who governed would the people serve
Not themselves but those deserved
Such a kingdom it was to be
A kingdom where all would see*

*That man could rule not selfishly
But for the good of all and could then be
An example fair just and wise
No longer then would man devise
Ways to enslave his fellow man
Because he could because he can*

When the traveler spoke as he did, a quiet fell over us, his fellow pilgrims. Not only was the traveler's tale markedly different than of the miller, the knight, and the sea captain, the traveler's tale had made us all uneasy. As if by listening we were somehow complicit in approving of this new kingdom's revolutionary way of government. We all knew to even talk of popular rule was seditious and if the King's spies were about, who knew what manner of trouble could greet us at Canterbury.

We thought perhaps the innkeeper might stop the traveler from continuing, for it was the innkeeper who had devised the telling of tales to pass the time to and from Canterbury. But when the innkeeper spoke, it was to question the traveler, not to admonish him.

"Quite a tale, dear traveler, and when, pray tell, did this occur?"

"In the future, dear innkeeper" replied the traveler. "The events of which I speak are still yet to be."

"And the new kingdom of which you speak, where is its location?"

"In a land called America," answered the traveler. "It is a land still yet to be discovered."

"Since your story happens in the future and in a land still yet to be discovered" said the innkeeper, "then I see no reason not to continue. For such a story is purely of the imagination, and there can be no harm in either the telling or hearing of such."

The innkeeper looked around to see if any would think otherwise and when no one voiced an objection, he bade the traveler continue with his unusual tale.

"How did this new nation come to be?"

"The nation's birth was by revolution, by waging a war of independence against the greatest empire the world had then known."

"Greater than Alexander's or that of Rome?" a fellow pilgrim asked.

"Yes, the empire was so great it will be said the sun never set upon it."

"Yet, pray tell, you say this nation wrested its independence from such a great empire?"

"Yes" the traveler continued, "And its war of independence was only exceeded by its

declaration of independence, a declaration which stated all men were created equal and were entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of justice.”

“Hear, hear!” approving voices cried out. Obviously, the traveler’s tale had so captured the imagination of his fellow pilgrims; they had lost all fear of the King’s spies.

“Did this nation’s declaration of independence and the rights of man then cause an uprising of all nations and all peoples against all tyrannies and the yoke of empire?”

“No” answered the traveler, “It did, however, light a flame of hope that such might someday be so. While the rest of the great land known as America still lay in subjugation, the very name America became identified with this new nation and the desire and pursuit of freedom and liberty for all mankind.

“Hear, hear!” more cheers did ring out at such news.

The traveler’s tale had obviously captured the imagination of all who journeyed to Canterbury. The story of a new land called America, with its dreams of freedom, did inspire us to know more about this new nation. That is, until, the next question was asked.

“This great empire against which this nation rebelled, what was its name?”

“England.”

A gasp of surprise arose. We were shocked at the traveler’s unexpected answer.

“England, hear, hear.” A cry rang out and we all in joined to celebrate the discovery that our very own England was to be the greatest empire the world had ever known.

“England, then, is to be the very empire upon which the sun does not set?”

“Yes, that is so.”

More cheering greeted the traveler’s revelation. I, however, could not but remember that only moments before we had been cheering the birth of the nation that had successfully revolted against England’s apparently tyrannical rule.

As the cheers continued, the crowd began to question the traveler.

“How many countries did England rule?”

“By what means did England achieve its empire, by its navy or its army?”

It was now obvious our desire was to learn about the greatness of England’s empire, not mankind’s quest for freedom and liberty. Then a voice asked,

“What happened to England’s empire when America rebelled against its rule?”

The pilgrims quieted at the question, anxiously awaiting the answer.

“Nothing” said the traveler, “Nothing at all. Except for the loss of its American colonies, England’s empire continued to expand well into the next century even after America’s successful rebellion.”

“Hear, hear.”

“Long live the King!”

Cheers again erupted at the news of England’s continued greatness.

“Into the next century? And what century might that be?” someone asked.

“The nineteenth century,” the traveler answered, “England’s empire will begin in the seventeenth century and will reach its peak in the nineteenth century, in the year 1850.”

We were stunned. England, our very own England was to rule an empire on which the sun was to never set and England’s empire was to reach its peak in 1850; almost five hundred years hence, the present year being but 1385.

My fellow pilgrims, however, seemed to be adversely affected by the news England’s great empire was still a ways off, a few hundred years at least. Too far in the future for any now present to reap any personal benefit. The parson could not count on gifts to build the new parsonage nor could the knight see immediate opportunity for more glory, nor the miller increased revenues as a result of England’s future empire. Such hopes now dimmed, the pilgrims’ attention turned back to what the traveler was to say next.

“England’s power and wealth in 1850 is to be unrivaled. Its coin is to be the basis of world trade and its fleet of ships would bring wealth from its many colonies back to its shores. But one hundred years later, in 1950, America will have replaced England as the most powerful and wealthy kingdom in all Christendom.”

“Will England be displaced as the result of war?” a pilgrim asked.

“War will play but a minor role in England’s decline,” the traveler answered. “England’s demise will come not as a result of war, but from the cost of empire. In 1870, England will begin to import more goods than it exported. At the same time its military budget will grow so large by the end of the century, England’s treasury, once the world’s richest will be no longer so. A devastating war in the beginning of the 1900s will then leave England but a shadow of its former self.”

“And by 1950, America, like England one century before, will be the world’s most powerful nation. Like England previous, its coin will be the basis of world trade and at

mid century America will possess three quarters of the world's gold. An amount so great that no nation previous had ever possessed so large a sum."

A pilgrim asked, "Will America's empire be greater than that of England?"

"America, almost wealthy beyond measure in 1950, will possess no empire."

All of us were unprepared for this answer and we listened as he continued. "Unlike all previous nations of wealth, nations such as England, Spain, Portugal, and Rome, America will not come by its wealth by empire. America will come by its wealth by industry and circumstance."

"Pray tell, what manner of circumstance, dear traveler, brought America its wealth?"

"Abundant land, the fortune of providence, and two great wars fought on the land of others which left America untouched and wealthy and the rest of the world devastated and in debt."

We who listened to the traveler's tale were amazed at this strange tale of America's great fortune. Unique among nations, champion of liberty and freedom, wealthy not by plunder and empire, America seemed indeed blessed by providence.

"How long, then, is to America reign as the wealthiest of all nations?"

"Not long. Within twenty short years, by 1970, America will overspend its entire hoard of gold."

A murmur could be heard from all who listened.

"In twenty years?"

"The hoard of gold America possesses in 1950 will disappear in but twenty years?"

"How can this be?" someone asked. "Did America buy so much more than it sold?"

"No," the traveler answered. "During those twenty years, its exports will far exceed its imports, though like England one century before, this would soon change.

"By what manner, then, will America spend its wealth?"

"America will spend its wealth in pursuit of empire."

A voice cried out, asking for all of us one question.

"If America needed no empire for wealth, why would it spend all its gold in pursuit of empire?"

“Because America had no need of empire, did not mean America will not yearn for empire. Finding itself alone among nations in wealth and power in 1950, America desired to extend its military, political, and economic interests over the rest of the world. To this end, it will send so much capital abroad that by 1970, it will owe more than it possesses and to keep what gold it will have, America will then refuse to pay the gold it owes, paying others only with printed money.”

“If America could not pay its debts, then its reign as the world’s greatest power must have also ended?”

“In the past”, the traveler answered. “that would have been so, but America’s power and might is to be so great, all nations, caught off guard by America’s bankruptcy will accept America’s money without requiring gold to make up what was owing. This will allow America to spend ever more until its profligate spending will endanger the entire world. This story, however, will have to wait until our return from Canterbury when you will also find out what happens when America with the representatives of past empires at its side, Portugal, Spain, and England, declares war on another nation to secure for itself access to that nation’s rich natural resources.”

Darryl Robert Schoon