King Wenceslaus Was Not So "Good"

By LESLIE ARMOUR

"Good King Wenceslaus looked out,
"On the Feast of Stephen,
"When the snow lay round about
"Deep and crisp and even . . ."

And so it goes: A kindly old monarch, concerned about the poor peasant scratching in the snow for his winter fuel.

The wamth of his heart, we are told, was so great, that his very foot prints were enough to warm his page who trudged after him with the meat and wine to cheer the poor peasant.

History does not tell quite the same story.

This same Wenceslaus, it appears, was once informed of a massacre of 3000 Jews in his territory. He took immediate action. He confiscated the property they left behind.

And this Wenceslaus allowed John Huss to be burned at the stake despite promises of protection.

Fortunately, the story is not entirely one sided.

In his early years, Wenceslaus appeared to be the darling of fortune.

He inherited the throne of the rich kingdom of Bohemia (now the central part of Czechoslovakia) in 1373. Not long afterward, he was crowned King of Brandenburg and, three years later, so great was his power, he was made Emperor of All the Romans, a title which meant, in fact, king of all the Germans.

From another relative, he picked up the Duchy of Luxemburg and, finally, the Kingdom of Hungary.

He was, if not the most powerful man in Europe at the end of the Fourteenth Century, at least very close to being so. His only rival of any consequence was Charles VI of France.

At the end of the century, when he was nearing 40, Wenceslaus went to Paris on a very delicate mission.

There were, at that time, two rival Popes, Benedict XIV and Boniface IX. There seemed no solution to the impasse created by their rival claims and both Church and State were imperilled by the divided loyalties they produced.

As always, in such matters, there were men who had financial interests in promoting the claims of one or the other and, in the face of the pressure of money, it was very difficult to persuade anyone to change sides.

The financial pressures had led to corruption among some members of the clergy and that only made the problem worse.

Wenceslaus developed a two pronged attack on the problem.

Abroad, he proposed to Charles VI of France that both Popes be prevailed upon — if necessary forced — to resign and an entirely new Pope chosen in their stead.

At home he supported the young John Huss who was campaigning against bribery of clergymen and against forged miracles.

Huss, seeking to end some of the theological disputes which were complicating the problem, also proposed a considerable simplification of Church ritual.

The citizens of Prague, aided by Wenceslaus, were, indeed, so impressed by the young man that they built the famous Bethlehem Chapel for him to preach in. And, at Charles University, Huss was installed as Dean of Philosophy.

For obvious reasons, both these attacks ran counter to the interests of both camps. Those who had made a good thing out of one Pope or another clearly did not want to see both go.

Furthermore, Wenceslaus had incurred the wrath of his nobles over his attempts to increase the centralized control of his empires.

In 1400, he was deposed and his half-brother Sigasmund, installed.

Huss, meanwhile, continued in business but in the face of mounting objections from his ecclesiastical superiors who, by this time, were far more alarmed by his assaults on ritual than by his complaints against corruption.

Sigasmund, who had taken over all Wenceslaus' interests gave him passive support.

Then, in 1404, Sigasmund decided to make his headquarters in Hungary and a somewhat chastened Wenceslaus was restored to the throne of Bohemia though not to his other titles.

His support of Huss was again active.

By 1411, Huss had been virtually outlawed by his church and in 1413 he was summoned to the Council of Constance to explain himself. The implication was that he was to be tried for heresy.

That meant that he would probably be executed for heresy.

Huss felt strongly that he should make his case known. On the other hand he had, of course, no desire to be burned at the stake and he knew full well that he was safe so long as he remained in Bohemia.

He therefore applied for a guarantee of safe conduct from Sigasmund and Wenceslaus.

It was granted in the name of Sigasmund who, apparently, was moved primarily by Wenceslaus' friendship for him.

Historians believe that Sigasmund never had an intention of coming to Huss' rescue should he be sentenced by the Church and that Wenceslaus knew this but did not warn Huss for fear of being deposed again.

Huss, however, accepted in good faith the guarantee of good faith and believed that the Church would not dare to flout Sigasmund.

In 1415, he was convicted and sentenced to be burned.

Neither king made any move to save him and he was duly executed.

In Prague, where the public was strongly in favor of Huss, Wenceslaus was disgraced for his part in the proceedings and, though he remained king in name, he was largely stripped of his authority.

He died, a broken man, with another rebellion on his hands, in 1419.

How, then, did Wenceslaus get the reputation described in the Christmas Carol?

The answer is that he has profited enormously by the amalgamation of his character with that of another Wenceslaus who lived nearly 500 years earlier.

This earlier Wenceslaus was never a king. But he was a Duke of Bohemia and he was later canonized and appears as St. Wenceslaus in the Roman Catholic calendar and stands as the patron saint of Bohemia.

Unfortunately, he, too, owes his reputation to a confusion.

He inherited the Dukedom — and with it local territorial powers — at the age of 22 during a long family feud. One cause of the feud was that one branch of the family, led by Wenceslaus had been converted to Christianity and the other branch, of which his brother Boleslaw emerged as leader, had not.

Wenceslaus' grandmother had been the first member of the family converted to Christianity. She saw that at least one of her grandsons was educated as a Christian but she was murdered in the course of the feud.

Her murderers had hoped that the non-Christian branch of the family would acquire the title but Wenceslaus won out temporarily. He ruled, precariously, for three or four years — and then he was murdered by Boleslaw.

The Christian community took it for granted that he was murdered on account of his religion but even Catholic historians are now agreed that that played only a small part in the struggle which was really a dispute over power between two groups of nobles.

Wenceslaus was entered, however, in the roll of martyrs and, much later, canonized.

His rule was confused since neither party really had control at any time. But he did get a reputation for goodness during a minor uprising of peasants with which he dealt with considerable humanity, settling, in part, their grievances over land.

Actually, he was not in a position to do otherwise. The peasants had taken advantage of the feud between nobles to make their own case and Wenceslaus was in no position to alienate them.

There the matter rested until the middle of the Nineteenth Century when an Englishman, J. M. Nealen wrote the now famous words to the Christmas Carol and attached them to a traditional tune, Tempest adest Floridem.

The words have since been translated into almost every language and the amalgamation of the two men of the same name is firmly fixed in the popular imagination. But there is no evidence of any earlier version of the carol.

YOUNGEST CHEF

With the silver-plated spade he uses for mixing the 24,000 servings of Christmas puddings to be served on Canadian National Railways dining cars in Canada during the Holiday Season, Chef Instructor Joe Nellis shovels a small portion in Susan Tolhurst's bowl so she can mix up a little pudding for her own family. Five-year-old Susan was made an honorary assistant chef-instructor for the occasion in Montreal. (CNR Photo).

Milk Means Life

It was cold that morning in Korea. Winter had settled in with a vengeance, bringing additional hardship to a country nearly ruined by war and its terrible aftermath.

As Mrs. Lee opened the door of the orphanage she could see men and women in the dim half-light hurrying to their meagre jobs - if they had one-bundled in whatever clothing they possessed. Suddenly at her feet she noticed a small parcel, the contents of which would shock Canadians into disbelief. It was an infant, frozen to death from lying in the snow for several hours.....

Again this winter, authorities will find abandoned babies on the steps of hospitals and police stations, whose desperate mothers can no longer care for them. Abject poverty and unemployment coupled with steadily rising prices and conditions that for many are worse than during the war, are sending the population of infant institutions soaring at an alarming rate.

THEIR FATE

Death claims a staggering number of these young lives—in some cases as high as 20 per cent and more! For those who survive and are placed in institutions, directors find it increasingly difficult to secure enough whole milk to keep them alive and well for at least the first year.

To meet this crisis, the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada has pledged 10,000 pounds of powdered whole milk for baby institutions and hospitals throughout South Korea. While Korean kiddies' high cheek bones tend to give them a round look their bloated tummies reveal how many of them suffer from malnutrition.

The USC has pledged one fifth from an overall budget of $175,000 for Europe, the Middle East and Asia, to medical, educational and rehabilitation projects in Korea. The USC has been working in Korea since 1952, when the executive Director, Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova, was invited by the United Nations to survey the most urgent needs among the children of that war-shattered country. Between 1953 and 1955, the USC fed thousands of Korean youngsters through its now famous "Milk for Korea" Barley for Korea" and "Operation Codfish" campaigns.

WAR VICTIMS

During two bitter years of fighting, South Korea was utterly devastated, and 50,000 children left homelesss, hungry and ill. Today in orphanages all over the country, are stark reminders of the suffering and destruction caused by warfare. Ten thousand beggar children still roam the streets.

Generous Canadians wishing to share this Christmas with little children in Korea, may send their contributions to the Unitarian Service Committee, 78 Sparks Street, Ottawa, or: Bank of Montreal, Charlottetown.

Who Was Dick Whittington; History Matches Invention

BY MARY NELSON

The age-old legend of Dick Whittington—the poor boy who hiked to London with his cat and became a rich andd popular Lord Mayor of the City—is one of the favourite themes of Christmas pantomime.

Although the story has been stretched and twisted in all ways by amusement caterers, yet much of the basis of the legend is fact. There was in truth, a Dick Whittington who travelled to London as a boy and became thrice Lord Mayor of the capital city.

RECORDS LOST

Many of the original records and chronicles concerning the life of Dick Whittington were lost in the Great Fire, but from various sources many of them only brief references, we can trace more or less the authentic story of one of the most romantic figures in history.

Dick Whittington was not a poor boy; that is certain. He was the third son of Sir William Whittington of Pauntley in Gloucestershire. . . . Sir William was a wealthy man and young Dick's life might have been very different but for the fact that his father fell on evil days and, according to some reports, was outlawed.

Young Dick was sent to London to serve an apprenticeship with Sir Ivo Fitzwaryn, a wealthy Dorset shire knight, who ran a very successful shipping merchant's business in London. How did Dick reach London? Did he walk: Records vary on this point, but it seems more than likely that he was forced to walk part of the way, for we do not read of him possessing a horse and that was the only method of travel in the 15th century.

HIS CAT

Now what of his famous cat, for Dick Whittington of pantomime fame is never seen without his equally illustrious four-legged friend. There are portraits in existence, painted in the 15th century, which show Dick with a black and white cat, while a statue of the boy who was to become Lord Mayor, with his head or the head of a cat, was erected over the main gate when Newgate Prison was rebuilt by the generous bequest of Dick Whittington.

Whether the cat walked to London with its young master cannot be proved, but it more than probable that Dick was a lover of cats for he was a genuine devotee on the simple pleasures of life. But there is another and far more plausible explanation of the popularly accepted connection between Dick Whittington and his cat.

SUCCESS

The young West Countryman who travelled to London to try to retrieve the fortunes of his family, certainly did not lack courage, not the faculty for hard work. That is obvious from the fact that it was not long before the youthful apprentice had achieved such success that he not only set up as a mercer in his own right, but he wooed and won Sir Ivo Fitzwaryn's beautiful daughter, Alice.

That chapter of the legendary story is definitely true to fact.

IN SILKS

Richard Whittington traded mostly in silks, which were in great demand in those days. The merchandise was carried from Continental ports to London in small, shallow boats known as "cats" and that, some historians contend is the reason why Dick's name is always connected with a cat.

Be that as it may, Richard Whittington prospered exceedingly and he was only 35 when he was elected an Alderman and Sheriff of the City of London. Three years later, Adam Bamme, the Lord Mayor, died suddenly, and it was the young mercer who was appointed by the king to succeed him!

Whittington had progressed beyond his most ambitious dreams. On two further occasions he was elected to the high office of Lord Mayor, just as the bells of Bow Church are supposed to have predicted years before. He became, also, the confidential friend of kings and princes.

He is often referred to as Sir Richard Whittington, but nowhere can I find proof of his knighthood.

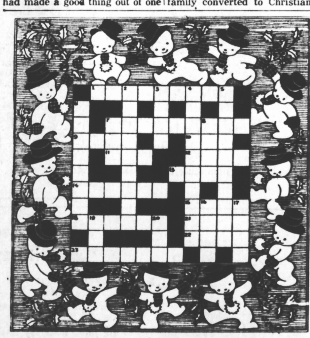
ENTERTAINED ROYALTY

This adventuring man never forgot that he had been comparatively poor when he had set out to seek fame and fortune, but as he continued to prosper, he entertained in the most generous fashion at his sumptuous home at Leaden Hall, on the site of which now stands Leadenhall Market, in the centre of the City of London. Some of the banquets he gave in honour of Henry the Fifth and his charming French queen, were memorable even to his royal guests.

Both Henry IV and Henry V had occasion to be grateful to Whittington for his ready loans to the royal purse, loans to the extent of many thousands of pounds, for which he often rejected payment.

In later life Whittington was left without wife or children and he found his greatest joy in his charitable benevolence. His work in this respect had been handed down through the centuries as a perpetual monument to his memory.

He bore nearly all the cost of building the Greyfriars Library and founded the college of St. Michaels Paternoster Church and the adjoining hospital. The hospital was destroyed in the Great Fire; it was rebuilt in the shape of almshouses at Highgate near to the now famous milestone which is inscribed with the legend of Bow Bells. The almshouses are now maintained by the Mercers Company.



FESTIVE CROSSWORD

CLUES:

Across

1. Birthplace of Jesus (9)
7. Television favourite of the undtr-five (4, 5)
9. You might find one in a Christmas 23 across (4)
10. Cheshire river (3)
11. Evergreen tree (3)
12. This is where the otter lives (4)
13. Small and feeble (4)
14. The reward for good work? (6)
15. What you must use when a grown-up gives you a Christmas present you don't really want! (4)
18. "The first - - - - - - the Angel did say was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay" (6)
21. What you may hear in the mountains (4)
22. A ceremony (4).
23. It gives you a loud bang and a paper hat at Christmas (7)

Down

2. This fruit is just the right size for your Christmas stocking! (9)
3. Songs or poems (4)
4. The wild man from Borneo who would like to add you to his collection! (4, 6,)
5. A fine Christmas present to take to the boating lake (5,5)
6. A sweet ingredient of the Christmas cake (8)
7. No matter which? (3)
8. City lights (4)
16. This test is really stiff (4)
17. Take yours out of your stocking before you hang it up! (4)
19. Having a row? This will help! (3)
20. Shelter (3)

SOLUTIONS

Across: 1. Bethlehem, 7. Andy Pandy, 9. Ring, 10. Dee, 11. Yew, 12. Holt, 13. Puny, 14. Praise, 15. Tact, 18. Nowell, 21. Echo, 22. Rite, 23. Crackers.

Down: 2. Tangerine, 3. Lays, 4. Head hunter, 5. Model yacht, 6. Marzipan, 7. Any, 8. Neon, 16. Acid, 17. Toes, 19. Oar, 20. Lee.