

Good King Wenceslas and the Leak

Good King Wenceslas looked out ...on the day after the feast of Stephen. The snow lay round about, just as deep, crisp and even as it had been the day before, but today no-one came in sight, and nothing was being gathered.

There was a polite cough behind him. It was his page. 'Sire,' he said, 'the Prime Minister is outside wanting to see you straight away. He says it's about a leak at the palace.' 'Really!' said the king. 'I'm surprised he should come personally to tell me about some plumbing problem! We've a policy with PalaceGuard I believe, so you might have to give them a call.' 'I don't think it's that kind of leak, sire,' replied the page, 'more of an information leak, I believe.' 'Ah,' sighed the king. 'Leakages of information are always more serious than leakages of water. You had better show him in.'

'Hither Prime Minister and stand by me' – the King used the official court language – 'now what seems to be the problem?' 'It's this story that has spread like wildfire on Warble and Spacebook,' said the prime minister, 'have you seen it?' 'Not me,' said the king, 'I don't warble.' 'Well someone here does!' retorted the Prime Minister, 'this story is said to come from the palace – here' - he handed over his Blueberry MultiPod (with apps). The king scrolled through the text. '...Poor man came in sight...St Agnes Fountain...mark my footsteps good my page... well well, someone's told what actually happened yesterday very well and in rhyme too, very clever. Should I warble 'I like' – I believe that that's what you're supposed to do, isn't it?'

'Please do no such thing your majesty,' the Prime Minister said firmly. 'If this is actually true then it makes matters much worse.' 'Why what's the problem?' inquired the King. 'It's being warbled about that you should be declared a saint,' said the Prime Minister, 'and that just cannot happen.' 'Well I certainly haven't made a personal application for sainthood,' said the King, 'but it does do one good to see how highly one is rated by ones subjects!'

'Your majesty, you don't realise the problems this story is causing,' explained the Prime Minister. 'Firstly we have checked and this peasant has already received his generous winter fuel allowance, and also gets full whack under the universal welfare credit scheme. He is rolling in benefits, your majesty, makes no attempt to work, and if you are seen as supporting him through personally

providing him with even more benefits, it makes a nonsense of government policy.

Secondly, this alleged cure of your page's health related problems. We have been trying to crack down on spurious medicines and health practices under considerable pressure from the Royal National College of Physicians, Barbers and Bleeders. This will be seen as royal endorsement of some sort of magical healing that can have no place in modern society.

Thirdly and by no means least, your majesty, we live in a pluralist society, and your parliament cannot be seen as favouring one religion more highly than another. We have already had warbles from imams, rabbis, gurus, patriarchs and heaven knows who else asking how you become a saint in this country, and why can't they become a saint too?

'Oh dear, I had no idea a simple act of kindness would create so many problems,' said the king. 'What do you advise, prime minister?'

'Your majesty must put out a firm denial of the whole story, and renounce any claims to sainthood.' 'Hmm,' said the king, 'well, I'll call my Royal Council and we shall consider our position, perhaps set up a comm...'. 'No sire,' interrupted the Prime Minister, 'you must do it today. My office will call you in two hour's time and will arrange for your denial to go out on all the news channels. And you had better find out who is telling these tales in the palace. The story definitely came from here.' With that the Prime Minister bowed and made his exit.

'Well' said the King after he had gone, 'not a happy womble there, or should I say warble! Now how do we tackle this one?' 'One thing I don't understand,' mused the page, 'is who sent the leak. I know I didn't, it wouldn't be in the peasant's interests to tell this story, and there were only three of us involved, so....'

'An interesting hypothesis, Watson,' smiled the king. 'How does it go now: 'whenever you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.' However if there is an enquiry over this leak, I'll say it was you. No –one will believe it's me – remember, people think I'm a saint!'

The King got up, walked over to the window and looked out. The snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even. Brightly shone the moon that night though the frost was cruel, when a poor man came in sight gathering winter fuel.... 'So what do we do?' asked the King. 'Issue a denial or go and help?'

'I suppose it depends on how much you want to be a saint.' 'Precisely, Watson,' replied the king. 'Come on, let's go, but this time, just in case miracles don't happen twice, please put on something warm!'

Therefore Christians all be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing
When sainthood beckons at your door
Seize it: but no confessing.

© Keith Walton 2012