

Good King Wenceslas and the seventh seal

Good King Wenceslas looked out. 'Hither page and stand by me, 'he said, 'if thou knowest telling: yonder peasant who is he, where and what his dwelling?'

'That does not look like an ordinary peasant,' said the page. 'He's not gathering winter fuel; he's wearing a tall pointy hat and is walking firmly this way, staff in hand.' 'Goodness me, that's Gandalf,' cried the king, 'Gandalf the Negotiator. It is many years since he has visited, but we sorely need him now. Go and let him in good page.' 'They say he only brings bad news,' replied the page; 'fireworks too,' added the king.

'Gandalf, my old friend!' cried the King, 'you are a most welcome guest, and have had a long journey I deem. Page, bring us refreshment!' 'Hail Wenceslas king,' Gandalf bowed low, 'Many leagues have I journeyed visiting far off lands, and I fear I bring grave tidings. In the lands of the Utmost West a new necromancer has arisen who is deceiving many, and will shortly hold the reins of power. He may feign friendship, yet is dangerous Wenceslas. However a more present and pressing danger lies closer to your shores, from those who wish to disconnect from the Middle Earth Union.'

'Dark indeed are these matters,' replied the king, 'but the hour is late. I shall summon my councillors and we shall hear your wisdom in the morning. Meanwhile good Gandalf, will you not partake of a goblet of wine?' 'Thank you, yes,' said Gandalf, as the page approached bearing a bottle. 'Strange seem the runes on the label,' he commented, 'and not in the common speech.' 'This is so they say, the wine of the moment: Chateau Brexit,' said the king, 'Will you not try some?' 'It pours clear and has much good colour,' noted Gandalf, 'yet its bouquet is... uncertain, and – ah its taste belies its appearance, more sour and disappointing on the palate, or so I deem.' 'You were always a connoisseur in these matters,' said the king, 'but perhaps you should try it with these dainties. Page, pass the platter to our honoured guest.' 'Yea this is more sweet and palatable,' said Gandalf 'and it is called?' 'Brexit Fudge,' replied the King. 'There is plenty of it I am told, though others claim its supply should be strictly controlled.'

'I am not entirely convinced about the worth of these new creations,' said Gandalf, 'for me I prefer the more traditional approaches, for example I would

now enjoy a pipe of your famous weed – will you not join me, Wenceslas, King?’ ‘Alas!’ cried the king, ‘our Health and Well-being laws now prohibit such activities in the Palace building, and I myself have shunned the use of the noxious weed these past two years. Tempt me not!’ ‘Alas,’ sighed Gandalf, ‘so much is already passing from Middle Earth. Where will it end I wonder?’

The next morning the King introduced some of his assembled councillors to Gandalf. ‘This is Borage the Fair, son of Johnswort, and you should also meet Fillpip, Keeper of the Common Purse.’ Gandalf bowed low in greeting, but kept his own counsel that these men seemed slight of stature compared to the king’s advisers of old.

‘Now,’ said the king, ‘Gandalf you spoke yester eve of the grave dangers posed by the Disconnectors. Speak now and tell us what you know.’ ‘Many years ago,’ began Gandalf, ‘but not so long ago that men should have forgotten those events entirely, when the last great alliance of the free peoples defeated the evil empire, both the victors and the vanquished swore that never again should such destruction be visited upon Middle Earth. Articles were forged and combined into a treaty of great power that all did assent to and which would shape the destiny of Middle Earth. I was present at that time, and marked how the treaty contained no provision for anyone to leave.’ ‘Accursed be anyone who swears to be true and does not remain loyal in difficult times!’ cried Fillpip. ‘Indeed,’ said Gandalf, ‘and those who forged these articles were loath to believe that anyone should ever desire to leave such beneficial unity. Yet my heart foresaw that the success of the union would attract others who understood not the reasons why the peoples of Middle Earth would forswear their own sovereignty for the greater good of all. These immigrants, as it were, to the Union might prove to be less than loyal. And so at my behest an article was added, an article of power, which enabled those who wished to leave, or to ‘disconnect’ as they say. It was not kept secret, though it was placed well covered within much rubric and verbiage; hence it was called L in the old tongue, article fifty in the common speech. The disconnectors know of its existence, but as yet are uncertain how to use it.’

Borage spoke up at this point. 'It seems to me,' he said 'that they have two basic options. The first is to seek to negotiate to remain in those aspects of the union that they deem to be beneficial, whilst disconnecting from the rest. But from our point of view this would be a lengthy and difficult process, a very hard disconnection to make, whereas if they simply said this is the end, we are going, farewell, this would be very easy for us, a soft disconnection if you will.' 'What you say is true,' replied Gandalf, 'yet either way is fraught for us. The hard disconnection would take many years to come to fruition, and create great uncertainty for those who labour and do trade. The soft disconnection seems easy, yet the bonds that knit us together are so strong and complex that they cannot be torn asunder at a stroke.' 'Yet I am mindful,' said Borage 'of a great warrior king of old who it is said cut through a similar knotty problem with just one stroke of his sword – or so the minstrels sing.' 'You are indeed well versed in the tales of yore,' replied Gandalf, 'and yet that King's empire created at a stroke was doomed to fail and fall ere a few years elapsed, and what remains of it now save sherds a ploughman might uncover in a field? No my friends, whether the disconnection is hard or soft, it threatens all that our Union of Middle Earth stands for. Indeed it will prove our undoing as well as theirs.' 'But they are decided to leave,' said the king, 'and once they have invoked the article of power we are powerless to stop whatever happens from taking its course.'

Not entirely' said Gandalf. 'Until the article is used we have a short window of opportunity, to do something that the disconnectors will never have imagined possible. In their blindness they discuss how to disconnect, without realising that we control what they can disconnect from. Their power exists only as long as this treaty lasts. In a way they have given us a wonderful opportunity. The old union can be dissolved, and a new union created. A new heaven and a new earth if you wish. We must bring about the apocalypse!' 'The apocalypse!' cried Borage, 'that's a revelation indeed! But how can this come to pass? I thought that no mortal can break the seals to sound the trump of doom.' 'There may be other apocalypses that even the wise cannot control,' said Gandalf, 'but as for this one, Wenceslas King, bring before us your treaty scroll.'

All wondered as the king held up the great scroll sealed with the six seals of the first peoples to have founded the union. And yet even as he held it high it seemed as if the seals were about to crack and fail. But lo, there appeared a seventh seal, which was firm and fair. 'How came this seal hither?' cried the King. 'It was created as were the others,' said Gandalf, 'but hidden from the common view. I foresaw that the passage of time, the weakness of men, and the wiles of the enemy might lead to the diminishing of resolve to maintain the union, and so this secret seal was forged. This is the seal of power, the one seal that holds all the others in its thrall. Unlike the others it cannot fail on its own. It has to be broken, and only then is the treaty unmade.' 'Then let me do it,' cried Borage, as he strove to snatch the scroll from the king's hand. 'Go on,' said Gandalf, 'see if you can.' Yet though he tried with all his might Borage the Fair found himself unable to achieve what seemed at first so easy. 'There is only one person who can break this seal,' said Gandalf, 'and that is he who is the true inheritor of those who first sealed this accord. It was when your king Wenceslas held the scroll that the seventh seal was revealed. A sure sign that he is the one who may break it. When it is broken the Trump of Doom will sound and the Union of Middle Earth will be dissolved. Many fair things may perish, yet the disconnectors will be thwarted, and a new age of Middle Earth may take shape. O king, on you alone is laid the burden. Good king Wenceslas, will you open the seventh seal?'

Therefore Christian men be sure
The times they are a-changing
The seal once broken can't restore
A lingering hope of remaining.

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