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Richard Whittington, a Gloucestershire Man

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RICHARD WHITTINGTON, A GLOUCESTER-SHIRE MAN.

By H. S. KENNEDY-SKIPTON.

THE Whittington or De Whittington family owned Pauntley, Gloucestershire, from 1265—1546. They probably took their name originally from Whittington, near Andoversford, five miles from Cheltenham. There were four other families of this name in four other counties, but their arms are different from those at Pauntley, which were: *Gules, a fess checky or and azure with a lion's head erased sable langued gules* for crest.

This we can see (with a good glass) on the chapel in Gloucester Cathedral, restored by Richard Whittington. The great merchant adopted *a bee semè* as his crest, as we learn from a Visitation of London in the Harleian MSS.

Whittington must be distinguished from Withington, some three miles south, also a good meet of the Cotswold hounds. There are six other Whittingtons in England. The Whittington family of Richard's branch had also an estate at Sollers Hope, Herefordshire, and his mother was a Mansel of that county.

We find Whittingtons Sheriffs of Gloucestershire at various dates from 1402—1740, and owning land in nine different parishes of the county. Collateral descendants of Richard still own property at Hamswell in Cold Ashton. The following Gloucestershire families have inter-married with them: Norwood (now Trye), Lingen, Berkeley, Hyett, etc.

The date of Whittington's birth was probably 1350, but is not certain, for he lived before the establishment of the compulsory registration of births in 1538, which was the only good thing Henry VIII. ever did.

The Pauntley estate was in Whittington's day worth £20

a year, a sum equal to about £350 now. In addition to their manor house at Pauntley they had a town house in Gloucester, which was sold in 1460, and pulled down about thirty years ago.

His father died in 1360, and his mother soon after married Sir Thomas Berkeley of Coberley Hall near the Seven Springs. She was his second wife, and he had a daughter, Alice, by his first wife. Alice married Sir T. Brydges, and from her the Lords Bray and Grey de Wilton (Wilton Castle, Ross) are descended. Of this Berkeley old seat only a wall and gateway remain; but the monument of the Knight and his wife, Whittington's mother, who survived her husband, can be seen in the church. Hence we may fairly claim Whittington as a Cotswold boy. He paid visits probably to the Cowlys then at Cowly, the Atwaters at Colesbourne, the Casseys at Compton Cassey, the Tracies, ancestors of Lord Sudeley, at Toddington, who brought bad luck on their family by their share in the murder of St. Thomas of Canterbury, the Norwoods at Leckhampton, the Chandos family of Sudeley, and the Earl of Stafford at Rendcomb, ancestor of that Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, who failed in his rebellion against Richard III. through the rising of the Severn in 1483, and of Mr. Stafford Howard of Thornbury Castle, who takes his motto from the Pump Room at Bath. He must have gone down Sandy Lane to Cheltenham. He no doubt followed the hares over those windy wolds then unenclosed by the stone walls, that sometimes obstruct the flyers of the hunt now. He had no fear of a claim for damages and an injunction, as he hunted north-west from Coberley towards Sullenwood.

In those days medicine, banking, and the Civil Service did not exist as professions, and if a young fellow did not care for the Church, and had not influence to get into the service of the Court, it was best for him to go into trade. To be apprenticed in London a boy had to be of decent birth, as the children of serfs were excluded.

No doubt Whittington went up to London at the age of

fourteen or fifteen, and was duly apprenticed to Sir Hugh Fitzwarren, a mercer of good family. The Fitzwarrens were Gloucestershire people, and came over with the Conqueror. We find them at Alveston and Rodmarton. Probably this is why Whittington joined Sir Hugh. Fulk Fitzwarren once, when playing chess with King John, was apparently clearing the board, when his Majesty checkmated him by taking up the board and breaking his head with it. But Fulk gave the royal head such a fearful blow in return, that he nearly killed him. (Atkyns.) Clearly this gambit was no gambol, and Fulk was not to be trifled with. Though the mercers have usually been dealers in soft goods, the word comes through the French *mercier*, from *mercator*, and means simply a merchant. As a guild they can be traced to 1172, but they did not take a first-rate position as merchants till the fifteenth century. Their wealth now is great, and this is partly due to the sixteen "messuages" in the City left them by Whittington, and now of immense value. They dealt in woollen goods up to the latter part of the 14th century, when they secured a monopoly of the silk trade.

As regards the "*Cat Story*," these explanations are given by Riley in his edition of *Liber Albus* of London, a precious record, which, in part, owes its existence to Whittington.

1.—"*Cat*" is a short form of *achats*, "traffic," from *achates*. We have *achate* in Chaucer's Prologue. *Caterer* and *cater* are also connected, and nowadays the caterer looms large in civic life.

2.—Cat was the name of a kind of ship that brought coal to London. Part of Plymouth Harbour called Catwater is said to take its name thence. Objections to this:—

(1) In a list of seventeen different kinds of ships hired by Henry V. as transports (v. *Rotula Normannie*, Henry V., 1517), and in Riley's list of nine others, cats are not mentioned.

Ketch has nothing to do with this word, but is derived from the Turkish *qaiq*, whence comes the French *caïque*.

(2) The London coal trade was in its infancy in Whittington's day, and really dates from the 16th century.

(3) There is no evidence whatever that Whittington engaged in this trade, which was quite out of a mercer's line.

Argument in favour of the cat story:—

Whittington, when an apprentice, is said to have sent a favourite cat in a ship to the coast of Africa. There the cat was sold to a "chief" for a vast sum, as it proved useful in killing the rats, with which his house was infested. We have what is practically contemporary proof of the truth of this story.

I.—When the town house of the Whittingtons in Gloucester was pulled down in 1862, a stone-carved figure of a boy holding a cat was dug up.

This apparently formed part of a chimney-piece, and belongs to the 15th century. The Whittingtons sold this house in 1460.

This stone is now in the Guildhall Museum, London, and a picture of it will be given in Part II. of this volume.

It shows that Whittington's relations and contemporaries believed in the cat story.

II.—Pennant tells us that before the fire of 1666 a figure of a boy with a cat stood in a niche over the gate of Newgate prison, which Whittington's executors rebuilt.

III.—A silver-gilt waggon, running by clockwork on four wheels and weighing 201 ounces, was presented to the Mercers' Company by William Barde, Warden in 1572. This curious old piece of plate has two cats enamelled on it, and also rats and birds.

Lysons thinks this figure refers to the most distinguished member of the Mercers, and their great benefactor.

IV.—The 1536 portrait of Whittington represented him with a most business-looking tom cat at his side. Engravings of this are preserved, though the original is lost. The face is somewhat like the portrait of Whittington in the original

copy of his ordinances, of the date of his death, belonging to the Mercers' Company. Elstrack's portrait, published about 1590, is still more like him, and in the first impressions he was represented with his right hand on a skull. But as these did not sell well, he substituted a curious cat for the skull, and then the impressions went off.

I am therefore inclined to believe the cat story in preference to any others.

The south side of Cheape was the place for mercers' shops, as it was the custom in those days for shops of a particular kind to occupy streets of their own, as we still see in the Shambles at York, one of the oldest and least changed streets in England. The Mercers' Hall is still in Cheapside.

As an apprentice, Whittington was under a man of his own class—a gentleman entitled to bear arms, Sir H. Fitzwarren,—and not a parvenu or brand-new baronet of the modern mayor type. The life of the apprentices then was something like that of medical students in town now. He married his master's daughter in due course, but left no issue.

Whittington sold silks, satins, cloth of gold, velvet, embroideries of precious stones, and also woollen goods. We learn from the *Issue Rolls, Easter, 3 Henry IV.*, that Whittington was paid £215 13s. 4d. for ten cloths of gold and other merchandise for the King's eldest daughter, Blanch, just before her marriage to Louis, Duke of Bavaria, in 1403. This is as much as £4,000 now, and not bad for the trousseau of a blushing bride of eleven summers, especially as there was another little bill for "the apparel and paraphernalia of the said Blanch" to the amount of £380 from William Cromer, "citizen and clothier."

The *Issue Roll of Easter, 7 Henry IV.*, shows the payment of £248 10s. 6d. to Whittington for pearls and cloth of gold for the trousseau of the Princess Philippa, when she married Eric, King of Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

WHITTINGTON'S CHARITIES, &c.

He built and endowed the Collegiate Church of St. Michael, Paternoster Row, where he was buried.

“ Here in streaming London's central roar
Let the sound of those he wrought for,
And the feet of those he fought for,
Echo round his bones for evermore.”

This church was destroyed in the Great Fire, and no monstrosity by Wren, “decorated” by that pagan, Gibbons, has happily been built in its place.

It is interesting to note, as a sign of his sympathy with the unfortunate King, that the priests were ordered to pray for the soul of Richard II.

He also endowed a hospital for thirteen poor men in connection with this foundation. This is now maintained at Highgate by the Mercers' Company.

He built a bridge and chapel at Rochester.

The building of bridges in those ages, which should be called devout and not dark, was considered a religious duty, and no bridge was complete without its chapel. Few such chapels are left now, thanks to reformers, Puritans, and modern improvers; but that at Wakefield, Yorks, is worthy of notice.

He gave London two drinking fountains: one in the wall of St. Giles', Cripplegate, known as Whittington's Boss from the lion's head, from which the water flowed, and another on the bank of the town-ditch.

He left money to rebuild Newgate Prison, of which we are told in a contemporary record: “Yat hit was febel over litel, and so contagious of eyre, yat it caused the deth of many men.”

He built the library of Grey Friars, Newgate Street, which is now part of Christ's Hospital, and gave £400 towards buying MSS. for it. The Protector Somerset, borrowed two cartloads of these, and forgot to return them. Soon after the executioner borrowed his head, and was equally oblivious.

He restored, and partly rebuilt the Guildhall, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and Gloucester Cathedral, where his arms are to be found in Boteler's Chapel.

HIS LOANS TO THE CROWN.

In 1420 Whittington burnt £60,000 worth of the King's bonds. This splendid gift of about a million in modern money was made in conjunction with the Mercers' Company, the Corporation, and the Grocers' Company.

We see from the Exchequer records that Whittington lent sums of from £65 to £1,000 to Henry IV. and V., and these were, of course, repaid.

"Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings" is true enough of him.

HIS CHARACTER AND CAREER.

He was Alderman and Sheriff in 1392, and had five apprentices. In 1397 he was appointed Lord Mayor in the place of Adam Baunne, deceased. He was also Lord Mayor in 1398, 1406, and 1419. In 1416 he was elected M.P. for London. In October, 1422, he attended at the Guildhall for the last time, and died in 1423.

Whittington had some great men as contemporaries, whom he may have known, *e.g.*, Wycliffe, Chaucer, Gower, William of Wykeham, and Froissart, who paid a visit to London at the end of Richard II.'s reign, about 1397. His religious foundations, and his purchase of the advowson of St. Peter's, Cornhill, which he gave to the Corporation, show that he was no Wycliffite, though one of his friends was. This man, R. Pecok, the first master of his hospital, got into sad trouble for Wycliffism, which was then regarded as a dangerous form of Socialism. When Bishop of Clichester, this Peacock got his wings clipped, and, in fact they were very near being burned, for he was convicted of heresy, and only escaped the stake by recantation. He was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment in a cell in Thorney Abbey. His character is absolutely stainless throughout. He lived in

the reigns of five kings, Edward III.—Henry VI. He saw the great Edward III., the hero of Cressy and Poitiers, outlive his energies and popularity, and die feeble and forlorn. He saw his son, the darling of the nation, the great champion of English chivalry, laid to rest before his time at Canterbury.

He saw the brilliant young Richard, the rash boy King, "who blazed the comet of a season," begin so brilliantly, when he faced the rebels under Tyler at Smithfield, exhaust his popularity by gross extravagance, alienate London, and die a wretched death without a friend at Pontefract.

He saw Henry of Lancaster enter London in triumph, riding on "Roan Barbary," as Shakespeare has described. He saw him grow prematurely old through the plots and perils that harassed him, so that he was forced to say:—

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown"

of that "polished perturbation, golden care."

He was the trusted friend of the King, and also of his brilliant son, aiding him with money and advice, so that it was natural for him to assign to the merchant the task of rebuilding the nave of Westminster Abbey. Whittington, no doubt, rode in the grand triumphal procession after Agincourt, a victory in which Gloucestershire had its full share, not only through the Berkeleys and other Knights of that county, but also through the lamprey pies, of which the King took a good supply for that campaign.

As a citizen and magistrate of London, he was ever the champion of the poor and the weak, and that at a time when the working man had no vote. He put one, Harold, in the pillory for selling as Malmsey "old and feeble Spanish wine," which was doctored with gum and spices. Probably it was like the "port wine" now made at Worcester from damsons.

He prosecuted the Brewers' Company, then as now a powerful body, for "forestalling meat and selling dear ale." "Boodle" was then not unknown in the City, and certain

disclosures of late show that it is not yet extinct. In 1391 the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs were deposed for taking bribes. Whittington, however, was not to be "squared." Foreigners had by bribes got apprenticed to members of City companies, and so got a footing as traders, in spite of the law; but Whittington set his face against this. "England for the English" was his motto at a time, when "Made in Germany" was happily unknown. He was a prison reformer centuries before Howard, as we see from his bequest for the rebuilding of Newgate, because the poor wretches confined there suffered so horribly.

As the friend of the poor, the adviser and generous benefactor of kings, the patron of learning, as a very king among the merchant princes of London, Whittington is a man of whom Gloucestershire and the great City—nay, even England—may well be proud.
