

King Bonverd II.

A Legend of a Lost Kingdom.

By F. A. MITCHEL

Since the dawn of history the map of Europe has been changing. Many years ago there was a nation the very location of which has been lost, but it is supposed to have occupied a part of Austria and a part of northern Italy. There is a legend connected with this country which has been handed down by word of mouth for many centuries. Traces of it have been found among German speaking people and among Italians.

There was a king of this country—so the story goes—who was at continual war with a people living to the east of his territory, supposed to have been Slavs, whose descendants now occupy the Balkans. He appears in different versions of the tradition under different names, but usually Bonverd. The name of the nation he governed was Thungaria, supposed by some to have been the origin of Hungary.

While King Bonverd was hard pressed by his enemies a son was born to him. There was a prophecy that the Serbs would overpower Thungaria, but that a Bonverd born at the time of the conquest would re-establish the kingdom and subject the conquerors. This prophecy, which reached the Serbs, filled them with a desire, should they succeed in fulfilling the first part of it, to nullify the second part by either killing the infant who was, when grown, to work their destruction or make him a captive.

At the birth of the heir to the throne (Bonverd II., if he lived) his mother was unable to nurse him, and a peasant woman who gave birth to a man child at the same time was called in to give suckle to the prince. She was assigned rooms in a wing of the palace and brought her own child with her.

The woman, whose name was Josepha, was dark and her child was of like complexion, while the heir apparent to the throne was fair, with blue eyes. The king, when Josepha and her son, who was called Herman, were brought to the palace, called upon his councillor to make an inspection of the two infants in order that the peasant boy could not be substituted for the prince. They reported to the king that since one was light and the other dark, any one who had seen them, knowing which was the prince, would always be able to judge correctly between the two. This satisfied the king, and he made no objection to Josepha bringing her own son with her.

Meanwhile the Serbs were slowly approaching the capital of Thungaria, their king, Boris, being a great general and matched against a commander who was his inferior, for King Bonverd was not a warrior and was obliged to yield the command of his troops to another. This man risked all on one battle and was defeated, and the whole of Thungaria was open to the enemy, who had advanced rapidly on the capital. Indeed, they came as fast as the news that they were coming.

One morning Josepha heard a din below and, looking through a window, saw the street filled with the enemy's troops. The prince was asleep in his cradle, covered with drapery of the finest texture and bearing the royal arms.

Josepha's own son was in his own cradle, made of oak and unadorned. Hearing a noise in the corridor and believing that the Serbs had broken into the palace and would murder the prince, she laid him in her son's cradle and put her son in the place of the prince. Then, passionately embracing her offspring, she went into an adjoining room that she might not see him killed.

She had scarcely done so when the nursery door was thrown open and armed men entered. In a few minutes they were gone, and Josepha went back, expecting to see the body of her murdered son. The cradle was empty, and the prince was lying where she had placed him in the oak cradle.

King Bonverd was killed fighting at the head of his bodyguard, and all his courtiers who opposed the taking of the city were scattered. Josepha, carrying the prince, who was supposed to be her child, escaped from the palace and made her way to her home in the country. She dared not let it be known that the babe was heir to the throne of Thungaria lest the fact reach the conquering king and he should be killed. She therefore kept her secret.

Twenty years passed. Thungaria was a province of the kingdom of Boris, governed by a viceroy. Bonverd was brought up by his foster mother under the name of Joseph Bernstein and unlike his father, manifested a predisposition for a military life. At an early age he enlisted in the army of King Boris in a corps stationed in Thungaria. Being a fine soldier, he was rapidly promoted till at twenty years of age he was made a captain.

A few years later a young man came to Thungaria and announced that he was Bonverd II., king of Thungaria. He declared that when the Serbs had conquered the country he had been taken by order of King Boris from his cradle in the palace and carried to the king, who had turned him over to one of his officers to be dispatched

The officer, not relishing the work of killing an infant, had turned him over to a common soldier, who in turn commissioned his wife to strangle him. The woman reported that she had done so, but instead had concealed him and afterward brought him up as her own child.

Great changes had taken place since the conquest of Thungaria. King Boris had died and had been succeeded by his son, Boris IV., who was a weakling. The young claimant to the throne of Thungaria called upon his people to rise and throw off the yoke. It was quite likely that he would have succeeded in putting himself at the head of an army of his countrymen, who had been commissioned to inspect the prince and his foster brother when they were babes, still lived. They at once visited the claimant to the throne and pronounced him an impostor. He was of dark complexion, while the true prince was fair.

Joseph Bernstein was at the time serving with the army and had risen to be colonel. He seldom saw his foster mother, and she had never revealed to him the secret of his birth, fearing that he would attempt to lead a revolt which would surely fail, and instead of gaining a crown he would lose his head. Bernstein heard of the pretender and espoused his cause, thinking it better that even a false pretender should lead the Thungarians to liberty than that they should remain subjects of their conquerors.

A secret meeting took place between the two men. Bernstein reported that the corps he commanded was largely composed of Thungarians and he could begin a revolt with it. The offer was accepted, and suddenly the viceroy and all the Serb civil officers of the government were arrested. The news spread rapidly, and the people sprang to arms. Not only was a sovereign at hand in the claimant, but a military chieftain in Bernstein. The army through a long term of years—a quarter of a century—had become largely Thungarian and only needed a leader. Bernstein therefore found himself at the head of an army almost immediately.

But a force composed entirely of Serbs was sent to put down the rebellion, and many battles were fought. At first it was a losing game for the Thungarians, but under Bernstein's leadership they held their own until, gaining strength, they were able to meet the enemy under more advantageous circumstances. Finally when their general found himself in a position to strike he sent his adversaries back in a rout, dictating terms of peace in their capital which restored the independence of Thungaria.

When Bernstein returned with this treaty at the head of a victorious army one of the first persons he met standing at the foot of the steps leading up to the palace, where he was going to report to the pretender, was his foster mother.

"Hail, King Bonverd!" she said, kneeling before him.

"What do you mean, mother?" he asked.

Before the throng that were crowding upon the young victor she told the story of how she had been his nurse, how she had put her own son in his place when the Serbs broke into the palace and how she had taken him away and brought him up as her own son.

At that moment an old man who had been a member of King Bonverd's cabinet came forward to congratulate the man who had freed his country, arriving in time to hear Josepha's story. He remembered Josepha and, looking from her to the man she had saluted as a king, dropped upon one knee and kissed his sovereign's hand. The crowd, recognizing in the old man one prominent as a minister of their late sovereign, rent the air with loud hurrahs for King Bonverd II.

The claimant, as became a sovereign, was waiting in the palace to receive the homage of his general, when, hearing the shouts, he directed an attendant to go and learn what they meant. The man returned and said:

"Please, your majesty, they have acclaimed General Bernstein king."

The pretender, rising from his seat, hurried out and appeared with clouded brow before the king and the group about him. Josepha threw her arms around the pretender's neck, exclaiming:

"My son, my son! I believed they had killed you! Happy day that both my children are restored to me! Salute your king!"

The proof that the blue eyed general was king of Thungaria was so complete that he who had believed himself king was convinced and gave his adhesion to the true sovereign. King Bonverd made him his prime minister and treated him as a brother. As for Josepha, the king had always believed that she was his mother and loved her as such. He insisted that she occupy quarters at the palace and be treated with the respect due a queen dowager.

When the Serbs heard the story of how their late king had filled in his attempt to thwart a prophecy it became a universal opinion that what fate had decreed it is useless to oppose.

They were very much dissatisfied with their own king, and when later King Bonverd, yielding to his subjects' clamor for revenge at their long subjection, marched at the head of an army to their country they declined to make any opposition. For had not it been foretold that he would conquer his father's conquerors? So Bonverd entered their capital, took possession of their government and made his foster brother their king. Since their new sovereign had been brought up among them they were well satisfied.

A quiet wedding took place at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Chas. Ernest, Toronto, on Dec. 17th, when their second daughter, Henrietta Louise, was united in marriage to the eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Archer, Wellington.

At the Methodist parsonage, Concession, Merritt Haycke and Miss Bertha Reid were quietly married on Dec. 23rd.

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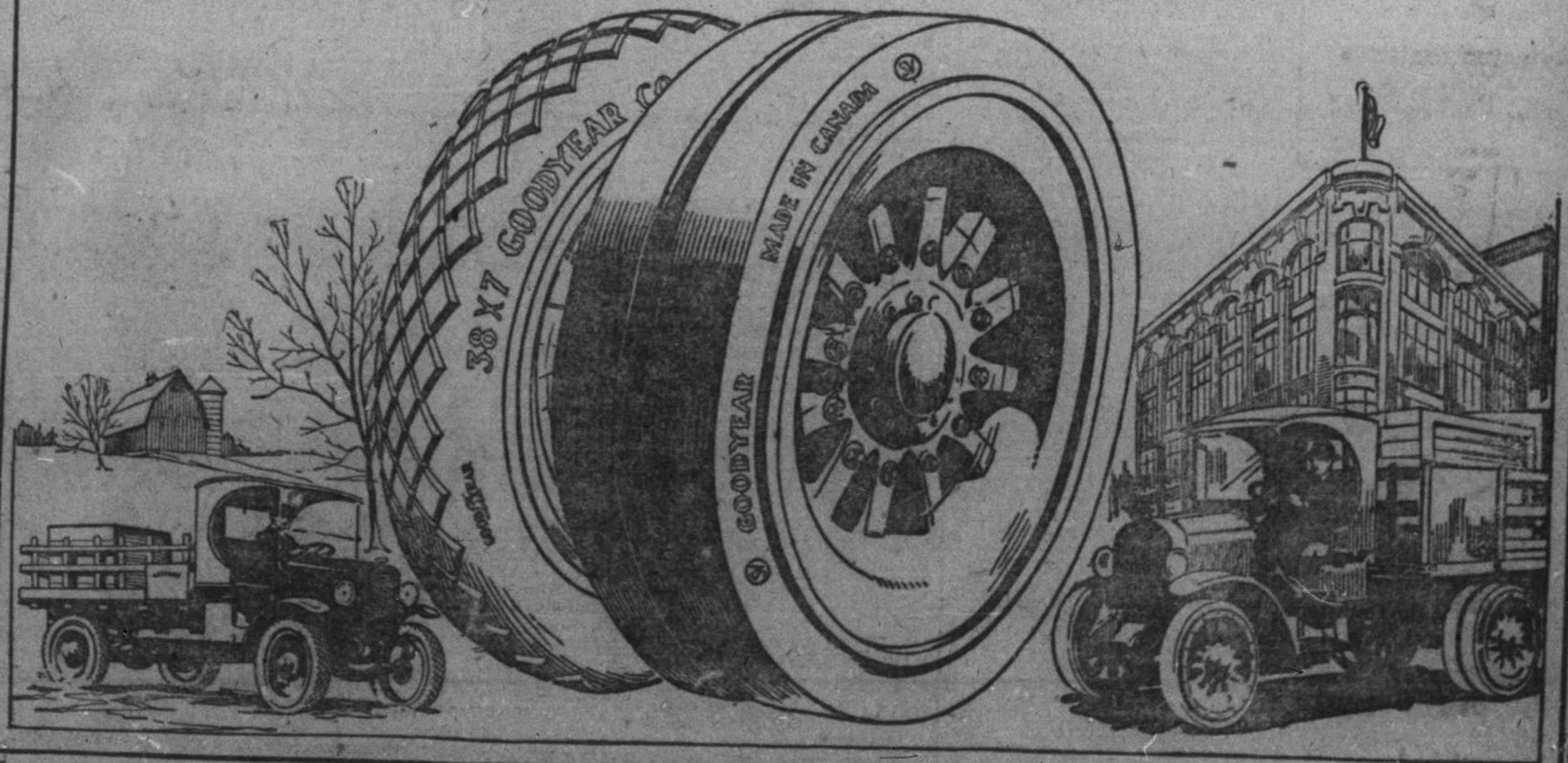
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