

Hippies New? Try 13th Century Children's Crusade

By R. G. WALESKA

That education crisis which newspapers and TV treat as a phenomenon peculiar to our time is actually as old as the world. The first parents to wonder "what did we do wrong?" when it dawned on them that they had raised a juvenile delinquent were Adam and Eve.

But then they might have realized that Cain was just one of the more unfortunate consequences of the Affair of the Apple.

Our times didn't invent hippies, either. To judge from contemporary reports the Children's Crusade of the 13th Century was the greatest hippie happening ever. Imagine 30,000 French and 20,000 German dropouts on the march!

A boy of 12, Stephen of Cloyes, started it all. Early in 1212 he came to Philip II of

France and brought him a letter he said came straight from Christ bidding him to organize a crusade. The sea, he was promised, would dry up to allow Stephen and his followers to walk dryshod to Jerusalem. The king ordered him to forget it and go back home.

But Pope Innocent III declared "the very children put us to shame" and to the dismay of the parents, gave his blessing to the undertaking. He expected it to put new heart into crusading which had become quite unpopular.

Youngsters from all over France flocked to Stephen and in June of that year they were on the way. They had neither arms nor maps nor food supplies. Many of them died by the wayside of hunger and exposure.

When the remnant reached Marseilles they found that the sea failed to dry up for them. Instead there appeared two disreputable mer-

chants, named Hugh the Iron and William the Pig and offered them seven ships free of charge to bring them to Jerusalem. Taking them for God's own messengers, the crusaders accepted gladly.

Two of the ships were wrecked off Sardinia with a total loss of life; the other five sailed — not to the Holy Land but to Algiers from where the youngsters were sold to the Saracens all over the Near East. Of the thousands of crusaders who had set out only a single one returned home — after 18 years of slavery — a priest who had been caught up in Stephen's contagious mania.

The German children fared somewhat better. Their leader, Nicholas — unlike Stephen — did not propose to take Jerusalem by storm but by converting the Moslems. One must hand it to Nicholas — he was the first to dream up a concept which was to take root — the concept of the

missionary crusade. But he never got to try it out.

After a great many of his followers died on the trek over the Alps, a number of the survivors accepted an offer of the city of Genoa to settle there. Nicholas and a few stalwarts made it to Rome where the Pope freed them of their Crusaders' oath. Some 2000 eventually returned to their native land.

Nicholas' father, held responsible for encouraging an enterprise which had cost the lives of so many children, was hanged by his fellow-citizens. (The German folk tale of the "Pied Piper" is said to have been inspired by Nicholas' father.)

There was another notable hippie happening a hundred years later. It was never qualified as a Crusade although it was intended as such. In 1320 some 40,000 so-called "Shepherds" moved southward through France. They were led by a young de-

frocked Benedictine monk, who had visions of many things, particularly of exterminating the rich.

His primary target were the Jews who had been recalled to France by Louis X "on the common clamor of the people" after having been expelled by his predecessor.

The Shepherds set fire to 120 Jewish settlements and murdered their inhabitants on the pretext that they refused to accept baptism. At last they arrived in Avignon with a view to asking the Pope to bless their crusade. They were out of luck.

Pope John XXII valued reason and order, detested anarchy. Great administrator, great legalist, great financier, he considered Jewish money-lending indispensable for the smooth functioning of the economy. Besides there was that Bull issued by Gregory X in 1272 which explicitly forbade forced baptism and violence against the Jews.

John XXII excommunicated the Shepherds outright. Secular justice did the rest.

A persistent rumor had it that the Shepherds crusade had been mounted by Templars who had gone underground before the trial against their order got underway and thus survived its destruction. It was said, which was wholly dedicated to the proposition of executing the dying curse which Jacques de Molay, last Grand Master of the Temple, had pronounced against the Kings of France as he was burned at the stake on March 19, 1414.

The Shepherds were part of the scheme in that they operated as a destructive force spreading terror throughout the realm and bringing it to the brink of ruin. The youngsters, it was said, acted under the influence of drugs which had the power of putting them into a

sort of ecstasy in which the worst crimes seemed not only possible but meritorious.

The Black Death (1347-50) which reduced the population of Europe by four-fifths made mass enterprises impracticable for generations to come. Moreover the social and intellectual climate had changed. Better educated than previous generations, highly critical of any mystical claims, the young wouldn't just up and trail behind some visionary leading them into danger and death.

They preferred instead to gain status in the schools and universities which had begun to open their doors to gifted boys of even the humblest condition. There were also respectable wars near home in which one could get oneself killed if he so desired.

Thus the Shepherds' crusade was the last of the historical hippie happenings of which ours are just a pale echo.



Padre Humberto Almazan, Mexican movie-star-turned-priest, radiates joy that has made him a favorite of young persons over the U.S. A Missionary of the Holy Apostles, he was guest Nov. 6 at Catholic Students Mission Crusade meeting at Cardinal Mooney High School, pleading for help for poor of the world, particularly a colony of lepers in Bali, where he spent the summer.

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