



The Pilgrim

“All the trumpets sounded for him on the other side”

—PILGRIM’S PROGRESS

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Culinary Note

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The business of supporting the preacher by gifts in kind was—and is—a tradition with both good and bad sides. In many cases it was—and is—an honest, loving sharing of food and other things with the pastor. Deacon Sauerbraten slaughtered several hogs each year and the preacher always shared in the results—and often it was more than the feet or the ribs. I still remember a cellar in a parsonage in western Canada that was stocked with row upon row of pressed duck, vegetables, fruits, and other good things.

On the other hand, I have often heard a pastor’s wife express profound resentment over the fact that she had to “oh and ah” over gifts of chicken necks and hand-me-down clothes. I recall that some farmers in central Illinois were regularly surprised by the faithful activity of their hens in Spring. They had more eggs than they could use or sell profitably. The result? The first batch went to the pastor. If there were still some left, they were shipped to the theological seminary at Springfield. I can still hear my good friends at the Sem come out of the dining hall cackling for week’s at a time. I recall a parsonage into which we moved more than forty years ago which was so solidly stuffed with baked beans—there must have been a sale somewhere because most of the cans were dented—that for years we couldn’t stand to look a baked bean in the eye.

I presume that by now this custom has succumbed to urbanization, super markets, and higher salaries. In one way, I must say, I regret this. The quantity and quality of the gifts were often used by our fathers as measures of sanctification. There was believed to be a close relationship between the degree of holiness and the quality of the eggs. For example, there was in my Grandfather Hueschen’s *Begleitschreiben* a provision that, in addition to his \$300 annual salary, the *Vorsteher* (elders) were to supply him with wood. This was no small order; he had a large house and there was a stove in every room. Normally, on cold winter days, each afternoon would find him making his sick calls. He usually walked because Hans, the

THE CRESSET

parish horse, was a contemporary of Ulysses S. Grant and got the chills on cold days. This was therefore the logical time—during his absence—for some of the elders to deliver their share of the wood. They could drop it and run. Grandfather Hueschen would come home as dusk came down over the *Friedhof* (cemetery) on the hill, take one good look at the new pile of wood in the barnyard, and say: “Das hat nun wieder der elende Schmidt gebracht. Der liebe Gott hat ihm gesagt er soil teilen was er hat; er teilt aber was er uebrig hat.” Translation for the monolingual reader: “This wood comes from Schmidt. God told him to share what he has; but he shares only what he has left over.” Footnote: it is a curious linguistic, cultural, and nationalistic fact that English has no exact equivalent for “der elende Schmidt” or even for “der liebe Gott;” neither “the noble Schmidt” nor “the dear God” captures anything like the precise meaning of the German.

These reminiscences were brought on by a report in the *New York Times* that a young Anglican vicar’s wife had published an article in which she advised “Never Marry a Cleric.” In that article she observed that she “had high-minded visions of entering with my husband to the great work of converting the world (who doesn’t at 21), but here I am surrounded by four children, tied to the house, expected to turn up at every cat-hanging and feeling like a widow as my husband is always on duty.

She continues: “I also resent the fact standard. A clergy wife is expected to run the conventional things, turn up at church and every other connected social affair whatever her domestic circumstances may be. It is often extremely difficult with a young family. One receives no encouragement from managing it with plenty of blame when one does not. Ordinarily a woman has a right to share her husband’s life but for the clergy wife this has been reduced to an occasional privilege.”

I really wonder if she is right. I know that occasionally I get a letter from a pastor’s wife in which she writes: “My husband is too busy. He told me to write.” I always read the next few paragraphs hurriedly because I know the good part is coming. It always begins: “As far as I am concerned—.” At this point my attention quotient goes up and I read with a great deal of interest and no little approval. Perhaps I should say that too often she refers to some hidden grief which has touched her family. I become aware of the fact that she does not like to trouble her husband with some of these problems and that she has very few people in whom she can confide. So

THE CRESSET

she writes to a dim, dumb, and distant figure. Perhaps there should be a separate set of counselors for pastors' wives.

