

Memories from Molotschna

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[Translator's Note: Recollections by the wife of Lutheran Pastor Joh. Kludt, whom I assume is the same pastor as indicated in a list of those who served in the Lutheran Church in Russia—*Kludt*, Theodor Fuerchtegott, b. 10 Jul 1861 in Neuburg/Od, d. 26 Oct 1931 in Korntal near Stuttgart (1236—Prischib/Tau: 1884-1885; 1268—Grunau: 1886-1900; 1370—Assistant at Rostov: 1900-1906; 261a—Vladikavkas: 1906-1926; 255—Jekaterinodar: 1908-1926; 259—Permanent Assistant Jekaterinodar: 1908-1926; 1214—Kronau: 1926-1928) Lived in Kronau in 1926 and then Rostov; since 1929 in Korntal near Stuttgart. Source: *Heimatbuch (Jahrbuch 1969-1972) der Deutschen aus Russland: Die Kirchen und das Religioese Leben der Russlanddeutschen*) Comments in square brackets are those of the translator.]

[Begin Translation]

Memories from Molotschna—A Pillar of the Community

Under the topic of “Pillars of a Community,” I understand it to be all those people who, in one way or another, helped the pastor promote the cause of the Kingdom of God and the preservation of things German among those living abroad. As a rule, it was such folks that were elected by the community as church trustees (*Kirchenvormünder*). But, besides these, there were also some female pillars who worked quietly, yet no less energetically. One such determined person was “Aunt Blank”. There is no one in all of Molotschna who did not know who Aunt Blank was. She was the daughter of Provost [Gottlieb Theophil Fr.] Föll, pastor for many years in Hochstädt/[Taurida], a neighboring parish of Prischib. This man had been dead for a number of years already when I met and came to know his daughter in 1883, she then being 56 years old. The people of the Hochstädt parish used to tell about their former pastor—after you asked them—that he had powerful sermons, but they were so long on major festival days that the people would take a break, left for their house and had their noon meal so that the soup would not get overcooked and the meat not burned, and then returned and participated in the conclusion of the worship service. But nobody thought ill of the pastor; on the contrary, they overlooked it because they felt that the subject was so very important to him and it could have been even longer. What pastor could get by with something like that today? During his school visitations, where he was also always very thorough, as the people put it, he always left the children with the good words: “Grow, dear children, like the meadows along the streams of water.” But the person who wants to think that our Germans in Russia were all so tolerant toward their pastors, if they preached a bit too long, or did something which was contrary to their own desires, that person is coming up with a completely wrong image of our German settlers. Take this for an example. The evangelist, Samuel Keller, not all the well known in Germany, was once a pastor in South Russia, after he was called to serve as a pastor in one of the colonies. There was the time when, in the presence of his church elders, that he opened the archival cupboard of his

future parish in which, among other cardboard boxes of official documents, there were two which had the following labels: On the first one was written “Complaints of the congregation to the Consistory concerning their pastor.” Anyone who knows anything about the life of this exuberant man Samuel Keller, will understand when he immediately grabbed the box and hurled it to the floor with these words, “No one is going to make any complaints about me to the Consistory. If anyone has something against me, he can tell it to me in a decent manner through the church council.” On the other box were written the words: “Complaints of the pastor to the Consistory concerning the congregation.” “There is no need for this box, too,” said Pastor Keller, and proceeded to pitch it, as he had done with the other, into the stove. “For when I have something against the congregation, you will hear from me through the council, you can believe that.” But this was only something on the side.

Now back to our Aunt Blank. She was the daughter of Provost Föll and had her training in a German school in Odessa. She was small, having suffered a long time from an English disease, and therefore she had a hump both on her chest and on her back and so remained small in stature. But she had a dear and friendly face and her bushy eyebrows, which joined each other over the bridge of her nose, and her dark eyes almost gave her the appearance of an oriental beauty. Since she was a young girl, there was a pastor who had made a marriage proposal to her. But she turned him down because he, as she put it, had a kind of mocking attitude when talking about other people. Afterwards, she married the teacher, sexton and organist of the Prischib Parish, by the name of Blank, who, just like Pastor Baumann, also came from Korntal—a pious and capable man.

The first pastors’ wives of the Prischib Parish may have perhaps been a bit unapproachable because they came from the Baltic Sea provinces and did not understand so well the qualities of character of our German settlers in the South. So it was probably that the people, and especially the women, came with their small concerns to the wife of the sexton and got accustomed to her. My father came to the parish in 1881. “Aunt Blank”, as she was known to all, made lovely bonnets for the baptism of children; wrote letters to the sponsors and provided confirmation gifts. She also conducted a small sewing and knitting school for the little girls in which she imparted knowledge of the handwork with great patience and, at the same time, taught them to sing many different songs/hymns (*Lieder*). She always had some good salve for “zusammenreissende Finger” [literally, travelling together finger], Arnika [plant=Arnica montana L.] tincture for cuts, Peppermint drops and other things for stomach pains, and, in every situation where she provided help, she always had some good advice on hand. Her heart was inspired with love for her fellow human-beings and full of the magnificence of God’s peace, and this gushed over, and whoever approached her also got some of it. She was always friendly and, should someone come to her from some distance, she always had a glass of coffee or tea, or a meal for that person. Those coming to her were never neglected.. In a word: She operated like the dew on the dusty grass of the South Russia Steppe, refreshing and invigorating.

When I returned to Russia from Germany at the age of 18, I chose her as my friend although she was three times as old as I was. She had a bit of youth in her, also had so much understanding for the young people so that they found it easy to be attracted to her, and it is no wonder that students who were not from the immediate area, who attended the Prischib Central School, were delighted to be with her in her retirement. Her hospitality was so famous that a story grew up

around it. They say that during the time of big celebrations, if someone asked her for accommodations, she consented even though she might not have enough beds for all her guests. She would put the little folks to bed first, and when they fell fast asleep she would stand them up against the wall and then the older guests could lie down in the beds. Of course, this is only a story, but it fits her.

Of the eight children that she had, six died while they were small and only two remained. Her son, Fritz, who after the death of his father, at his request, became a sexton and organist in the parish, and one daughter, Eugenie, married Pastor Friedrich Amann of Friedenfeld, a daughter parish of Prischib, but she died while she was still young. The death of Aunt Blank was nice. She held my blessed father in great reverence. When he lost his life under such terrible circumstance in October, 1904, and was brought to the grave, she said, "Now I am going to live only days." And she had that right. She got a slight flu. On the evening before her death, she had her son read the evening devotion and concluded the evening with these words to him: "This will probably be my last night here on earth." And it is difficult to believe how it happened just like that. In the morning, as her son came into her room to check on her, to see how she was doing, she had gently and blissfully crossed over into eternity.

"Blessed are the dead who died in the Lord."

25 August, 1939

[End of Translation]