

Pastor M.F. Schrenk in Glückstal - 1880

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[Translator's Note: A pastor's perspective on the conditions he finds himself called to as spiritual leader in the huge Lutheran Parish in the Kherson Jurisdiction villages around Glückstal and Neudorf. Previously, he had served in Elisabeththal, Georgia, in the Caucasus.]

[Begin Translation]

First Impressions and Experiences in the New Field of Work in Glückstal September 1880

As recorded by Pastor M.F. Schrenk

“The harvest is great, but the workers are few”

That was exactly my first impression, when I arrived here, after I had taken some time to look over the parish. The Glückstal parish numbered around 6,000 souls at my arrival. However, these 6,000 folks are spread out over various villages and hamlets, which one here calls “Chutora” (in reality, the people say Futter). **Glückstal** is the largest colony and is made up of some 2,500 souls and has a large stone church. **Neudorf**, the first sister congregation (*Filial*), with 1,800 souls (Lutheran – mixed colony), also has a church only somewhat smaller than the one in Glückstal, located 6 verst [1 verst = 1.06 km, or 2/3 of a mile] from the pastor's office, and has to be served by the pastor along with the mother congregation. Every 2nd Sunday and festival days, I have to travel there to serve them with God's Word, officiate at marriages, conduct confirmation instruction and confirmations. In addition to the Lutheran Church, Neudorf also has a Reformed Church of about 400 souls, which has a prayer house and school and is served by a Reformed Pastor in a vicar capacity (*vicariter*) 2 time a year out of Odessa.

Klein-Bergdorf, the 2nd sister congregation of Glückstal, numbers around 30 families with about 180 souls. It is 5 verst from Glückstal and is served 6 to 8 time a year with worship services. Couples planning to get married have to come to Glückstal as do those confirmands who are to be instructed and then confirmed.

Neu-Glückstal, the 3rd sister congregation, is 60 versts from here, in an easterly direction, numbers about 70 families with 400 souls. It has a prayer house [*Bethaus*] with a school and is served by me 4 times a year. The confirmands must come to Glückstal to be instructed, couples to be married, with my consent, are married by Pastor Becker in Hoffnungstal.

Neu-Beresina, the 4th sister congregation, is 5 versts from Neu-Glückstal, 65 versts from Glückstal, and numbers about 30 families with 180 souls and, like Neu-Glückstal, is served by me 4 times a year, at the same time as the above and in such a way that the Sundays are set up in

such a manner between the two congregation so that one time Neu-Glückstal has the morning worship service and Neu-Beresina has the afternoon worship service and the next time around the times are reversed. For confirmands and couples to be married, things take place just as do in Neu-Glückstal.

Friedenstal, the 5th sister congregation, is 18 versts from Glückstal, in a northeasterly direction, numbers, along with the new settlement of Mariental, 36 families with around 220 souls. It is served by me one or two times a year, in their own prayer house, which they constructed a year ago.

The remaining 700 souls in this church parish are scattered in various Chutors and in the small neighboring country villages (*Landstädtchen*) of Grigoriopol and Dubosari, and, for their spiritual needs, come to the mother church in Glückstal.

My local field of labor is also 6 times greater than the one was back in Georgia, where I only had to serve one village with about 1,000 souls (Elisabethtal). However, my efforts are not only not growing, but diminishing in the advancing years. A huge work load rests on my shoulders here and I have often already expressed my opinion “Had I known what kind of work was waiting for me in this parish, I would not have undertaken the transfer.” There ought to be a division of labor within the parish. (Later, Neu-Glückstal and Neu-Beresina came under the Hoffnungstal parish as it came under the Consistory, which until 1888 was on its own.) But this division has different and great difficulties. The first difficulty has to do with financial support. This cannot be reduced or else it affects the existence of the pastor and his family. Yet, the congregations do not want to increase it so that an assistant could be hired, and so the whole load remains on the shoulders of one man for the time being. In Russia, there are no reserve spiritual workers available, but, on the contrary, for some years, there has been a shortage of pastors so that some 20 church parishes in the country are almost finished due to vacancies. There are many church parishes still larger than this (namely, on the Volga River), which in some places number from 10,000 to 20,000 souls. Those are truly mission places! It is hardly possible to conceive that things in these places will soon change or get better.

Compared to the German colonists in Georgia, the educational level in these colonies is strikingly lower. It has its definite reasons. In the Georgian colonies, there are 9 to 10 school-attending months in a year and only 2 to 3 months of vacation. In these colonies, in the Tiraspol District, there are only 6 months of school and 6 months of vacation in a year, and even in those 6 months of school, the children are not sent to school on a regular basis, mostly because quite often it has to do with the parents who hold back. The office of the mayor does not want to offer a helping hand to punish this neglect for schooling. Furthermore, the present schools are overcrowded with children because there are too few teachers, in which it can be said: “The harvest is great, but the workers of few.” In the Glückstal school, for example, there are up to 500 school age students with only one called teacher to this position and two assistants (*Provisoren*) or helpers who are newly “hired” in the later part of each year, from within the community, by the mayor’s office, at the lowest price possible—just as one hires the cattle herders. These very same people themselves have very little knowledge and, at most, can drill the children somewhat in reading, writing and arithmetic. Just one class is made up of nearly 200 students. In such a situation, the teacher becomes nothing more than a baby-sitter. You would think, how, after 6

long months of summer vacation, where school is held only on a Sunday, that when the children show up in school, unruly, that the teacher's switch has a lot of work to do to bring a bit of order and attention among the unruly young fellows. The more one comes to know about this situation, he is not surprised that so few, or to put it another way, that children, between 7 and 15 years of age, after 8 years of schooling, are able to learn to read, write and do arithmetic properly and the catechism, with its verses, is impressed upon them. Of course, one cannot put too high a standard on their acceptance into confirmation instruction, otherwise, you would have to exclude most of them. So, it is no wonder that the level of education is inferior. Furthermore, as our people move about with those Jews and Russians (in trading and at the markets) who are generally not so well educated, they are exposed to learning a somewhat corrupted language, and especially their sins and vices such as brandy-drinking, stealing, lying, and cheating. Now we are no longer dealing with honest and upright German folks, but, in many respects, with a decadent generation. Some of the better parents sigh under the deteriorating conditions, but do not know what to advise or how to help. The German Welfare Committee (*Fürsorgekomitee*) (which existed until the 1870's) was focused on advancing the genuine interests of the German colonies and should never have been abolished, leaving the German colonies on their own to manage their own affairs, whereby they proved that they were incapable of governing themselves. When it comes to economical matters, they are in a moral dilemma and in a state of immaturity and are in need of guardians and keepers for something that has now been turned over to them. Since the Welfare Committee has not been in existence for 10 or 12 years, the colonies have been in a strong decline in every way, that is to say, as it pertains to the orchards, vineyards and vegetable gardens, and whatever other cultivation one can think of. Their watchword is always the field crop—wheat, wheat, and wheat again. By planting wheat over and over again, the time will come when the soil will no longer produce anything else but thorns and thistles and all kinds of weeds.

Under such circumstances, the spiritual labor in the fields of these colonies is not very promising. It is very clear to see that how things look in the natural world, so it also appears in the realm of the spirit. There is so much spiritual indifference, ignorance, superstition and moral depredation found here. The worst among all the congregations in this parish is Neudorf. Oh that everything old would soon pass and everything become new; however, the prospects for that does not yet exist.

(The folks at Neudorf are all from the Palatinate (*Pfälzer*) – always at the Tumann market – Sundays – that is to their ruin.

The folks in Glückstal are not only Swabians, but many are German immigrants from Hungary.)

26/28 August, 1939

[End Translation]