

Mayday

An Unedifying Story

From the Actions of the Accounts-Review-Book of 1746-1807 and the Geradstetten Town Archive No. 463

It happened about 250 years ago, in relatively quiet times, as the last French invasions were over for more than 50 years, and the next ones would not be for another 50 years. Geradstetten numbered then some 800 souls, and had a school with 150 children. The schoolhouse was an attractive, exposed beam structure in the Schmaltzgasse, still standing today.

A *schultheiss* by the name of Lederer ruled the town, the third generation in his family to administer the office, together with the tribunal [*Gerricht*], which corresponds to our current day town council. And naturally there was a pastor, as in all the rest of the duchy of Württemberg. *Magister* Stöltzel alongside his spiritual duties also acted as school superintendent, and annually ran the school inspection visit. The schoolmaster was Johann G. Weeber, who died during this story. For simplicity, he was succeeded by his son. However, as lowly schoolmasters, they were not drawn into this tale.

The authorities had their seat in Schorndorf. Here before all others we must name the Overseer Breitschwerdt [Broadsword]. If your name is an omen of what you are like, then he was certainly a solidly built man who knew how to get his way. When you see his signature and the nature of his [account] review, then his name rings true. Further we deal with his accountant-auditor Schwarz, who apparently got the story rolling. They were watched over from above by a high authority in Stuttgart, the Ducal Church Court.

Finally, we must name the victims, the school children of Geradstetten. Boys and girls described almost poetically in the record book as “in the first bloom of youth [*der ersten Jugend Bluthe*].”

A few words to help us understand the story. The word *Rezess* (actually singling out, reconciliation) means in this connection an objection of fact, here to the settlement of an account disbursement. The town account books were audited at various changing times, and objections were documented in the *Rezess* [Review] book.

So there were various *Rezess* books, a fine *Rezess* book, one for town maintenance, and the accounts review book in question here. This contained the objections to the church treasury accounts. The accounting remarks of the auditor Schwarz can be found on the right side of the book, and on the left Pastor Stöltzel expresses his thoughts.

School inspection visits [*Schulvisitationen*] were in these times the business of the Church, as in fact were all school activities. It was customary to close these visits with a drink at town expense. In this connection, in our case, 1 *Imi* (16.7 liters) and one *Mass* (1.67 liters) of wine were consumed. As only approximately 18 liters of wine were consumed, considering the visitors' robust thirst, probably only the older school children were allowed a portion of wine. For the vita of the named persons:

Philipp Burkhardt Breitschwert, assistant overseer of Schorndorf, 1743-1757, before that overseer at Heidenheim, also had the title of revenue board-dispatcher-counselor. He died in 1763.

Carl Ludwig Schwarz, born 1716, since 1744 accounts-auditor in Schorndorf. He was also designated a dispatcher. He applied in 1752 for the town council secretary in Beutelsbach, but did not get the job.

M. Philipp J. Stöltzel, 1726-1756 pastor in Geradstetten. Born in Metterzimmern, was Preceptor in Marbach before he came to the Remstal. He died here at the age of 60. He was highly treasured here in the community. His name sounds every day several times when the bells chime, as it is inscribed in the bells, cast in the year of his death, 1756. He took his job as superintendent of the school very seriously. This is affirmed by a remark one seldom hears today, from the year 1743:

...on his own the pastor diligently comes to school, often twice a day, some times not for a few days, so the children never know when he comes, so they always stay on their toes.

The Story

As every year, the school visitation took place under the auspices of the pastor. He tested the knowledge of the students, let them recite the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, and asked them questions from the Catechism. For this they received at town expense a few *Kreuzer*, a bread roll, and "according to custom" [*nach Observanz*] one or two glasses of wine. This last gift, though pedagogically questionable, had for years been blessed by the Schorndorf auditor, until 1744 when a young accountant-auditor named Carl Ludwig Schwarz took over examining the books.

At the beginning he was of the opinion that the wine costs in the accounts were the responsibility of those who had taken part in the visit. Upon closer examination, he had to conclude that the school children also were given wine.

In such a case, an example had to be made! The town began to feel the heat. A first review contained by itself 12 objections at the year-end. One can picture how the auditor, with finger raised, dictated his findings to the council secretary. Before all others, we are interested in points 7 and 8. The last sentence of the review leaves no doubt what would happen, if the town did not obey:

This objection must be adhered to in an orderly way. Those who are responsible for the church treasury [accounts] will be subject to ducal punishment if they do not obey exactly.

The First Review of 10 April 1746

In point 7, fault is found that the bread distribution charge is not settled in an orderly way, which, in consideration of the trifling amount, is a malicious remark:

Likewise for legitimate charges of church and school visitation costs in the future, an orderly note must be made – every day's wages certified – and the invoice then enclosed.

Concerning, however, the bread that was given to the children, the schoolmaster must complete a proper itemized list, in which however those are listed who actually went to school, and not also those who were brought to the visitation, so that the list can be given over as a voucher of charges to the church treasurer.

Then the auditor's point 8 come to the meat of the matter:

Concerning the offering of open wine; in the beginning one had supposed that the wine was consumed by those who performed the school visitation, but upon closer examination it was revealed that every school child, according to old custom, was given 2 glasses of wine (Pastor Stöltzel corrects: 1 or 2), with the consequence that children in the first bloom of youth were introduced to this disagreeable drinking habit, drinking an equal amount as the town council members.

This is a highly forbidden misappropriation of funds, which never again is to happen. This shameful drinking is hereby absolutely stopped, sub poena alterius tante, rather it is ordered that paper and pens are to be distributed to the children to further inspire in them industry for their youthful studies.

Now, Pastor Stöltzel knew well his Geradstetten farmers and vineyardmen. It was clear to him: If the authorities wanted to save money on the children, then the town would be angry, and above all, this would be felt in the church plate [*Klingelbeutel*]. Therefore he advocated keeping to the old ways, and letting the children have a glass of wine. In open words, later characterized as '*ohnziemliche terminus*' [intolerably blunt], he set to battle:

Compliance with this order is very harmful to the church treasury, as will be quickly reflected in the weekly church plate donations. It will be said: if poor small children cannot receive some small enjoyment from the church treasury, so their parents will no longer be generous with their offerings.

Children do not become accustomed to drinking from this practice, rather the poor, who generally see no wine the year long, can receive something to delight them.

The authorities widely shame themselves by making such reproaches of blame. Just check the record for the order and payment of wine for the Holy Communion, which allowance both in quality and quantity is triple that charged for the school visitation. If this Rezess ruling it to remain, the church offerings will decline as a consequence as long as the children are deprived of their reward, as long as such indecent laws are prescribed. If the church treasury thus gains or loses, that can be judged by all impartial observers.

For the responsible authorities in Geradstetten, the matter seemed thus settled. The direction of giving the children paper and pens was taken note of and followed. And the children received as before their wine at the visitation. As these “*Pfingst examen*” [Whitsuntide exams] fell mostly in May, they were combined with a May festival, as in other villages of the Duchy. So the years went by in the land. But one did not reckon with the long memories of the auditors in Schorndorf. In the copy of the final year-end reports of 1750-1754 it was clear that as before the *Imi* (16.7 L) of wine costs were miss charged. So it came in 1754 to a second review complaint:

The Second Review of 6 July 1754

Complaint is charged as follows. According the above page 7 contained in the Overseer’s review book, the drinking at the school visitation was to be stopped. One has changed the habit now into a Mayday celebration, given the custom another name, and thereby incurred even more costs than at the school visitation, as this celebration costs:

[A long exposition of the costs of the visitations of 1750-1754 follows.]

Even as the town acted contrary to the ruling of the Rezess, it is not to be thought that in some towns holding Mayday celebration it is customary, much less allowed, to introduce such new habits.

Thus this entire matter is humbly sent forward to be resolved by the most noble gentlemen Dijudicatur. In the future, however, these newly instituted and disallowed Mayday festivities and resulting expenses will not be paid.

Now all this business was to be laid before the Ducal Church Court for decision. And if it were painful to give up a custom to which all had grown fond, the children would just have to do with a bread roll, pen, and paper. Pastor Stöltzel wrote of his soulful anguish in a barely readable hand, which can be found in the church court proceedings. He deeply deplores again the prohibition of this old town custom by the higher authorities:

d. 29 April 1755

For uncounted years, it was established that the school youth taking part in the school visitation should also have a glass of wine along with their piece of bread, but several years ago your high honored office has spoken against this, which however has resulted in much difficulty with the citizens. Because of these ensuing difficulties, for many years on Mayday these children annually got a small treat of wine and bread, which the highly honored office now wishes, on account of the wine, to prohibit.

Because this is however an old custom, if it is to be stopped, it will harm the yield of the church plate, yet the cost is small. However, not to oppose your commendable office because of the wine sharing, the practice was stopped [at the visitation]. Instead on Mayday the children who wrote well were given 1x paper and the others 1x bread; on the

school visitation every child got 1x bread. Those however who did not yet go to school, they received nothing.

The authorities answered in a newer finding, firmly, with satisfaction:

Third Review of 19 Nov. 1756

What was authorized for Mayday, reviewed above on page 14b, that is affirmed as in the account review 1754-1755

Cash 1 fl. 53x

Wine 1 Jmi, 1 mas charged income revenue

From 1755 to 1756 however the amendment is to be added: from the church project accounts for paper and bread

1 fl 35x

to be charged and paid.

The date of this report is no accident. A few days before, Pastor Stöltzel died. In the opinion of the authorities he certainly was responsible for clinging to the old custom, as he had repeatedly argued the issue in writing. For the church court this was the opportunity to place the final line under the story with a *Kanzlei* review. A “*billige Ahnung*” (we would say an appropriate censure) was published in the town, and as Pastor Stöltzel with the primary blame could no longer be called to answer, one put the matter to rest in the record, where it still lies.

Kanzlei Review of the Princely Church Court of Stuttgart of 7 May 1757:

After one had obediently allowed the Princely Court to referee the dispute over church disbursements of 1733 through 1751 and subsequent revision of these by the council, the following resolution was arrived at, to which the high office, on threat of punishment, requires the church treasurer, accountants, and sub-accountants to obey strictly, to wit:

Since the high office properly call the disbursement for wine for students and the visitors, a misuse of funds from the church treasury, against this stands the merits as stated by the Pastor and the church officials, who stood against the ruling as stated on p. 7 and did not end the practice and in fact instituted Mayday celebrations to which half the payment were charged, and this practice continues at this date.

An Equitable Punishment

As, however, the Pastor, who started and continued this arbitrary opposition to the authorities, was largely to blame, but as he has died, so one wants to put this issue to rest.

In the future, the high office is to disallow these expenses, and those in charge are to discontinue their arbitrary behavior and must attest to this in writing.

The cranky earnestness of the bureaucrats had prevailed over the ancient wisdom of an experienced pastor. A small satisfaction however was yet to come to local citizens, but they had to wait another 15 years. When several secretaries of the Schorndorf administration came to Geradstetten on a Sunday excursion for amusement at the “*Ochsen*” Inn, these persons were pointed out and a notice was sent to the higher [Schorndorf] office:

On Sunday, Septuag: 7 February 1773 certain secretaries by the names of Mr. Auch and Mr. Kammerle of the honored administration came here to the Ox Inn in a sled with women, for fun and dancing. As this runs against church rules, it was decided respectfully to inform the Duke’s upper office in Schorndorf, so that such disorderly conduct could be prevented in the future.

N.B. According to testimony of the innkeeper, they borrowed two fiddles from the schoolmaster and Mühlecker, on one of which the secretaries themselves played. They even danced two minuets.

reported the 15th February

Pastor M. Fischer and Schultheiss Lederer

We end our sad story with the remark of Vogt Breitschwedt:

***...in this way, the Mayday celebrations
are completely canceled.***