

Charter VII

Kilian: Patron of Neu Franconia.

by

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When Matt's pioneer ancestors emigrated to America they brought with them not only their physical and tangible treasures but their patron saint as well: St. Kilian. And they named their church after him, also the cemetery and school. Matt knew the name was special to the pioneers but it is doubtful that he knew the story behind it.

According to legend, based on history, Kilian was born into a highly respectable, scholarly family in Scotland where he was educated in the arts and skills. Later he went into a monastery where he used all of his available time studying the bible. He acquired something of a reputation as a scholar and teacher, coming to the attention of King Dieterich XIII who sent him and two other monks on a mission converting heathens to Christianity.

The three monks preached and converted throughout France, went on to Rome and then north to Wurzburg, Germany, which was still quite pagan in the seventh century. Duke Gisbert, who lived where the Johannesstift, a religious establishment in Wurzburg stands, was so impressed with Kilian's preaching that he converted to Christianity and was baptized by Kilian on March 29, 688 A.D. And his court likewise.

Now, Gisbert was married to his deceased brother's widow, Gailana, as was customary in the pagan religion, and cared for her deeply.

However, Kilian told him that he had to separate from Gailana if he wanted to be Christian, because marriage to a brother's wife was contrary to Christian law. Gisbert's mind was in a turmoil. He was torn between renouncing his beloved wife, or returning to paganism and keeping her.

With Kilian's admonitions disturbing him endlessly, Gisbert decided to leave Wurzburg under the pretext of business.

"The King has requested me to go to Rome for a while and I cannot refuse. I won't be gone long, and you'll be with me in my heart", he said to Gailana in their Franken dialect, as he held her close in their bedroom one sunny morning.

"If you must go, you must, but I shall be very lonely without your beloved presence beside me. Come back as soon as your business is finished, my loved one," she answered turning her tear-filled eyes away from him.

"I will try, my love, I will try." And he was gone. Gailana was not entirely unhappy about Gisbert's absence because this gave her a chance to think and lay her plans. She was aware of the possible legal separation from her beloved Gisbert, and she was not only worried but deeply hurt.

"How can I prevent this from happening and how can I get revenge on that instigator, Kilian?" Gailana thought, her feelings of loss and revenge intermingling as she plotted and schemed.

"I know, I'll have the three trouble making missionaries killed and their bodies buried where nobody will ever find them. And then when Gisbert returns I'll tell him they've gone back to Scotland, and maybe he'll forget about that Christian foolishness and come back to me and my bed." And Gailana went about carrying out her plan.

Who would help her? Who would do the killing and getting rid of the bodies? She couldn't do that herself. But who? Suddenly, she remembered two aimless young men from their court who would do anything for money.

Late one afternoon she encountered the two men in a remote area of the Court and proposed her plan: For an agreed upon sum of money they were to kill Kilian and his companions, Kolonat and Totnan, and bury their bodies in the stable. The men pledged to carry out Gailana's plan.

That night, as Kilian and his companions had retired to their quarters near the horse stables and well, the Lord appeared to Kilian in a dream, telling him that his time to go to his heavenly reward was near. Frightened, Kilian shook his two companions awake, and after hurriedly telling them about his dream, he said, " We must pray, for I am going to die."

They had no more than fallen to their knees and begun to pray together when the door was pushed open and the two men from the Court entered. Startled out of their concentration at the intrusion, they said in virtual unison, " What do you want, what are you doing here?"

"We have orders to carry out", one of the men answered. And with that, swiftly and silently, they drew their swords, killing the three missionaries. Then they wiped up the blood that poured from their helpless victims with their clothing, and, under cover of darkness dragged the bodies to the horse stables. Here they loosened the planks of the flooring, dug away some of the soil and buried the remains of Kilian, Kolonat, and Totnan along with all of their clothing, books, and other personal effects. After carefully replacing the planks and covering them with debris, the two hired assassins went silently into the night.

About a week later Duke Gisbert returned from his 'business' trip and when he didn't see the three missionaries around he asked Gailana if she knew where they were. Gailana had a ready answer for him, having anticipated the question. A few days ago they had stopped in after breakfast to bid her farewell and give her a message for the Duke. She was to tell him, when he returned from his business trip, that they had to go on to other places to do their preaching and converting of heathens. They would remember him in their prayers.

This explanation seemed to satisfy Gisbert and without Kilian's presence to remind him of his Christian responsibility to separate from Gailana, he pushed the idea to the back of his mind, and returned to Gailana's bed.

For a time all went well and Gailana was satisfied that her scheming and plotting had paid off. Her amorous lover-husband has gotten his foolish Christian notions out of his head and he was all hers again. But her new-found happiness didn't last very long.

According to legend, the Lord had his revenge on the pagan conspirators, as well as on Gisbert and Geilar. The hired murderers met with violent deaths themselves. Gisbert was choked by his own faithful valet during a minor quarrel a few years after the murderers died. And Gailana, her conscience obsessively bothering her, became 'possessed' by evil spirits."

And Wurzburg declined further into Paganism until sixty years later when the missionary St. Winifred came and revitalized the work of Kilian, Kolonat, and Totnan.

The ultimate fate of the three missionaries came to light some years after their disappearance when the barn, which had fallen into disrepair, was torn down and the rotted floor boards gave way to evidence of the grizzly crime. Subsequently, Kilian was sainted and a tomb to the martyrs was erected. This tomb, with images of the men on too can be visited and venerated at any time. It is located on the basement level of the Neumünster church which was built on the spot where the bodies were discovered. The three skulls are kept in a removable glass case within the tomb. Annually, on July 9, which ushers in the two-week Kiliani-Fest (celebration of St. Kilian) the glass case is brought into the sanctuary of the church. Flowers and candles decorate the case which is placed so that the faithful can kneel, contemplate, or

pray, before going into the street or park for the big celebration... but I digress, that's another story.

Ironically, over twelve hundred years after the Gisbert-Gailana dilemma, Matt and his sister-in-law Gertie were placed in a similar situation. Gertie, childless widow of Matt's brother Stephan who had been for four years, lived alone in the house across the road from Matt's home place, where he had been born, married, and ultimately died.

Gertie was not only sister-in-law to Matt's sisters Lena and Anna, but she was also this close friend. They were delighted beyond words when they saw their brother take Gertie to their New Franken church in his Model T. Ford, and to country dances at rear by Walhain, Sugar Bush and Humbolt. Sure, Matt couldn't dance be- cause of his "bad" leg, but he and Gertie enjoyed listening to the polkas and waltzes, drinking a few beers and socializing.

All of Matt's sisters, Katie the eldest, Maggie who lived in Bay Settlement, (Johanna was deceased by this time) besides Lena and Anna, thought it would be wonderful to keep Gertie in the family. On their telephone party lines, or when they saw each other they often spoke of this, and what's more, of how great it would be for their brother. His wife Lizzie, they reasoned, had been dead for seven years and sick in that institution for seven before that, and what kind of life was that. And since Stephan and Gertie never had any children, mothering those two of Matt's still at home would be good. Yes, real good...

"I wonder when Gertie was coming to help like she always done," Lena said one hot August morning in our big farm kitchen, looking a bit nervously at the chime clock on the mantle as it gonged nine times. A wedding present to Matt and Lizzie in 1899, it had been reminding the occupants on the farm when to get up, when to have morning lunch, dinner, afternoon lunch, supper, and when it was bed time, ever since.

"Yah, I don't know," Anna answered, moving a little faster, her large, garden-tanned hands making summer sausage sandwiches and sacking them in the basket for the men's lunch in the field.

"I seen her a couple days ago," she went on, "and she was planning on coming and helping like she always done for years now."

It was threshing time. A wonderful exciting time. The three aunts, Lena, Anna and Gertie would come early in the morning and leave lunch ready for the twenty five or so men by nine thirty, and then a perfectly scrumptious dinner by twelve noon!

I never ceased to wonder at their efficiency and ease with which they accomplished this, year after year. And all of the country women tried to outdo each other, for after all, word got around...

Matt would have gone to Jandrain's butcher shop in the village and brought home the beef and pork roasts which his sisters put into the oven of the wood-burning range soon as they got to the house. Like clock work, one would make crusts for the August apple pie (and maybe a raisin or mincemeat) another would stir up a cake or two, while I peeled and reeled and sliced and ran errands.

The pies and cake would go into the kerosene stove oven in the summer kitchen which we customarily used during the hot weather. But on threshing day we used everything. Oh, the smell of the house when I would come back from the field after I'd brought the men their forenoon lunch!

It was really something to look forward to, the promise of the big meal on threshing day! And then in fall, silo filling day - a repeat. Slightly different version in menu and crew, but the same wonderful cooks!

"Maybe Aunt Gertie's car wouldn't start," I chimed in, continuing to fill the big jugs with "Eier-Bier", a mixture of cold well water, vinegar, beaten eggs and a dash of baking soda, to take to the threshing crew.

Just then Matt walked into the kitchen. He took off his hat, wiped his forehead with the large blue and white banana handkerchief that he always carried in his back pocket, and said,

"It sure is hot out already, It'll be a scorcher by afternoon."

"Yah, we know dat," his sister Anna answered, continuing to pack the lunch basket, "but men gotta eat, so we gotta cook. and where's our third cook? She's always here by now."

"Oh, I guess she ain't coming today." Matt answered quietly, sitting down next to one of the curtainless windows.

"Ain't coming? 'that happened, she ain't sick, is she?" Lena asked, concern and curiosity reflected in her voice. They would indeed miss her help, but what's more, the visiting and gossiping they always did whenever they got together.

"No. No, she ain't sick, but we ain't going together no more." And Matt's blue eyes turned sadly away from us as he looked out the window at the nearby garden (or maybe at nothing) for a moment while we waited in shocked silence, each disappointed in our own way. Then, haltingly, he told us what had happened.

Two days earlier he and Gertie had gone to the parish priest, Father Dieterich, to apprise him of their marriage plans and to ready him for the reading of the banns in St. Kilian's church for the following three Sundays. To their great surprise and chagrin he told them they could not get married, that it was forbidden according to church law, that somewhere in the Bible it said something about a man not being allowed to marry his brother's wife, even if the brother were deceased.

"But Pa, you're not blood relatives, that just doesn't make any sense," I said, reveling in my great logic, and disgusted at the stupidity of others.

"That's too bad," Lena said sympathetically, "It sure would have been nice, but if the priest says that's the way it is then that's the way it's gotta be. It'd be a sin to get married. Gee, it sure would have been nice though."

"That's right, Matt. Youse mustn't live in sin," Anna agreed, shaking her head in assent, "but, it sure would have been nice though"

They didn't reach out to him but Matt felt their empathy and understanding as they returned to their dinner preparation and he got up from his chair and walked out of the room. His characteristic limp a bit more pronounced and his shoulders more stooped as though the weight of it all was more than he could carry.

Lena and Anna reckoned on how it all sure was too bad as one scooped lard out of the crock for pie crust and the other got the ingredients together for the cakes. Poor Matt. How lonesome it was for him these fourteen years without a woman. Always alone. The kids to worry about and nobody to worry with him. Matt and Gertie. It would have been so nice. "tsz, tsz," and Lena shook her reddish head, while Dana echoed the "tsz, tsz" while shaking her dark one.

I was too young and immature to really share the sisters' concern for Matt's sadness and loneliness. My main concern was with shedding some responsibility and having a woman taking it over.

So Matt stayed alone for the next six years until life closed for him entirely. Meanwhile Gertie married Andrew Bake, widowed husband of Lizzie's cousin Mary. They made their home in Gertie's house - across the road from Matt's birthplace.

When Matt died he was laid out in the parlor of his original home, now occupied by his sister Anne and her husband Peter; where Annie had nursed him the two months preceeding his death, when the 'bad' leg that never really healed. had taken its ultimate toll....

Whole neighbors and friends came to pay their last respects, so did Andres and Gertie – separately. As I stood at the side of Matt's casket, engrossed in my grief and sense of loss, memorizing every line and crevice of his face, remembering poignantly, at the sight of the dimple-like indentation in his cheek, the game we use to play, and the fun we had with it and the tale he would tell concerning how he got it, Andrew came into the room and stood next to me.

He gazed at Matt's peaceful face for a time, then turned to me and said almost defiantly, as though he were continuing his thoughts aloud: "But she married ME!"

Momentarily shocked out of my grief, I recoiled from the emotional outburst and realized for the first time that Andrew knew somehow he hadn't been first choice. I looked in his hard, embittered face and said quietly, "Yes Andrew, she married YOU"

References:

<https://youtu.be/OUALFOWnaaU>