



CAPTAIN VON ROHR WITH HIS DOG AND GUN

HEINRICH VON ROHR AND THE LUTHERAN
IMMIGRATION TO NEW YORK
AND WISCONSIN¹

PHILIP VON ROHR SAUER

HEINRICH von Rohr was born on the twenty-eighth day of March, 1797. In France the Revolution was still fresh in the minds of the people, and Napoleon Bonaparte that very month was marching toward Vienna, gluttoned by his recent victory at Mantua. In America, that same month, George Washington had completed his eight-year term as the first president of the United States. In the dusty annals of Brandenburg-Prussian history the name "von Rohr" had appeared very early. The "Gotha" records that his direct forebears had been active in the Mark Brandenburg as early as 1191 and had been numbered among the nobility ever since that time. Many of them had served as officers in the Prussian army at various times, others had found government positions in the kingdom. Heinrich's father, Philip von Rohr, had been a privy councillor at the court in Berlin. His work, moreover, carried him into various parts of Germany and Russia where revenue assessing was being arranged. And it was during one of his trips, while he and his wife were residing in Billerbeck, Pomerania, that Heinrich was born.

During the early years of his life Heinrich traveled a great deal with his parents, whose residence was seldom fixed. His life was planned by his father to give the youth

¹This article was prepared in part from a group of Heinrich von Rohr's letters, a source not hitherto known to exist.—Error.

every privilege and advantage of a Berlin aristocrat. Heinrich was destined to become an officer in the army so that he could carry on the family tradition of voluntary military service. At the age of eight he was therefore sent to Stolp, the famous Prussian academy founded by Friedrich II, in which the youth of the nobility received its first military training. Though only a child when he entered there, this blonde-haired, blue-eyed lad of slight frame soon adapted himself to the stern army discipline. He progressed eagerly, showing a conscientious seriousness in all his work, and after three years' training at Stolp, was advanced to serve as a page at the court of Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia. He remained in this capacity for several years and became a familiar figure in the family of Prince and Princess Wilhelm who honored him with many gifts and court favors. He also continued his military service during these years with such zeal that at eighteen he was made a second lieutenant in the grenadier regiment "Kaiser Alexander." The fact that this particular regiment was called on to go into France for the purpose of making a settlement after the Napoleonic régime meant for the young lieutenant still further adventures and more of life. He spent three months in Paris in rather close connection with the diplomats who were settling the Franco-Prussian disputes. He was also transported into various foreign borderlands whenever necessity arose. In short he spent his youth as a typical young grenadier, as carefree at least as his earnest nature would allow. He became a first lieutenant in his regiment on March 30, 1824, and with his apparent interest in military affairs he seemed destined for the career of a soldier.

But his duties soon brought him back to Berlin and with the approach of his thirties and a comfortable residence in the capital, there came thoughts of a settled life of matri-

mony, a fact which in his particular case was to alter conditions to a very remarkable extent. He entered this condition of life at the age of thirty-two, thus changing inadvertently not only his material but also his mental condition; for during the marriage service came his conversion to Christianity and the unquenchable thirst for religious truth that was to alter not only his own life but also the destiny of many fellow-Lutherans. The sermon that day as well as subsequent sermons by such renowned preachers as Schleiermacher and Hengstenberg, caused this worldly-minded young man to take an active interest in Lutheran theology. He was filled with a profound enthusiasm for the newly-found faith, diverting his energetic will suddenly into entirely new channels. He read widely in Scripture and took daily instructions from a local minister in order to explore thoroughly the field of his new endeavor. And when his wife died with the birth of their first child, his adversities only strengthened his desires for the religious life.

He gradually came to prefer the young theological aspirants to his erstwhile grenadier companions and soon became a leader among these serious-minded youths. Together with others of his conviction he founded the Berlin Sick-Benefit Society, hoping thus to put his faith into actual practice.

But his career was destined for change and variety. His quiet Berlin life was interrupted by the fact that new military duties demanded his attention elsewhere. On March 30, 1834, just ten years after he had received his first lieutenantship, he was appointed captain in the "Kaiser Alexander" regiment and asked to take up his duties at Magdeburg. Before leaving, however, he courageously made another attempt at matrimony and took to wife Julia Mangold, daughter of a Berlin physician. This marriage though happy for

a time, brought the valiant young captain even more sorrows than the first but again served to mould more firmly his religious precepts. An incident that throws into vivid relief the deep religious fervor of Captain von Rohr is the painful illness and death of his little son, Max. This child of three had contracted a pernicious cancer of the mouth that had grown until it closed almost the entire oral cavity. Two major operations were performed. One by the grandfather, Dr. Mangold, though seemingly successful, proved wholly futile within a year; another and more difficult one by a renowned Berlin surgeon, Professor Dieffenbach, was likewise unsuccessful. During the latter of these the child as well as the father evidenced a most remarkable religious faith and hope.

"Will the doctors believe in Christ, if He gives me power to lie quietly?" asked the precocious child.

"I shall ask this of God," was the father's reply.

And while the surgeons, without any anæsthetic, hollowed out the child's mouth no sound was heard except the sincere encouragements of the father and an occasional "Jesus" from the son. The child died soon after this, but the sad parent only strengthened his new faith through this terrible ordeal.

But the continuous domestic griefs that checkered the career of the young Lutheran were slight compared to his religious ordeals. Heinrich von Rohr had come into contact with Lutheranism at a time when a great problem was confronting the Lutherans of Germany. Up to 1817, the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, the German Lutherans had had reasonable religious freedom. But in that year with the accession of King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia their freedom was at an end. This monarch in his Prussian zeal for unity, had proclaimed the Union, a merger

between the Lutheran and Reformed churches. The chief point of difference was of course the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. The Lutherans insisted on the actual presence of Christ's body in the Sacrament; the Reformed body considered the Sacrament only a symbol of Christ's body and blood. Von Rohr was convinced through his reading of Luther that the Lutheran concept was biblical and refused to join a body that he considered unorthodox. And so firmly was he grounded in his stand that he disregarded all warning and gathered about him a group who believed as he did—in defiance of the Prussian government that he was serving. His faith, indeed, was strong and if his family griefs had tested it, his political difficulties were to give it the acid test.

His opposition to the Union came to a quick head in 1836 when he told Bishop Dräseke of the Union that that body lacked the proper faith in the Sacrament. The bishop thereupon replied: "All right, we are through with you—I have nothing more to say."

Resorting to military methods the bishop then gave von Rohr a certain amount of time in which to select a Unionist pastor to christen his child, stating as his ultimatum that any non-conformist would be forced out of civil and ecclesiastical privileges. When Captain von Rohr refused in spite of the ultimatum, he was referred to King Friedrich Wilhelm III—where he was once in great favor—on a charge of insubordination. He appealed to the king not to confuse military affairs with matters of the conscience. General von Thiele too appealed to the king on von Rohr's behalf, suggesting that he place the captain in a section where he would not have to join the Unionist church. But the king's reply was short and decisive—and typically Prussian—"I hereby release Captain von Rohr from further service because he refused to carry out the order of his superiors."

A mandate to this effect, though in a somewhat milder form, was handed to Captain von Rohr by General von Thiele on February 10, 1837. Von Thiele with countenance more in sorrow than in anger, carried out the command very reluctantly and realized that it tolled the death knell of all further military service on the part of the von Rohrs.

At the news of his dismissal the whole military group of Magdeburg was amazed. Instead of "Captain von Rohr," the renegade was referred to as the "Mad Captain" and the *beau monde* laughed at his decision. Even his friend, General von Zglinitzke, remarked to von Rohr: "I wish I had your faith, but I fear you are going too far. You ought to consider your wife and children."

Asked how he meant to earn his daily bread he replied: "I have another King who will offer me wages."

And when the time came to transfer his company as well as his military wardrobe and treasury to his successor, his bewildered wife asked: "What are you going to wear tomorrow? You have no civilian clothes."

His reply was simple, "We have a merciful Provider."

Upon his arrival at home he found there a new suit, the gift of Graf Pückler, colonel of the regiment; in the evening other wearing apparel was brought to him by members of the congregation.

Captain von Rohr's farewell address to his company was indeed a spectacle. Clad in his captain's uniform, thin but of excellent military bearing, the nobleman stood before his troops for the last time. His face was pale, but his blue eyes flashed confidence as he spoke to his subordinates. He begged them to remain faithful to their ideals and to uphold their fidelity both to their God and king. He spoke to them in dignified phrases of interests they had in common and when

he left them—for the last time—we are told that “they could not retain their tears.”

A man of forty who is eager for a quiet conscience and religious freedom does not abandon himself to dreams of his former glory or wait for Providence to reward him. The ex-officer made plans for the future—a future in the church of his choice. His income, it is true, was very meagre, consisting chiefly of an allowance advanced to him by the company. A gift of \$100 from his father-in-law was refused because its acceptance meant that he must cut off all charitable pursuits from then on. A timely gift from a professor friend prevented utter poverty when all other income failed. But sorrows were to come in battalions, and to poverty was added arrest and fines. For every church service held in the von Rohr home a \$5.00 fine had to be paid. Another fine of \$30 was imposed for not revealing the name of a christening pastor. In the home conditions were further aggravated. Illnesses of the children were a constant source of care to the parents; finally the parents themselves were taken ill for want of sleep and rest, and lastly the father was completely prostrated by a nervous breakdown. Add to this the fact that on all sides friends of the von Rohrs were being persecuted for not joining the Unionists and the fact that cholera was a menace to the household, and we have only a partial picture of their grief. This dread disease spread through the household with such vehemence that within a week the wife and child as well as a widow who had come under their protection and the maid of the house all died of cholera. Like a gnarled oak whose every support had been cut off in a storm Heinrich von Rohr still remained, by the grace of God, unshaken. His only earthly comfort was his three and a half year old daughter, Julchen; his only ambition was to

find the true means to salvation and a place where he could propagate it.

Such were the trials and misfortunes of Heinrich von Rohr, difficult indeed to bear but only the beginning of a tempestuous career. Fortunately for this young lay preacher adventures were to come in such speedy succession that he had little time to brood over his griefs. He set out from Magdeburg within a few months and with the zeal of a Luther traveled about looking for religious books. He journeyed first to Nuremberg, then to Glauchau, and Erlangen seeking men and books that would gratify his desires for spiritual truths. Among the religious zealots of his acquaintanceship, the fate of Pastor Grabau was a particular concern of his. The latter was at this time confined to a prison in Heiligenstadt for views similar to von Rohr's. Anxious above all to help this fellow-sufferer, the young Prussian captain together with an oboe-player from his former company—one Herr Mueller, who later migrated to America with him—made a deliberate and successful attempt to free the prisoner. Their success was made easy by the fact that the prison-keeper had been very sympathetic toward Grabau and somehow made an escape possible. Once freed Grabau again became an eager companion of the enthusiastic captain, and accompanied by Oboist Mueller, the men began to carry on secret missionary work among the distressed non-Unionist Lutherans of Saxony and Pomerania. In a buggy drawn by horses the three companions traveled from city to city and served many of the despondent congregations whom they greeted with the secret password, "Unknown and yet Known." But the missionary work was harassed by no less difficulties and dangers than the more sedentary life. The work had to be carried on in utmost secrecy. The German police force, famous for its detective

work, was constantly on guard against these lay preachers; very often there were gendarmes, armed to the teeth, following close behind the little buggy in an effort to incriminate its three occupants. That dangers of imprisonment were constantly becoming graver as the reports of this secret preaching spread about is evidenced by the fact that, in the very midst of their endeavors, they saw fit to separate and go into different directions. Heinrich von Rohr stole toward Lübjest where his brother, a landowner, was ready to conceal him if worst came to worst. But it seems, when we read of his experiences, as if the former militarist preferred action and change to a quiet life in seclusion. And action enough—though it terminated in compulsory seclusion—he found when he left his brother's estate and made for Berlin. He had not anticipated that the Berlin officials were eager for any news of Grabau or von Rohr and that his presence there was the very thing most desired. Once in Berlin he was seized, arrested, threatened; but he doggedly refused to reveal information as to his recent activities. And when he likewise refused to give any evidence against Grabau, he was promptly imprisoned. His prison sentence was to be completed in Magdeburg where threats and even third degree were to force from him a confession. But in Magdeburg the warden was so greatly impressed by the open frankness of his prisoner as well as by his firm convictions that he neglected to question him further and even allowed him the most unusual kinds of freedom. He was so convinced that von Rohr was a scholar and a gentleman that he actually granted him leave to go at various times to Berlin and Nuremberg to practice his hobby, antiquarian lore. And it was during this imprisonment, which lasted nearly a year, that Heinrich von Rohr no doubt reached his decision to scan new horizons and to seek out that Promised Land which was

welcoming even then the thousands of refugees whose indomitable determination was to make America the land of the future. "Why should I," he must have said, "expend my vital energies in a land that stubbornly refuses all requests for religious liberty? Why not instead transfer this vitality to a land where it will not be trampled underfoot but yield fruit an hundredfold? Why not expend my potent energies on a pioneer venture and gratify at once my religious enthusiasm and my inborn love of action?"

Upon leaving prison, Heinrich von Rohr gave these thoughts serious consideration. He presented the possibilities to his companions as soon as possible. Grabau was weary of being hunted down by police just because he preached the Gospel and he was also convinced of the necessity to emigrate. He soon suggested his ideas to the Silesian Christians and at once two factions, the Joshua and Caleb faction, and the conservative debated the question. The conservatives asserted, "We have been given no definite sign from God to emigrate," and added, "It would be wrong to forsake our suffering fellow-Christians here."

But Grabau replied like Joshua of old that the time had come, and von Rohr, his trusty Caleb, reëchoed his sentiments. Those who so desired could go; the rest might continue their obviously hopeless struggle.

Within a few weeks Grabau had collected a company of courageous emigrants and a sufficient sum to carry them over the waters. Von Rohr meanwhile utilized his well-trained organizing ability to unite the Lutherans of Saxony and led them to Bremen in that epoch-making year, 1838. While his eager followers confidently awaited further maneuvers, he made arrangements for two merchants to convey his party Americaward and started out ahead in order to prepare for them in their new home.

Provisions were so bountifully provided by the Lord we are told, that even in the primitive forests of Wisconsin (*im Urwalde Wisconsins*) the pioneers were to partake of their German foodstuffs. Amidst an outburst of good and evil wishes the German ship left Bremen with its company of stalwart pilgrims. The emigration was not an isolated one. Some had preceded the little flock, still others were to follow. But to the admiring spectators in Hull and Liverpool, where the ship made stops, the fact of religious persecution in Germany was wholly unknown. The British, entirely sympathetic, were the last to wish well the little company before their ship finally braved the Atlantic.

When they arrived in New York City after a long voyage, the majority of the group left at once for Buffalo to found their first church and parochial school. This consisted of a large empty warehouse which served the small Lutheran group until it was finally able to construct its own buildings. The congregation soon flourished and became well established but at times it seemed to have too much leadership. Both Grabau and von Rohr were born leaders, and two leaders in one community are undesirable. Von Rohr, therefore, with his native craving for adventure took forty of the most robust families and set out for the wilds of Wisconsin.

It is difficult for us to realize today what such a removal implied. It is as if we were to leave all our friends in our native city and move into the wilds of northern Canada—never to return! In von Rohr's case it seemed a separation from much that was dear to him, from lifelong friends, and from his sweetheart, Margarethe. But there was no hesitation when the time came, and before long the little party of immigrants had reached the German settlement near Milwaukee. While Grabau was founding in Buffalo a center of Lutheranism and establishing schools for his people, von

Rohr and his flock were penetrating the deeply wooded country sixteen miles northwest of Milwaukee. Here in November, 1839, these hardy German farmers staked out their little acreages.

That this body of immigrants was among the first, if not the first, of the German bodies to settle in Wisconsin is evidenced by an excerpt from the *Transactions* of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters. We read there:

This was in the spring of 1839 and with Magdeburg as a center, a large emigration was arranged for that year. Capt. von Rohr was chosen to engage passage for them and to go in advance to America and choose places for settlement. He chose Buffalo, N.Y., and Milwaukee. Just why he selected Wisconsin, it is impossible to say. . . . It is thought that the climate which resembles that of North Germany was an inducement. Another was the prospect of obtaining finely wooded lands, always highly prized by the Germans, at low prices. Capt. von Rohr was always fond of the hunt and the west doubtless attracted him strongly. . . . They emigrated in the latter part of July and reached Buffalo, October 5th. Capt. von Rohr had met them in New York and told them of the places he had chosen and their advantages. Accordingly about one half settled in and near Buffalo while the remainder came to Wisconsin with Capt. von Rohr.

These were chiefly Pomeranians. It is doubtless this body of immigrants that is mentioned in Mr. Buck's pioneer history of Milwaukee. "The year 1839," he says, "brought the first installment of immigrants from Germany and Norway. The effect of their arrival with gold and silver wherewith to purchase land was electric. . . . Whereas Milwaukee had been under financial depression before, now all doubts about the future were dissipated." Again he says: "The first German colony arrived in 1839. . . . [They] encamped on the lake shore south of Huron street. The men went about in a business way, examining the government plats in the land office, and having ascertained by all means in their power where lands well timbered and watered could be purchased, they entered lands bounding on the Milwaukee river between Milwaukee and Washington (later Ozaukee) counties. . . . The majority of the immigrants . . . went to Mequon and there formed the Freistadt colony, a name chosen, no doubt, to commemorate their new freedom; some settled in Cedarburg also, while a few remained in Milwaukee."²

² *Transactions*, viii, 293-294.

Land in the Milwaukee office was to be had almost for the asking, and homesteaders were given their plots of ground for \$1.25 an acre. In the center of the settlement forty acres were reserved for the church, while the country about it was meted out, by casting lots, to the farmers who comprised the group, each getting forty acres. Heinrich von Rohr also received his forty and paid for it with the legacy left to his daughter Julchen by her mother, he having invested all his own money in the voyage to America. The work of building blockhouses was begun at once while the pioneers were living in their temporary bush-houses. These permanent homes were for the most part completed by the time winter set in and were bulwarked by those long rows of evergreens which even today deck the horizons of the neighboring plains. But some of the less fortunate farmers, unable to finish their houses in time were overtaken in their bush-houses by that winter of '39 with its four feet of snow. Upon his plot of ground Heinrich von Rohr, now a farmer as well as a preacher, built his first log house, furnished not only for the family that accompanied him but large enough also for conducting divine services or school sessions as necessity demanded.

One can well imagine the hardships and deprivation that these early settlers endured. Implements and foodstuffs were both of the most meagre sort. Only two yoke of oxen were available in the entire settlement. The primitive felling of oaks for building purposes was an ordeal that no description can revive; fortunately a sawmill in the near neighborhood, run by one Turck, a former Baptist minister, was at the disposal of the farmers and proved a godsend for their little community. Methods of travel too were primitive, and supply stores in cities were far away. It is told of Heinrich von Rohr, for instance, that he carried foodstuffs weighing

eighty pounds from Milwaukee to the settlement on Christmas Eve—foodstuffs, we must add, for which he pawned some of his own clothing. The food in the colony consisted almost entirely of bread and black coffee; only twice during his stay there did the pioneer enjoy a meal of pork. In the spring maple syrup from the enormous trees—said to have been four feet thick—furnished a novel dessert for the table of the early settlers. Von Rohr himself tapped 100 trees and helped to offer, however meagerly, a bit of variety for the meals.

But there is hardly a settlement that has all work and no play and this one had its joys. There were various fascinating aspects of pioneering to attract these new Americans. Their forests, "so densely set with maples, oaks, and walnut trees that one could see the sky only in clearings," were full of all kinds of game. The Indians, they assert, chased deer right into their settlement. Rabbits and partridges were plentiful in the dense underbrush while the hundreds of brooks were teeming with lusty brook trout. What a paradise for a man like Heinrich von Rohr whose greatest delight was to carry his double barreled shotgun over his shoulder and don his feathered hunting cap for a hunt in the forests. And there were other elements favorable to the optimistic peasants. They had spiritual independence at last and could sing freely all the familiar Christmas melodies before the stone hearths of their little wooden huts. Moreover, sermons in the blockhouses were no longer molested by any interruption of the Union. It was not long, either, before their colony achieved independence from the physical handicaps that harassed them. The devastating winter of '39 passed finally, and the harvest of 1840 was an unprecedented event. In the small clearings grain and all varieties of vegetables were progressing well. The summer of 1840 was an ideal one for

the early agriculture of the community, requiring only the skill of these experienced German farmers and the benign hand of Providence to produce a gratifying crop.

With these divers blessings the community became permanent within a year and was called Freistadt to denote the religious freedom of its founders. It is located some five miles from Thiensville, Wisconsin, and up to this day this little city is outstanding as a stronghold of the religion that its builders propounded. And very near the acreage of these settlers now stands a stately theological seminary, founded by their descendants and dedicated to their ideals of Lutheran Christianity. The whole community, in fact, is now a rendezvous for Lutherans from all over Wisconsin.

But in the very year that gave permanence to the Freistadt settlement, its leader, Heinrich von Rohr, was called by Pastor Grabau to teach in his school in Buffalo and to prepare himself for the ministry. So urgent was the call that the conscientious Christian could not even grant the wishes of his fellow settlers to remain with them for their great day of Thanksgiving.

One letter of his still remains to tell us of his hardships as well as his comforts in these years of continual change. It bears an old Milwaukee postmark (September 13, 1840), and is written to his sweetheart, Margarethe Lützel. Its tone is the profoundly serious one of the pioneer. In it he relates how he has sold his property and is arranging to travel to Buffalo the eighteenth of September on the *Great Western*. His grain and stock are still to be sold at auction. Several hardships are described minutely. The small toe on his right foot has been cut by a blow from his axe and is so infected that he thought for a time it would have to be amputated. A valuable letter has been lost and despite a walk of two miles in search of it, it has not been found. Finally "an

Englishman" recovered and returned it. His little daughter Julchen is very happy that it has been found at last. The letter is not without hope, however, for the comforts of religion, particularly of the eighty-fourth psalm, and the hope of seeing Margarethe are his chief solace and joy.

The return to Buffalo marked a great turning point in the career of Heinrich von Rohr. It implied the first definite opportunity for a sedentary life broken though it was to be by many strange destinies. He was to teach there and gradually prepare himself for the ministry. He was to be in the center of a great German settlement; and he was to be united finally with the woman of his choice, Margarethe Lützel, the sturdy pioneer who had watched with keen interest all his unique experiences. His duties as a school teacher must have offered him compensations other than the lucrative, for he served this calling at \$3.00 a month. During his spare time he followed two avocations, the one voluntary, the other obviously necessitated by the low state of his exchequer. He studied church history and dogmatics, exegesis and homiletics, eagerly waiting for the day when he was to be ordained as a minister. The other pursuit that took up his time was private tutoring in German and English, a pedagogical interest that, no doubt, offered a higher premium than the work in the parochial school. That he had the courage to marry under the stress of such financial conditions is not remarkable if we recall that none of the settlers had any great means and still were content. Moreover, if he were to have postponed the wedding until he had a congregation to serve, his finances would show very little improvement, as he himself well knew. His married life, moreover, brought him untold satisfaction and the simple comforts that a wandering missionary could well appreciate. That his marriage to his beloved Margarethe greatly delighted his friends and

brought him peace of mind such as he had never known before is evidenced by a score of extant letters. His wife proved a kind mother to little Julchen, whose own mother she had known in her youth, and Margarethe became the center of a thoroughly contented family group. In 1843 while Heinrich was teaching in Buffalo his eldest son, Philip, was born. He it was who delighted the father for the remainder of his days. In Philip the aged Heinrich was to realize all the ideals and advantages that his own stormy life had made impossible. And he too was to carry on his father's work by supporting the parishes west of Lake Michigan, and building up one of the largest of them; and he was to become even more deeply influential in the Lutheran church of America than his father could hope to be.

After four years of study were added to his rich pastoral experience, Heinrich von Rohr finally entered upon his duties as an ordained minister. He passed his prescribed examinations in 1844 at the late age of forty-seven years and was ready to heed the call of the needy congregations at once. From the wilds of Ontario came the sudden request, "Come over to Canada and help us," and for the last time von Rohr's adventurous spirit came to the aid of his religious zeal. He left his comfortable circle in Buffalo to minister unto the congregation to the north, at Humberstone, Canada.

Conditions in this little parish were of the most discouraging sort. Only those missionaries who have attempted to organize the scattered Christians of an outlying wilderness can be expected to realize them. Von Rohr's many letters to his wife at this period express a deeper seriousness than ever before and indicate a host of difficulties that confronted him. He had for instance never been in the pulpit until June 6, 1844, when he delivered his first sermon in Humberstone; hence, his memory had to be trained and poise ac-

quired all at an age when most men refuse any real readjustment. Moreover, he had to travel under very adverse conditions to meet and gather up his members. And last but hardly least was his utter poverty. Forty pounds a year for him would have seemed not merely riches but wealth. He hardly received his forty pounds for his entire stay in Canada. In one of his letters is still to be seen the painful evidence of a man who cannot support his family properly. The enclosed slip, written in a plain German hand, reads as follows:

“On this bill of exchange I promise to pay my dear wife Margarethe von Rohr, née Lützel, \$2.00 [written two dollars], for a coat, as soon as God the Lord grants me the means.

“Humberstone, the 18th of November 1845

Heinrich von Rohr

Ev. Luth. Pastor at Humberstone.”

In the following year, 1846, the pastor received a call from New Bergholtz, Niagara County, New York. He thereupon left the parish in Canada, which he had built up considerably, and returned to the states. Twenty miles from Buffalo, six miles from Niagara Falls, New Bergholtz was a growing pioneer community. Governor Hunt of New York, whom von Rohr describes as an unusually altruistic personage, was greatly responsible for the prosperity of the pastor's new home. He furnished the settlers much lumber, some oxen, and 600 acres of land on 10 years' credit. It was not long, therefore, before the von Rohr family was able to join its father in what was to become its permanent home. In New Bergholtz the tempestuous life of the pioneer was to descend into a halcyon period of 28 years, a period not without its difficulties but certainly full of rich blessings. If congregational organization in Canada had been difficult,

New Bergholtz was uniquely different; all the residents in this city as well as those in the neighboring villages, New Walmore and St. Johnsburg, were members of the congregation. The city governments had simply required it! The home of the von Rohrs soon became a gathering place for the neighboring German settlers. Heinrich became well known among the ministers of the Buffalo Synod, had regular contacts with the Dr. Martin Luther College in Buffalo which Grabau had founded, and thus gratified his ambition of furthering the Gospel in fruitful fields.

In 1847 twin daughters, Marie and Elise, were born to the pastor, and in 1850 a son John was born. The development of his children was a great delight and interest to the aging parent. He eagerly watched the three daughters and two sons all find happy destinies during his lifetime. Julchen, companion of his pioneer ventures, married the oboist, Mueller, who had since become an ordained minister, and accompanied him to the new mission fields in Wisconsin, Marie married Pastor Grabau's oldest son, who became president of Dr. Martin Luther College at Buffalo, and it is their son, Amadeus Grabau, whose fame as a geologist is world-wide and whose wife, Mary Antin Grabau,³ is equally well known. Von Rohr's two sons, John and Philip, as well as the other daughter, Elise, heeded the call of Greeley and went West for their careers. Philip, being older and having concluded his studies in theology, was the first to go. He found his destiny on the banks of the Mississippi, at Winona, Minnesota, where an outlying parish, a last outpost of the Milwaukee settlement, was in need of a pastor. His work in this flock of 20 communicants literally bore fruit an hundredfold, for at the end of his career he left a congregation numbering 2,000 members. John, the younger son, soon followed his

³The author of *The Promised Land* and other books.

brother and established a pioneer pharmacy at Winona, while Elsie, their sister, also went West and made her home with the brothers.

The remainder of Heinrich von Rohr's life is the simple story of a Lutheran minister, gracefully growing old in the service of his Master. But two definite endeavors of his intermingle themselves constantly with his congregational duties. He was continually inspiring immigrants to share the advantages of his new freedom. He continued both by letter and personally all of his earlier pioneer interests. A trip abroad in '53 for the specific purpose of inducing immigration is recorded in the *Transactions* of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters:

In 1853 Capt. von Rohr and Rev. Grabau made an extended tour through Germany, especially through North Germany, and by their conversations and reports about the success of their countrymen in Wisconsin caused the majority of Lutherans to settle in this state. . . . Since 1870, Pomerania, Prussia and the adjoining countries have furnished the greater part of the German emigration, of which Wisconsin has received a large share. . . . But these early settlers were not only the first body of German immigrants to Wisconsin; they were also the beginning of the Lutheran church in the State.⁴

Von Rohr's other endeavor was an attempt to organize or hold together in one orthodox body the Lutherans that he had influenced. He traveled far and wide and visited with Dr. Walther and other renowned Lutherans in an attempt to learn church organization. He often toured Wisconsin and Minnesota where he was gratified to find his parishes in the Freistadt vicinity as well as his son's congregation at Winona well organized, but he was doubtful as to which synod they should join. His own Buffalo Synod, he felt was assuming an ecclesiastical organization altogether too strict for Protestant churches. He had for this reason gradually

⁴ *Transactions*, viii, 296.

separated himself from the traditional Buffalo Synod and during the latter years of his career became the leader of a small independent group. Unable himself to bring the congregations of this group under any of the Lutheran synods, he left the problem at his death in 1874 to his son and successor, Philip. The latter after much litigation and investigation saw fit to dissolve the group and to join the newly organized synodical conference of which Dr. C. F. W. Walther, the eminent leader of the Missouri Synod, was the head. His reason for joining Walther is stated in Philip von Rohr's autobiography as follows:

He [Grabau] propagated an almost dictatorial attitude, very un-lutheran, that practically smothered the rights of the individual congregation. Walther, on the contrary,—and a blessing it was—upheld the principle of congregational rights.

In the Wisconsin Synod, that branch of the synodical conference which Philip von Rohr joined, he found many friends, particularly the two professors, Ernst and Hoencke. And after showing a deep interest in the institutions of this synod, as well as a sympathetic understanding of them, he became the synodical president and served in this capacity for nineteen years until his death in 1908.

This consummation of his life's work in his son, Philip, was the crowning joy of Heinrich von Rohr's ambition. From the period when he discarded the family tradition of service to the king, until the time when his last sermon was preached in New Bergholtz, the sole motive of his life was to serve his Master. His native modesty, so remarkable in a Prussian officer, was fertile ground for the propagation of the Gospel. No sooner had his Pauline nature met with its magnetic influence than the whole gamut of his worldly advantages became mere means to an end. His remarkable training, his leadership and organizing power, his dynamic

will, his love of adventure, his patience where patience was desirable, and even his undeniable individualism—all these were directed toward his calling. And in all the data that have remained we find this as the supreme, the paramount object of his life. His struggle with the Prussian dynasty, as well as his battle against the American frontier, had no other source than his missionary zeal. And with the salvation of souls as his ultimate aim he quietly completed his modest course. *Soli Deo Gloria*—to God alone he wished the credit to be given.