

Privilege
A memoir by Cordella Lewis

On the books in the presbytery, the church was entered as Episcopal but called Anglican. On the way to church, as the worshippers tripped over broken stones on the unpaved roadways, clutching ancient hymnals which had lost a few precious pages to wayward winds or even by stubborn children who had set them free, not wanting to go sit up straight for two and a half hours watching the organist's almost hypnotic up-down up-down head movement from her music score with its do-re-me clefs, to her keyboard with its black and white humps set all in a row. It stood to reason that this older player had obviously not acquired her skills by the hard-earned, tried and true method of learning the notes, and to top it all, she had acquired the dubious dramatic flair of flaunting a well-developed dewlap, which jiggled as she bobbed along.

The new parson was obviously as 'high brown' as his predecessor. He possessed a wife and two daughters of the same hue. They were trained in the arts of organ playing, singing descant, and the rudiments of the Easter cantata, respectively. It would take some effort to unseat this 'player' from her God-given but farcical privilege of being the village pianist. The newcomers were professionals whose lives were devoted to their tasks; they did not expect to engage in strenuous or mundane village tasks they had heard about, such as dancing the seasonal quadrille, visiting the caves for fresh, clean water in times of drought, or sewing their own clothes. They were about bringing oratorio and aria to these backward congregations, Handel, Bach and Beethoven must arrive here, voices must soar over these simple palm trees lining quiet if dusty paths; lives must change, soar to greater heights. The descant must transport simple concepts to higher heights; the cantata will introduce rocky Italian words for 'loud' and 'soft', etc., etc. As was their wont they ate sparingly of crackers, cheese with imported oolong tea, oranges instead of bothering with the local and popular fruit in season. There was the luscious, yellow and pithy jackfruit which made up for staining dentures by gifting a bonus edible seed inside, which could be boiled and eaten as a separate meal; carambola (starfruit - it appearing to be a perfect star when cut straight across), the naseberry and starapple, both somewhat stinky when not perfectly ripe, the Otaheite apple which originated from as far away as the South Sea Islands (Captain Bligh rises) with its delicate color and flavor; Their hired help (yes, the family had both male and female employees, paid by the church committee), faithfully reported that THEY had to take the fruit home for their own children to eat. All that fibre was going to waste. They sipped broth – no thick red pea soup as did the villagers, and a hand (roughly 12) of bananas served them an entire week – until those spoilt and had to be thrown out. These folks just could not be bothered!

The members of the congregation gave them their due, although with some exaggeration. The missus was a great baker 'ooman', but the time she spent breakin' eggs, rubbin' them in a pan, wastin' electricity, addin' bakin powder, salt, cinnamon, butter, just to end up with a thin sweet slice with icing on it, might as well boil the eggs, eat them and get out of the kitchen than end up so exhausted, with diabetes and covered with flour, and still have to go spend an hour getting ready. Meanwhile, Parson in the office writin' sermon, doin' accounts, signin' death 'cerfittickets', life 'cerfittickets', weddin' 'cerfittickets', reports to the Bishop, lay preacher reports, head teacher reports, school board reports, school chairman reports, senior choir reports, junior choir reports, Sunday school reports, confidential

reports, financial reports – ALL BY PEN AND INK – because the Olivetti typewriter had run out of ribbon and the nearest town was twelve miles away and the last bus would be by the following Monday. They felt that the Rev. Mac. (for anyone whose forbears originated in Scotland was a Mac.) was taking his privileges for granted. The parsonage/vicarage, for instance, though not a replacement of the historical busha or overseer's large quarters, still occupied a strategic position on the hill overlooking the town, and the large number of rooms, bathrooms, maids' quarters, outhouses, workrooms, butteries, stables, store rooms and visitors' quarters there, still raised questions in people's minds so long after slavery had been abolished. This was especially because so many large families were still squeezed into one-/two-room spaces within walking distance from there. The vicar drove himself and family everywhere in the Oldsmobile that was provided with the gasoline that was also provided via clerical coupons for that purpose.

The doctor came once a week to the small clinic in the village.

The handyman who did the work around the vicarage and the churchyard had a clean bill of health. He said he walked, rode his mule, did his work, did not feel anxious, bathed in the river and 'knocked back' a 'Q' of white rum about twice a week, that's all.

Rev. MacIndoe's b.p. was 190/90 and he was ordered to go horseback riding for an hour every morning and do light reading for an hour each evening. The wife and daughters were all overstressed and under weight. Clearly, privilege was not always high on the things that matter to human wellbeing!