



Foreword

Somehow I have a feeling that if Ernst Pihlblad's wishes could be consulted, he would like to have this foreword deal materially with Bethany College. Perhaps that would be the highest tribute that could be paid to a man, for it would mean that his own life was so inseparably enmeshed in the institution that the two were truly integrated.

Indeed, in looking back upon incredibly fast-moving years, it is hard for me to realize that Dr. Pihlblad, up to the time of his retirement, had guided the destinies of Bethany College almost two-thirds of its entire existence.

It happened that I was one of the pall-bearers at the funeral of Dr. Carl Swensson, founder of Bethany College and president for a score of years, and the memory of what Dr. Julius Lincoln describes is so vivid that it will surely go with me forever.

Dr. Swensson had suddenly died, in Los Angeles. When the telegram came, there was the usual chapel service, and Myrtle Sundstrom sang "I know That My Redeemer Liveth," from "The Messiah." At the funeral the great chorus was in its accustomed place in the old auditorium whose very rafters were saturated with harmony. The symphony orchestra was there. Theodore Lindberg, its director, not only led the musicians, but he played his violin as he had never played before, with tears streaming down his face. Ernst Pihlblad and Julius Lincoln stood together before the body of the fallen leader who had been so vigorous and dynamic only a few days before, and they pronounced the words of the service. At last the chorus sang the "Amen" chorus from "The Messiah," and I am sure that at no time or place was it ever sung with such power and feeling, and the majestic harmonies rang in the ears of all the mourners as they followed their friend to the little cemetery where my own parents lie. There was a strong and indescribable presentiment of other-world exaltation, as if the Creator Himself was hovering over this amazing little community of Lindsborg that had rendered such magnificent service in His cause. There was infinite sorrow, yet it was accompanied with the overwhelming assurance of immortality, and a montage of the spiritual meanings of "The Messiah," which was the cherished treasure of Carl Swensson.

"Comfort ye, my people—He shall lead His flock—even so in Christ shall all be made alive—all we like sheep have gone astray—yet in my flesh shall I see God—the trumpet shall sound—Hallelujah—Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto Him—Amen."

All these things, and many more, I remember from that day, without consulting the record. Yet it happened more than forty years ago.

Only brief excerpts from "The Messiah" were sung at the funeral, but the whole oratorio and the college and the church and the com-

munity and the man Swensson seemed to converge at this focal point.

It was in such tremendous hours that Ernst Pihlblad came into full responsibility. They were hours more momentous than the community, or the nation, or the world, or the universe, for they were hours when God Himself must have touched the eyes of poor, fallible human beings, such as we all were and are, and moved through the gray clouds of that day, and over the bleak country-side, and revealed His children to themselves more clearly than can be explained. The musical thunders of those tremendous "Amens" rolled out over the farm-lands, and they continue to reverberate in affirmation of a great life—a life that was an indestructible institution to be guided through the years by new hands.

Ernst Pihlblad was capable of carrying the severe and exacting burden. He had caught the vision.

Fully realizing the importance and significance of the musical background of Bethany College and the integration of music with the sciences and other arts, he quickly developed an intimate knowledge of the musical world, and in our many contacts through the years I was amazed at his familiarity with the best obtainable talent for the various concerts and Oratorio renditions.

At the same time he kept his feet firmly on the ground, attacking the difficult problems of financing and administration that are such a trial to nearly all college presidents. He was deeply interested in political government and spoke courageously when courage was sometimes a dangerous quality to have. He kept up his studies of literature and history and arts and sciences, and I well remember various stimulating conversations we had, touching almost anything from a study of the political intrigues of Alcibiades to the origin of the Nordic myth or the phenomenon of jive.

He had a puckish sense of humor and enjoyed the human contacts such as you find in the lobby of a state capitol, or hotel, or in a congenial group of neighbors. He seemed to see through pretense and pose, with genial and almost sardonic glee, and was no poseur himself.

When I had been out of college more than fifteen years, he once broached the subject of getting our old "Terrible Swede" football team of 1903-04 together for a game against the current college team. It never came off, and perhaps this is the only time the matter has come to light, but it shows his ever-youthful zest for all aspects of Bethany college tradition.

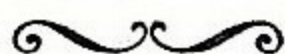
I am very certain that my education at Bethany College was far different from what it would have been at any other institution. It was saturated with such an extraordinary variety of phenomena that it stands out in memory as an adventure in spiritual, esthetic and human values more than a course in academic instruction, though Bethany was well abreast of the times in that respect. The thing that floors me is that I seemed to get more and more inspiration and stim-

ulus out of that experience after I had been graduated, for vagrant seeds kept sprouting after long dormancy, and I suppose it was 25 years after graduation that I acquired anything like a comprehensive grasp of what it all meant. I could not get away from it if I wanted to. Living at Los Angeles, I encountered an enthusiastic Lindsborg club with nostalgic reunions of intense fervor. On the beach at Puget Sound, near Seattle, a dozen of us had a Bethany gathering and sang the old songs at dusk. At the Yale Club in New York I have lunched with the executive of a great economic service institution who was once a football team-mate. At Apache, Oklahoma I met the fabulous Charlie Clancy, who played a smashing halfback on the same team, and is now a wealthy rancher. Here in Oklahoma City I have met a devotee of Birger Sandzen's art. From Minneapolis to New Orleans and from Boston to San Diego I have heard from a thousand tongues the saga of Lindsborg. These are but random items out of a four-decade post-graduate course in humanity, and the end is not yet.

Perhaps these observations will lamely suggest rather than actually tell what I am trying to say—namely that Bethany College, during forty years—under the guidance of Ernst Pihlblad—has remained a vital force in my life rather than a chapter that is finished and laid aside. I have no idea how he did it, for the ways of a college president are a mystery to me. I knew Dr. Swensson only one year, but to me he lives and at the latter day shall stand. I knew Dr. Pihlblad forty years, and he was hand in hand with his predecessor and mentor. They live, and they keep striding forward over the hills of infinity, "gentle men unafraid," having performed and maintained a miracle on the Kansas plain, where the haze of the Smoky Hills rests like a benediction upon the graves of my father and mother and the great silent congregation of the valley.

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The Sermon

A great and good man in Israel had fallen, the greatest of woman born. His disciples heard the sad news, and were heartbroken. The sacred writer sums it up in a few words: "And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus".

So here in our midst a great and good man has fallen. He was a loving father, a devoted grandfather, a good, loyal, true friend of us all. The departed has for almost a half century ranked as the foremost citizen of this city, community and state. Coming here in early youth he became instrumental in building up the city, the church, and the college, established here a few years previously.