New Blackfriars

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Comment: *Exchanging Gifts*

On April 4, Pope Francis welcomed the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall to the Vatican. On such occasions gifts are always exchanged. Much thought no doubt goes into deciding what would be appropriate, sensible or diplomatic. Charles gave the Pope framed photographs of himself and Camilla, and a large hamper of goodies from his Highgrove estate: 'They're all homemade things I produce', he reportedly said, a little egoistically. 'They're all good', the Duchess confirmed. The photographs (one guesses) are unlikely to end up on display in the Pope's private quarters. The items in the hamper, however, were destined for immediate distribution among the poor and homeless in Rome, a gesture that the Prince, surely rightly, believed the Pope would appreciate.

Whether these luxury items were appropriate for destitute folks in Rome one may wonder. In the television clips, the hamper looks like a beefed-up version of the Highgrove Afternoon Treats Hamper (£50.00): 'Indulge in an afternoon tea to remember with our delicious hamper, filled with a selection of mouth-watering treats. Our traditional wicker box comprises an elegant tea caddy, filled with HRH The Prince of Wales blend tea bags, as well as some delicious accompaniments to complete your spread: a rich strawberry preserve and tangy lemon curd to slather on scones, buttery biscuits that melt in the mouth, and a rich clotted cream fudge to truly satisfy your sweet tooth'.

Perhaps there were free range chicken legs and slices of cooked meat among the jam pots and biscuits. Historically, the first item in Duchy Originals was of course the famous biscuits, made from oats harvested on the Highgrove estate. The farm now holds Tamworth pigs, Irish Moiled, Gloucester, Shetland and British White cattle, as well as Hebridean and Shropshire sheep, rare breeds that Charles prizes highly for the quality of their meat and also their natural affinity (he thinks) with the farming landscape of the United Kingdom.

The Duchy is the Duchy of Cornwall, which the eldest son of the reigning monarch has inherited since the early fourteenth century. The land to be managed now totals 135,000 acres, scattered about, mostly in the south west of England.

Duchy Originals has always been an independent venture. In 2009 it came to an agreement with Waitrose, the supermarket firm, giving them the exclusive right to manufacture, distribute and sell its products. Profits had slumped as people shunned the pricy biscuits, jams

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etc., during the recession. Waitrose pays a fixed percentage royalty on all wholesale and retail purchases. Duchy Originals remains an independent company wholly owned by the Prince's Charities Foundation, supporting a variety of projects, ranging from the environment to arts and education.

Pope Francis and his team had also thought carefully about their gift. He offered red leather bound copies of papal documents including his encyclical *Laudato Si'* which focuses on the environment, ecology, climate change and sustainable development, all matters that would resonate with the Prince's thinking over many years. The Pope, or his advisors, also decided to give Charles a bronze olive branch, a symbol of peace, allowing the Pope to bless the heir to the throne: 'Wherever you go, may you be a man of peace' — to which the Prince replied: 'I'll do my best'.

In January, as she hastened to Washington to impress the new President, the Prime Minister took a hamper of Bakewell tarts, apple juice, damson jam and marmalade for his wife Melania, all created by the staff at Chequers, her country residence; and a quaich for the President (*cuach*: Gaelic for cup).

A flattish bowl, not that easy to drink from, a quaich is a traditional Scottish symbol of friendship (King James VI is reported to have given one as a 'loving cup' to his new wife Anne of Denmark in 1589). This was obviously meant as recognition of the President's Scottish connections, as if he half belongs to us, in what Mrs. May has spoken of as 'our precious union' — not that most Scots, pro independence or otherwise, would regard Mrs. May as one with any right to offer this ancient Scottish symbol to anyone. Anyway, since his elder brother Freddy died young, a victim of alcoholism, Donald Trump never drinks alcohol, so has no use for a quaich, traditionally brimming with whisky.

Melania Trump gave the Prime Minister a pair of sterling silver cufflinks for her husband Philip May, designed by the iconic New York jeweller David Yurman. Donald Trump presented Mrs. May with a copy of the Harper's Weekly that reported Abraham Lincoln's second inauguration (1865), together with a hand-printed excerpt from the address: 'With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations'.

It's hard not to think that, in this exchange, the Americans were much the better advised in their choice of gifts.

Fergus Kerr OP

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