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I

THE CZECHOSLOVAK ELEMENT IN VIRGINIA

Bohemia, the native home of the Czechoslovaks, is located in the central part of Austria-Hungary. It is noted for its fertile soil and favorable climate. More than half of the country is cultivated and produces abundant crops. In the mountains are found almost all kinds of valuable minerals, except salt. Bohemia is equally distant from the Baltic, the Adriatic, and the North Seas. Though inclosed by mountains it is easily accessible, because of the Danube and Elbe Rivers. Since known in history it has served as the avenue of many armies.

Besides Bohemia the Czechoslovaks occupy the smaller neighboring territories, Moravia, Silesia, and Slovakia.

The Czechs and Slovaks are sister nations; the only difference is that of dialect, but they do not have any trouble in understanding each other. They are one in history and tradition.

Historical data concerning the Czechoslovaks begin in the seventh century. Their territory included what is now Bavaria, and they have occupied a very large portion of what is today Austria-Hungary.

The favorable and protected situation of the Czechoslovaks resulted in a rapid and auspicious development of the people, and had it not been for some of its rulers with foreign sympathies, the nation would have played a greater part among European peoples and would be a different political unit today.

Colonization with Germans and Magyars of parts of Bohemia and Moravia by these rulers was detrimental to the Czechoslovak nation. This continued to the fourteenth century, when it was checked by the revulsion of the people under the leadership of John Huss in the Hussite Wars. The result of these wars was that the Czecho-

slovak language again became the official language in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries German aggression was again felt. Bohemian nationality was ruined by the destructive invasions of the Thirty Years War; their country was almost depopulated; and for nearly two hundred years the nation appeared to be dying. The Protestant religion was uprooted, and the Roman Catholic faith forcibly restored. It seemed as if the nation was doomed to become completely Germanized. Instead of this a gradual reawakening of the national spirit became manifest, and today it stands a cultured, united, and productive country.

The Czechoslovaks are a freedom loving people, and thoroughly patriotic. Their national songs reflect their character. *Hej Slovane*, a stirring battle song, translated by Dr. Vincent Pisek, is as follows:

Ho, Slovians! Our beloved language still
surviveth,

While the faithful heart within us for
our nation striveth;

Yea, the Slavic spirit liveth; it will live
forever.

Hell and thunder, 'gainst us raging, vain
is your endeavor;

Hell and thunder, 'gainst us raging, vain is
your endeavor.

God to us our tongue entrusted, God who
sways the thunder;

Who on earth then shall presume this
gift from us to sunder?

Tho' the earth were filled with demons, our
rights assailing,

We defy them! God is with us, His strong
arm prevailing;

We defy them! God is with us, His strong
arm prevailing.

Though about us storms are raging, bringing
devastation,

Rocks disrupting, oaks uprooting, upshak-
ing earth's foundations,

Yet we stand like castle walls, our vested
rights asserting;

May the earth engulf the traitor from
our ranks deserting;

May the earth engulf the traitor from our
ranks deserting.

Sej Slovane, "My Homeland," another national song which shows the other side of the Bohemian character, translated by Dr. Vicent Pisek, may be of interest:

O homeland mine, O homeland mine!
Streams are rushing through thy meadows;
'Mid thy rocks sigh fragrant pine groves,
Orchards decked in spring's array,
Scenes of Paradise portray,
And this land of wondrous beauty,
Is the Czechland, homeland mine,
Is the Czechland, homeland mine.

O homeland mine, O homeland mine!
In thy realms dwell, dear to God's heart,
Gentle souls in bodies stalwart.
Clear of mind, they win success;
Courage show when foes oppress.
Such the Czech in whom I glory,
Where the Czech lives is my home,
Where the Czech lives is my home.

The aristocratic German and Magyar rulers were the cause of these freedom loving people leaving their native home. In many towns with pure Czechoslovak population the system of municipal administration imposed upon the Czechoslovak people was Teutonic in form and spirit. They were not given a chance to help in the making of the laws or in any other form of government.

Nearly all magnificent researches in the chemistry of sugars performed by the leading Czechoslovak chemists, and their chemical patents, were published in German journals and all credit was given to the Germans and Magyars. There was the same treatment along musical and literary lines.

The German and Magyar aristocrats owned large estates and lived in fine homes, while the Czechoslovaks lived on small tracts of land toiling and drudging to make an honest living.

The schools were administered according to the German and Magyar system. Czechoslovak children were not taught their "mother tongue" in school. The textbooks were printed in Magyar or German and classroom conversation was carried on in the Magyar language. In a one-room school with their "cantor," or schoolmaster, the pupils were taught to read and write. They were compelled to attend this school daily, while school was in session, until the age of twelve; their education was then considered to be completed. The schooling of the majority ended here. Very few of the ambitious pupils could afford to attend a higher school to get

a better education. The Magyars refused to establish better schools.

At the age of eighteen every able-bodied boy was compelled to go to a military camp and stay in service for a period of three years, with practically no salary. After serving three years he was free to return home penniless, to take up his chosen calling anew.

The Czechoslovaks pleaded simply for an opportunity, but as they went yearly to their German and Magyar overlords they found that the chains of their oppression were being drawn tighter and tighter as time went by, in spite of the promises of relief that were made to them. Denied all opportunity for personal advancement and for racial development, with their desire to be of service in the world unrequited, thousands of these people turned away from the homes of their forefathers and came overseas to take up life anew here in the land of the free, in this splendid country where men are equal before the law and where opportunity is the same for all.

When conditions at home became unbearable, mothers, for instance, wept with joy when an opportunity came to send their daughters and sons out of the Hun-ridden homeland, for it was like liberating them from slavery of body and soul. The fathers and mothers slaved for the hated taskmasters, stifling their sufferings that their daughters and sons might be spared to come to America. Many of those heroic parents never saw their children again.

In the hearts of those who were so fortunate as to get away from the oppression at home, there was a beautiful conception of America. Many people left their homes in the "native hills," to dare the dangers of a trip to America alone. The glorious vision of the promised land helped them bear it all.

But they did not find that dreamland when they reached America, for they fell straightway into the hands of agents of the money-mad, slave-driving industrial corporations, who fed and fattened upon the labor of the ignorant, homeseeking immigrants from the oppressed nations of Europe. That freedom for which they had left their unhappy homes they did not find; nor did they find that friendship and encouragement for which they longed. Many of them gave up hope and faith in God as well as man, and in turn became but lowly worshippers of

gold. Some, however, began to shift from place to place, spending all of their earnings, still hoping against hope that somewhere in this country they would find a place where they could live like other people and realize their dreams. Into many cities and states their quest for homes, and for economic as well as political and religious liberty, carried them on until one day, nearly thirty-two years ago, a few of these wandering people came to Virginia; and on the James River at the cradle of the Republic, they found the promised land. Today many thousands of the Czechoslovaks have come to make their homes here in the "Old Mother of States."

The colony of the Czechoslovaks is centered around the city of Petersburg, in south-east Virginia, chiefly in the county of Prince George. This county, together with the counties of Dinwiddie and Chesterfield, contains the bulk of the Czechoslovak element in Virginia. This colony was begun by a few of the Czechoslovak families from the industrial and mining communities of western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio. These early settlers came to Virginia with very little money and without friends, but the desire to make homes for themselves on the fertile lands of the James, filled them with courage to go forward.

Shortly afterwards more families came to this vicinity and settled down on the abandoned and "wornout land" farms in Prince George, Dinwiddie, Chesterfield, Surry, and Sussex counties. As the years passed by more families arrived from all sections of the United States, and a considerable number direct from their homeland in Europe. When the Czechoslovak families first made their appearance in this section, garbed in their European clothes, the women folks in their head shawls of many colors, and embroidery, the men in their top boots, and the many children, they were regarded as some tribe or members of the great army of Gypsies. The very fact that they were known by the name Bohemians only emphasized this wrong conception. Life, however, was not all roses in Virginia for these first settlers. At first the Virginia people, because of a lack of understanding of the Czechoslovak people, having never heard of them before, were inclined to be skeptical as to the desirability of the Czechoslovaks as citizens of the Commonwealth. They had to struggle against heavy

odds. In many places they had to reclaim farmlands from new forest growth. They continued to established homes for themselves, undaunted even by the worn-out soils of their fields. Gradually, by their hard work, honesty, and progress, they gained the respect and confidence of those who at first were indifferent.

The Czechoslovak, by persistent application of toil and faith in the land of their adoption, now number more than three thousand families settled in the vicinity of Petersburg, Richmond, and Norfolk. They contribute in large measure in the production of peanuts, corn, tobacco, and other products. On the peanut crops alone, they have without exception made themselves independent financially, although at their start in this work they had practically no capital, even hardly enough to tide them over the first few years. Most of them now own their fine homes and farms free from debt. The land value in the different localities has greatly increased, and improved conditions in agriculture are very marked, the "worn out land" having been turned into valuable producing farms. They have not introduced any new methods in crops, but by their characteristic thrift and hard work they have been able to accomplish good results.

The Czechoslovaks have proven themselves among the very best citizens of the United States. In some counties more than half of the men of voting age are fully naturalized, while a large majority of the other half hold first papers. Illiteracy among men of voting age in the counties was reported by the Thirteenth Census of the United States to be higher among the native-born whites than among the Czechoslovaks foreign born. They are interested in all kinds of public welfare work. A few members of the colony hold important public offices. The Czechoslovaks are especially interested in schools for their children.

The Czechoslovak sons have fought bravely side by side with the native sons of Virginia in the cause of justice and the freedom of the world. And the people at home helped in every way possible to win the Great War.

The Czechoslovaks are not all farmers, but are represented in many mechanical and professional activities, not omitting business enterprises. The women folks are not all

housewives; some are doctors, school teachers, nurses, and business women.

The unusual feature found among the Czechoslovaks of Prince George county is the predominance of Protestantism. There are three Protestant congregations in the county and only one Roman Catholic, the latter having possibly no more than two hundred and fifty members, while the combined Protestant congregations include about 800 members. Among the Protestants the Congregational church has a membership of about five hundred and is the largest congregational pastorate in the state of Virginia which has its resident pastor. There is also a large Presbyterian congregation of about two hundred members and a Lutheran church with about half this number.

The Czechoslovak keeps in touch with the outside world through their daily papers and magazines printed in their native language. These are all printed up North, in New York, Pittsburgh, and Chicago, in the Czechoslovak printing houses. Many of the Czechoslovaks who can read English take one of the Virginia newspapers.

This colony of Czechoslovaks form an independent group, and visiting among themselves is almost the only form of enjoyment. Occasionally a big dinner or a party of some kind is given when these people meet; amusements of some form are usually planned for an occasion of this kind, such as a talk by some member of the group, or a play performed by members of the group. The younger folks have parties frequently during the winter months and other forms of social amusement. In the summer the monotony of farm work is frequently broken with picnics, and other social diversions both for old and young folks.

Most of the women belong to a "Sewing Circle," the meetings of which are held every two weeks during the winter months at the homes of different members. The meetings are usually opened with the reading of the Bible and prayer. After the devotional exercises the women begin to sew and work for about three hours. All materials that they work with are furnished by the dues that each member pays at the beginning of every new year. In the spring the women hold a "Bazaar," at which they sell the things that they have made at these different gatherings. The money made at the "Bazaar" is usually

divided; one part of it is given to the Red Cross, and the other part sent to help take care of orphans in Europe.

National, state, and church holidays are all celebrated by the Czechoslovaks, and such gatherings are often made the occasion of great festivity. The Czechoslovaks associate freely with the Americans and the very best feeling exists between them.

Virginia has showed real understanding and appreciation of the Czechoslovaks. She mothered them until today they number many thousands of devoted, loyal citizens, who are all eager to labor and strive for her upbuilding and further greatness. The Czechoslovaks did not come to Virginia for money, because they could have made much more in the mines and mills of the North; but because Virginia has given them the opportunity to enjoy the privileges of citizenship which they have suffered so much to obtain and have come so far to find.

Virginia has given the Czechoslovaks a home and made it possible for them to rear their children in the fullness of American ideals and southern culture. The Czechoslovaks are proud of their adopted state, proud of the privilege of calling themselves Virginians. In days to come they hope for an opportunity to repay the "Old Mother State" in kind for her tender care of them in those early unhappy years.

While the flag of the reborn Czechoslovak Republic in Europe means little to many of the American people, to the Czechoslovaks in Virginia it means much. It is the symbol of a new day, the emblem of a liberated people.

RUTH TOMKO

REPRESSION CULT DYING

Pupils are eager to engage in athletics, to run a school paper, to dance, to act plays, to build, to do dozens of things that merely sitting at a desk, studying and reciting, will never permit. One of the richest veins in all education has been tapped in recent years by turning these energies to account. Instead of frowning, as in older days, upon the desire of the young to act upon their own initiative, we have learned that only upon these very interests can be laid the surest basis for healthy growth.—Henry Neumann, in *Moral Values in Secondary Education*.