

## THE BOHEMIAN PEOPLE IN CHICAGO.

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THE neighborhood of Hull-House was once the Prague of the Bohemian people in Chicago. The district extending from Canal to Halsted, and from Ewing to Twelfth Street, was, before the great fire of 1870, the largest and best settlement of Bohemians in the city. When, after that fire, the city began to extend itself beyond the western limits, and new tracts of land were measured off into cheap lots, the Bohemians, who love nature, pure air, and gardens, sold their property in this crowded part of the city, and moved to the new region, where they might invest in more land, and so afford the luxury of a garden. The movement once started, it was not long before the whole community changed its location, and soon there grew up a vast colony, "a city within a city," spreading from Halsted to Ashland Avenue, and from Sixteenth to Twentieth Street, and numbering not less than forty-five thousand Bohemians.

The colony again received a name; and this time it was in honor of the second largest city of Bohemia, Pilzen, or Pilsen. Soon, however, it grew too small for the flood of Bohemians, which reached its highest tide in the years 1884-1885, when the greatest percentage of the Bohemian emigration to the United States poured into the new and prosperous Chicago. It is now estimated that there are from sixty to seventy thousand Bohemians in the city; and Chicago has the distinction.

of containing within itself the third largest city of Bohemians in the world. The last element of the rapidly growing settlement is now forming west of Douglas Park.

The first Bohemian emigrants came to Chicago in 1851 and 1852, and possibly even earlier. Soon after the revolution in 1848, many of the enthusiastic patriots, young men with large, liberty-loving hearts, forced to flee from their fatherland, sought homes in this country. Among those earlier emigrants were men of cultivation and energy, who loved liberty so well that they were ready to undertake all manner of menial service for her sake; and thus one would often find men of education and high social standing engaged in street-sweeping, cigarmaking, and other humble occupations; and graduates of the University of Prague working for \$2.50 and \$4.00 per week.

The emigration from Bohemia increased after every Continental war, and especially after the Austro-Italian wars of the '60's. This time not only the political refugees sought new homes, but artisans and peasants also began emigrating. People were tired of constant wars that were sapping the best blood of their nation, wasting their fields, and fastening still more grievous tax burdens upon the shoulders that were already crushed beneath those they had. This was the case in most European countries, and especially in Bohemia.

The social and political upheavals, the exaggerated stories of American wealth, and the natural feeling of self-preservation, were, and still are, the causes of Bohemian emigration. One of the chief causes now is the military law, which drives into this country a steady

stream of strong, healthy, and able-bodied men. Bohemia has never sent her "slums," as some politicians assert, because her slums, like the slums of other nations, never like to "move on;" they are too contented in their indolence and filth to be willing to go to work, or to take the trouble of a sea-voyage. Besides, the Austrian money, although exceedingly hard to get in that country, is so depreciated in value, that it takes about one thousand gulden to move a family of eight to America.

Often good artisans were compelled to work for low wages, even \$1.25 a day; still, out of this meagre remuneration they managed to lay a little aside for that longed-for possession, — a house and lot that they could call their own. When that was paid for, then the house received an additional story, and that was rented, so that it began earning money. When more was saved, the house was pushed in the rear, the garden sacrificed, and in its place an imposing brick or stone building was erected, containing frequently a store, or more rooms for tenants. The landlord, who had till then lived in some unpleasant rear rooms, moved into the best part of the house; the bare but well-scrubbed floors were covered with Brussels carpets, the wooden chairs replaced by upholstered ones, and the best room received the added luxury of a piano or violin.

In those early days rent was high and flour ten dollars a barrel, but they bought cheap meat at four cents a pound, coffee at twelve cents; and thus by dint of great economy many were able to lay aside money each year, and some of those early settlers now own property ranging in value from fifty thousand to two hundred thousand dollars.

To form at least a small, even if very insufficient, estimate of the value of property owned by the Chicago Bohemians, it may be interesting to note how much the working-people have invested in property within the last eight years. They have saved it in the Bohemian building and loan associations. Before these societies began their activities, the Bohemians had already a large community of not less than fifty thousand inhabitants, and owned property running into hundreds of thousands of dollars in value. The reports are quoted of five Bohemian building and loan associations, out of the forty or more societies that are in existence. From the year 1885 to 1893:—

The society "Borivoj" . . .	has paid	\$107,795.74
The society "Oul" . . . .	"	121,224.34
The society "Bohemia" . . .	"	78,370.00
The society "Domov" . . . .	"	80,247.47
The society "Slavie" . . . .	"	306,454.24
TOTAL . . . . .		<u>\$694,092.09</u>

We can safely estimate that within the last eight years these societies have disbursed over four millions of dollars, which is all invested in property by the working-people.

Before 1878 the majority of the Bohemians were engaged in the various building-trades, as carpenters, bricklayers, painters; others, again, were tailors, and many ordinary laborers working in the lumber-yards; but after 1878 they began entering as clerks into stores, law offices, and various other business enterprises, so that to-day there is not a profession in which Bohemians are not to be found. The majority of the Bohemians are

artisans, and only some of the peasants are contented to be ordinary laborers. The Bohemian business-men command the respect of the very best firms in the city on account of their honesty and integrity in all of their business relations. Business-men dealing with them readily acknowledge the "bad debt" among the Bohemians to be very rare.

#### THE LABOR MOVEMENT.

The condition of the ordinary workingman is the same as that of his German, Irish, or Swedish brother, the only probable difference being that the Bohemian workingman is frequently more patient, more conservative, and less progressive in reforms. The labor movement, until recently, has made very slow progress among them. This may be accounted for partly by the mistrust which the majority of the people have of strangers who come to agitate among them, and also because certain so-called leaders were neither wise nor honest.

One of the chief reasons for the advance made of late by the Bohemian working-people in Chicago, is the fact that since 1880 some leaders have come from the native land, where the labor movement has been more successful; and many of the immigrants who have arrived here recently are better accustomed to labor unions, and know the power of organization. Then, too, the various newspapers that have been started to agitate reform have grown more popular. The result is, that there are now about twenty-three labor organizations; and, what is more encouraging, the majority of these societies are auxiliary to American labor unions, such as the bricklayers' and other building-trades, or the clothing unions.

Two typographical co-operative associations publish dailies; one the *Pravo-Lidu* ("Rights of the People"), the other, *Denni-Hlasatel* ("Daily Herald"), which has the largest circulation of all the Bohemian dailies. The majority of the workingmen favor the eight-hour movement, and many object to child-labor. The wages earned are the same as those paid to other nationalities. There is not a single working-women's union; in fact, nothing whatever has been done for the Bohemian working-woman. No one has deemed her worthy of any effort; and with the exception of the few Americanized tailoresses who belong to the Tailors' Union, the whole mass of girls who work in tailor-shops, cigar-factories, and candy-factories have seldom been near a "union meeting." This is an interesting fact; for as long as these hundreds and thousands of girls shall be left unorganized and uninformed, they will always be a great stumbling-block in the path of the working-woman of Chicago.

#### SOCIAL LIFE.

Although the Bohemians have better food and more of it than they had at home, they lack the social life. They miss the free garden concerts that are given in almost every large city in Bohemia; the Sunday walks, the reading-rooms, and various holiday feasts that are almost indispensable to the Bohemian temperament.

This yearning after more social life has led them into various schemes for entertainment which are not always wholesome. The picnics, with uniformed processions, led by brass bands, that are so common and perfectly proper in Bohemia, appear strange and almost ridiculous. The Sunday dances, theatres, and concerts that stand sub-

stitute for the walks in the fields; the home entertainments, when families make calls, and amuse themselves by singing, eating, drinking, and telling stories — are to the conservative American desecrations of the Sabbath.

Similar amusements are popular with the newcomers; but as they live here longer, and become more Americanized, this social life changes and becomes more formal, more affected, and gradually becomes a mixture of American and European, something unlike the real Bohemian, and foreign to the American; entirely original, the “Bohemian-American.”

The love of social life is the predominating feature in the Bohemian settlement. ~~Almost every Bohemian,~~ man and woman, ~~belongs to some society,~~ and many are members of several orders. Unlike any other Slavonic nation, the Bohemian women have a great many organizations, both educational and benevolent. The secret societies of “Jednota Ceskych Dam” are among the most popular and influential. Their object is at once educational, social, and benevolent; and they pay yearly thousands of dollars to aid the orphan children of their former members. Among the younger women the gymnastic societies, known as “Sokolky,” are best organized. Women, like men, also separate their social from their religious life, and have organizations of freethinking and catholic women.

#### FAMILY LIFE.

The family life, like that of all Slavonic peoples, is very affectionate. It is a prevailing custom among the working-class that the father and children should give all their wages to the wife or mother. Seldom do the

children keep their earnings and pay board; they usually all work and live together, and then at marriage each child receives a portion, or after the death of the parents all is equally divided among the children. The Bohemian women are clean and thrifty, economical housekeepers, and very good cooks. They know the art of making a little go far; and this enables them to feed large families with comparatively meagre sums.

The Illinois State factory inspector has said that of all the children who come to her for medical examination, the Bohemian and Jewish children are the best fed; although these "best-fed" children who work in the factories are usually from the poorest families, where frequently as many as six are fed on less than five dollars a week.

It is not the general custom for the mothers and wives of Bohemians to go out working; but more and younger children go out to work here than in any other Bohemian community. The reason for this is that there is a greater demand for child-labor in Chicago, the supply for which is recruited from the ranks of the needy families of all nationalities. It is a great temptation to all foreigners to sacrifice their children; for the little ones can often get work when grown people, slow to learn a new language, are forced to be idle. The Bohemian press is doing all in its power to discourage this objectionable child-labor, and urges compulsory educational laws.

#### RELIGION.

It is estimated that the larger half of the Bohemian population in Chicago is Catholic, while the rest are non-church-goers. The Catholic Bohemians have in Chicago eight parishes, with fine church edifices, of



which that of St. Prokopius, corner of Allport and Eighteenth Streets, is the largest and most costly. With the school-buildings, convent, church, and rich farms, it has property the value of which exceeds a million dollars. In every parish there is a Bohemian school, where a half-day is devoted to teaching the English branches, and the afternoon to teaching the Bohemian language, grammar, and catechism. The pupils in these number not less than two thousand seven hundred.

The Bohemian order of Benedictines of St. Prokopius parish has founded a Bohemian College, which is equivalent to the common high school, offering the same curriculum; and it has also a business course, all in the Bohemian language. In each parish there are organizations of men and women, many being benevolent, others more purely social and religious. There are four Catholic Bohemian newspapers published in Chicago,—one daily, one children's paper, the other two weeklies. The Catholics have their own halls, theatres, schools, and cemetery.

The Protestants have two Bohemian churches: one the Congregational "Bethlehem," and the other the "John Huss" Methodist Episcopal church, and two Methodist Episcopal missions. They publish two papers: one the *Pravda*, Congregational; and the other the *Krestanski Posel*, published by the Bohemian Methodist pastors. These churches have about fifteen hundred members.

One of the many reasons why the Protestant movement has not gained a stronger hold on the Bohemians is that it was initiated by strangers or foreigners; but now that the native Bohemians are taking hold of the work themselves, they are naturally more successful,

and their fellow-countrymen are more willing to listen to the message uttered in their own tongue by their own people.

There is a secular society known as the "Svobodna Olbec," which has its speaker, and is pronounced in its agnostic philosophy. One of its chief objects is to publish agnostic literature and arrange anti-religious lectures. This society numbers about one hundred members.

The remainder of the Bohemian people are simply non-church-goers, and call themselves "freethinkers," most of them having no definite philosophy, only cherishing antagonism against church institutions. Of these, the greater part merely imitate and repeat the sayings of the newspapers, many of which are edited by agnostics. These people have suffered so much in Bohemia from the state and the clergy, that when they once feel themselves relieved from the "yoke of bondage," they are not afraid to voice their sentiments, and are very bitter in their hatred. They have learned to associate the Roman Catholic Church with the Austrian house of Hapsburg; and the oppressions of these two powers have been the chief reason why so many intelligent people in Bohemia, especially the "Young Czechs," are hostile to the church, and have accepted so readily the materialism of Western Europe.

The freethinkers have four Bohemian-English schools, where both Bohemian and English are taught. They are devoted to the public school, and have the Bohemian schools only as an offset to the parochial schools. The children usually go for a year or two to the Bohemian school, where they learn to read and write in

Bohemian, and then enter the public schools. They have separate halls, theatres, and societies. When the priests refused to baptize, marry, or bury the members of these societies, they separated entirely, and now even have their own cemetery. There are one hundred and sixty societies, all of which have some benevolent object, such as paying death-benefits, supporting schools, etc.

Besides these, there are eleven singing and dramatic clubs. The latter clubs give several plays during the season, and the money made is donated to some good cause. There is a great deal of rivalry between these amateur actors, and they do not hesitate to try their abilities on the best of Shakespeare's or Sardou's dramas.

The freethinkers publish three daily newspapers and seven weeklies, so that the Bohemians publish in all sixteen newspapers in Chicago.

#### CITIZENSHIP.

In 1860 several of the Bohemian-Slavonian young men organized a Lincoln Rifle Company, and this was the first regiment that went from Chicago to fight for the Union; and to-day the best monument in the Bohemian cemetery speaks of the patriotism of those early immigrants, who had already learned to love their adopted country so well as to be ready to lay down their lives for its preservation. Year after year their fellow-countrymen gather about this monument, and with flowers and addresses honor the memory of their fallen brethren.

In political life almost all the old settlers, before and

after the war, were Republicans. After the year 1880 some began to vote the Democratic ticket; and when in 1883 this party nominated a Bohemian for the office of alderman, it got the first real hold on the people in Chicago. The first political recognition given them was a stroke on the part of the Democratic wire-pullers to win the Bohemian vote. It "took;" and the result was that to-day out of the twelve thousand Bohemian votes cast, eight thousand are Democratic. The politicians work on the people's feelings, incite them against the men of the other party as their most bitter enemies; and if this doesn't succeed, they go to work deliberately to buy some. Thus adding insult to injury, they go off and set up a pharisaic cry about the ignorance and corruption of the foreign voters.

As everything in the old country has its price, it is not at all surprising that the foreigners believe such to be the case in this also. But Americans are to blame for this; for the better class of citizens, the men who preach so much about corruption in political life, and advocate reforms, never come near these foreign voters. They do not take pains to become acquainted with these recruits to American citizenship; they never come to their political clubs and learn to know them personally; they simply draw their estimates from the most untrustworthy source, the newspapers, and then mercilessly condemn as hopeless.

The Bohemian citizens in Chicago have been or are represented in the following offices: alderman, county commissioner, school-board, public-library board, corporation counsel, assessor, and State legislature; while about one hundred and fifty Bohemians are employed in

the service of the city government, engaged in almost every department.

Since 1874 there has been a Bohemian department in the Public Library, which now numbers four thousand books.

The Bohemian Republican League publishes a very good politico-economic journal called the *American Citizen*; and many of the younger politicians are men of culture, who take vital interest in social and economic questions, and are thoroughly Americanized. This is very cheering, and promises better things for the future.

The Bohemian people in Chicago are called "clannish." They may deserve that epithet; but who is to be blamed for that? In the early days it was natural that they should settle near their kinsmen or relations. Their language, being Slavonic, was unlike any other about them; and they were at a disadvantage as compared with the Germans, whose native tongue is so closely allied to the English that they learn the latter readily, and thus appear superior to their Bohemian brethren. Then, too, the Germans, being their traditional enemies, took no pains to enlighten the American in regard to them, but rather tried to disparage them in every way, until the poor inoffensive Bohemian was insulted by all around him; so that in time he began to regard every one non-Bohemian as his enemy. As was said before, a goodly portion of the blame for this rests upon the American press; for in times of political campaigns it heaps insult or flattery without discrimination. We ought not to cater to the foreigners at the cost of truth, any more than we would do so to our own children; yet we should not allow our own pre-

judices to undermine the future good of this republic. Left alone, the foreigners are harmless, for they are too divided by their petty traditional national hatreds; but this constant aimless baiting of the American press gives these great masses one theme, one bond of sympathy, on which they can all unite; and that is, — hatred of Americans.

So far, the Bohemians are free from any such feeling, and, to the sorrow of their European brothers, Americanize almost too rapidly; so that frequently the second and third generations do not even speak their own native language. They constitute only a drop in the mighty artery of foreign blood in America; but their leaders are anxious that this shall be pure and healthy, and in its way contribute the very best to the life of this new and mighty nation.